

The Disclosure of Sensitive Information

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
under the Executive Committee
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2020

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Abstract

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The real-life disclosure of sensitive information is associated with intra- and interpersonal benefits in the disclosure literature, but the current work suggests it is often associated with regret. In Chapter 1, an overview is provided of the disclosure literature, and common constructs across sub-disciplines are identified and categorized on select attributes. A general process model of disclosure is proposed. Chapter 2 features empirical examination of factors that contribute to regret following the disclosure of sensitive information. Across five survey-based studies, the qualities of 11,854 disclosures from 974 participants are correlated with participants' reports of post-disclosure regret and gladness. Specific qualities of disclosure are identified that are associated with post-disclosure regret, including that people disclose *unintentionally*. Conclusions from these studies suggest that planning the disclosure of sensitive information is associated with less post-disclosure regret.

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Acknowledgments

I owe the members of my committee my heartfelt thanks. I am extremely indebted to Michael Slepian, who guided me tirelessly throughout this dissertation and generously shared his ideas, methods, and R code. Malia Mason has been a wonderful guide throughout graduate school; as my advisor she was always my staunch advocate. Malia and Michael have been great co-authors as well as mentors. Kathy Phillips shepherded me through years of SINGO lab meetings and provided invaluable advice. Vanessa Burbano and Janet Ahn have been extremely encouraging co-authors and inspiring role-models for how to succeed as junior faculty.

Finally, this work would not exist without the support of my friend Ashley and the steadfast love and countless hours of childcare provided by my superlative husband, Paul.

(My kids didn't help *at all*, but none of this would matter much without them.)

Introduction

Sharing personal information with others is an integral part of both self-discovery and relational bonding. We devote approximately 30% of all verbal communication to apprising others of our personal experiences (Dunbar, Marriott, & Duncan, 1997). Disclosure of personal experiences activates our brain's neural reward circuitry, indicating that people find sharing intrinsically rewarding (Baek, Scholz, O'Donnell, & Falk, 2017; Tamir & Mitchell, 2012).

Over the last five decades, extensive research on disclosure has been conducted in the social, organizational, and clinical psychology fields, uncovering many aspects of disclosure that have led to the emergence of several robust theories about disclosure. However, this vast body of disclosure literature is not only fragmented across various sub-disciplines but has also been inconsistently updated. In an effort to overcome this issue, scholars have recently started to link the results from different sub-disciplines to develop abstract disclosure decision-making models and elucidate the mechanisms underlying the disclosure process (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Omarzu, 2000). The aim of this thesis is to contribute to this scholarship by synthesizing insights gained from emerging disclosure literature, as well as by contributing new results to its corpus.

Psychologists tend to emphasize the benefits disclosure bestows to both the disclosers and their relationships with their chosen confidants. Available evidence indicates that individuals experience improvements in their psychological and physical well-being following disclosure (Greenberg & Stone, 1992; Greenberg, Wortman, & Stone, 1996; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Pennebaker, 1990; Slepian, Chun, & Mason, 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Sharing of personal information spurs intimacy and liking, both in newly formed relationships between former strangers and between parties to long-term close relationships (Collins & Miller, 1994;

Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Laurenceau, Rivera, Schaffer, & Pietromonaco, 2004; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Reis & Shaver, 1988). Disclosure also strengthens social networks, as information dissemination articulates group membership and norms (Cockrill & Biggs, 2018; Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012; Slepian & Greenaway, 2018; Small, 2009, 2013).

Despite the benefits disclosure confers, non-disclosure is also common. Ninety-seven percent of people admit to keeping secrets from others, with an average person holding thirteen secrets, five of which have never been disclosed to anyone (Slepian et al., 2017). This is not surprising, given that disclosing personal information carries risks, especially if the information is sensitive, i.e., emotionally intense or potentially embarrassing (Afifi & Steuber, 2009) (Howell & Conway, 1990). Moreover, people can be reluctant to disclose their secrets to others due to previous negative experiences. Nonetheless, given that ample body of evidence indicates that disclosure, even of very negative information, is beneficial (Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019), the prevalence of poor outcomes and non-disclosure is troubling.

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, an overview is provided of the historical and recent disclosure literature landscape. The aim is to uncover common constructs across sub-disciplines and propose a general process model of disclosure. Chapter 2 is designated for the examination of factors that have been found to contribute to post-disclosure regret and gladness. Ultimately, the goal of the current work is to identify more effective means of disclosing.

Chapter 1: Disclosure Literature Review

1.1 What is Disclosure?

Self-disclosure can take many forms and can yield a myriad of outcomes. As the present investigation pertains to the disclosure of sensitive information, this literature review will focus on extant studies on disclosure and its role in social interactions. Given that disclosure involves at least two parties, it allows the discloser to outwardly express his/her inward cognition and emotions while expecting support and validation from the confidant(s). In making the internal external, we can clarify our thoughts and feelings and strengthen our sense of self. Moreover, by disclosing to others and gauging their reactions, we can develop a sense of how we fit in the world. We can also strategically manage our self-image in the eyes of others by varying our disclosure strategies and content (e.g., Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). Empirical evidence indicates that disclosure benefits both parties to the information exchange, as it breeds liking and trust, forming the foundation of intimacy among new acquaintances while deepening existing relationships (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993; Jourard, 1971). Thus, it is not surprising that 30% of conversation time is dedicated to discussing personal experiences (Dunbar et al., 1997).

Given human propensity for sharing personal information and the implications of this behavior for social relationships and structures, extensive research has been conducted on self-disclosure, or the deliberate sharing of personal information with others, especially in the social psychological field. This has led to the emergence of various conceptions and models that have developed over time. In addition, the early broad focus on disclosure as either a relationship-building mechanism or a catharsis-generating action has been diversified, resulting in various research sub-domains, such as those focusing solely on topic-based disclosures like the

disclosure of concealable stigma or health-related issues. Recently, an attempt has been made to reintegrate these various research streams into the larger vein of disclosure literature. Moreover, the phenomenon of non-disclosure, specifically of keeping secrets, has received renewed attention, as mounting empirical evidence indicates that non-disclosure contributes to adverse outcomes. Emerging outlets for disclosure, such as social media, have also prompted reexamination of previously accepted conceptions of disclosure, as these new platforms for disseminating information not only increase the scope or frequency of disclosure, but also offer new means of disclosure. These topics are discussed in more detail in the next section.

Decades worth of studies explore self-disclosure. This literature review can never be exhaustive. Its aim is to provide an overview of the most influential disclosure research sub-fields and identify the major contributions to disclosure theory in each of these domains, while delineating different disclosure types. Moreover, by outlining the major developments in the disclosure research since its inception, the evolution of sub-categories of disclosure behaviors would implicitly emerge, thus placing extant studies on the disclosure of sensitive information in the appropriate temporal and scientific context.

Even though disclosure has been studied for many decades, a widely accepted definition of disclosure is lacking, as researchers tend to adopt various conceptualizations in relation to specific antecedents, processes, or outcomes of disclosure in focus of their investigations. Disclosure definitions also differ across time and academic focus, which is to be expected, given that disclosure is a flexible behavior involving a variety of personal information that can be divulged in diverse ways for many different reasons. Nonetheless, generalization is possible, and this is the primary aim of this chapter.

The disclosure definition adopted in the present study echoes that put forth by Derlega and colleagues (1993), who equated it to “what individuals verbally reveal about themselves to others (including thoughts, feelings, and experiences)” (p. 1). Similar disclosure conceptualizations have been adopted by other authors, such as Cozby (1973) and Chelune (1979), and is typically cited in studies on concealable stigma (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Piazza & Bering, 2010; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009) and secrecy (Slepian et al., 2017).

The present study focuses on the disclosure of sensitive information in real time to one or more individuals. In this context, sensitive information is defined as personal information routinely kept from all or some others because of its intimate nature. For this purpose, it is also important to gain insight into the ways the intimacy of disclosure content has been measured in extant literature. For example, Howell and Conway (1990) consider all highly emotional or negative information as intimate. This definition is applicable to most practical situations, and corresponds to the categories of intimate personal information proposed by other authors (Mathews, Derlega, & Morrow, 2006; Rubin, 1975; Slepian et. al., 2017). It is also aligned with the theoretical findings yielded by communication scholarship (e.g., Petronio, 2002, 2010).

In the sections that follow, precedence is given to the disclosure concepts that are most relevant to the disclosure of sensitive information. For this reason, empirical studies on written emotional expression and journaling (Gortner, Rude, & Pennebaker, 2006; Pennebaker, 1990) are not discussed in detail, while extant research on the disclosure of concealable stigma is explored in depth (Beals, Peplau, & Gable, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Smart & Wegner, 1999).

Disclosure as a Strategic Social Behavior

The pioneering social psychology work in self-disclosure tended to focus on the benefits of this practice in the context of relationship building (Cozby, 1973; Derlega & Berg, 1987; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega, Harris, & Chaikin, 1973; Derlega, Wilson, & Chaikin, 1976; Jourard, 1971; McAllister, 1980; Miller & Kenny, 1986; Quattrone & Jones, 1978; Tolstedt & Stokes, 1984; Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969). This allowed scholars to articulate one of the most enduring and robust findings about self-disclosure as a social process—it increases intimacy and liking between people, and leads to a sense of obligation (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega et al., 1976; McAllister, 1980).

Collins and Miller (1994) summed up this early phase of disclosure research in their meta-analysis of 94 studies, which uncovered that being the recipient of self-disclosure increases one's liking of the discloser. The authors also identified several mechanisms through which self-disclosure increases intimacy and liking, one of which pertains to similarity seeking. Indeed, when strangers meet for the first time, in sharing information, they can find commonalities that would imply similarity, which engenders liking, given that we tend to affiliate with people we consider similar to us, a phenomenon called "homophily" (Laurenceau et al., 1998; Laurenceau et al., 2004).

Self-disclosure is also perceived as a display of the discloser's trust in the confidant (Greene & Serovich, 1996), possibly because revealing personal information makes the discloser vulnerable (Petronio, 1991, 2002). Social exchange scholars liken disclosed personal information to a social currency, suggesting that the more intimate the disclosure, the higher its worth (Worthy, Gary, & Kahn, 1969). Presumably the receipt of intimate information also bestows a

certain amount of social power to the confidant, who can judge the discloser, damage the discloser's reputation, or even exact instrumental concessions.

The transference of social power that is implicit in disclosure tends to create a sense of obligation to reciprocate, with the confidant becoming the discloser, thus continuing the cycle of similarity, linking, and bonding. With each round of disclosure, the intimacy of the information shared increases (Derlega & Berg, 1987; Derlega et al., 1976; Miller & Kenny, 1986).

In fact, this sense of obligation can prompt disclosure even when liking is absent: Derlega et al. (1973) conducted a study aiming to elucidate and compare disclosure of conventional (heterosexual) information and "deviant" (homosexual) information. The authors found that, even though participants liked the "deviant" disclosers significantly less than the conventional disclosers, they were still willing to reciprocate with the same depth of disclosure in both contexts. These findings were subsequently confirmed in other investigations, with authors suggesting that people who feel uniquely chosen to receive a disclosure will more often fully reciprocate the disclosure (e.g., Jones & Archer, 1976; Petty & Mirels, 1981; Taylor & Hinds, 1985).

Disclosure also makes the provision of emotional or material support possible, which further promotes intimacy (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012). In offering support, confidant demonstrates commitment and compassion, and the discloser can experience relief and overtly express gratitude (Pennebaker, 1990). However, empirical evidence indicates that self-disclosure is not only important in developing new relationships, it also deepens intimacy and strengthens already close relationships (Reis & Patrick, 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988). This is not surprising, given that repeated success in social sharing between individuals nurtures perceived social

support, an asset that characterizes healthy individuals and couples (Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987; Brooke C. Feeney & Collins, 2014).

Derlega and Grzelak (1979) proposed an early functional theory of disclosure that highlighted its strategic nature. According to their model, five basic goals drive disclosure—self-expression, self-clarification, social validation, relationship development, and social control. The authors justified this framework by stating that individuals disclose in order to fulfill one or more of these goals, whereby different determinants of self-disclosure will correlate with different goals.

The aforementioned theory has since been corroborated by empirical evidence confirming that disclosure can be a strategic behavior. For example, Berg and Archer (1982) assigned their study participants to one of three disclosure reciprocation conditions, instructing them to "try to make a good impression," "try to present an accurate impression," or "imagine that this is a normal conversation with a friend." The authors found that the type of disclosure content participants reciprocated was likely to vary by goal, with descriptive information offered in the "accuracy" condition and emotional information in the "good impression" condition. Their findings confirmed these assumptions, suggesting that people actively alter the content and depth of self-disclosure based on situational context and interaction goals.

Social Sharing

Extant studies examining social sharing overlap in many respects with the self-disclosure research, while adopting a more classic psychological foundation e.g. (Curci & Rimé, 2012; Rimé, 2009; Rime, Mesquita, Boca, & Philippot, 1991; Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992). Rimé et al. (1991) were among the first scholars to examine the social sharing phenomenon, focusing their theoretical and empirical explorations on its emotional content.

Their pioneering work has prompted subsequent research into associated concepts, like emotional interpretation and regulation, and the role of social sharing of emotion in each (Curci & Rimé, 2012; Nils & Rimé, 2012; Reis et al., 2010; Rimé, 2007). Rimé (2009) suggested that emotion elicits the social sharing of emotion, which in turn elicits emotion in both the discloser and the confidant.

Of particular interest for the present study are the emotional consequences of social sharing. It is noteworthy that simply sharing an emotional information has been shown not to lead to catharsis, as it tends to reactivate the emotion tied to the information (Brans, Van Mechelen, Rimé, & Verduyn, 2013; Nils & Rimé, 2012). Consequently, sharing positive information begets positive feelings, a process called "capitalization" (for a review, see Peters, Reis, & Gable, 2018), whereas sharing negative information instigates negative emotions (Nils & Rimé, 2012). Rime and other researchers have examined these phenomena further, aiming to elucidate the temporal evolution of shared emotions (Curci & Rimé, 2012). Their findings suggest that sharing positive life experiences sustains happiness and allows disclosers to center the positive feelings and events in their personal narrative (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004; N. M. Lambert et al., 2013). Conversely, sharing negative emotional events can sometimes increase the salience of that negative event and trigger rumination (Rimé et al., 1992).

Sharing mutually experienced emotions with others—that is, sharing emotions pertaining to events that affect both the discloser and the confidant—can lead to communal coping, as the discloser and confidant are likely to support each other in the coping process (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998). However, if the discloser and the confidant continually share negative emotions, this can elicit co-rumination, a state in which the sharers magnify each other's negative cognition. Co-rumination is highly maladaptive, as indicated by recent findings

pertaining to adolescents (Rose, Glick, Smith, Schwartz-Mette, & Borowski, 2017; Stone, Hankin, Gibb, & Abela, 2011).

Research on emotional expression (e.g., Pennebaker, 2018) indicates that written emotional expression can also provide catharsis and reappraisal, and thus bolster healing from trauma and psychological wellness. However, written emotional disclosure to oneself or to a figure of authority (such as an experimenter) does not involve the same social processes and consequences as does oral disclosure of sensitive information to persons in our social context (Pennebaker, 1997; Smyth, 1998). In their study, Balon and Rimé (2016) compared the effects of written and oral emotional disclosure, revealing differences in the emotion words employed. Specifically, when sharing information orally, participants tended to report more emotion-free facts to convince their audience, whereas written disclosure contained more emotional words and possibly more self-confrontation (Balon & Rimé, 2016). As previously noted, given that the present study focuses on the social interactions involved in the disclosure of sensitive information, written emotional disclosure will not be examined further in this thesis.

Disclosure of Concealable Stigma

People regularly conceal personal stigma that is not readily apparent to others. However, the concealment and disclosure of stigmatized personal information only started to gain research interest in the last two decades (Pachankis, 2007; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). Moreover, extant studies in this field mostly focus on individual stigmatized identities, such as non-heterosexual orientation or non-cisgender identity (Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2009; Schrimshaw, Siegel, Downing Jr, & Parsons, 2013; Willoughby, Malik, & Lindahl, 2006), mental health issues (Slade, O'Neill, Simpson, & Lashen, 2007), or disease states that do not obviously affect day-to-day functioning, such as being HIV positive (Cherenack, Sikkema, Watt, Hansen, &

Wilson, 2018; Galano et al., 2017; Hays et al., 1993; Kalichman & Nachimson, 1999; Ostrow et al., 1989). A small number of studies has also been conducted on the disclosure of past actions, such as having had an abortion or having been sexually abused (Cockrill & Biggs, 2018; Jonzon & Lindblad, 2005; Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Petronio, Reeder, Hecht, & Ros-Mendoza, 1996). At first glance, this literature can seem fragmented, as focus is given to specific concealable stigma or vulnerable populations, such as adolescents (Broman-Fulks et al., 2007; Galano et al., 2017; Rose et al., 2017). However, this body of research has also produced an influential disclosure processes model that merges the work conducted on concealable stigma with general disclosure patterns and presents a synthesis of disclosure decision making and disclosure strategies (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010), as discussed further under the "The Process of Disclosure" heading.

Disclosing stigmatized information can bring benefits, such as relief and feelings of authenticity (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Goffman, 2009; Pachankis, 2007; Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). It can alleviate the burden of living with a stigma by engendering feeling of community membership and sense of acceptance. However, revealing a stigma can also be detrimental to the discloser, if it triggers social backlash, such as stereotyping, rejection, and discrimination (Greene & Serovich, 1996; Ostrow et al., 1989). Even though progressive social politics have reduced the negative associations with some classically stigmatized identities in the United States and other progressive societies, disclosure still has downsides. For example, openly LGBT people continue to draw negative reactions, including hate crimes, verbal harassment, and discrimination in employment or housing (Herek, 2009).

Management of stigmatized identities across life domains presents additional challenges, as what might be acceptable at home may not be welcomed at work (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean,

2005; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). Researchers of concealable stigma address these multi-domain challenges by segmenting disclosure and concealment into several variations and emphasizing the differing goals and outcomes of each specific case. Most impactful is their distinction between active concealment of personal information and passive non-disclosure. Active concealment involves attentive hiding of a stigmatized identity, attempting to present an alternative, more socially acceptable, version of oneself. Not surprisingly, this strategy has deleterious effects on mental and physical health (Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Quinn, Weisz, & Lawner, 2017), due in large part to the heightened mental activation of the stigmatized identity, which may be triggered by a constant monitoring of one's environment for compromising situations that must be avoided. Because the troublesome identity must always be concealed at all costs, concealers are likely to ruminate on their feelings of inauthenticity or worries about discovery, adding to their mental burden (Pachankis, 2007; Piazza & Bering, 2010; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009).

Passive non-disclosure, on the other hand, appears to be much more benign (Jackson & Mohr, 2016). To an uninformed observer, the active concealer and the passive non-discloser may both appear free of stigma. However, the person engaged in active concealment is expending effort to hide a stigma, while the other is merely not disclosing it. For example, a woman may be relatively untroubled by the fact that she had an abortion in the past, but would still chose not to share this fact with others, even though this is not a closely guarded secret. By the same token, those comfortable with a mental illness that they manage effectively may never discuss it at work because they see it as irrelevant to that environment. Evidence suggests that active concealment of stigmatized information is highly detrimental, while passive non-disclosure is not (Beals et al.,

2009; Hatzenbuehler, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Dovidio, 2009; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Quinn et al., 2017).

Non-disclosure and Confiding Secrets

Recent work on secrecy aligns well with extant research on disclosure of concealable information, as both pertain to sensitive information—information that one may not want to reveal widely. It is estimated that 97% of people keep secrets from others (Slepian et al., 2017). On average, thirteen secrets are kept from at least one other person, and five of these are never disclosed to anyone (Slepian et al., 2017). Early studies on secrecy focused on the damaging effects of inhibition—keeping a secret, especially during social interactions with people who cannot know its content (Frattaroli, 2006; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Pennebaker et al., 1987; Smyth, 1998). According to this premise, disclosing secret information would relieve the stress endured during the monitoring of one's words and actions for potential slippage of information that may uncover the secret. In other words, inhibition of secret information during social interactions is similar in behavior and damage caused to active concealment of a stigma (Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Quinn et al., 2017).

The stress of inhibiting revealing actions in the presence of others to whom we do not wish to reveal specific information is to be expected, as attempting to inhibit specific conduct can produce ironic errors in both thought and deed (Lane & Wegner, 1995). Like the iconic "white bear" that an experimenter orders you to not to imagine, the suppressed secret leaps to mind (Smart & Wegner, 1999). However, as Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) speculated, "given that disclosure has been shown to affect such a wide array of outcomes...it is unlikely that all of these can be attributed to the fact that it can alleviate the psychological and physiological distress caused by inhibition" (p. 245).

It is widely established that the physical and psychological well-being of secret keepers is affected by the fact they harbor secrets (Larson, Chastain, Hoyt, & Ayzenberg, 2015; Pennebaker, 1990). Yet, results reported by Slepian and colleagues (2017) contradict the assumption that inhibition during social interactions with others from whom the secret must be kept is the main source of harm. In fact, the authors have shown that it is the mind-wandering to the secret content *outside* of social interactions that exerts the greatest psychological and physical damage (Slepian et al., 2017). This is not because it is easy to conceal secrets during dangerous social interactions, as supported by evidence from prior work in secrecy and the disclosure of concealable stigma (Smart & Wegner, 1999; Daniel M Wegner, 1992). However, social interactions during which one must conceal a secret are far less common than widely assumed, and considerably less frequent than ruminating on the secret outside of those interactions (Slepian et al., 2017).

Researchers studying secrecy have identified negative cognitive preoccupation (e.g., mind-wandering, rumination) without release as the damaging element of secrecy but predict different triggers for those intrusive thoughts. As in the case of active concealment versus passive non-disclosure, discloser's well-being is primarily governed by his/her cognitive preoccupation with the secret rather than his/her social behaviors *per se* (Maas, Wismeijer, Van Assen, & Aquarius, 2012; Slepian, Camp, & Masicampo, 2015; Slepian et al., 2017).

The work of Slepian and colleagues is particularly beneficial in this context, as they not only uncovered information that distinguishes secrecy from other kinds of social sharing, but their findings also inform the larger picture of disclosing sensitive information. Self-disclosure, emotion expression, and confiding secrets are all types of social sharing. But confiding a secret may have process elements and goals that do not overlap with self-disclosure and emotion

expression as they are denoted in the literature (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Confiding a secret may increase intimacy as does self-disclosure, and confiding is likely to involve expression of emotion. However, when one confides a secret, one is likely asking for help in a context that implies confidentiality (Slepian & Kirby, 2018). Confiding a secret benefits well-being above and beyond the benefits of simply disclosing the same information (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Confiding secrets can lead to provision of social support that raises the perceived efficacy of the discloser to cope with the secret, according to a model developed by Slepian and Moulton-Tetlock (2019). This raised efficacy is associated with a drop in intrusive, repetitive thinking about the secret, which is associated with higher well-being.

1.2 Deeper Distinctions in Disclosure

In the previous section, the historical context and major discoveries within the disclosure research sub-fields in the last forty years were presented. This has revealed some of the main features of disclosure, particularly the benefits that disclosing can bring, such as liking and intimacy, social support, and relief from intrusive thoughts (Collins & Miller, 1994; Derlega & Berg, 1987; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Petronio, 1991; Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Moreover, evidence indicating that disclosers' awareness of disclosure's social importance sometimes allows them to use it as a strategic tool was presented (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). In the sections that follow, distinctions within disclosure will be explored in depth, aiming to elucidate why they arise both theoretically and in real-life disclosure, as well as to determine what accounts for patterns of disclosure and non-disclosure.

Rival Approach and Avoid Motivations Underlie Disclosure Distinctions

As previously noted, disclosure is defined as an act of verbally communicating personal information to another person (Chelune, 1975; Cozby, 1973). Even within this relatively narrow conception, disclosure is a complicated, varied, and flexible behavior. The content of disclosure can range across all levels of personal detail, from the superficial and anodyne to the deeply personal and deviant. Disclosers can prompt reciprocal disclosure and thereby gain information about the confidant. They can also selectively disclose only flattering details and change the subject if something uncomfortable arises. Disclosure can be motivated by the desire to obtain support, or to give it to someone struggling with a matter we have also faced. We may seek others with similar experiences online while remaining strangers in all other life domains.

The reasons we might not disclose vary as much as those for disclosure. We may be habitually private or flagrantly indiscriminate. More likely, we may segment others into circles of intimacy to which we disclose only select information. We may integrate our domains (e.g., work, home), or set strict boundaries that restrict the flow of personal information across domain boundaries. We may choose non-disclosure when we fear the risks of disclosure, such as rejection or judgement. Those risks may be psychological or even physical, and may be based on sound evidence or unconfirmed fears.

Disclosure, it seems, is full of contradictions. It increases liking and intimacy, but we often avoid disclosing when trying to manage our self-impression on others. The higher our need for social approval, the more reluctant we are to disclose (Brundage, Derlega, & Cash, 1976), thus forgoing the intimacy and support that disclosure may yield. In fact, studies of people in financial trouble (Keene, Cowan, & Baker, 2015) or in unsupportive home environments (T. D. Afifi et al., 2019; Galano et al., 2017; Petronio et al., 1996) find that we tend to conceal our need

the most at times when help is most needed (Greene & Serovich, 1996; Ostrow et al., 1989). The confidant we choose does not always make sense either. We may tell strangers on the Internet things we would never share with our closest relatives (Gage-Bouchard, LaValley, Mollica, & Beaupin, 2017), likely because the good opinion of those closest to us matters the most (Manigault et al., 2018). Most importantly, whether disclosure actually benefits the discloser remains to be established.

The contradictions inherent in disclosure partly arise due to the rival motivational systems underlying disclosure. The clashing motivations that drive people toward and away from disclosure are a major source of its varied nature (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Slepian, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2019). Multiple lines of psychological research have also given rise to the distinction between the “approach” and “avoid” motivational systems. An approach focus motivates a person to pursue positive outcomes, while an avoidance focus motivates a person to avoid negative outcomes (Carver & White, 1994; Elliot, 2008; Higgins, 1998). Nonetheless, a person can simultaneously hold both avoidance and approach goals for the same task, and the tension generated by these warring motives can affect when, how, and how well one performs the task. For example, a person can want a clean house but not want to entail the discomfort of scrubbing toilets, causing that person to delay the task, rush through the task, or only perform the task when company is imminent.

Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) were perhaps the first researchers to clearly articulate that the fundamental motivation systems of approach and avoidance underlie all acts of disclosure. Their Disclosure Processes Model furthermore stipulates that these two motivational constructs can serve as general categories into which various disclosure goals can be placed. The approach and avoidance goals can then be compared to help determine when disclosure would be beneficial. In

other words, understanding the approach and avoid motivations related to disclosure allows scholars (and, presumably, disclosers themselves) to perform a cost–benefit analysis for disclosure under a variety of circumstances. The authors further posited that this activity informs every step of the disclosure process, as discussed in detail under the Disclosure Process heading.

Other researchers have used the dual motivation system constructs to suggest that approach goals are associated with disclosure, while avoidance goals are linked to concealment (Uysal, 2019). For example, (Jin, 2012) analyzed antecedent goals of participants' disclosure of medical information on an e-health website. They found that truthful (concealment) disclosure was predicted by approach (avoidance) motives.

More recently, Uysal (2019) reported that the existence of multiple audiences for a disclosure (either sequential or simultaneous) can trigger both disclosure and concealment psychological processes. Certain audiences may be more receptive to the content than others, or a growth in number of people to whom one should disclose may make self-presentation goals more salient than they would be otherwise.

Empirical evidence suggests that goal conflict between the two motivational systems can cause active psychological harm. For example, Slepian, Halevy, and Galinsky (2019) investigated goal conflict in secrecy and discovered that the competition between the goal to connect with others by disclosing the secret and the goal to avoid negative ramifications of the secret's disclosure caused participants to feel fatigued and alone. Similarly, Cherenack, Sikkema, Watt, Hansen, and Wilson (2018) found that avoidant coping with a recent HIV positive diagnosis among men who have sex with men mediated the effect of self-efficacy to manage their depressive symptoms.

In the present study, the aim is to elucidate how these clashing motivational systems can simultaneously act on would-be disclosers to generate some of the effects of concealment and disclosure. Its further goal is to make deeper distinctions between forms of disclosure, by linking them with goals along the approach–avoid continuum. As approach and avoidance are broad basic instincts, they provide a useful framework that can be subdivided into several motivational spectra, each corresponding to an important aspect of disclosure, as shown in Table 1. Given the scope of the present investigation, in the sections that follow, emphasis is placed on *avoiding social consequences vs. connecting with others* as the main avoid–approach motivations.

Table 1: Rival Motivation Pairs Underlying Disclosure Distinctions.

Avoidance motivations	Approach motivations
Avoid social consequences	Connect with others
Control private information	Reveal authentic self
Serve the self	Serve others

Avoiding Social Consequences vs. Connecting with Others

We risk judgement, rejection, or ostracization if we reveal our inner thoughts, expose sensitive information, or freely express our emotions. People with a wide variety of concealable stigmatized identities commonly cite fear of rejection and stigma as the main reasons behind their decision not to disclose (Ahrens, 2006; Black & Shandor, 2002; Chandra, Deepthivarma, Jairam, & Thomas, 2003; Clark, Lindner, Armistead, & Austin, 2003; Duru et al., 2006; Herek, 2009; Herrschaft & Mills, 2002; Simoni et al., 1995). Secret holders try to avoid damaging their reputation and relationships by carefully curating the people in whom they confide their secrets. Attempting to avoid judgement, they often hide shameful or stigmatizing information from their social circle (T. D. Afifi & Olson, 2005; Cowan, 2014; Keene et al., 2015; Owens, 2014).

Communication theorists coined the term "relational risk" (Cline, 1989) to convey that disclosure can both promote and threaten connections with others.

In practice, many people opt for non-disclosure to maintain relationships and avoid arguments with both close and non-close others, even when the matter is not stigmatizing. There is a surprisingly regular set of topics people avoid discussing when their objective is conflict-free communication (Sun & Slepian, 2019). Cowan and Baldassarri (2018) found that Americans avoid discussing politics with others that hold different opinions but will readily engage in such conversations with those who share their political affiliations. Although non-disclosure of this kind between non-close others may be merely polite, withholding secrets from close others to maintain the pretense of conflict-free relationship can be detrimental for trust and intimacy (Finkenauer, Kerkhof, Righetti, & Branje, 2009).

People often pursue disclosure, as well-received disclosure helps forge and strengthen relational bonds that fulfill fundamental human needs for belonging and connectedness (Tamir & Mitchell, 2012). At an intrapersonal level, people crave emotional catharsis and shared experience, as they strive to be known authentically. Interpersonally, we value the liking and relational intimacy that disclosure brings, whether we are disclosers or confidants. Unsolicited disclosures are robust signs of intimacy (Altman & Taylor, 1973); they can both communicate and generate trust (Greene & Serovich, 1996), and fondness (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001).

While some of the reasons people approach disclosure may be non-conscious, disclosers can be aware of possible benefits disclosure can bestow. Disclosers often seek help and emotional support through personal disclosure and confiding secrets (e.g., Slepian & Kirby, 2018), whether from close others (Reis et al., 2004) or from internet-based groups focused on a specific stigmatized topic (Gage-Bouchard et al., 2017). Whether the impulse to disclose

negative content is automatic or not, most people are driven by an innate need to make sense of their lives and comprehend themselves as a coherent and agentic self (Steele, 1988; Steele & Liu, 1983). Disclosure processes can thus foster reappraisal of the negative content and help integrate it into a narrative the discloser controls. In fact, it is to the extent that reappraisal occurs, through self-confrontation (Balon & Rimé, 2016) or ideas offered by the confidant (Kross, Gard, Deldin, Clifton, & Ayduk, 2012; Park et al., 2016), that positive benefits accrue, such as raised self-efficacy and coping ability (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019).

Control Private Information vs. Reveal True Self

Should we control our private information, or should we reveal our "true" selves? Decisions of whether to disclose become personal when they involve deliberation on what to reveal about the self (Baum & Critcher, 2019). Communication theories of self-disclosure tend to focus on the interplay between conceal and reveal motivations. They are particularly useful in outlining a system of privacy boundary management (Petronio & Martin, 1986) that features dialectic approaches for navigating the presumed conflict between motivations to reveal private information and to maintain control of it through concealment (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

In her book, *Boundaries of privacy: Dialectics of disclosure*, Petronio (2002) put forward the communication privacy management theory, thereby providing a framework for analyzing the multivariable process of managing personal information among and between social circles. The author subsequently adapted the model to family dynamics (Petronio, 2010). According to this framework, dialectical processes contribute to "boundary regulation" according to rules that make boundary coordination possible. However, boundary coordination processes can malfunction, causing "boundary turbulence." This model can be applied to the disclosure process, as most people have experienced navigating through various domains (e.g., work and

home, online or offline) with different disclosure norms and rules for self-expression. Revealing private information makes us vulnerable, not in the least because it brings opportunity to commit a boundary error. Moreover, committing boundary errors not only causes adverse consequences, but the goal conflict itself appears to be problematic when extreme. For example, extant studies on this topic suggest that the dual motive conflict to disclose and conceal contributes to the negative effects of secrecy (Larson & Chastain, 1990; Larson et al., 2015; Slepian et al., 2019).

As previously noted, non-disclosure can deprive a person of the benefits of disclosure, such as instrumental and emotional support. Nonetheless, the discussions that follow will focus on one's inability to feel and be perceived as authentic if personal information is concealed. If unsolicited disclosures are seen as actions conveying trust and authenticity, withholding information in the face of direct questioning results in more negative evaluation relative to people who disclose, even when the conveyed information is negative (John, Barasz, & Norton, 2016). Feelings of inauthenticity also plague secret keepers (Pachankis, 2007; Slepian et al., 2017). In their qualitative study, Itzhaky and Kissil (2015) examined the effects of concealing their sexual orientation on Orthodox Jewish gay men. Their participants reported feeling torn between their religious identity and their "sinful" same-sex attractions (Itzhaky & Kissil, 2015). Following a large-scale survey of thousands of secrets, Slepian and colleagues (2017) similarly reported that secrecy is attended by feelings of unauthenticity.

Authentic disclosure online can benefit well-being as well, but its benefits accrue most to people who reveal authentic, positive information. For example, Reinecke and Trepte (2014) ran a two-wave longitudinal study examining the reciprocal effects of authenticity on social networking sites and subjective well-being. Authenticity online predicted increases in three

measures of well-being, although users with low well-being felt less authentic on the sites and benefitted less from online authenticity.

Yang, Holden, and Carter (2017), found a similar result when examining the relationship between authentic disclosure and higher self-esteem in first-year undergraduates. Authentic online disclosure was associated with higher self-esteem and identity clarity only for students already high in mindfulness. Those low in mindfulness who posted intimate information online tended to have lower self-esteem and identity clarity, although positive online disclosure was related to higher self-esteem across all participants.

One proposed reason positive information was more beneficial is that social networking sites tend to have a "positivity bias" in their communication norms, and sharing negative information may be counter-normative and associated with less consistent support from confidants (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014). Disclosing *falsely* positive personal information online is unlikely to boost psychological wellness long term. In fact, the larger difference between one's "true" personality and the personality one presents on a social networking site, the more social connectedness and less stress one feels (Grieve & Watkinson, 2016). In summary, studies of online disclosures clearly show a link between authentic disclosures and well-being, but they also highlight the domain specificity of disclosure outcomes.

Serve Oneself vs. Serve Others

Several disclosure models emphasize that disclosure behaviors are primarily governed by personal and relational motivations. In their functional model of disclosure on social network sites, Bazarova and Choi (2014) proposed a continuum of disclosure motivations that ranges from intrapersonal to interpersonal motivations. The authors further argued that relational

development is the overarching goal of motivations near the interpersonal end, while self-expression and identity clarification are characteristic goals of intrapersonal motivations.

Disclosure motivated by relational development attempts to raise mutual intimacy and familiarity with another individual. This intention has been correlated with an increase of self-disclosure on social media networks (Lai & Yang, 2015) as well as higher levels of intentional, positive, and honest disclosures (Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2015). By definition, a secret is something meant to be purposefully withheld from others, making it entirely relational (Bok, 1989; Slepian & Kirby, 2018). In order to preserve their own reputations and relationships, people are judicious in what secrets they reveal; they seek to avoid judgement by not sharing stigmatizing or embarrassing information (Cowan, 2014; Keene et al., 2015)

Yet concern for others is also an element governing the disclosure of secrets or sensitive information. Although most secret keepers worry primarily about harming their self-image or relationships, they also take into account a sense of obligation to inform specific others, or desire not to burden them with potentially troubling facts (Afifi & Steuber, 2009).

Being overly concerned with controlling one's information prompts people to implement avoidant strategies, such as concealment. Thus, it is important to examine whether disclosures can be benevolently other-focused, and if there is a range in which disclosures can benefit the self on one end and larger groups on the other. Seeking to benefit others would be associated with approach motivations, whereas seeking to gain personal benefit might be more associated with avoidant disclosure behaviors, including secret keeping and non-disclosure.

Disclosure can serve wider informational goals. While these do not presuppose absence of relational goals, relational goals are not necessarily present, and if they are present, they are secondary. For example, disclosure allows disclosers the opportunity to reinterpret their

information in light of the feedback provided by their confidants. Such reappraisal can allow disclosers to feel better prepared to deal with their situation (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). It can also create a shared reality between the discloser and the confidant, and may even link the discloser to a larger network of people who share that reality (Boothby, Clark, & Bargh, 2014; Liu & Slepian, 2018). In addition, inter-network sharing of others' secrets—commonly known as gossip—allows sharers to define group membership, articulate group values, and reinforce group norms (Kniffin & Sloan Wilson, 2010; Wilson, Wilczynski, Wells, & Weiser, 2000). It can thus be hypothesized that some disclosers understand that, when others hear sensitive information they possess, those others may reevaluate their assumptions about that content (Cockrill & Biggs, 2018; Major & Gramzow, 1999). Consequently, disclosers of personal information may intend to spread awareness or acceptance of that content more broadly. In other words, extreme approach-motivated disclosures might be focused on a community or even society at large.

1.3 Distinctions in the Degree of Disclosure

As noted previously, approach and avoid motivations are believed to underlie all disclosure behaviors. This has led to the development of a framework that allows categorizing disclosure on the spectrum ranging from active concealment to active presentation (Figure 1, below). However, in reality, most disclosures are somewhere along the continuum between these extremes, as personal information is usually selectively disclosed based on its content, how motivated the sharer is to reveal the information, and the closeness and context of the relationship.



Figure 1: Disclosure categories in relation to the disclosure degree.

Active Concealment vs. Passive Non-disclosure

Active concealment and non-disclosure are two behaviors that have similar surface-level outcomes—the information is not spread—but affect the non-sharer in very different ways. Larson et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of extant studies on the motivations underlying disclosure. They reported a negative correlation between self-concealment and self-disclosure, with an effect size of $r = -.36$, typical of constructs that are related but not redundant. Self-concealment is damaging, as demonstrated by Larson and Chastian (1990) who analyzed 137 studies and confirmed that it correlates with negative mental and physical health outcomes. It is associated with higher anxiety (Larson et al., 2015; Uysal, Lee Lin, & Raymond Knee, 2010), higher rates of depression (Edmonds, Masuda, & Tully, 2014; Finkenauer, Engels, & Meeus, 2002), elevated health risks (Cole, Kemeny, Taylor, & Visscher, 1996), and maladaptive health behaviors, such as eating disorders (Masuda, Latner, Barlie, & Sargent, 2018) and suicidal behaviors (Friedlander, Nazem, Fiske, Nadorff, & Smith, 2012).

Disclosure is helpful, as it alleviates negative psychological and physical symptoms (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988; Richards, Beal, Seagal, & Pennebaker, 2000). Recent work in this field validates and refines these broad findings, suggesting that disclosure of negative personal information can reduce anxiety, stress, and the negative impacts of trauma (J.

A. Harvey, Manusov, & Sanders, 2019; Köhler, Schäfer, Goebel, & Pedersen, 2018; Pagani et al., 2019). At first it may seem that self-concealment harms just as disclosure helps, i.e., that their effects are complementary. Yet, when both constructs are included in the same analyses, self-concealment is found to be uniquely responsible for more of the variance in well-being for people effected by a variety of stigma, such as mental or physical illness, and minority sexual orientation (Quinn et al., 2017). In other words, self-concealment harms well-being more than disclosure improves it (Finkenauer et al., 2002; Quinn et al., 2017; Uysal et al., 2010). Active concealment is a particularly damaging type of concealment, as it entails consciously hiding accessible personal information that the concealer perceives as negative. This drive to hide part of one's identity naturally stimulates avoidant behaviors, such as avoiding revealing situations or lying. Thought and behavior suppression typically result in cognitive preoccupation with the concealed information, as the person monitors thoughts and actions to avoid revealing the stigmatizing facts (Larson & Chastain, 1990). One example of a situation that might cause active concealment would be if a homosexual individual felt compelled to hide his/her orientation, perhaps even to the point of attempting to "pass" as a heterosexual. Secrecy is an intentional act (Slepian et al., 2017) that is closely related to active concealment, as it involves conscious effort to conceal the information (Larson et al., 2015).

The mechanisms by which active concealment and secrecy harm individuals seem to be related to cognitive preoccupation with the hidden information. Critcher and Ferguson (2014) suggest that active concealment depletes one's ability to self-regulate; Slepian et al. (2017) provide evidence that the mechanism for this depletion could be the continual resurgence of intrusive off-task thoughts concerning one's secrets.

This preoccupation may lead to rumination, which is a symptom and an agent of depression (Treyner, Gonzalez, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003). For instance, several authors suggest that secrecy comprises of three elements—possession of a secret (i.e., state secrecy), self-concealment (i.e., trait secrecy), and cognitive preoccupation (i.e., thinking and worrying about the secret). Their findings further indicate that, among these elements, cognitive preoccupation is particularly problematic, for it exhibits unique negative associations with well-being (Maas, Wismeijer, & Van Assen, 2019; Maas et al., 2012).

Evidence suggesting that secrecy is accompanied by cognitive preoccupation similar to that involved in active concealment is mounting. Slepian and colleagues (2017) also discovered that this preoccupation extends beyond situations in which the secret keepers would actively avoid telling the secret to people they encounter to times when they are away from such individuals. In addition, as secret keepers experience harmful goal conflict, they tend to feel alone and fatigued (Maas et al., 2012; Slepian et al., 2019).

However, simply not mentioning personal information does not equate to hiding it. Indeed, most people have personal information that they do not necessarily conceal, but may not consider mentioning in most contexts. The same kinds of information can be concealed or simply not disclosed—with very different consequences. For example, Jackson and Mohr (2016) tested three different measures of stigma management—concealment behavior, concealment motivation, and nondisclosure—among a population of lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. Higher concealment motivation was associated with more negative identity variables such as self-stigma and acceptance concerns. Higher exhibition of concealment behavior was associated with depression and lower life satisfaction. Nondisclosure was not only unassociated with negative measures, it was associated with group membership esteem and identity strength.

In other words, hiding the fact that one is homosexual is markedly different from feeling unconcerned about revealing such information but simply not doing so in a specific instance. Baum and Critcher (2019) have labeled this benign type of non-disclosure passive non-disclosure, which is non-disclosure when there is no query. For example, in a job interview, one may tell the truth, but not every truth: much personal information is not applicable to interviewing, and probably won't even come to mind. Clearly, passive non-disclosure is less avoidant than active non-disclosure or active concealment, because the imperative to conceal is absent. Without the push to conceal, the information does not remain on top of mind.

Some people may actively conceal because refusing to answer direct questions is reputationally costly. Perhaps because disclosure is considered an act of honesty in itself (Greene & Serovich, 1996), failing to disclose when prompted can be more damaging to one's reputation than revealing the information outright. John et al. (2016) demonstrated that this effect operated by reducing the person's perceived trustworthiness. They further reported that even revealing negative information, such as having stolen an item worth more than \$100, was considered more positive by their study participants than withholding that information. Baum and Critcher (2019) call this behavior *active* non-disclosure and this term is adopted in the subsequent discussions.

Selective Disclosure vs. Active Presentation

Selective disclosure and active presentation are often strategic disclosure behaviors, in that the discloser considers goals of the disclosure and chooses confidants and strategies believed to aid in meeting these aims. However, as the goals and audiences differ, a less selective (i.e., more public) disclosure would impose fewer restrictions on the information being shared. There is thus an implicit negative correlation between disclosure selectiveness and the number of people with whom that information may ultimately be shared.

Selective disclosure is a broad category of disclosure referring to sharing of information in specific contexts or with specific people. Most of the disclosure types discussed throughout this thesis can be categorized as selective disclosure. As stated previously, an average person has five secrets that have never been disclosed to anyone (Slepian et. al., 2017), but all other secrets are confided to at least one individual. Given that on average people keep 13 secrets, it follows that majority of our secrets are confided (Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Whereas active concealment is equivalent to secret keeping, passive non-disclosure is selective insofar that the information may be known to certain others, and is simply not discussed outside of that group. The disclosure of concealable stigma and the disclosure of sensitive information are similar to confiding secrets, albeit with specific content. Social sharing usually entails propagation of emotions, sometimes throughout groups (Rimé, 2007). However, typical self-disclosure of personal information when newly meeting others usually includes exchange of relatively anodyne information that does not elicit emotional response.

When the goal of disclosure is to "serve others," the discloser may strive to reach as many people as possible, whereby this behavior is denoted as "active presentation," as it is diametrically opposed to the concept of "active concealment" coined by Quinn et al. (2017). Just as an individual actively concealing personal information will expend cognitive and emotional energy to hide that information, people engaged in active presentation will use all means at their disposal to disseminate that information freely to as wide an audience as possible, whether that audience wishes to receive the disclosure or not. The most emblematic forms of active presentation involve what Cain (1991) denoted as "political disclosures," as their aim is to make private information public to direct societal conception of a particular stigma. Cain's (1991) work focused on disclosure of sexual orientation, and the author concluded that such disclosures

were intended to make "homosexuality more visible, thereby challenging the misconceptions that engender oppression" (p. 69). Over time, this process can alter societal views and allow stigmatized groups to "reclaim" formerly derogatory terms (e.g., "queer") as they elevate their status and power (for a discussion, see Corrigan, 2005). As public attitudes toward the traits or behaviors characterizing the group shift, the context of active presentation may become more positive, even celebratory (as is the case with PRIDE parades and merchandise).

Some members of groups with concealable stigmas feel compelled to actively present their stigmatized status to educate the public. For example, people living with HIV/AIDS frequently share accurate information about the disease and combat misconceptions about it (Derlega et al., 2004; Greene et al., 2003). Such other-oriented disclosure was denoted as "ecosystem" disclosure by Chaudior and Quinn (2010), who explained that, when disclosure includes informational content, it serves a purpose beyond lessening the stigma of afflicted individuals. In the case of a communicable illness such as HIV, ecosystem disclosures can also help members of the public stay disease free while assisting those that are HIV-positive with accepting their diagnosis, thus prompting them to seek medical attention. Celebrity disclosures are an extreme (but common) example of this form of disclosure and probably have the greatest impact on public opinion. For example, Michael Phelps spoke openly about having attention deficit disorder and depression while sponsoring online therapy site "Talkspace" as a way of destigmatizing this condition.

Active presentation can thus be likened to public disclosure, in that its primary aim is to inform, entertain, challenge, or unite. It can take the form of "political" or "ecosystem" disclosure (Cain, 1991; Corrigan, 2005; Derlega et al., 2004; Greene et al., 2003) designed to change public opinion on a sensitive or controversial topic. Active presentation is frequently

performative in that it often involves slogans (e.g., "We're here, we're queer, get used to it!"), and/or adopting visual signals of the information such as specialized apparel (e.g., wearing a shirt such as "I'm sorry I don't look sick" to promote mental health awareness or changing one's media avatar to represent a personal cause). A fruitful research avenue in this domain might thus involve examining the effects of encountering active presentation on individual and macro-outcomes.

1.4 The Process of Disclosure

Models of Disclosure Processes

The current disclosure process models can be classified as purposive or contextual (Cowan, 2019). Both model types can be thought of as "value-based," implying that potential disclosers are sensitive to the costs and benefits of the key aspects of disclosure (Cowan, 2019). Disclosers precede a potential disclosure with the assessment of their motivations for the disclosure and any specific goals they hold, and balance the potential rewards with the risks and possible consequences of the disclosure. Based on this risk–benefit analysis, they might adjust their approach, and if they determine that disclosure is "worth it," they will identify to whom and with what strategy they should disclose.

Purposive models are typically developed by social psychologists and foreground the rational ability of potential disclosers to consciously evaluate aspects of disclosure and choose among them (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Greene, 2015; Omarzu, 2000). On the other hand, contextual models are more commonly the domain of sociologists and communication scholars, and emphasize the analysis of communication networks (Small, 2009, 2013, 2017).

Purposive Models

The disclosure decision model. Omarzu (2000) developed the Disclosure Decision Model (DDM), delineating a series of steps that individuals follow in order to decide if and how to disclose. It is based on the premise that disclosers choose aspects of potential disclosures based on a cost–benefit analysis of those disclosures. According to the DDM postulates, most disclosures are motivated by one of five goals, whereby the individual must select a disclosure strategy that would most likely yield the desired outcome. Next, the discloser selects a target confidant that would maximize the potential rewards and minimize the potential risks of disclosing. The author further argued that higher expected utility is associated with increased duration of disclosure and reduced breadth, while higher perceived risk decreases disclosure depth.

Revelation risk model. More recently, Afifi and Steuber (2009) proposed the Risk Revelation Model (RRM) to explain predictors of secret revelation or concealment. According to the authors, when considering disclosure, people initially engage in a central risk assessment of its likely outcomes to determine their preparedness to share their secrets or sensitive information. They further conjectured that three particular conditions would pressure people to disclose above and beyond the basic risk assessment, namely (1) need for catharsis, i.e., urge to release "fever" feelings; (2) belief that the confidant has the right to know the information; and (3) external pressure to disclose. The RRM also incorporates the concept of communication efficacy, denoting disclosers' belief in their ability to discuss the secret or sensitive information in a suitable manner. If this belief is strong, the disclosure is more likely to occur. Another key component of RRM pertains to the importance of selecting appropriate disclosure strategy.

Disclosure processes model. The Disclosure Processes Model (DPM) was developed by well-known scholars Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) who have made significant contribution to the

research on concealable stigma. DPM is based on the premise that disclosure is an intrinsic part of managing a concealable stigma. Unlike visibly identifiable personal challenges, such as wheelchair use or blindness, people with concealable stigma must choose to make their stigma known for it to be accommodated. Thus, they are repeatedly faced with the decision on whether and how to disclose such information. Perhaps because of the salience of this reoccurring situation in the lives of those coping with concealable stigma, DPM is designed as a purposive model with a clear articulation of goal conflict. The model posits that disclosure decisions are moderated by the motivation (“approach” or “avoidance”) behind the potential disclosure. The authors further posited that the mediating effect of these factors allows for disclosure outcomes to alleviate inhibition, while increasing the likelihood that the discloser will receive social support or obtain new social information.

Contextual Models

Contextual models are grounded in the assumption that context shapes our behaviors and social connections. When these concepts are applied to self-disclosure, they suggest that individual choice is both constrained and enabled by circumstance. This fact can confound the analysis of individual disclosure behaviors, causing them to appear idiosyncratic (Pescosolido, 1992; Small, 2017). The context can apply to both social and informational networks—which are not always fungible—and bounded domains of communication. Yet, it is important to emphasize that contextual models do not completely exclude individual choice, but rather focus on broader patterns of information flow and the embeddedness of individuals in networks, along with human tendency to be driven by habit or coincidence, as well as purposive action. When purposive models are applied to social networks, this is usually done in order to better understand the possible outcomes of social sharing and norm reinforcement (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010), whereas in contextual models networks are treated both as an antecedent *and* as outcome.

Many contextual models have emerged as a result of "core discussion network" research that has proliferated over the past 40 years (Small, 2009). The core discussion network is defined as the set of close others with whom one discusses important topics. In academic studies, these networks are generated by the participants in response to the prompt to name people with whom they would typically discuss important topics. The assumption behind this research strategy that the identified individuals are participants' closest others was, however, not tested until about a decade ago. In this pioneering study on the validity of the aforementioned premise, Small (2009) examined the "core discussion networks" generated by 2,000 participants and found that 45% of the named discussion partners were in fact not people with whom the participants were close. Instead, these confidants appear to have been chosen for topic-specific knowledge or mere availability. This is to be expected, given that most individuals would approach professionals, such as doctors, to discuss important health topics, or would consult spiritual leaders on existential issues. In this and subsequent studies (Small, 2009, 2013, 2017) further found that, in many instances, confidants were merely people who were available when the need to disclose arose. Both phenomena are clearly dependent on context and the network in which the participant is embedded.

In the tradition of sociological inquiry, communication scholars argue that secrets are never random, as social structure governs acceptable attitudes, practices, and identities (Cowan, 2019). Moreover, power relations that underlie social structure and cultural worldviews can also operate on intimate scales. Consequently, the power dynamics between members of a dyad or a small group (comprising of friends or work colleagues) are inevitably influenced by the larger social structure that imposes what is considered normative (Nippert-Eng, 2010; Simmel, 1949;

Zerubavel, 2006). These widely accepted laws and norms would therefore influence what personal information we feel comfortable disclosing in different social settings (Cowan, 2019).

Synthesis of Model Elements

Purposive and contextual models have much in common, as both are value-based and imply that individuals are sensitive to the costs and benefits of disclosure. Moreover, both are guided by the premise that humans are driven by "subjective value maximization," and would thus select an option perceived to be most valuable within the informational and contextual constraints (Scholz, Jovanova, Baek, & Falk, 2019). The models, however, differ in emphasis of the importance of rational, conscious deliberation and choice versus outcomes enabled by contextual structures and chance.

Purposive models imply that deliberation about disclosure is largely conscious and boundedly rational. Contextual models, on the other hand, indicate that disclosure is not solely driven by internal choices of the discloser, but is rather influenced by the situations and context surrounding the discloser. For example, contextual scholars assert that mere availability of a possible confidant may promote a disclosure. However, the models are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, just as the proponents of contextual models do not deny that rational deliberation and choice can influence disclosure within a discloser's social context, purposive models do not rule out the effects of social context on the decisions made by the discloser.

In fact, some authors argue that these models can be readily integrated if two basic conjectures are accepted, namely (1) all disclosures—and therefore any deliberation about them—occur within a social context, and (2) they are preceded by some form of cost–benefit analysis. With respect to the first argument, although purposive models do not explicitly include the social context, they feature disclosure deliberations, which involves deciding to whom to

disclose from one's family and friends, and calculations of risk that the information will spread. On the other hand, the social context of disclosure is the primary feature of contextual models, in which it is approximated by a group of individuals with whom one would discuss important subjects. Although the assumption that these individuals constituted a "core" network of close others underpinning the early work on contextual models was flawed, the focus on the social network of the discloser was perspicacious.

With respect to the cost–benefit analysis, which is explicitly posited by the purposive models to occur in all disclosures, some may argue that this assumption is antithetical to the improvisational encounters suggested by the contextual models. However, value-based models do not assume that these cost–benefit analyses are conscious or lengthy (Omarzu, 2000). Rather, value-based models presume that humans are adept at making value calculations quickly, even trading off value between apparently non-equivalent domains (e.g., social and economic domains). Contextual models, in particular, are based on the premise that disclosure often happens opportunistically (Cowan, 2019; Small, 2013). Although humans are subject to numerous cognitive biases and are susceptible to shortcomings, including cognitive load and sequential attentional processing, social scientists concur that humans can make multi-domain judgements.

This ability manifests physically in the human brain during contemplation of disclosure (Baek et al., 2017; Scholz et al., 2019). Specifically, there appears to be a neural valuation system in the brain with connections to self-related and social processing neural areas. Those areas mediate activity in the neural valuation area, which in turn predicts information sharing behavior. The interconnectedness and inter-mediation of activity in these brain regions before a disclosure decision suggest that the valuation system integrates information from multiple

domains in order to reach a sharing decision. This process is called value integration (Baek et al., 2017; Scholz et al., 2019).

Although, at the physiological level, this valuation system seems to function efficiently, it is not infallible, as the inputs from the other brain regions presumably reflect any biases or misconceptions a person holds. The value integration process will also stir conflicting motivations to approach connection and avoid rejection, and may come to ambivalent conclusions. Obviously, disclosure decision-making process cannot be represented as a sequence of steps involving the "right" calculations along the way. Nonetheless, it is useful to propose that some form of decision making precedes disclosure, as it helps clarify the aspects of disclosure that may be improved.

Given these two conjectures, the general aspects of disclosure from the perspective of the discloser are similar in both model types, as both contextual and purposive models suggest unmet needs are the primary driver of disclosure motivations or goals, based on which potential disclosers assign value to those goals. However, in many cases, neither the needs nor their associated value goals are fully conscious. Nonetheless, both model types suggest that some assessment regarding the costs and benefits of disclosure occurs, during which several aspects of the disclosure may be evaluated. This evaluation can be conscious and detailed, or instinctive and vague. It can lead to immediate action or be followed by further rounds of computation. According to both model types, specific aspects of disclosure are evaluated in these computations. Even though purposive models suggest a more robust and time-consuming analysis than do contextual models, both are based on the premise that once the motivation to disclose (needs and goals) arises or is formed in the mind of the discloser, the discloser undertakes a cost–benefit analysis to determine whether or not to disclose, to whom to disclose,

and how to disclose. When the disclosure event occurs, the outcomes it yields will serve as feedback to the discloser that may affect likelihood of future disclosures, as well as the evaluations described above.

As these four "steps" are common to all prominent disclosure models, each will be discussed in detail in the following sections, along with relevant theory and findings reported in pertinent disclosure literature. This extensive analysis will also help uncover some understudied parts of the disclosure process that will be explored in Chapter Two.

Step 1: Need Analysis and Goal Formation

Precisely determining disclosure goals is difficult in naturalistic settings, as disclosures are complex experiences and can be motivated by multiple goals. For example, a person can share worrisome information with a significant other, hoping to relieve his/her pent-up feelings as well as receive emotional support. The act of disclosure is likely to increase intimacy, regardless of whether this was the initial goal of the discloser. Moreover, rival motivations can produce conflicting disclosure goals that can inhibit or interfere with other goals. Disclosers that share distressing information may also wish to manage their self-perception, and would likely downplay elements of the disclosure that could reflect poorly on them. If this obfuscation is suspected by the confidant, the disclosure will backfire, as it is unlikely to elicit the desired response.

Ample empirical work has been conducted on the conflicting role of goals in disclosure. In this context, significant contribution has been made by Derlega and colleagues (Derlega, Winstead, Folk-Barron, & Petronio, 2000; Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2001; Derlega, Winstead, Greene, Serovich, & Elwood, 2002), whose findings indicate that people living with HIV/AIDS report a number of different types of goals both for and against disclosure. For

example, they may be motivated to disclose because they want to strengthen the relationship with the confidant, or because they feel a moral duty to educate or inform the confidant in order to protect the confidant's health. However, these individuals also possess goals against disclosure, including the desire to keep information about the diagnosis private, avoid social rejection, and protect the confidant from feeling distressed or concerned about the diagnosis. Results yielded by studies on sexual orientation similarly highlighted the strategic use of disclosure by individuals in order to obtain symbolic and tangible assistance (Cain, 1991), or to educate people about non-heterosexual identities (e.g., Goldberg, 2007).

Available evidence also suggests that contemplating disclosure can activate both "approach" and "avoid" motivation systems within disclosers (e.g., Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010), which can cause distress (Slepian et al., 2019). As previously mentioned, goal conflict appears to be related to poor emotional regulation behaviors (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2009) and increased cognitive preoccupation (Slepian et al., 2019). Nonetheless, people do disclose, and hold goals—either explicit or implicit—for their disclosures, and understanding different disclosure goals is critical to better understanding the phenomenon of disclosure (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979).

Theoretical models of disclosure suggest that disclosure goals can be broadly classified as either intrapersonal (self-oriented) or interpersonal (other-oriented) (e.g., Barasch, 2019). It is, however, noteworthy that intrapersonal and interpersonal goals can coexist, as disclosers can have multiple and overlapping goals for any disclosure. In addition, disclosers may have varying degrees of conscious awareness of different goals. Despite these potential entanglements, researchers consistently categorize goals as primarily intra- or interpersonal.

Intrapersonal goals

Intrapersonal goals are self-oriented in that the discloser expects primarily personal gains from goal fulfillment. In extant disclosure literature, intrapersonal goals are typically classified

under certain logical categories, five of which are presented in Table 2, along with synonyms used by different authors. All span the history of disclosure research covered in this chapter.

Possibly due to the prominence of disclosure in psychotherapy, one of the most influential goal frameworks for disclosure is the "fever" model (Stiles, 1987b). The fever model posits that troubling thoughts people withhold build inside them, causing mounting distress. As this process builds, people become more likely disclose in order to relieve the "fever" of their distress before it overwhelms them (Stiles, Shuster, & Harrigan, 1992). This urge to relieve a psychological pressure caused by emotion-laden information has been extensively studied under several synonyms, including "catharsis" and "venting" (e.g., Berger, 2011; Rimé, 2009).

Pennebaker and colleagues consider the release of emotional information essential to capitalizing on the health benefits of written emotional expression (Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002; Pennebaker, 1990). However, recent empirical evidence indicates that the link between catharsis and improvements in psychological and physical health is not straightforward (e.g., Kelly, 2002; Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Nils & Rimé, 2012; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Nonetheless, there is a general consensus that catharsis is still a goal of disclosure.

Self-expression refers to the process of sharing one's thoughts and feelings and can be distinguished from catharsis-driven disclosure due to typically containing milder and more self-relevant information. Nonetheless, catharsis can include sharing of self-relevant information—defined as information that one considers to be part of who one is; in other words, it is personal information. It can include beliefs ("I believe in God") or opinions ("eating meat is wrong"), or personal experiences ("I've had cancer before"), as long as the information expresses or clarifies the self. When it includes accurate information, self-expression leads to feelings of authenticity, and vice versa (Grieve & Watkinson, 2016; Reinecke & Trepte, 2014).

Need for help or emotional support can also prompt disclosure. Nils and Rimé (2012) termed these expected outcomes "socio-cognitive" and "socio-affective" feedback, respectively. In pertinent literature, they are also frequently denoted as instrumental or emotional social support (House, Umberson, & Landis, 1988; Laurenceau et al., 1998). In fact, most disclosers would expect some form of practical or emotional support, as both holding and sharing a secret or sensitive information can be distressing. One might want emotional validation or comfort, or may need information and advice in order to address the causes of these feelings. The provision of instrumental or emotional support, especially when it leads to reappraisal, can raise disclosers' self-efficacy and help them persevere (Coyne & Downey, 1991; Brooke C Feeney, 2004; Kalichman, DiMarco, Austin, Luke, & DiFonzo, 2003; Slade et al., 2007).

These help-seeking goals can be viewed as "social control" goals (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979) because, to fulfil these goals, disclosers require assistance from others. For that reason, goals presented in Table 2 are grouped by whether the discloser seeks receipt of something from the confidant, such as support or feedback. According to this definition, those goals beginning with "seeking" could be considered "social control" goals, whether they are intra- or interpersonal. In disclosure literature, "social control" is usually treated as synonymous with "social strategy" or "exercising control" (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Jones & Archer, 1976; Jones & Pittman, 1982; Omarzu, 2000; Quattrone & Jones, 1978).

Interpersonal goals

Self-presentation theories (e.g., Baumeister, 1982) suggest that social approval is the "default" goal for most people in social settings. Indeed, in the absence of a competing social reward, most people expend effort to be accepted and liked by others. As well-received disclosure fosters liking (Collins & Miller, 1994), disclosers can alter their disclosures to maximize the potential for social approval. Relationship building goals refer to the desire of

disclosers to increase intimacy with another individual, and to raise their feelings of connectedness overall (Cwir, Carr, Walton, & Spencer, 2011).

Reiterating or clarifying norms by disclosing something personal—or sharing information on another person through gossip—assists disclosers in understanding their membership (or lack thereof) of a particular social group. As humans have inherent need to belong and be accepted, finding oneself outside of a social group might spur ecosystem or political goals, goals that aim to disseminate information publicly or change social norms (Cockrill & Biggs, 2018; Gerbert et al., 1999; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Smith & Applegate, 2018).

Table 2: Disclosure Goals

Disclosure goal		Related terms from literature	Select citations
Intrapersonal Goals			
<u>Engaging in</u>	Catharsis	venting, social sharing, releasing "fever" of pent-up emotions, relief	(Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Forest & Wood, 2012; Omarzu, 2000; Rimé, 2009; Rimé et al., 1992; Stiles, 1987a; Stiles et al., 1992)
	Identity Clarification	self-clarification, present an accurate impression, enhancing identity	(Berg & Archer, 1982; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Omarzu, 2000)
	Self-expression	egosystem goals, emotional expression	(Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Forest & Wood, 2012; Rimé, 2009; Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992)
<u>Seeking</u>	Emotional Support	social support, socio-affective feedback (getting empathy/support/comfort)	(Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Park et al., 2016; Tamir & Mitchell, 2012; Vogel et al., 2018; Ziegele & Reinecke, 2017)
	Advice / Help	feedback, socio-cognitive feedback (receiving clarification/meaning, advice/solutions)	(Tamir & Mitchell, 2012; Vogel, Rose, & Crane, 2018; Ziegele & Reinecke, 2017)
Interpersonal Goals			
<u>Seeking</u>	Social Approval	social validation, self-image goals, make a good impression, egosystem goals	(Berg & Archer, 1982; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Garcia & Crocker, 2008; Omarzu, 2000)
<u>Engaging in</u>	Relationship Building	relationship development, liking, intimacy, closeness, connectedness	(Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Omarzu, 2000; Slepian et al., 2019)

Clarifying /
Reinforcing
Norms

ecosystem goals, social sharing,
gossip

(Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Ellwardt et al., 2012; Foster, 2004; Garcia & Crocker, 2008; Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2010; Kniffin & Sloan Wilson, 2010; Rimé, 2007; Rosnow & Fine, 1976)

Step 2: Cost-benefit Analysis

Value-based models are governed by the assumption that potential disclosers seek to maximize subjective value of an intended disclosure. Subjective value maximization is a process during which people choose an option they judge to have the most value (Scholz et al., 2019). Purposive models suggest that disclosers follow a relatively stepwise process when performing this evaluation, which commences by determining the disclosure goal, such as self-expression, enhancing intimacy, or teaching others. Once the goal has been established, they must evaluate whether it can be attained by disclosing (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). If they proceed, they next assess possible confidants and appraise the risks to ensure self-preservation and to protect the relationship (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Petronio, 2002). The risk appraisal involves gauging the probable reaction of the confidant and the likelihood of positive outcomes for the discloser (Afifi & Steuber, 2009). Disclosers must further consider if they have a duty to reveal the information to certain people (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Ryan, 2006) and whether they were asked by someone else to share the information (Afifi & Steuber, 2009).

Several models explicitly address the cost–benefit analysis pertaining to these specific elements of disclosure (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Omarzu, 2000). In most cases, analysis is modeled as a sequential process, whereby selection of strategy and of target sets up the conditions under which individuals will be making the ultimate decisions about what and how to disclose. The decisions (a) to disclose or not (b) to whom to disclose (c) and how to disclose are therefore assumed to be implicit in a larger cost–benefit analysis.

Decision: Disclosure or non-disclosure?

As indicated previously, when deciding whether to disclose, potential disclosers must complete a cost–benefit analysis. The Disclosure Decision Model (DDM) proposes that both the expected utility of disclosure and the risks of disclosure are considered when deciding if and what to disclose. Common risks are rejection, betrayal, and making the confidant uncomfortable. These risks are almost indistinguishable from the ones proposed by Baxter and Montgomery (1996), who argued that disclosure may result in a decline of the individual's autonomy and integrity, a decrease in control or effectiveness, and/or harm or embarrassment to the confidant. Kelly and McKillop (1996) also cautioned that, if the discloser is unable to coherently express his/her thinking, there is a possibility that the listener will form an inaccurate impression, which would render disclosure unsuccessful. Thus, the discloser may be burdened with a false identity based on these mistaken impressions. The Risk Revelation Model (RRM) also postulates that risk assessment is performed by the discloser before determining if revealing secrets is beneficial. Similarly, models rooted in communication theories of self-disclosure explicitly include "relational risk" as one of the variables (Cline, 1989).

Decisions to disclose are not only affected by the aspects of the disclosure process (whether, to whom, and how to disclose), but can also be distorted by misunderstanding the risks of non-disclosure and concealment. People often erroneously assume that non-disclosure avoids risk and harm, overlooking the fact that concealment is effortful and can deplete their self-control (Lane & Wegner, 1995; Pennebaker, 1989; Richeson & Trawalter, 2005; Daniel M Wegner, 1994). In fact, ample body of evidence shows that people predict harsher judgement than they actually receive, which can cause them to delay or forego a disclosure that might bring benefits (Moon, Gan, & Critcher, 2019; Savitsky, Epley, & Gilovich, 2001). Sharing sensitive information has been shown to progress better than anticipated in several domains. Kardas,

Kumar, and Epley (2017) demonstrated empirically that sharing secrets leads to better-than-predicted outcomes. Similarly, in their study titled "you can handle the truth," Levine and Cohen (2018) demonstrated that offering blunt feedback is more acceptable than evaluators assume, and sharing an embarrassing moment offers more benefits than expected. People consistently underestimate the positive effects of authentic communication on others, regardless of its valence. For example, people do not accurately predict the positive consequences of expressing gratitude (Kumar & Epley, 2018). Because benefits of disclosure and costs of non-disclosure are underestimated, many individuals may choose to disclose less frequently and less deeply than is optimal.

Of course, in extreme cases, risks can be severe, and disclosure may provide fewer benefits than non-disclosure in certain situations. Smith and Applegate (2018) authored a recent review of pertinent literature on stigma and negative consequences that can follow disclosure of negatively stereotyped information. They found that scenarios wherein disclosers face prejudice from authority figures who represent the most likely avenue of support to be particularly harmful. For example, educators are often skeptical when students disclose having dyslexia, and consider such disclosures meritless excuses. Yet, when the disclosed diagnosis is believed, educators may wrongly assume that the students cannot be successful in the classroom (Pino & Mortari, 2014). Of course, these effects are exacerbated when the authority figures are involved in perpetrating, denying, or encouraging concealment of traumatic experiences. In extant literature examining disclosure of childhood sexual abuse, power imbalances with the perpetrator, family dynamics, and prior poor disclosure outcomes are cited as key reasons people choose not to disclose (Reitsema & Grietens, 2016). However risky disclosing in these kinds of

situations may be, these results do not suggest that disclosing these issues would not yield benefits if such information is shared with receptive, informed, and caring confidants.

Decision: Choice of confidant(s)

The choice of confidant is the main differential between the predictions yielded by purposive and contextual models. Nonetheless, both model types emphasize that disclosers are aware of, and responsive to, the benefits and risks that accompany different confidants. However, as contextual models are based on the classic communication theory on self-disclosure, they posit that people share intimate information most readily within a trusted dyad (Pearce & Sharp, 1973) or with a complete stranger (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987; Rubin, 1975), as each situation minimizes risk of losing control of the information and could provide rewards.

Contextual models also foreground the counterintuitive confidant choices people make based on the social and organizational contexts in which they find themselves on a given day. While rational choice models presume that careful confidant consideration is normative and common, communication scholars emphasize that mere availability of a confidant is one of the main drivers of confidant choice (Small, 2009). In addition, disclosers tend to choose confidants that operate in the domain to which the information pertains. Small (2013) labeled this the "role–topic match," based on the premise that individuals are most likely to disclose to their spouse information regarding their children, and to coworkers work-related information, etc. (Small, 2013, 2017). Functional disclosures to experts represent another type of role–topic match. For example, if one needs professional advice or assistance, one will disclose to another with whom he/she does not have a strong emotional bond, but who is especially helpful in that domain, such as a doctor or a lawyer. In such instances, the discloser will limit the discussion with that expert to the role-specific topic and will not share other important matters (Perry & Pescosolido, 2010). Although purposive models do not emphasize this aspect of confidant

choice, their authors acknowledge that immediate necessity (as in the case of an emergency) may govern confidant choice, which is akin to functional disclosure. In these cases, the selection of the confidant is "automatic" (Omarzu, 2000), p. 179).

Communities of people with similar experiences can be a source of multiple confidants that do not overlap with a discloser's standard social network. Mounting body of evidence indicates that people undergoing similar experiences can form intense relationships, share personal information they regularly withhold from others, and exchange material goods with near-strangers (Desmond, 2012; Small, 2009, 2013) or people that are merely members of a related Facebook group (Gage, 2013). One class of community is the support group (either offline or online) that provides therapeutic outlets and information for similarly afflicted people, such as patients with acute or chronic illnesses (Gage-Bouchard et al., 2017; Gage, 2013). Support groups can also be formed by individuals at a similar life-stage, such as new parents or new graduate school students (Gage, 2013; Perry & Pescosolido, 2012; Small, 2013, 2017). Formal assistance programs aiming to produce instrumental help can also facilitate the formation of strong bonds between people undergoing similar ordeals (Desmond, 2012). These groups blur the line between functional disclosure with experts and more familiar kinds of disclosure with friends and family. While purposive models would predict that most intimate disclosures occur between longstanding, tight networks of intimates, contextual models easily account for these effects by suggesting that disclosure networks can be functional and circumstantial.

The attributes of an ideal confidant are not often addressed in the literature, as many aspects of the choice would be dictated by the goals held for disclosure, and the perceived benefits and risks associated with that confidant. For example, disclosers must consider the confidant's likely reaction and any obligations to share the information with that person.

Nonetheless, authors of purposive models have identified some generic attributes that disclosers review when considering confidants. For example, Omarzu (2000) opined that the power the confidant holds relative to the discloser, as well as his/her efficacy to assist the discloser, should affect the discloser's assessment of the rewards that disclosing to that confidant might bring. Some confidants might be better positioned to assist in a specific situation because of their social or functional power (e.g., one's boss can grant time off, whereas a wealthy relative can help financially).

Slepian and Kirby (2018) conducted one of the few studies focused entirely on confidants of secrets. Their study sample comprised of 600 confidants to whom approximately 10,000 secrets were divulged in total. The confidants' "big five" personality types were evaluated, with the results suggesting that preferred confidants were very high in conscientiousness and moderately high in extraversion. The authors posited that this combination of traits is likely correlated with confidants that would display compassion and discretion. In contrast, highly extroverted people could be perceived as more likely to gossip, and would thus be deemed less capable of keeping one's secret.

In a recent study exploring the burden of being confided in, Slepian and Greenaway (2018) found that a greater overlap with a discloser's social network was associated with a higher burden on the confidant. This outcome reiterates the tradeoff that disclosers must consider when contemplating the intimacy of a confidant. A more intimate confidant is likely to be more understanding, and his/her opinion would carry more weight from the discloser's perspective. However, intimacy implies embeddedness in one's social network, and divulging a secret to a member of one's social network is expected to produce conflict, as this person is may have

access to people the secret is being kept from, causing divided loyalties. In either case, it seems advantageous to choose empathetic confidants, whom Goffman (2009) labelled “the wise.”

Based on the discussions presented above, it would be beneficial to explore the unfolding process of disclosure in greater depth. For example, perhaps disclosing a novel secret to a confidant with select attributes before sharing that information with other type(s) of confidants can be shown to consistently yield superior outcomes. Regardless of the order in which one discloses to a confidant, it is the opinion of those closest to the discloser that will matter the most (Manigault et al., 2018).

Decision: Choice of Disclosure Strategies

Disclosers also face choices regarding the disclosure approach they adopt. Empirical evidence suggests that disclosers fare best when they consider various ways in which they can disclose and choose a way that resonates with them, as the manner of disclosure can moderate outcomes (Camacho, Reinka, & Quinn, 2019). Since the inception of disclosure research, focus has mostly been given to either antecedents to the disclosure process (e.g., Derlega, Winstead, Greene, Serovich, & Elwood, 2004; Goodman-Brown, Edelstein, Goodman, Jones, & Gordon, 2003; Omarzu, 2000) or its outcomes (e.g., Rodriguez & Kelly, 2006; Smart & Wegner, 1999), while largely overlooking the actual strategies of disclosure. Among the strategies that were explored in extant studies, confidant choice was addressed most thoroughly, which is why it is considered separately above.

A decade ago, Chaudoir and Fisher (2010) pointed out that this gap in pertinent literature has resulted in a disconnect between the disclosure's preceding factors and its outcomes, creating uncertainty about how the entire disclosure process unfolds in real-world settings. This prompted these authors to examine direct and indirect disclosure strategies, finding that communication efficacy—how able people feel to disclose the information in a way that will allow them to

achieve their intended goals—moderates the decision to adopt a direct or indirect strategy. An example of an indirect strategy they tested was observing the reactions of potential confidants to others' similar disclosures, a phenomenon previously discussed by Kelly and McKillop (1996).

However, their inquiry into disclosure strategies was not followed by a surge of theoretical or empirical work on the topic during the next decade. Social network research stands as an exception, as social networking sites and online communication tools are widely viewed as viable alternatives to customary face-to-face disclosure. Findings reported by Baum and Critcher (2019), for example, suggest that potential disclosers do not adequately consider these disclosure strategies; thus, if they anticipate that in-person disclosure would be challenging, they might also avoid disclosure via online channels, even though several studies indicate that online disclosure strategies can work well (Baum & Critcher, 2019; Reich, Subrahmanyam, & Espinoza, 2012; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007).

Online disclosures are posited to be effective, as people often use social media to rehearse their disclosures (Green, Wilhelmsen, Wilmots, Dodd, & Quinn, 2016; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). This rehearsal may serve to strengthen communication efficacy as well reduce cognitive preoccupation with an impending "real life" disclosure. Greene, Derlega, and Mathews (2006) developed a theoretical model that describes the process of mentally rehearsing an upcoming disclosure as the "message choice process" that unfolds over time.

Given the paucity of research focusing specifically on disclosure strategies, more work needs to be done in this domain, especially with the explosion of online opportunities to control—an lose control of—one's private information. Authors of future studies could, for example, assess to what extent online rehearsal (or, indeed, any rehearsal) predicts disclosure outcomes, and if the effects of raising efficacy or reducing cognitive preoccupation are more

predictive. Afifi and Stuber (2009) suggested that incorporating planning theory into a study of disclosure strategies would also be fruitful (Berger, 1997, 2015).

Steps 3 and 4: Disclosure Event and Feedback Cycle

As mentioned above, the disclosure event itself is insufficiently explored. Thus far, disclosure strategy research remains largely in the social network domain, whereby preliminary results indicate presence of differences between depressed and non-depressed individuals in the content of Facebook disclosures and colors of Instagram posts (Forest & Wood, 2012; Reece & Danforth, 2017). Their audiences also reacted differently, and their reactions tend to be interpreted differently across the aforementioned two groups (Forest & Wood, 2012; Gil-Or, Levi-Belz, & Turel, 2015).

A growing body of evidence supports the view that the confidant's reaction to the disclosure exerts one of the greatest influences on the benefits of the disclosure. Findings reported by Nils and Rimé (2012) suggest that, when the chosen confidant provides advice (i.e., socio-cognitive feedback) when emotional support (i.e., socio-affective feedback) is sought, the disclosure outcomes will not be as positive as if the confidant had provided the anticipated type of reaction. Further work thus needs to be done to establish how important the goal–reaction alignment is compared to the affective response of the confidant.

In one longitudinal study, when women disclosed their abortions to a confidant that they perceived as not being fully supportive, they did not show signs of lower psychological distress (Major & Gramzow, 1999). Results yielded by experimental studies further indicate that participants who engaged in imagined or actual experiences with non-accepting confidants did not experience improvements in physical or mental health (Lepore, Ragan, & Jones, 2000; Rodriguez & Kelly, 2006).

If the listener reacts by rejecting, betraying, or intensifying distress, then the discloser's worries have manifested. Sexual assault survivors' reports of negative reactions illustrate that when anticipated risks materialize, this can eliminate the rewards of disclosure or halt the disclosure process before the goal of alleviating distress is accomplished. In addition, this adverse reaction can decrease the chances that the discloser will confide to someone else (J. H. Harvey, Chwalisz, Garwood, & Orbuch, 1991; Orbuch, Harvey, Davis, & Merbach, 1994). Thus, each disclosure triggers a feedback cycle during which the discloser updates the reward/risk analysis, and this predicts likelihood of subsequent disclosures as well as their manner. A positive first disclosure is particularly encouraging, as it increases the chance of multiple subsequent disclosures (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010).

1.5 Outcomes of Disclosure

Disclosure Outcomes are Variably Determined

The benefits of disclosure are not guaranteed. Disclosure can deepen relationships is associated with increased psychological and physical well-being, but factors of the disclosure itself moderate these effects, including valence of the information shared, the manner in which the information is disclosed, the confidant choice, the confidant's reaction, and the meaning made (Camacho et al., 2019; Izaguirre & Cater, 2018; Manigault et al., 2018). If a disclosure goes well, benefits follow. If it goes poorly, the discloser (and confidant) are harmed by the interaction, as opposed to merely not benefitted.

The valence of the content disclosed is shown in the literature to be a key moderator of the outcomes of disclosure. Simply put, relating emotional content usually involves emotional expression, which reactivates the emotions in the mind of the discloser. Disclosers feel positive when they share positive information, and negative when the information is so (Choi & Toma,

2014). In the case of positive content, the salience of the positive event is enhanced during disclosure, a phenomenon called "capitalization" (Gable & Reis, 2010). When positive content is shared, positive outcomes reliably follow (Lambert et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2018), while disclosing negative content leads to more variable outcomes---it doesn't always bring benefits (Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Slade et al., 2007).

There has been an increasing amount of research that indicates that the confidant's reaction to the disclosure is one of the biggest influences on the benefits of the disclosure (Afifi, Shahnazi, Coveleski, Davis, & Merrill, 2017). The confidant's response, and the interpretation of that response by the discloser, contribute highly to the both the personal and relational outcomes of the disclosure. For example, work by Gable and Reis (2010) suggests that a confidant that actively engages with the discloser and is motivated to reinforce positive feelings and fulfill the discloser's needs for understanding, validation, and attention. Such constructive and positive responses reinforce relational bonds and benefit both the discloser and confidant. These strengthened relational links also predict futures interactions between the pair (Peters et al., 2018). On the other hand, If the disclosure causes the confidant to feel negative affect, harm to the discloser and confidant can follow (Zhang & Dailey, 2018).

Research investigates disclosure result assessments that differ by subspecialty, history, and the nature of the disclosure being researched. Important kinds of disclosure results include affinity and intimacy (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994; Laurenceau et al., 1998), physical health (Quinn et al., 2017) and mental health (Lane & Wegner, 1995; Pachankis, 2007; Slepian et al., 2017). There is an immense range of disclosure result assessments in order to collect subtle or distinct reactions. Like disclosure goals, disclosure *outcomes* can be divided into two general categories: intrapersonal and interpersonal.

In this section, an overview of the outcomes of disclosure is presented, categorized by their temporal associations. Disclosure outcomes are thus categorized here into intrapersonal and interpersonal outcomes, and further separated by short and long-term effects. Table 3 relates these categorizations and presents related citations. Many of these outcomes have been explained in previous sections of this work, thus the text of this section describes disclosure outcomes that require more explanation, such as those that theoretically conflict with each other.

Table 3: Disclosure Outcomes

	Outcome	Select citations
Short-term intrapersonal outcomes		
<u>Disclosure</u>	Activation of neural reward circuitry	(Baek et al., 2017; Tamir & Mitchell, 2012)
	Catharsis, venting	(Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Forest & Wood, 2012; Omarzu, 2000; Pennebaker et al., 1988; Richards et al., 2000; Rimé, 2009; Rimé et al., 1992; Stiles, 1987a; Stiles et al., 1992)
	Emotional reactivation	(Choi & Toma, 2014; Gable et al., 2004; Hovasapian & Levine, 2018; N. M. Lambert et al., 2013; Langston, 1994; Rimé, 2009; Verduyn, Van Mechelen, & Tuerlinckx, 2011)
Either short- or long-term intrapersonal outcomes		
<u>Disclosure</u>	Reappraisal, meaning making	(Lepore, Fernandez-Berrocal, Ragan, & Ramos, 2004; Lepore et al., 2000; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002; Nils & Rimé, 2012; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019)
	Coping efficacy	(Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019)
	Authenticity	(Slepian et al., 2017)
	Physical & psychological health benefits	(J. A. Harvey et al., 2019; Köhler et al., 2018; Lepore et al., 2000; Manigault et al., 2018; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002; Pagani et al., 2019; Pennebaker et al., 1988; Pennebaker & Susman, 1988; Richards et al., 2000)
	Social or emotional support; instrumental support	(Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Park et al., 2016; Tamir & Mitchell, 2012; Vogel, Rose, & Crane, 2018; Ziegele & Reinecke, 2017)
<u>Non-disclosure</u>	Depletion, rumination, fatigue	(Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Critcher & Ferguson, 2014; Slepian et al., 2019)
	Physical and psychological health costs	(Cook, Salter, & Stadler, 2017; Friedlander et al., 2012; Larson & Chastain, 1990; Larson et al., 2015; Masuda et al., 2018; Masuda et al., 2017; Rimé et al., 1992; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019; Uysal & Lu, 2011)
	Feelings of inauthenticity, self-punishment	(Forest & Wood, 2012; Gil-Or et al., 2015; Slepian & Bastian, 2017)

	Forgoing access to support, ignorance	(Cook et al., 2017; Keene et al., 2015; Malek, Chang, Clark, & Cook, 2013; Owens, 2014)
<u>Disclosure</u>		Short-term interpersonal outcomes
	Connectedness	(Berg & Archer, 1982; Collins & Miller, 1994; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Garcia & Crocker, 2008)
	Perceived authenticity of discloser	(Gromet & Pronin, 2009)
<u>Non-disclosure</u>	Perceived inauthenticity of discloser	(Adams & Webster, 2017; Finkenauer et al., 2009; John et al., 2016)
		Either short- or long-term interpersonal outcomes
<u>Disclosure</u>	Relationship building (including liking and intimacy)	(Collins & Miller, 1994; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012; Lamb & Edgar-Smith, 1994; Omarzu, 2000; Sprecher, Treger, & Wondra, 2013; Sprecher, Treger, Wondra, Hilaire, & Wallpe, 2013)
	Rejection, judgement; stereotyping; ostracization	(Reitsema & Grietens, 2016)
	Clarifying, changing or reinforcing norms, gossip	(Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012; Foster, 2004; Garcia & Crocker, 2008; Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2010; Kniffin & Sloan Wilson, 2010; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005; Rimé, 2007; Rosnow & Fine, 1976)
	Membership reinforcement; social network formation	(Burt, 2005; Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012; Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012; Izuma, Saito, & Sadato, 2008; Klucharev, Hytönen, Rijpkema, Smidts, & Fernández, 2009; Klucharev, Munneke, Smidts, & Fernández, 2011; Rademacher et al., 2010)
	Communal coping	(T. D. Afifi et al., 2019; T. D. Afifi, Afifi, Merrill, & Nimah, 2016; Basinger, 2018, 2019; Basinger, Caughlin, & Wang, 2018; Helgeson, Jakubiak, Van Vleet, & Zajdel, 2018; Maguire & Parcell, 2015)
	Co-rumination	(Rankin, Swearingen-Stanborough, Granger, & Byrd-Craven, 2018; Rose et al., 2017; Schwartz-Mette & Smith, 2018)
<u>Non-disclosure</u>	Relationship damage	(Slepian & Greenaway, 2018; Z. T. Zhang & Dailey, 2018).
	Social isolation	(Keene et al., 2015; Quinn et al., 2017; Slepian et al., 2019)

Short-term Intrapersonal Outcomes

Emotional Reactivation vs. Catharsis

Research regarding catharsis suggests that disclosing intense feelings can reduce emotional feelings; it can "release" emotions that build inside a discloser until they cause the

discloser distress (or, in the case of positive information, intense excitement) (Nils & Rimé, 2012; Peters et al., 2018).

Past disclosure studies have claimed that people with psychological distress are attracted to self-expression (Pennebaker, 1997) since they can lower stress by discharging the "fever" of pent-up, intense emotions by using self-expression (Bazarova & Choi, 2014; Stiles, 1987a). Zhang (2017) upheld this conclusion by finding that increased amounts of life stressors prompted more frequent self-disclosures on social media. Because disclosure can mitigate stress by freeing intense feelings, people who use these self-expression motives are more likely to share negative emotions.

Venting—sharing negative emotions while in an aroused state—has not only been shown to release immediate distress (Lepore et al., 2000), it can also shorten the duration of the negative episodes (Brans et al., 2013), and reduce repetitive, invading thoughts (Lepore, Silver, Wortman, & Wayment, 1996). Thus the process of disclosing negative content has been shown to offer catharsis and psychological relief (Pennebaker, 1990).

Yet results on the immediate cathartic benefits of emotional sharing stand in stark contrast to emotional reactivation results also found in the disclosure literature. This set of results suggests that merely sharing an emotion usually evokes regeneration of the emotion instead of expelling it (Rimé, 2009). This is true for both positive and negative information, meaning that if one shares positive information, one experiences positive emotions, and vice versa.

Choi and Toma (2014) demonstrated that across multiple forms of communication, expressing positive experiences caused the discloser to feel positive emotions. Not only is positive affect and happiness increased when one shares positive experiences (Gable et al., 2004; Lambert et al., 2013; Langston, 1994), but people experience raised feelings of life satisfaction

(Lambert et al., 2013), and to reiterate the cognitive significance of the experience in their mind (Hovasapian & Levine, 2018; Verduyn et al., 2011). This process of enhancing positive affect is called "capitalization" (Choi & Toma, 2014; Gable & Reis, 2010; Peters et al., 2018).

Conversely, verbalizing negative experiences reactivates negative emotion and can focus one's attention on it. Research continues to find that simply expressing negative experiences usually leads to detrimental results. In one study where participants were given the option to express their feelings immediately after 9/11, those who decided to express their initial reactions reported worse mental and physical health outcomes which were only exacerbated with longer responses (Seery, Silver, Holman, Ence, & Chu, 2008). Similarly, increased disclosure of negative emotions between people at risk for post-traumatic stress disorder was associated with higher levels of PTSD (Hoyt et al., 2010). And when victims of violent crimes decided to deliver a Victim Impact Statement in court, they did not achieve the same significant decreases in anger and anxiety that victims who did not submit statements experienced (Lens et al., 2015). Thus, verbalizing negative emotions may not offer the catharsis disclosers crave, but may instead aggravate their harmful effects and curtail emotional recovery (Curci & Rimé, 2012; Rimé, 2007, 2009; Rimé et al., 1992; Tait & Silver, 1989).

Differentiating between these two competing findings would be a fruitful avenue for future research. One obvious avenue of explanation would be that disclosures that "release" emotions also include additional elements, such as validation or comfort from the person being vented *to*—the de facto confidant. For example, a confidant might respond with a gesture of support (e.g. a hug) or an "I know, right?" This positive reaction could then trigger further supportive rounds of social support that raises the discloser's efficacy to cope with the emotional experience, as in the confiding secrets model (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). In other

words, sharing emotional information can eventually result in catharsis or resolution, but *first* it elicits emotional (re)activation.

Short or Long-term Intrapersonal Outcomes

Reappraisal and Efficacy

As discussed in the previous section, sharing negative emotions can reactivate them, raising the discloser's mental and physiological stress (Mendolia & Kleck, 1993; Nils & Rimé, 2012; Páez, Velasco, & González, 1999; Rimé, 2007, 2009). According to cognitive theories of emotion, the qualia of an emotion result not from the event that triggers the psychological response, but from the following cognitive appraisal of that event. Thus, reappraising—changing the cognitive evaluation of an emotional stimulus—can change the emotions one feels about it (Kross et al., 2012; Wisco et al., 2015).

One of the most efficacious reactions a confidant can give to a disclosure of negative information is assisting with reappraisal. Nils and Rimé (2012) conclude that it is to the extent that a disclosure leads to reappraised that the disclosure is helpful. Lepore and colleagues (2000, 2004) conducted experiments that sorted participants in groups. One group shared with a confederate who was supportive, but did not prompt the participant to reappraise. The other group's confederate confidants did challenge their participants to reappraise. Those who shared with supportive but unchallenging confidants had no better outcomes than those that merely talked alone or did not share at all (Lepore et al., 2004; Lepore et al., 2000).

There are many psychological mechanisms through which reappraisal could operate. For instance, one can reduce the impact of a past trauma by making the event less vivid and more objective by practicing self-distancing. Kross et al. (2012) had veterans analyze their combat-related feelings from a first-person perspective (i.e. "I feel") or a distanced, third-person perspective (i.e. "he feels"). Veterans considering events from a distanced perspective

displayed lower physiological reactivity, even though they reported similar levels of emotional reactivity (Wisco et al., 2015). Thus, changing one's perspective of an event can change the emotional impact of the event in one's mind (Rimé, 2009).

Confidants may trigger reappraisal in myriad ways, such as providing emotional validation that negates the discloser's worry the information will cause rejection (e.g., "I still love you, don't worry"), or they confidant could provide new information and insight (e.g., "My brother has the same thing. It's not *that* bad.") When a person discloses, they are allowing themselves to view private information through others' eyes and experiences, turning a personal problem into a shared reality (Boothby et al., 2014; Liu & Slepian, 2018). Reappraisal naturally follows such a process, which can then instigate an upward spiral of positive results.

When confiding a secret, the discloser that receives social support can also experience a boost in their perceived coping efficacy, or their ability to deal with the secret information (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). In their study on confiding secrets, Slepian and Moulton-Tetlock (2019) observed that to the extent social support was provided, coping efficacy was increased, and higher coping efficacy predicted increased well-being. In short, disclosure can make information seem less daunting and thus contribute to well-being.

Of course, if a disclosure goes poorly, disclosers' fears can be reaffirmed or even reappraised in a negative direction, (e.g. "I am worse off than I thought!"). Negative effects on coping efficacy were associated with a lack of social support following a confided secret (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Given that a disclosure of negative information is likely to activate the negative emotions and cognition, undergoing a disclosure process that does not provide social support or reappraisal will instigating a negative state but not assuage it. Not only would this create temporary pain for the discloser, but it will have downstream effects. For

example, a poor reaction from a first-time disclosure decreases the likelihood of subsequent disclosures (Clair et al., 2005; Greene et al., 2006), thus eliminating the opportunities to benefit from a disclosure that goes well.

Non-disclosure depletes cognitive and emotional resources

Concealment—from keeping secrets to hiding one's stigmatized identity—depletes cognitive functional and self-regulation (Critcher & Ferguson, 2014; Larson & Chastain, 1990; Larson et al., 2015). There are two major mechanisms for this depletion supported by disclosure literature: inhibition and intrusive, off-task contemplation of the information (known as "mind wandering") (Lane & Wegner, 1995; Mason et al., 2007; Slepian et al., 2017; Daniel M Wegner, 1992; Daniel M. Wegner, Giuliano, & Hertel, 1985). Cognitive preoccupation with the hidden information underpins both mechanisms.

According to the inhibition hypothesis, concealing hidden information during social exchanges is cognitively taxing, because one must monitor one's thoughts and behaviors for instances that might reveal the information, but at the same time, try to inhibit thinking of the information in order to conduct proper social interactions. Psychologists have long established that cognitive depletion results from inhibition in lab experiments (Lane & Wegner, 1995; Pennebaker, 1989; Wegner, 1994). A study by Wegner, Schneider, Carter, and White (1987) famously asked participants to not think of a white bear, only for their thoughts to be overrun with white bears. Ironic errors—when one makes exactly the mistake one is hoping to avoid—can occur naturally as a result of cognitive monitoring for unacceptable thoughts and actions (Dalgleish, Yiend, Schweizer, & Dunn, 2009; Wegner, 1994).

Disclosure-specific evidence suggests that active concealment of a stigmatized identity creates a similar kind of inhibition scenario, with a resulting drop in cognitive function. For

example, Critcher and Ferguson (2014) divided participants into groups whose members were either asked to conceal, or not conceal, their sexual orientation while interacting with a stranger. After the interaction with the stranger, those that concealed their orientation performed significantly worse on a spatial reasoning task, indicating that the interaction had depleted the participants' cognitive resources.

Proponents of the mind wandering hypothesis provide evidence that the cognitive depletion caused by secrecy is caused by the continual resurgence of intrusive off-task thoughts concerning one's secrets (Slepian et al., 2017). Importantly, this mind wandering occurred much more often in times when inhibition was unnecessary, for example when participants were not near others from whom they had to conceal the information. In addition, secret keepers are plagued by goal conflict; caught between the desire to connect with others and to avoid rejection. This causes depletion that manifests as fatigue and feelings of aloneness (Slepian et al., 2019). Mind-wandering can also be thought of as a paucity of mindfulness (Masuda et al., 2017) that further contributes to cognitive depletion associated with active concealment and secrecy.

Perhaps because it was authored by concealable stigma researchers, the Disclosure Processes Model (DPM) emphasize that avoidance goals related to the disclosure decision making process lower one's ability to employ successful emotion regulation (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010).

Short-term Interpersonal Outcomes

Authenticity vs. Inauthenticity

Choosing to withhold information is interpersonally risky, not the least because if that information is coerced, the fact it was withheld will compound any negative effects of the information. For example, Adams and Webster (2017) show that leaders with concealable stigmatized identities that are involuntarily revealed are rated to be less effective and liked less than those that voluntarily disclose their identity. In both cases, the stigmatized identity is the

same, but the manner in which it was exposed affects whether the disclosure benefits the person with that stigmatized identity.

This effect could be due to the additional character information that withholding implies. Across seven studies, John et al. (2016) investigated the costs and benefits of disclosing or withholding information. Others judge people who decide to withhold information negatively because they see them as untrustworthy, but the "hidiers" do not anticipate this reputational cost. The negative effect persists even controlling for the valence of the withheld information when the valence ranges from questionable (e.g. poor grades, STI) to flattering (e.g. blood donation).

This short-term effect can affect even long-term relationships. Even if one's partner is *not* withholding information, the mere perception they could be will lower relationship satisfaction. (Finkenauer et al., 2009). Thus, disclosure and non-disclosure can affect others' perception of the character of a discloser even apart from the information that is withheld. Voluntary disclosures are themselves noteworthy displays of honesty and genuineness. Even as disclosers fret over how recipients will process the revealed content, recipients may have respect for the discloser's gutsy act (Gromet & Pronin, 2009).

Short or Long-term Interpersonal Outcomes

Communal Coping vs. Co-rumination

Sharing between people facing the same stressors can magnify the benefits of disclosure in a phenomenon known as communal coping. Communal coping manifests when multiple people face the same stressors and share among themselves how to conceptualize the stressors and how to respond to them (Basinger, 2018, 2019; Lyons et al., 1998; Richardson & Maninger, 2016). Communal coping can involve nonverbal behaviors, but its characterization as a form of disclosure is based on the prevalence of verbal social sharing that occurs between people coping together.

The benefits of communal coping can be profound. Members of the group can build relational connections that enhance feelings of connectedness and reduce members' feeling alone with their problems. Members can aggregate resources, including information, and help one another reframe the stressors more positively. These effects, in turn, raise efficacy and resilience of individual members (Helgeson et al., 2018). By uniting the members of the group and creating a shared reality, communal coping can contribute to group problem solving and prime the group for collective action (Richardson & Maninger, 2016).

Recently, scholars have also investigated the boundary conditions of communal coping. The bulk of the initial research on communal coping was featured relatively wealthy (middle to upper class) white participant samples dealing with stressors that were either acute or moderately chronic (Basinger et al., 2018; Maguire & Parcell, 2015).

Communal coping may not be possible when the stressors are overwhelming or the lack of agency among group members is too profound, and attempts to enact it might backfire (Basinger et al., 2018). For example, Afifi et al. (2016) studied mothers and adolescents in Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, Lebanon and observed that communal coping may not be practicable or even desirable if there are too few resources to meet basic needs and mistrust and violence are present. In a study of the same camps but with different data, Afifi et al. (2019) demonstrated that communal coping may actually harm the mental health of adolescents who have experienced trauma and whose homes have high levels of conflict.

In summary, communal coping may be most effective when stressors are moderate in intensity and duration, as opposed to severe (Maguire & Parcell, 2015). A lack of trust is one mechanism for the failure of communal coping implied in the study of mothers and adolescents in the Palestinian refugee (Afifi et al., 2016). Members of a group who do not trust the other

members will naturally resist collaboration, and may view overtures to share with suspicion. Stress contagion is a second mechanism that could undermine benefits of communal coping and is implied by the study of adolescents with home trouble (Afifi et al., 2019). A specific kind of stress contagion, called co-rumination, has been shown to be detrimental even in situations of low severity.

Co-rumination occurs when two people continuously share their stressors and their negative emotions about them with each other. This pattern of disclosures produces stress contagion at a physiological level; members of a pair practicing co-rumination can achieve attunement in their cortisol levels, which tend to rise as the practice continues (Rose et al., 2017). Attendant with this rise are increased symptoms of anxiety and depression, even as members of the pair grow closer emotionally (Rankin et al., 2018). So although co-rumination predicts poorer mental health outcomes (Rose et al., 2017), it may also promote intimacy, which could reinforce its continued use within the pair (Rankin et al., 2018).

The majority of studies on co-rumination have featured adolescents. While some studies have not found significant differences by sex (Schwartz-Mette & Smith, 2018), most of the conclusions in the field indicate that adolescent girls engage in co-rumination with each other more often than adolescent boys. Rankin et al. (2018) found that young women with cortisol levels that were already roughly synchronized engaged in more co-rumination during a laboratory task, which then lead to more minutely attuned cortisol levels as measured after the task.

The dual effects of co-rumination in adolescent girls—decreased mental health but increased relational bonding—likely flow from the ability of disclosure to increase intimacy but also to reactivate the emotions related to the content of the disclosure and keep the disclosed

information top of mind. If a confidant reflects the negativity of one's disclosure back at the discloser—or worse, exacerbates it—the disclosure will not yield psychological benefits.

Reinforce vs. Reduce Stigma

For many with a stigmatized identity, fear of gossip has made non-disclosure seem a better option than it otherwise would. Rejection from one confidant is hurtful, but the risk of mass rejection is worse still (Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004; Chandra & Robinson, 2009; Dunbar, 2004). Gossip, or sharing the personal information of others, including shared secrets (Dunbar, 2004; Wert & Salovey, 2004), can result from disclosures of personal information. The spreading of personal information of group members has been posited to have ramifications for group membership and social control (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994; Carey, 2005; Dunbar, 2004). What gets gossiped about and by whom codifies and reiterates group norms and group membership (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012). Meanwhile, the threat of being gossiped about is the first defense that a group has to enforce norm compliance (Feinberg, Willer, & Schultz, 2014; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Merry (1984) noted that the act of gossip must be reinforced by an actual ability of the group to ostracize the deviant, that the gossip itself is not the full punishment the group can enact. Rather, it serves a cataloguing function of norms, and a warning system that discourages and fixes minor norm violations through reputational loss and repair (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005; Wilson et al., 2000). As Cowan (2019) points out, gossip is a means for establishing "what is worth keeping secret in the first place," (p. 3). In this way, group secret sharing as an unintended consequence of a dyadic disclosure can reinforce stigma.

Dyadic disclosure can also be a means to reduce stigma within a group, by exposing private concerns and contributing to shared realities among its members (Liu & Slepian, 2018). Individuals who engage in "ecosystem" and "political" disclosures often hold explicit goals to reclaim problematic monikers and foster acceptance for their stigmatized identities (Cain, 1991;

Corrigan & Kleinlein, 2005). In other words, the same mechanisms that operate to reinforce stigma can also ameliorate them by changing group norms through social sharing (Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Cockrill & Biggs, 2018). However, this is not an immediate process, given that gossip is a phenomenon that operates by multilevel selection theory, in which individual and group-level benefits can conflict (Kniffin & Sloan Wilson, 2010; Kniffin & Wilson, 2005). In organizations, socially-redeeming gossip can arise when members of small groups are uniformly rewarded for production (Kniffin & Sloan Wilson, 2010). In this way, members may share positive gossip (e.g. praise, stories of effort and contribution) along with personal information about each other with the members of the small group and with members of the larger social environment. This serves to reinforce group membership and spread the word of group performance (Kniffin & Sloan Wilson, 2010).

1.6: Conclusion

In Chapter 1 of this thesis, an overview is provided of the historical and recent disclosure literature landscape. The dual aim was to uncover common constructs across sub-disciplines and propose a general process model of disclosure. We distinguished types of disclosure as they are studied in the literature and plotted them against common constructs such as motivation(s) for the disclosure (Table 1) and depth of the disclosure (Figure 1).

The rival motivational systems underlying disclosure were discussed, and it was suggested that clashing approach and avoid motivations that draw people toward connecting with others but steer them away from vulnerability and rejection can further be separated into motivations to serve oneself or serve others, and to control private information or reveal the true self (Table 1). Similarly, disclosure behaviors were categorized and arranged along a proposed

spectrum that ranged in its degree of disclosure (Figure 1). On one end is positioned active concealment, in which personal information is effortfully hidden. On the other is active presentation, a form of public disclosure or broadcasting of information. Most disclosure behaviors were categorized as between the two poles because they are acts of selective disclosure, disclosure that is discriminatory based on context and the content of the disclosure.

In addition, the process and outcomes of disclosure were analyzed. The process steps of the two main model types for disclosure decision making were shown to be compatible and consist of four basic steps: need analysis and goal formation, cost-benefit analysis, and the disclosure event and feedback loop(s). Outcomes of disclosure and non-disclosure were categorized by their temporal attributes (Table 3), whether they are short-term or long-term. Several apparently conflicting outcomes of disclosure prominent in the literature (e.g. catharsis/emotional reactivation) were compared, and resolutions proposed.

Finally, gaps in the disclosure literature relevant to the current study were identified, including Afifi and Stuber's (2009) suggestion that incorporating planning theory into a study of disclosure strategies would be fruitful (e.g., Berger, 1997), and a more general observation by Omarzu (2000) that research tying outcomes of disclosure to its motivations (goals) and process (e.g. disclosure strategies) is relatively sparse, especially across multiple types of disclosure content. Addressing these gaps is the primary function of Chapter 2.

Chapter 2: Empirical Work

In Chapter One, an overview of the most pertinent studies focusing on the phenomenon of disclosure was provided, with the dual goals of identifying common constructs across sub-disciplines and proposing a general process model of disclosure. This process uncovered several lines of inquiry as candidates for further exploration. Moreover, authors of several influential theories called for the evaluation of motivations, process steps, and outcomes of disclosure (while holding the content of the disclosure constant) in the context of the same study e.g. (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010).

It is also noteworthy that both purposive and contextual models of the disclosure process postulate that the discloser conducts cost–benefit analysis before engaging in disclosure. Thus, Afifi and Steuber (2009), developers of the revelation risk model, speculate that additional theoretical and empirical direction can be drawn from the planning literature (e.g., Berger, 1997; Berger & diBattista, 1993) to better understand the disclosure strategies used in practice. The work presented here aims to address these gaps, with a specific focus on the disclosure of sensitive information.

2.1: Disclosure of Sensitive Information

The current work defines sensitive information as personal information that is routinely kept from all or some others. People seek to control sensitive information about themselves, as its content may be private, counter-normative, or negative (Petronio, 2002, 2010). Although sensitive information may be selectively disclosed, doing so carries a risk (Afifi & Steuber, 2009). The present work explores the disclosure of sensitive information to another person "in real life."

All forms of self-disclosure have the potential to include sensitive information. Social sharing, for example, often deals with sensitive topics. However, highly emotional communication—regardless of valence or specific content—is neither common nor appropriate in most daily contexts. Even relatively impersonal topics, such as politics, or benign topics, such as food preferences of other cultures, are routinely avoided in casual discussions (Sun & Slepian, 2019). On the other hand, intimate and emotional self-disclosure during relationship formation and building tends to increase liking and intimacy (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994; Derlega & Berg, 2013; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). Still, even in these cases, it can backfire if the disclosure is perceived as excessive or inappropriate to the context of the discussion or the relationship (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Kelly & McKillop, 1996).

However, what *could* be the content of disclosure differs considerably from the topics examined in pertinent literature. Extant studies on social sharing as a sub-discipline tend to focus on the expression and transmission of emotive content (e.g., J. Berger, 2011). Conversely, authors of classic self-disclosure studies have primarily examined content disclosed in relationship building by manipulating low-stakes disclosures in the context of stranger–stranger relationships e.g. (Berg & Archer, 1982; Chaikin & Derlega, 1974; Cozby, 1973; Derlega & Berg, 1987; Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Derlega et al., 1973; Derlega et al., 1976; Jourard, 1971; Kirshner, Dies, & Brown, 1978; Quattrone & Jones, 1978). Confiding secrets (e.g., Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019) and disclosing concealable stigma inevitably involves disclosure of sensitive information (e.g., Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009). The approach adopted in this investigation draws upon both research streams.

Concealable Stigma and Sensitive Information

In most prior studies on concealable stigma, both the disclosure content and the populations studied were limited. This is problematic, as concealable stigmas are already a subset of personal stigmatized qualities. Nonetheless, most studies exploring this phenomenon are limited to the disclosure of a single type of concealable stigma by a specific group of participants. For example, in their study on HIV-positive men who have sex with men, Greene and Serovich (1996) focused on their revealing their HIV status to their partner(s), while Manigault et al. (2018) studied queer youths revealing their identities to close family members.

Although these and other authors have produced influential theoretical work on disclosure processes in general, when developing their models, they relied on the findings reported in general disclosure literature and prior research on secrecy (e.g., Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). These trends emphasize both the natural constraints of a field focused on specific disclosure content, and the limited applicability of its findings to the disclosure of sensitive information more generally. Accordingly, the present investigation draws upon both theories and empirical work in this field to frame and support the inquiry into the disclosure of sensitive content in the broader sense.

Secrets and Sensitive Information

The research approach adopted here is also guided by the structure and methodologies utilized in recent works on secrecy (e.g., Slepian & Bastian, 2017; Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). This social situation associated with the disclosure of sensitive information mirrors the structure of an event during which one divulges a secret (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019) without demanding secrecy. The intimate conversation that undoubtedly occurs, as well as the possibility of social support or affirmation being offered are presumably

similar in disclosures of sensitive information and confiding of secrets, and are treated as such in the current approach.

The topics of secrets that people share and the disclosure of sensitive information are presumed to be similar based on the findings reported by Slepian and colleagues (e.g., Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Moreover, Sun and Slepian (2019) identified 10 categories of subjects that people avoid discussing with others, including money, politics, religion, sex, family, and one's personal history. These categories underlie more specific subsets of information that people keep secret as illustrated next.

Slepian, Chun, and Mason (2017) developed an expanded subset of these topics that encompass the secrets people keep, giving rise to the 38-item Common Secrets Questionnaire (CSQ). The questionnaire content was informed by a survey of over 1,000 individuals and has been validated by Slepian and colleagues in numerous subsequent studies featuring over 5,000 participants and more than 100,000 secrets. The CSQ includes analysis of concealable stigma as a part of its topic set, whereby six topics specifically relate to concealable stigma. Furthermore, its 38 topics represent 92% of the secrets Slepian et al. (2017) had uncovered during their investigations. Owing to the broad applicability of this questionnaire and its relationship to a set of topics people avoid discussing (Sun & Slepian, 2019), it is reasonable to assume the CSQ could be adapted for studies on the disclosure of sensitive information.

To this end, Slepian and Moulton-Tetlock (2019) have used the Common Secrets Questionnaire to study the disclosure of sensitive information and its downstream effects on well-being. Specifically, disclosing the information—sharing it without a request for secrecy—leads to lower well-being than does disclosing the same content with a request for secrecy. The authors suggested that the difference could be attributable to increased intrusive thoughts in the

former case, as the discloser contemplates his/her lack of control over sensitive information that has not been restricted by a request for secrecy. The current work expands upon this comparison to identify additional causes of regret following the disclosure of sensitive information.

Thus, in the approach adopted in the present investigation, the content of each disclosure is standardized by only allowing participants to evaluate standard disclosures. The topics included have been drawn from pertinent studies on secrecy and concealable stigma. . Moreover, by gathering within-person data across a variety of sensitive information types, it is possible to account for individual differences in disclosure tendencies or evaluations. This approach permits uncovering larger trends in the disclosure of sensitive information, rather than idiosyncratic discrepancies attributable to individuals or a specific topic. In sum, the aim of the current work is to examine generalizable aspects of disclosing sensitive information in the context of selective disclosure, while acknowledging the complexity of personal disclosure decisions.

2.2: Research Questions

Linking Motivations and Processes of Disclosure to their Outcomes

The goal of the work presented in this chapter is to identify factors that contribute to the outcomes of the disclosure of sensitive information. To achieve this aim, analyses were conducted to ascertain whether theoretical and empirical findings reported in extant disclosure literature also predict aspects of the disclosure of sensitive information. Specifically, identified gaps in the disclosure literature (such as evaluating motivations, process, and outcomes of disclosure) were investigated, while controlling for disclosure content and assessing the extent to which planning affects disclosure.

In Chapter One, the motivations for disclosure, the process of disclosure, and its outcomes were delineated, and the same categories are used here when presenting the empirical

inquiry of disclosure of sensitive information. The first set of studies pertains to regret as an outcome of disclosure. In subsequent studies, focus is given to motivations and process "steps" in the disclosure of sensitive information and their associations with disclosure outcomes. The chapter closes with a discussion of strategies that can be adopted to disclose sensitive information more effectively.

Outcomes of Sensitive Information Disclosure

Is disclosure of sensitive information regretted?

The benefits of disclosure have been extensively studied in a variety of contexts. Available evidence indicates that disclosing personal information prompts reciprocated disclosure with an interaction partner, leading to increased mutual liking and intimacy (Collins & Miller, 1994; Derlega & Berg, 1987; Dindia, 2002; Jourard, 1971; Laurenceau et al., 1998; McAdams, 1988; Miller & Kenny, 1986). Repeated success in social sharing between close individuals nurtures perceived social support, an asset that characterizes healthy individuals and couples (Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1987; Feeney & Collins, 2015). Moreover, burgeoning literature on secrecy highlights the burden of hiding secrets and the contribution of confiding them to mental well-being. Disclosing sensitive information is similar to confiding secrets, in that it involves topics that may be counter-normative, or appropriate only to limited contexts or deep degrees of interpersonal intimacy (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Sharing this kind of information, especially to the extent that doing so fosters support or reappraisal, can alleviate rumination and increase well-being (Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019).

Akin to social sharing, disclosure of sensitive information can benefit the discloser. Yet, people commonly fear and avoid disclosure of negative information due to real or perceived disclosure risks e.g. (Afifi & Steuber, 2009). When people disclose to others their struggles, worries, and feelings (Rime et al., 1991), they make themselves open to support but also

vulnerable to pain. Curci and Rimé (2012) suggested in their review of social sharing that people share negative emotions to facilitate processing of challenging emotional experiences. However, ample evidence indicates that sharing negative emotions can *increase* negative thoughts and feelings, thus contributing to physiological stress (Mendolia & Kleck, 1993; Nils & Rimé, 2012; Páez et al., 1999). If one conveys negative emotions to an individual that expresses support but fails to direct the discloser to re-think his/her position and reactions, the sharing event is no more helpful than talking to oneself (Lepore et al., 2004; Lepore et al., 2000). Concealable stigma disclosure has also been shown to lead to dire consequences, such as ostracization and discrimination e.g., (Berrill & Herek, 1992; Corrigan & Kleinlein, 2005). Although confiding secrets can benefit the confider (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019), and confiding a secret is posited to be the closest analog to sharing sensitive information (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019), it does not always do so (Kelly, 2002; Kelly & McKillop, 1996). Even in the domain of professional disclosure of sensitive information, clinical talk therapy encompasses a variety of techniques and leads to variable outcomes (Lambert & Barley, 2001; Norcross, 2010).

Authors of disclosure studies have used diverse outcome measures depending on the subfield, history, and the type of disclosure studied. Some of the most prominent outcomes studied are liking and intimacy (e.g., Collins & Miller, 1994; Laurenceau et al., 1998), psychological well-being (Lane & Wegner, 1995; Pachankis, 2007; Slepian et al., 2017), and physiological health (Quinn et al., 2017). Subsets of these broader categories have also been frequently examined, such as social support (e.g., Kalichman et al., 2003), distress (e.g., Broman-Fulks et al., 2007; Greenberg & Arthur A Stone, 1992; Hays et al., 1993; Jonzon & Lindblad, 2005; Kalichman & Nachimson, 1999); posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms (e.g.,

Broman-Fulks et al., 2007; Filipas & Ullman, 2001), questioning one's identity (e.g., Major & Gramzow, 1999), and self-esteem (e.g., Afifi & Caughlin, 2006).

In this research, however, the goal is to develop a broad, single-item outcome measure of post-disclosure regret/gladness. If disclosure varies so dramatically in its risks and rewards, sometimes bestowing benefits and other times bringing burdens, there may be meaningful variation in regret that follows the disclosure of sensitive information, which results in the first research question:

RQ 1: Is the disclosure of sensitive information ever regretted?

To answer this question, the study participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they regretted or were glad of every disclosure they could remember sharing. Emotional states tend to be fleeting; most last from several seconds to a few hours (Frijda, Mesquita, Sonnemans, & Van Goozen, 1991; Verduyn, Delvaux, Van Coillie, Tuerlinckx, & Van Mechelen, 2009). Yet regret is a complicated amalgam of sadness, disappointment, and self-blame that can persist over a longer period (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995). This persistence is due in part to the emotional amplification that occurs when people engage in counterfactual thinking (Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Miller, Turnbull, & McFarland, 1990; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). If the counterfactual is easy to imagine—for example, if a person changes his/her reservation at the last minute to take a bus that crashes, both the subject of the incident and third-party observers will judge that event to be more tragic than if that person had been booked on that bus all along (Miller et al., 1990). Regretted actions (and inactions), like the sadness that forms a crucial part of the regret emotion, are likely to be accompanied by rumination, or the lingering cognitive effects of a negative emotion that can reactivate its affective state (Gilovich & Medvec, 1995; Rimé et al., 1992; Roese & Summerville, 2005). Regretted incidents also tend to reassert their grip on a person's

mind periodically without prior thought, as in the case of mind wandering to unfinished business (Roese & Summerville, 2005). Because of regret's persistence, questioning participants about regret allows reactions to disclosures that have happened across a wide timeframe to be measured.

How are valence and importance of content associated with regret/gladness?

The literature survey conducted as a part of this investigation revealed certain factors that reliably affect the successful outcome of disclosures, one of which is the valence of content disclosed. To a certain extent, people relive the emotions associated with the content they disclose. Not only do they feel positive when sharing positive information and vice versa (Choi & Toma, 2014), but the cognitive salience of the event is reiterated during disclosure—a phenomenon known as the capitalization process (Gable & Reis, 2010). Sharing positive content is reliably associated with positive outcomes (N. M. Lambert et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2018), while outcomes associated with disclosure of negative content vary considerably (Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Slade et al., 2007). It is well-established that results of negative-content disclosures are less consistently beneficial, as the relationship between processing negative events and emotions and the disclosure of the same is complicated (e.g., Stanton & Low, 2012).

The disclosure literature also addresses a broad set of topics that range from the mundane getting-to-know-you information sharing to the confiding or concealment of important and intense secrets (e.g., Chelune, 1975; Derlaga & Berg, 2013; Slepian et al., 2017). Would-be disclosers may understandably fear and avoid disclosure of negative content (Afifi & Steuber, 2009). Yet, it is the non-disclosure or concealment of negative information that has the most deleterious effects (for reviews, see Larson & Chastain, 1990; Larson et al., 2015). Thus, it is especially important to study the disclosure of negative content in order to identify ways to

maximize the benefits it yields. These observations have promoted the following research question:

RQ 2: How are valence and importance of content associated with regret or gladness following the disclosure of sensitive information?

The empirical approach adopted in this study includes a measure of valence with which participants are required to rate every disclosure they report. These ratings are utilized when exploring moderation effects by valence of content, ideally replicating the moderation reported in literature. A measure of the importance of content is also included, given that, according to Sonnemans and Frijda (1995), it is the importance of an event, as appraised by the subject, that influences the degree to which that event affects the subject's personal concerns. Exploration of a wide range of disclosure content importance in a single study is important, given that in prior research focus was typically given to a narrow set of disclosure content.

These two content variables were adopted in the present study not only to explore the moderation by content valence, but also to investigate the understudied dimension of its importance. Moreover, consistently capturing these variables across multiple studies comprising this work allows them to be used as controls in experiments aimed at exploring an effect invariant across content.

Motivations

Are other-focused motivations associated with higher gladness outcomes?

The motivations behind disclosure can be roughly classified under avoid and approach categories developed in the classic psychology context (e.g., Carver & White, 1994; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Elliot, 2008). Concealment tends to be motivated by avoidance, whereas approach is commonly linked to disclosure, as established by (Jin, 2012) following analysis of antecedent goals of participants' disclosure of medical information on an e-health website. More generally,

-serving the self and *-serving others* are the two extremes of a continuum that can be applied to disclosure motivations, whereby the former is associated with avoidance of disclosure, and the latter with “approaching” disclosure (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Garcia & Crocker, 2008; Omarzu, 2000).

Revealing the authentic self and connecting with others are two disclosure motives theoretically designated with an approach classification e.g., (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Indeed, in pertinent literature, both reveal and connect motives are associated with positive outcomes (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Collins & Miller, 1994; Grieve & Watkinson, 2016). Revealing aspects of the self via disclosure fosters feelings of authenticity that are appreciated by the confidant. Indeed, available evidence shows that confidants offer more emotional support (Kim & Lee, 2011) and instrumental support (Vogel et al., 2018) to disclosers they perceive as authentic. Truthful disclosures also increase disclosers' general well-being (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014; Yang et al., 2017). Lamb and Edgar-Smith (1994) found that disclosers motivated by the desire to connect with the confidant (i.e., seek intimacy) were most likely to report confidants reacting positively to their disclosure of a history of sexual abuse.

Revealing hidden aspects of the self can be associated with self-focused or other-focused motives. For example, in their daily diary study featuring participants with concealable stigmas, Garcia and Crocker (2008) found that the motive matters. Specifically, participants who held other-centered (“ecosystem”) goals demonstrated less depression and anxiety than those who held self-image (“egosystem”) goals. These findings prompt the third research question addressed in this work:

RQ 3: Are “other-focused” approach motivations associated with higher post-disclosure gladness levels than “self-focused” motivations?

To address this question, the current work investigates the relationship between holding two disclosure goals: 1) "reveal oneself" or 2) "connect with the confidant") and the post-disclosure regret associated with holding these goals. In this analysis, the valence and importance of the content are measured and controlled for to isolate the association between the two motivation types and their post-disclosure outcomes irrespective of content.

How is obtaining support from a confidant associated with disclosure outcomes?

Disclosure can lead to connecting with others and receiving either emotional or instrumental support (Beals et al., 2009; Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2011; Vogel et al., 2018). Repeated social sharing among friends and family creates perceived social support, which is a hallmark of healthy individuals and couples (Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1987; Feeney & Collins, 2015). Confiding a secret can trigger support from the confidant, which may lead to reappraisal of the troubling secret. These outcomes can alleviate rumination and increase well-being (Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Slepian and Kirby (2018) found that disclosers of secrets prefer conscientious confidants that can provide help. Support from close others can be particularly important (Clark & Reis, 1988; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Reis et al., 2004; Reis & Shaver, 1988), but so can support from communities of otherwise strangers that share a common stigmatized or traumatic condition (Desmond, 2012; Gage-Bouchard et al., 2017; Zhang, 2017). In sum, social support matters and is facilitated by disclosure facilitate.

Yet, the process of giving and receiving of support during disclosure can be complicated. Nils and Rimé (2012) found that socio-affective support—including empathy, social support, and validation—decreased the discloser's feelings of loneliness, which increased if socio-cognitive help—such as stimulating reappraisal of the issue—was offered by confidants. This stands in contrast to the findings reported by Lepore et al. (2000) and Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock (2019)

suggesting that reappraisal is essential to benefitting from confiding secrets or emotional expression.

Available evidence also indicates that receiving help when it is not sought could lead to feelings of being patronized. Given that disclosure motivated by avoidance is often aimed at controlling private data, which engenders the feeling of agency (Petronio, 1991, 2002, 2010), sense of being belittled by a disclosure interaction could develop even if the reaction was helpful. Disclosure of sensitive information makes disclosers vulnerable, and unsought help may underscore their vulnerability. This contradiction in the seeking and receiving of support is reflected in the following research question:

RQ 4: Does the benefit from receiving support depend on whether that support was sought?

A preliminary answer to this question is sought by exploring the relationships among having a goal to receive help, receiving (or not receiving help), and the post-disclosure gladness or regret.

Disclosure Process

Choice of confidant and strategies for disclosure

Multiple disclosure frameworks propose that disclosers evaluate viable revelation options by engaging in a risk-reward analysis of the objectives and dangers involved (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Omarzu, 2000). Theoretically, the discloser must assess which person they should confide in so that they secure more favorable results. Another element for disclosers to gauge is the optimal disclosure strategy (Afifi & Steuber, 2009), taking into consideration their relationship with the confidant and/or the potential of an adverse reaction, therefore increasing the likelihood of a beneficial outcome. The prominence of both "choices" or steps in the disclosure models inspired the following research question:

RQ 5: Can the post-disclosure regret associated with choosing the "right" confidant be separated from the post-disclosure regret associated with choosing the "right" disclosure strategy?

These questions are addressed in the present study by measuring the extent to which the intention to disclose to a particular confidant and the intention to use a specific disclosure strategy are formed before the disclosure, which are treated as distinct steps. First, the antecedents that would support one of the calculations and not the other are calculated to test whether they predict only one of the choices. That is, the current work tests for a dissociation in the variance in regret/gladness that each choice predicts. If they are indeed two separable calculations performed before disclosure, it is expected that each would contribute to regret/gladness variation in outcomes even when controlling for the other.

Do people plan for disclosure of sensitive information?

Three of the most prominent process models for disclosure postulate that would-be disclosers evaluate their disclosure goals and the risks associated with disclosure to select confidants, and then perform a cost–benefit analysis to determine whether and how to disclose (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Omarzu, 2000). Nonetheless, the proponents of these purposive models noted that, although their theories seem to imply that disclosure is preceded by considerable cognitive effort, these deliberation processes may or may not be conscious or lengthy. As this assertion has never been tested directly, the following research question was addressed in the present study:

RQ 6: Do people consciously plan for the disclosure of sensitive information? If so, to what extent does this contribute to post-disclosure regret/gladness?

In answering this question, it can be assumed that the degree of pre-disclosure conscious deliberation can be deduced from how "planned" these disclosures are. If there is a positive association between unplanned disclosures and regret, it could be implied that non-conscious

cost–benefit analysis is not as effective as a deliberate process, as it may reduce the fidelity with which the confidant and the disclosure strategy are selected. The effects of disclosure planning have rarely been examined and, to the author’s knowledge, an explicit integration of planning theory has not yet occurred. Thus, it is noteworthy to consider Afifi and Steuber (2009) revelation risk model, according to which "willingness" or "readiness" to disclose builds up inside people to a point after which they can disclose the information. This is similar to the theory of planned behavior and its associated behavioral change process models postulating that people undergo consecutive stages of increasing preparedness to change a habitual behavior they deem problematic (Ajzen, 1991; Armitage & Conner, 1999, 2001; Dennison & Shepherd, 1995; Sparks & Guthrie, 1998; Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999). Possibly because of this similarity, Afifi and Steuber (2009) called for the integration of planning theory with disclosure theory.

In the present study, the aim is to ascertain whether planned disclosure is associated with less regret than a non-planned revelation with the same valence and importance of content. This is important to establish because of the positive relationship between disclosure content and outcomes demonstrated in prior studies. Even though disclosure can greatly benefit those who confide negative secrets or reveal stigmatized identities (Beals et al., 2009; Pachankis, 2007; Pennebaker, 1997; Slepian et al., 2017), adverse outcomes are also possible. Hence, it is important to establish if suboptimal outcomes are inexorably related to negative content, or if certain mistakes made by disclosers of negative content could be ameliorated by planning.

What might cause unplanned disclosure?

As discussed in Chapter One, concealment of stigma or keeping a secret can cause rumination, feelings of aloneness, and fatigue (Slepian et al., 2017; Slepian et al., 2019; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Emotion also triggers social sharing and can cause depletion, which reduces self-control. Thus, a combination of strong negative emotion (i.e., distress) brought on

by non-disclosure may be associated with haste to disclose regardless of planning. Available evidence suggests that distress triggers disclosure *and* impairs relational goals, supporting this conjecture (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001; Quinn & Chaudoir, 2009; Slade et al., 2007).

2.3: Method Overview

In the five studies comprising this work, the same general design, procedures, and data analysis techniques were adopted. The general design and procedure for all studies is reviewed next.

Design and Procedures

The design of the five studies comprising this work is based upon a technique developed by Slepian and colleagues (2017), which reflects the notion that experimentally manipulating the disclosure of sensitive information is neither practical nor ethical. For example, an experimenter cannot randomly assign a participant to have an abortion and then share this news. Instead, focus is given to the experiences people have had in real-life when disclosing sensitive information to others. In this work, the goal is to relate these experiences to post-disclosure regret and gladness.

For the present investigation, U.S.-based adults were invited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk to participate in an online survey. Recruiting on Mechanical Turk ensured that the study sample would be more representative of the general adult U.S. population than, for example, typical college students, while guaranteeing anonymity. Each participant answered the Social Sharing Questionnaire (SSQ).

The Social Sharing Questionnaire (SSQ) is based on the CSQ developed by Slepian et al. (2017), whereby "secret information" is replaced by "sensitive information" where applicable. This change was important, as the goal was to focus on topics that people might not consider

secret. In other words, they are not necessarily hiding the information from another person, but its disclosure would still be meaningful to the discloser, because of its personal and negative or counter-normative nature.

The SSQ commences with items pertaining to general life satisfaction, followed by a list of 38 topics of common sensitive information people might find personally relevant (e.g., infidelity, discontent, preferences, finances, beliefs, drug use, trauma). For each of the 38 categories of experience, participants are required to indicate whether they had the experience, as well as if they had shared. For each disclosed (shared) topic, participants are asked a series of follow-up questions about that specific disclosure. These follow-up questions were adjusted for each of the five studies to align with the relevant variables. Because most participants recounted multiple disclosures, a large number of data points per study was obtained, permitting the use of mixed modeling techniques designed to capture both fixed and crossed random effects (as discussed in the Data Analysis section below). After answering these questions, participants completed the final questionnaire section pertaining to demographics.

Correlational, Retrospective Data

The goal of the present study was to capture and analyze the relevant aspects of participants' prior disclosure experiences. Hence, correlational and retrospective design was adopted, as these qualities are well-matched to the study of real-world disclosure, albeit with limitations. Capturing people's impressions of their actual past experiences is preferable to more traditional in-lab experimentation because the data reflect the naturalistic disclosure of consequential and real sensitive information. In other words, the fact that a person possesses specific sensitive information that could be disclosed is not artificially assigned, but occurs naturalistically. This means that the procedures and consequences captured regarding this

disclosure are not subject to the demand characteristics that would be associated with assigning participants sensitive information or randomly prompting them to disclose. Because these experiences are real, and because multiple data points (disclosures) per person were captured during data collection, it is possible to explore how differences in disclosure covary. This approach thus examines real world disclosures rather than a one-time laboratory experience with a single assigned disclosure.

Still, it is important to acknowledge the limitations in retrospective data. For example, participants are unlikely to remember exactly how a disclosure occurred. Yet relative evaluations across disclosures should be appropriately ranked for each of the measures. For example, a discloser may not remember exactly how much he/she wanted to connect with a confidant over a specific disclosure related to a highly unusual hobby, but would be able to recall how it differed from disclosure of a previous abortion.

Finally, in the present study the downstream effects, such as the regret that lingers after a disclosure, are examined. It is thus relevant to query participants how much they regret a specific disclosure.

Data Analysis

The data captured through the survey was subjected to multilevel modeling, as disclosures are nested within individual participants' lived experiences and within topics. R-packages `lme4` and `lmerTest` were used to subject multilevel models to Satterthwaite approximation tests to calculate p -values. This involved scaling model estimates to approximate the F -distribution to estimate degrees of freedom, which are thus non-whole numbers and differ slightly across analyses (Kuznetsova, Brockhoff, & Christensen, 2013).

Rather than summarizing data per participant, individual disclosures were treated as units of analysis. Such analyses are far more powerful than person-level approaches and eliminate the risk of omitting valuable information, which might be the case when aggregating per participant. Instead, multilevel models were used to test the fixed effects of interest, while also including participant and disclosure category as crossed random factors, which would account for random variance attributable to participants and categories of disclosure.

The remaining variance explained in each model corresponds to the *general* relationships between the fixed effects and the dependent measure, such that any effect found is neither attributable to a particular participant nor secret category. Each individual participant and category of secret is associated with a random intercept in the model, and the fixed effects generalize and average across each specific participant and category of secret. Consequently, the results yielded are not attributable to a particular participant or secret category.

Overview of Studies

The motivations, processes and outcomes of disclosure were presented in Chapter 1, and the organization of Chapter 2 is similar. Chapter 2 encompasses five studies that were conducted to understand the disclosure of sensitive information, particularly which elements are associated with post-disclosure regret. In addition, the studies explored associations between motivations and process steps in the disclosure of sensitive information and its perceived outcomes. Chapter 2 finishes with ideas on how people might improve their disclosures of sensitive information.

2.4: Study 1

In Study 1, the aim was to establish basic relationships between the main variables—valence and importance of content disclosed—and post-disclosure regret/gladness. This study was also conducted to replicate findings yielded by prior research, as this would validate the

method adopted here. As the same method was intended for use in all five studies, it was essential to ascertain whether it was appropriate for studying the disclosure of sensitive information. If the most consistent findings could not be replicated, it would be necessary to reconsider the choice of research approach.

The goal of Study 1 was to establish whether disclosure of sensitive information is followed by a significant amount of regret, and if patterns could be detected that led to regret. It was assumed that regret would not be randomly distributed, but would rather be associated with attributes of disclosure content. Specifically, it was hypothesized that valence would moderate disclosure outcomes, as previously reported (Choi & Toma, 2014). Moreover, analyses were conducted to test whether disclosure of negative information is associated with greater regret compared to the disclosure of positively rated topics (H1). In order to test H2, analyses sought to replicate the prior finding that not all disclosures of negative content lead to poor outcomes, but rather that outcomes following disclosure of negative information are more variable than those associated with disclosure of positive information.

A further aim of Study 1 was to investigate the role of content importance in disclosure outcomes. Evidence suggests that greater depth of disclosure (Collins & Miller, 1994) and more emotional disclosure increase intimacy, whereas merely sharing more facts does not (Laurenceau et al., 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1988). This necessitated exploration of the influence of disclosure content importance on post-disclosure regret/gladness. Given that important disclosure content is related to intimacy, it was postulated that important topics would contribute more than unimportant topics to both post-disclosure gladness and regret (H3). In other words, when important disclosures are well-received, outcomes are particularly palliative.

Method

Participants and procedure

The procedure adopted for Study 1 was utilized in all five studies reported in this chapter. As previously noted, Amazon's Mechanical Turk was employed when recruiting study participants, yielding the initial sample of 200 U.S.-based adults. However, data pertaining to three participants who admitted that their answers had been untruthful was excluded, leaving the information shared by 197 individuals (43.15% of whom were male and 56.85% were female) for analysis. Participants' average age was in the mid-thirties ($M = 36.05$, $SD = 12.74$, 95% CI = [34.26, 37.84]).

All 197 participants completed the SSQ, answering additional follow-up questions for every shared topic. This resulted in 2,891 disclosures, or 14.68 on average per participant. These disclosures ranged across all 38 topics and showed considerable variation on measures of importance and valence.

Measures

Each shared disclosure (whether recent or not) was assessed by the participant on the following measures. Post-disclosure regret was measured on a 13-point Likert scale, whereby when responding to the question "How do you feel about having shared this with them?" participants were instructed to select one of the offered answers, ranging from "I regret sharing this with them" (1) through "No feelings one way or the other" (7) to "I am glad I shared this with them" (13). Regret was reverse coded to facilitate subsequent analyses.

Importance of content disclosed was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, instructing the participants to respond to the question "How important is what you shared?" by selecting one of the answers ranging from "Not at all important" (1) to "Very important" (7).

Valence of content disclosed was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby when responding to the question "Is what you shared positive or negative?" participants were instructed to select one of the offered answers, ranging from "Very negative" (1) to "Very positive" (7).

Results and Discussion

Descriptives

Most of the 2,891 disclosures made by the 197 participants were not regretted and were important, and their content was roughly split between positive and negative valence. Specifically, 13.49% of disclosures were regretted (rated at < 7 on the 13-point scale), while 27.95% produced ambivalent feelings of regret/gladness (rated as 7/13) and disclosers were glad to have made 58.08% of disclosures (> 7/13).

Content was rated as negative in 36.46% of disclosures reported by the participants (rated <4 on a 7-point valence scale), while content of 21.76% and 41.65% of disclosures was ambiguously valenced (rated at 4/7) and positive (>4/7), respectively, suggesting that topics considered negative by the disclosers are shared almost as often as positively-rated topics. It is noteworthy that 19.41% of the topics rated as negative were also rated as "important" (>4 on a 7-point importance scale).

Analyses

Because these findings are based on self-ratings of content importance and valence, random effects were allowed to vary for both person and disclosure topic. In other words, these crossed-random effects allow the associations of the perceived importance or negativity of content on post-disclosure satisfaction to be discerned, making the results generalizable beyond normative assignments of valence or importance per topic.

Valence and importance. In support of H1, lower levels of disclosure content valence (i.e. more negative) predicted higher levels of post-disclosure regret, $b=-0.41$, 95% CI=[-0.47, -0.35], $SE=0.03$, $t(1655.15)=-13.84$, $p<.00001$, controlling for the level of importance. Lower levels of importance in disclosure content also predicted higher levels of post-disclosure regret, controlling for levels of valence, in support of H3, $b=-0.64$, 95% CI=[-0.69, -0.58], $SE=0.03$, $t(2709.88)=-22.43$, $p<.00001$. These results are graphically represented in Figure 2.

Negative valence and regret. H2 posited that negative disclosures would be associated with higher levels of variance in post-disclosure gladness/regret than positive disclosures, based on the substantial benefits and risks associated with disclosure of negative content (e.g., Barasch, 2019). In support of H2, the variance of post-disclosure gladness/regret predicted by disclosures rated as negative (i.e. disclosures rated below the midpoint on the valence measure were dummy coded as 1=negative and 0=not negative), was significantly higher than that predicted by disclosures rated as positive (i.e. dummy coded as 1 if the valence measure was above the midpoint of the scale), $F=0.90$, 95% CI=[0.84, 0.97], $df=2697/2697$, $p=0.007$. This result is visually represented in Figure 3.

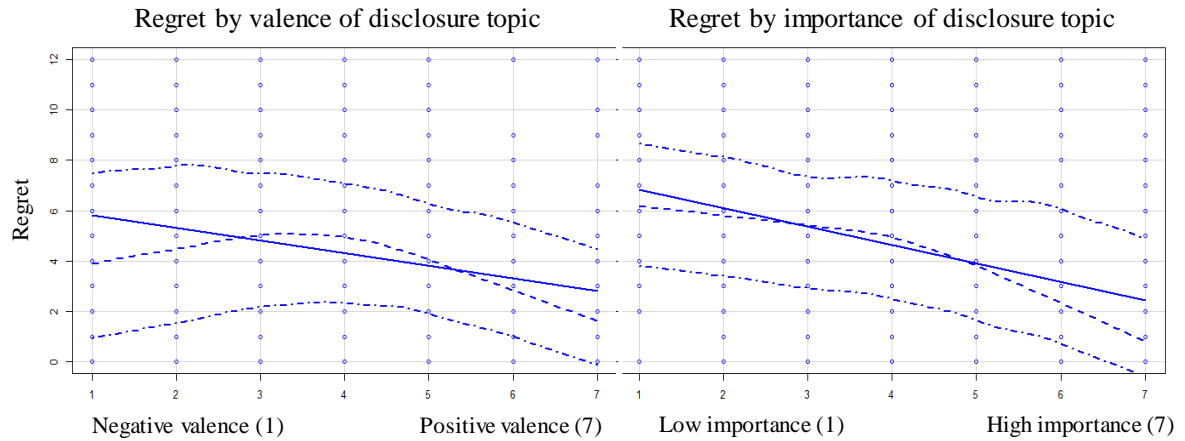


Figure 2: Prediction of post-disclosure regret by valence and importance of content in support of H1 and H3. It is evident that regret decreases as the negative valence or importance of disclosure content decreases.

The results yielded by Study 1 align with the findings reported in the disclosure literature, as they confirm that disclosure of sensitive information is beneficial (e.g., Frattaroli, 2006; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002; Pennebaker, 1990, 1997). Although the majority of disclosures are not regretted, as predicted, Study 1 results supported H1 and H3 postulating that the content of disclosure information is associated with disclosure outcomes, with both positive and important information bringing more gladness than the opposite. H2 is also supported, as disclosure of negative content does not always lead to regret, but the variance is higher than that for positive information.

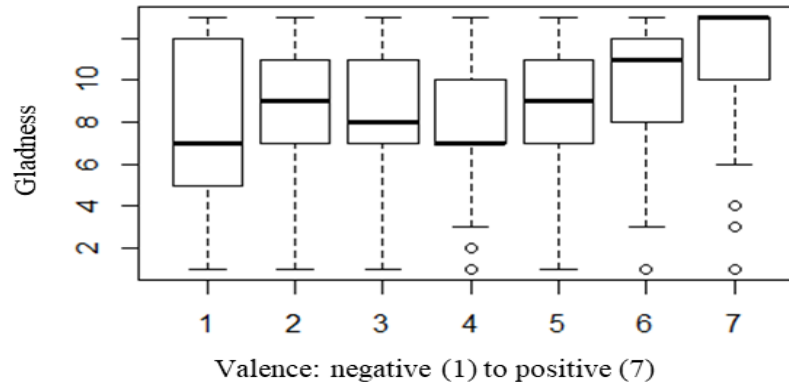


Figure 3: Gladness from disclosure by the valence of its content. The boxplot illustrates that the variance in gladness experienced following disclosure is greater for low valence disclosures than for high valence (positive) ones.

2.5: Study 2

In Study 2, the motivations behind disclosure of sensitive information and their connection to confidant reactions (and ultimately to disclosure outcomes) were explored. In other words, the goal was to evaluate the regret associated with different combinations of disclosure goals and confidant reactions. Thus, the study commenced with the investigation of nuances underscoring the RQ3: Are other-focused motivations associated with higher gladness outcomes? For this purpose, two approach motivations shown to be associated with disclosure (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010) were compared. The relatively self-oriented motivation “to reveal oneself” was contrasted with the more other-oriented motivation “to connect with the confidant.”

Because the crossed-random effects method adopted in this research permits controlling for the variation attributable to the topic of the secret (e.g. “[I have] stolen something from someone or some place.”) and the individual characteristics of specific disclosers, it was possible to isolate the association between the motivations of the disclosure and the outcomes of interest

(confidant reaction and post-disclosure regret/gladness) apart from the specific content of the disclosure.

According to the findings reported in the disclosure literature, other-oriented goals tend to be associated with superior outcomes, while outcome of self-oriented disclosures show more variation. As previously noted, in their daily diary study featuring participants with concealable stigmas, Garcia and Crocker (2008) found that participants who held other-centered ("ecosystem") goals demonstrated less depression and anxiety than those who held self-image ("egcosystem") goals. Empirical evidence also indicates that connecting with the confidant is a relational process that engenders intimacy and liking (Collins & Miller, 1994).

These assertions imply that, given disclosure of content controlling for negativity and importance, disclosure motivated by the goal to reveal oneself will be associated with more negative reactions from a confidant than if the equivalent content is disclosed motivated by the goal to connect with the confidant (H4).

In Study 2, the seeking and receiving of support was also explored, as this is another commonly cited motivation/outcome. Available evidence suggests that seeking one kind of support but receiving another can lead to suboptimal outcomes. For example, Nils and Rimé (2012) found that disclosers that received socio-cognitive support such as re-framing or advice experienced increased loneliness compared to those that received socio-affective support, such as empathy and concern. In Study 2, the goal was thus to determine the relationship among seeking instrumental help, receiving or not receiving that help, and regret/gladness.

Seeking and receiving help during disclosure is also a complex process. Offering help to a discloser can be counterproductive, as the seeker can feel disempowered, interpreting the gesture as an indication of his/her lack of coping ability (Maisel & Gable, 2009). Therefore, the

analyses performed in Study 2 aimed to show that, although seeking help is a common disclosure goal, unsolicited help can lead to regret. This is conveyed in H5 postulating that the relationship between receiving help and regret is moderated by the disclosure goal to seek help. In other words, seeking help during disclosure and not receiving it will foster regret, but so will not seeking help and receiving it anyway.

Method

Participants and Procedure

As noted previously, the same procedures were adopted in all five studies. Thus, the initial sample for Study 2 comprised of 200 U.S.-based adults recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk for monetary compensation. However, as four participants provided untruthful answers, data pertaining to the remaining 196 participants was retained for analysis. Participants' age averaged in the mid-thirties ($M = 37.63$, $SD = 12.14$, 95% CI = [35.92, 39.34]), and 42.35% identified as male, 57.14% as female, while 0.51% selected "other."

When completing the SSQ, participants first indicated their general life satisfaction, before proceeding to the 38 topics that could be considered "sensitive information." For each topic, if participants shared it with someone recently or in the past, they were required to respond to additional follow-up questions. This process yielded 2,739 disclosures, or 13.97 on average per participant. These disclosures ranged across all 38 topics and showed considerable variation on measures of importance and valence.

Measures

Each shared disclosure (whether recent or not) was assessed by the participant on the following measures. Post-disclosure regret and the valence and importance of the content were measured as in Study 1.

The disclosure goal to reveal oneself was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby the level of agreement with the statement "DURING the conversation, I wanted to reveal more about myself," was indicated by selecting one of the options, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7).

The disclosure goal to connect with the confidant was also measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7), indicating level of agreement with the statement "DURING the conversation, I wanted to connect more to this person."

Holding a goal to seek help was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby the level of agreement with the statement "Why did you share the information with this person? [I wanted help/advice]" was indicated by selecting one of the options, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7).

Help provided by the confidant was measured by prompting the respondent to indicate whether the confidant reacted to the disclosure by giving the confidant "help or advice," which required a binary (yes/no) response.

Similarly, negative reaction from the confidant was measured via a question whether the confidant reacted negatively to the disclosure, which required a binary (yes/no) response.

Results and Discussion

Descriptives

Fewer than half of the 2,739 disclosures made by the 196 participants were associated with the goal to reveal (45.93%) or connect (44.03%) above the midpoint of the rating scales. About 37% were associated with a goal to seek help. In a significant number of cases, confidants responded supportively, with about 35% of disclosures prompting an offer of help or advice. Moreover, ~85% of participants shared at least one topic that prompted their confidant to offer help or advice, while only ~8% of disclosures received negative reactions.

Analyses

Analysis of the post-disclosure regret associated with disclosures motivated by the need to reveal oneself, connect with a confidant, and seek help revealed that all were associated with lower post-disclosure regret (Table 4).

Table 4: Disclosure Goals to Reveal, Connect, or Seek Help are Associated with Lower Post-disclosure Regret

DV = regret ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 3.17$, 95% CI = [4.82, 5.06])						
<u>Predictor</u>	<u><i>b</i></u>	<u>95% CI on <i>b</i></u>	<u><i>SE</i></u>	<u><i>df</i></u>	<u><i>t</i></u>	<u><i>p</i></u>
Connect goal	-0.18	-0.25, -0.11	0.03	2648.12	-5.09	4.00E-07
Reveal goal	-0.11	-0.18, -0.05	0.03	2637.97	-3.31	9.00E-04
Help sought	-0.07	-0.12, -0.02	0.03	2611.67	-2.73	0.006
Valence	-0.43	-0.50, -0.37	0.03	1572.53	-13.18	<2e-16
Importance	-0.32	-0.38, -0.25	0.03	2617.7	-9.6	<2e-16

Reveal vs. connect goals. In support of H4, a disclosure motivated by the goal to reveal oneself is more likely to be associated with a negative reaction from a confidant (Table 5), $B=0.11$, $SE1=0.06$, $SE2=1.11$, $z=1.93$, $p=.05$, whereas disclosures motivated by a goal to connect with the confidant during a disclosure is not significantly associated with receiving a

negative confidant reaction, $B=-0.22$, 95%, $SE1=0.06$, $SE2=0.8$ $z=-3.81$, $p<.00001$, controlling for the valence of the disclosed content (Table 5). As receiving a negative reaction is significantly associated with post-disclosure regret (Table 5), $b=0.97$, 95% CI=[0.78, 1.17], $SE=0.1$, $t(2673.07)=9.85$, $p<.00001$, this outcome indirectly suggests that emotional or logical aspects of the two goals are different. In other words, failing to anticipate differences between disclosure goals may be associated with a higher likelihood of post-disclosure regret.

Table 5: Associations with Holding a Goal to Reveal Oneself

Holding a Goal to Reveal Oneself is Associated with a Negative Reaction

DV = negative reaction ($M = 0.08$, $SD = 0.27$, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.09])

Predictor	B	$SE1$	$SE2$	df	z	p
Reveal goal	0.11	0.06	1.11	n/a	1.93	0.05
Connect goal	-0.22	0.06	0.8	n/a	-3.81	1.00E-04
Valence	-0.36	0.05	0.7	979.67	-6.71	2E-11

Note: Importance and help sought were n.s.

A Negative Reaction is Associated with Higher Regret

DV = regret ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 3.17$, 95% CI = [4.82, 5.06])

Predictor	b	95% CI on b	SE	df	t	p
Negative reaction	0.97	0.78, 1.17	0.1	2673.07	9.85	<2e-16
Valence	-0.44	-0.50, -0.37	0.03	1534.88	-13.46	<2e-16
Importance	-0.38	-0.44, -0.32	0.03	2597.56	-12.23	<2e-16

Interaction in goal to seek help. Results also support Hypothesis 5, which postulated that receiving help would be most beneficial when help has been requested. The main effect of receiving help on regret ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 3.17$, 95% CI = [4.82, 5.06]) was significant, controlling for the goal to seek help and content valence and importance, $b = -0.42$, 95% CI = [-0.69, -0.16], $SE = 0.13$, $t(2647.24) = -3.18$, $p = .001$.

However, this main effect is qualified by a significant two-way interaction. After standardizing the variables, regressing regret on the receipt of help, the goal to receive help, and content valence and importance revealed a significant two-way interaction between receiving help and the goal to receive it, $b = -0.26$, 95% CI = [-0.37, -0.15], $SE = 0.06$, $t(2633.57) = -4.61$, $p < .0001$ (Table 6). Consistent with H4, the relationship between receiving help and regret is moderated by whether that help was sought. This suggests that receiving unsolicited help is associated with more regret, whereas requesting and obtaining help is more likely to promote gladness.

Table 6: Receiving Help Moderates the Relationship between Seeking Help and Regret

DV = regret ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 3.17$, 95% CI = [4.82, 5.06])						
Predictor	b	95% CI on b	SE	df	t	p
Help received	0.6	0.09, 1.11	0.26	2625.64	2.32	0.02
Help sought	0.06	-0.02, 0.13	0.04	2651.93	1.54	0.12
Help received \times Help sought	-0.26	-0.37, -0.15	0.06	2633.57	-4.61	4E-06
Valence	-0.48	-0.55, -0.42	0.03	1582.25	-14.79	<2e-16
Importance	-0.35	-0.42, -0.29	0.03	2638.42	-10.83	<2e-16

The relationship between receiving help and regret was plotted with high and low values of holding a goal to seek help serving as the slope (Figure 4), in accordance with appropriate plotting techniques (Aiken, West, & Reno, 1991; Jaccard & Turrissi, 2003; Preacher, Curran, & Bauer, 2004).

Simple slope analysis for moderated regression was performed by using the `apa.lmer/simple slopes for continuous variables` function from the R package `apastats` (Slepian, 2016). These results were duplicated via analysis with the `simpleSlope` function from the R package "Pequod: Moderated Regression Package" (Mirisola & Seta, 2016). The `simpleSlope`

function was also utilized when performing a region of significance test for the two-way interaction (Bauer & Curran, 2005).

The slope of the -1 SD help goal displayed a trend toward significance, slope = 0.064, $SE = 0.0344$, $t = 1.86$, $p = 0.063$. The slope of the $+1$ SD help goal was highly significant, slope = -0.146 , $SE = 0.025$, $t = -5.81$, $p < .0001$, supporting the concept that receiving (or not receiving) help when it is highly sought is associated with the steepest gradient of regret. The area of significance of the effect—i.e., the estimated scores of the standardized help goal variable *outside* of which the regression of regret on receiving help is significant (Preacher et al., 2004)—was $CI = [-1.05, 0.012]$. This suggests that receiving unwanted help (less than one SD below the mean) is still associated with more regret. This result underscores the counterintuitive psychological impact of receiving help, as it may undermine the gladness of the recipient if received when not explicitly requested.

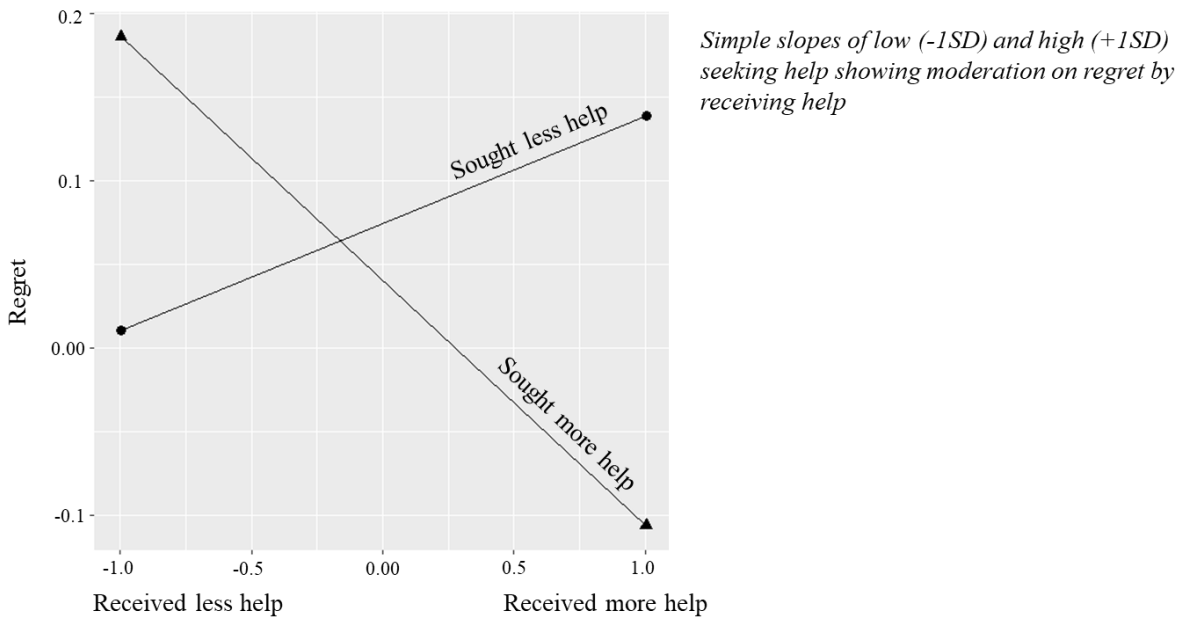


Figure 4: Receiving help moderates the relationship between seeking help and regret. The graph displays simple slopes indicating how the relationship between seeking help and regret is moderated by receiving help.

Study 2 revealed that different disclosure goals are associated with different confidant reactions regardless of the content disclosed. If the discloser aims to seek help, the results imply that certain practices could improve disclosure. Specifically, disclosers should explicitly state whether or not they wish to receive help, whereas confidants should only offer assistance if requested. However, no clear guidelines related to “reveal” and “connect” goals emerged. All three goals—including revealing oneself—were associated with lower regret, even though revealing oneself was also associated with being judged by a confidant.

2.6: Study 3

Multiple process models of disclosure theorize that disclosers undertake a cost–benefit analysis of goals and risks associated with available disclosure options (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Omarzu, 2000). One of the calculations that the discloser theoretically conducts pertains to the choice of confidant from a pool of possible alternatives. Presumably, this process is motivated by the belief that telling the “right” confidant will lead to better outcomes than not making a conscious choice, or making a mistake in that choice. This idea was tested in Study 3 by measuring whether the confidant in whom the participant had confided was the intended individual. This analysis was guided by the hypothesis that the more the confidant was the intended recipient of the disclosure, the less regret the discloser would feel (H6).

The aforementioned assumptions were based on a premise that there are indeed some traits that make an individual a “good” confidant. In his critique of prior work on Americans’ core discussion networks—the group of family and friends with whom they presumably discuss important topics—Small (2013) found that participants choose conversation partners that offer specific role-based information who are not necessarily bound to the participant by strong

emotional ties. Consequently, Small (2013) called for additional inquiry into how people choose confidants for important topics. In responding to this call, Slepian and Kirby (2018) found that disclosers of secrets prefer confidants that can provide help, are conscientious, and not *too* extroverted. Taken together, these findings suggest that attractive confidants possess *understanding* of the topic of disclosure. They may have experienced something similar, or they may simply have a sympathetic mindset. In Study 3, it was postulated that the more a discloser intends to disclose to a confidant, the more that confidant will have been presumed to understand the situation (H7). In other words, a discloser evaluates potential confidants based on the perceived quality of their understanding of the disclosure content, and chooses to disclose to confidants who rate highly in this regard.

As a part of Study 3, the extent to which choosing the disclosure strategy used is associated with post-disclosure regret/gladness was measured. Disclosers also presumably calculate how to disclose (Afifi & Steuber, 2009), perhaps choosing a strategy that will either suit the confidant-discloser's relationship, and/or the level of risk perceived by the discloser. As with choosing the "right" confidant, it is assumed that some strategies are more favorable, and making a conscious choice of strategy will be associated with better outcomes than not doing so. This assumption was tested directly by assessing whether the manner in which a disclosure was made was the intended manner. This is reflected in the hypothesis that the more the manner (e.g., the disclosure strategy) was intended, the less regret the discloser will feel (H8).

Study 3 also included an evaluation of whether choosing the right confidant and choosing the right disclosure strategy are actually separate decisions disclosers make during the cost-benefit analyses. If so, unique cognitive-emotional pathways may predict these two variables. The two emotional pathways tested were "anticipated understanding" from a confidant

and "reluctance to disclose" a topic. It was hypothesized that more reluctance to disclose the topic would significantly predict having disclosed it in a less intended manner as reluctance to disclose is an avoid motivation and should thus be negatively associated with disclosure planning. Anticipating understanding from a confidant would not be associated with an intended manner of disclosure, as judging a confidant's understanding is theoretically associated with a different disclosure process calculation: confident choice (H9). For the reverse reasons, it was further hypothesized that anticipating that a confidant will understand the topic predicts having greater intention to disclose it to that confidant, while reluctance to disclose would not (H7).

Finally, as a part of Study 3, whether the confidant or the disclosure strategy a discloser chooses will be more predictive of post-disclosure gladness was investigated. Given that confidant choice was subjected to much more scrutiny in extant research, it was hypothesized that, although both confidant choice and manner of disclosure (e.g., disclosure strategy) will be significantly associated with post-disclosure regret/gladness, controlling for disclosure strategy, confidant choice will be more predictive of post-disclosure regret/gladness (H10).

Method

Participants and procedure

The procedure outlined for Study 1 was once again employed for Study 3, whereby 201 U.S.-based adults were recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk and were asked to respond to the SSQ. As nine participants admitted that their answers had been untruthful, data pertaining to the remaining 192 participants was included in the analysis. The sample comprised of 35.42% males, 64.06% females, and 0.52% individuals that selected "other" for their gender orientation. Participants' age averaged in the mid-thirties ($M = 36.46$, $SD = 11.84$, 95% CI = [34.78, 38.15]). When responding to the SSQ, the participants identified a total of 1,700 disclosures, or 8.85 on

average per participant. As in Study 1 and 2, disclosures covered all 38 topics and ranged widely on measures of importance and valence.

Measures

Each shared disclosure was assessed by the participant on post-disclosure regret, and valence and importance of content disclosed as in previous studies reported in this chapter. Participants' intended disclosure strategy was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby when responding to the question "Did you intend to share this information in the WAY that you did (timing, setting, words, etc.)?" participants were instructed to select one of the offered answers, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7). Participants' intended confidant choice was similarly measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby when responding to the question "Did you intend to share this information with THIS PERSON specifically?" participants were instructed to select one of the offered answers, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7).

Participants' reluctance to disclose the topic was calculated as the average of two variables, pertaining to the responses to questions "I was reluctant to share this information," and "Had you been putting off sharing the information?" which were separately assessed on 7-point Likert scales anchored at "Not at all" (1) and "Very much so" (7). Finally, participants' anticipated confidant understanding of the experience was calculated as the average of two variables pertaining to the responses to questions "This person might have had a similar experience or feelings?" and "This person might 'get it'?" which were separately assessed on 7-point Likert scales with the answers ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7).

Results and Discussion

Descriptives

As noted previously, the 192 participants rated a total of 1,700 disclosures, more than 60% of which were shared in an intended manner or to an intended confidant. About half (55%) were shared in both the intended manner and to the intended confidant.

67.24% of disclosures were made to confidants that were rated as "intended" by the discloser; i.e. the discloser responded with a rating above the midpoint of the scale when questioned if this specific person was the intended target of disclosure. The anticipated confidant understanding measure (67.29%) was a composite of believing that the person would "get it" (70.12%) and have had a similar experience or feeling before (61.0%). The fact that the discloser assumed that the confidant would have had a similar experience or feelings in more than 50% of the cases examined suggests that people are at least moderately close to many of their chosen confidants. Sharing the information in an intended manner was also relatively common (60.88%), again based on an above-midpoint rating for each qualifying disclosure. Participants experienced prior reluctance to disclose a topic less frequently; this measure was an average of feeling reluctant to share the information (36.35% of disclosures scored above the midpoint) and delaying the disclosure (34.0% of disclosures).

Analyses

Disclosure choices and regret. Both disclosing to an intended confidant, $b=-0.26$, 95% CI=[-0.35, -0.17], $SE=0.05$, $t(1669.39)=-5.64$, $p<.00001$, and disclosing with an intended strategy, $b=-0.28$, 95% CI=[-0.37, -0.19], $SE=0.05$, $t(1622.89)=-5.84$, $p<.00001$, were negatively associated with post-disclosure regret (Table 7). This suggests that both contribute to the success of any particular disclosure, and supports both Hypothesis 6 and 8 (see Figure 5).

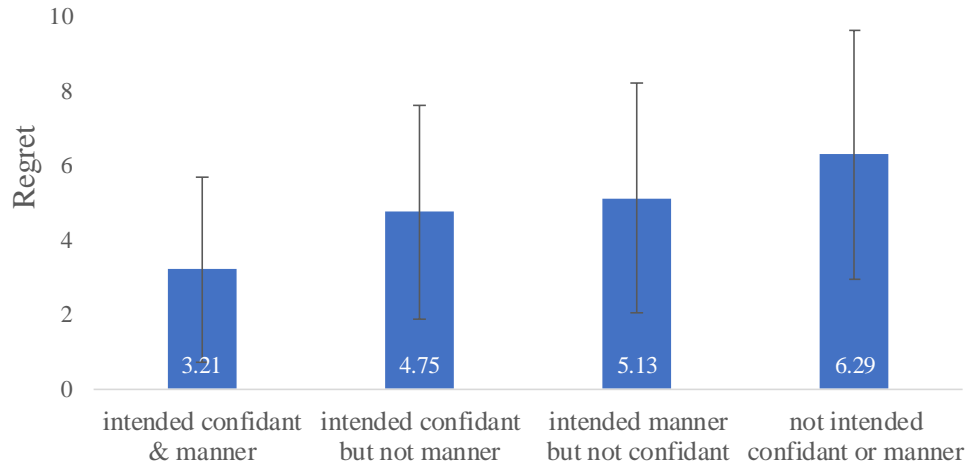


Figure 5: Means of post-disclosure regret following disclosure to an intended confidant and/or in an intended manner. Both confidant choice and disclosure manner are associated with changes in post-disclosure regret.

However, Hypothesis 10, which stated that choice of intended confidant would be associated with more post-disclosure gladness than the choice of intended disclosure strategy, was not supported; in fact, disclosure strategy was more predictive of gladness/regret (Table 7).

Table 7: Regret by Intended Confidant & Manner, Controlling for Valence & Importance

DV = regret ($M=4.24$, $SD = 2.98$, 95% CI = [4.10, 4.38])						
Predictor	b	95% CI on b	SE	df	t	p
Intended confidant choice	-0.26	-0.35, -0.17	0.05	1669.39	-5.64	2.00E-08
Intended disclosure strategy	-0.28	-0.37, -0.19	0.05	1622.89	-5.84	6.00E-09

Separability of choices. It was hypothesized that separate pathways would predict disclosing to an intended confidant or in an intended manner. The emotional pathways tested were "anticipated understanding" from a confidant and "reluctance to disclose" a topic. Results indicate that H9 was supported, in that more reluctance to disclose the topic was significantly and negatively associated with having disclosed it in a more intended manner, (Table 8) $b=$ --

0.11, 95% CI=[-0.14, -0.07], $SE=0.02$, $t(1397.89)=-6.14$, $p<.00001$, as reluctance to disclose is an avoid motivation and should thus be negatively associated with disclosure planning.

Table 8: Testing Further Separability of Choices

Less Reluctance to Disclose the Topic Predicts Having Disclosed it in a More Intended Manner

DV = intended manner of disclosure ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 2.05$, 95% CI = [4.76, 4.95])

<u>Predictor</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>95% CI on b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>p</u>
Reluctance to disclose topic	-0.11	-0.14, -0.07	0.02	1397.89	-6.14	1.00E-09
Anticipated confidant understanding	0.08	0.04, 0.11	0.02	1631.01	4.03	0.00006
Intended confidant choice	0.67	0.64, 0.70	0.02	1684.32	40.32	<2e-16
Valence	0.01	-0.02, 0.04	0.02	285.78	0.71	0.48
Importance	0.04	0.01, 0.08	0.02	1299.41	2.43	0.02

Anticipating that a Confidant Will Understand the Topic Predicts Having Had Greater Intention to Disclose it to that Confidant

DV = intended confidant choice ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 2.06$, 95% CI = [4.97, 5.16])

<u>Predictor</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>95% CI on b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>T</u>	<u>p</u>
Anticipated confidant understanding	0.06	0.02, 0.10	0.02	1657.1	3.22	0.0010
Reluctance to disclose topic	0.01	-0.02, 0.05	0.02	1367.06	0.69	0.49
Intended manner of disclosure	0.73	0.70, 0.77	0.02	1604.56	40.73	<2e-16
Valence	0.01	-0.02, 0.05	0.02	306.55	0.85	0.4
Importance	0.08	0.04, 0.12	0.02	1318.27	4.22	0.00003

Contrary to the prediction of H9, anticipating more understanding from a confidant was associated with having disclosed in a more intended manner, $b=-0.08$, 95% CI=[0.04, 0.11], $SE=0.02$, $t(1631.01)=4.03$, $p<.0001$. This suggests that the cost-benefit tradeoffs a discloser envisions when choosing a confidant and choosing a disclosure strategy are not entirely separable. H7 predicted that anticipating a confidant will understand the topic will be associated with having greater intention to disclose to that confidant, while reluctance to disclose in general would not be associated with confidant choice. Results support this hypothesis, as anticipating a

confidant would understand a topic predicted intending to disclose to that confidant (Table 8), $b=-0.06$, 95% CI=[0.02, 0.10], $SE=0.02$, $t(1657.10)=3.22$, $p=.001$, while a general reluctance to disclose the topic did not predict having intended to disclose to that confidant, $b=-0.01$, 95% CI=[-0.02, 0.05], $SE=0.02$, $t(1367.06)=0.69$, $p=.49$.

In aggregate, the results yielded by Study 3 suggest that people may perform at least two overlapping but largely distinct judgements when determining the key parameters of an upcoming disclosure—their selection of a confidant and a disclosure strategy. These choices were identified as separate by demonstrating that distinct pathways were associated with one but not the other. However, it is important to note that these are not the only pathways that could lead to each. Multiple pathways could precede each of these fundamental choices.

2.7: Study 4

The results yielded by Study 3 suggest that successful disclosures are associated with conscious intention. Indeed, disclosures made to intended confidants and/or using intended strategies were more likely to be associated with lower regret. The revelation risk model developed by Afifi and Steuber (2009) theorizes that a "readiness" to disclose builds up in disclosers until they must act. These authors thus called for an integration of planning theory into the study of disclosure. Accordingly, the aim of Study 4 was to evaluate whether disclosers consciously plan for disclosure and, if so, whether this purposive action is associated with gladness or regret. There are three important reasons to undertake this inquiry. First, if there is a positive association between unplanned disclosures and regret, it could be implied that non-conscious cost-benefit analysis is not as effective as a deliberate process. Second, if planning is associated with increased gladness for negative, important information, it suggests that disclosers are not doomed to experience adverse outcomes simply due to the nature of their disclosure

content. Conversely, planning for disclosure might be implemented as an intervention. Third, if planning is a construct readily applied to disclosure, the wealth of planning theory and interventions (Gollwitzer, 1999; Michie et al., 2013) may also serve as a guide for further inquiry.

To address these questions, Study 4 was guided by the hypothesis that planning for a disclosure will be associated with less regret than not planning for disclosures with the same valence and importance of content (H11). If planning does not alleviate post-disclosure regret when the topic disclosed is negative, then perhaps the content itself is responsible for the regret associated with negative topic disclosures. In contrast, if mistakes are made by disclosers that are more common when the content shared is negative, planning should alleviate these issues without changing the content of the disclosure itself.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 4 also followed the methodology described under Study 1, and included 201 U.S.-based adults recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk, who completed the SSQ. As six participants admitted that their answers had been untruthful, data pertaining to the remaining 195 participants was retained for analysis. The sample comprised of 43.08% males, 55.9% females, and 1.03% individuals that selected "other" when declaring their gender. Participants' age averaged in the mid-thirties ($M = 35.13$, $SD = 12.20$, 95% CI = [33.41, 36.85]).

When responding to the survey, the 195 participants reported 3,109 of disclosures, or 15.94 on average per participant. Disclosures ranged across all 38 topics and showed considerable variation on measures of importance and valence.

Measures

Each shared disclosure was assessed by the participant on its post-disclosure regret and its valence and importance of content as in previous studies. Planning for a disclosure event was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, whereby when responding to the question "Think of that example you remember. Was sharing it planned?" participants selected one of the options offered, ranging from "I never planned to share this information with this person" (1) to "I had specific plans on how to share the information with this person" (5).

Results and Discussion

Descriptives

The analyses revealed that 15% of the 3,109 disclosures made by the 195 participants were subsequently regretted, while respondents were glad they have made 56% of the reported disclosures and were ambivalent about the remaining 29%. Moreover, 62% of people regretted a disclosure in at least one out of the 38 categories. On average, participants reported regretting disclosures in 2–3 categories and 8–9 they were grateful for. Among people with at least one disclosure that was subsequently regretted, on average 3–4 such disclosures were reported. Moreover, 22% of disclosures were completely unplanned, while 50% involved some degree of planning and 25% were ambiguous. At least one completely unplanned disclosure out of the 38 categories was reported by 69% of respondents, while on average 3–4 disclosures were completely unplanned. Among people with at least one unplanned disclosure, 4–5 were reported on average.

Analyses

Planning interactions. The central hypothesis guiding this study, that planning will be associated with increased gladness following the disclosure of negative, important content, was supported by the results (H11). The main effect of planning on regret ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 3.12$, 95%

CI = [5.19, 5.42]) was negative and significant, $b = -0.72$, 95% CI = [-0.80, -0.64], $SE = 0.04$, $t(2855.73) = -18.06$, $p < 2e-16$, indicating that more planning is associated with less post-disclosure regret.

However, this main effect was qualified by the presence of multiple significant interactions. After standardizing the variables, regressing regret on planning, valence, and importance revealed a significant two-way interaction between planning and importance, and a significant three-way interaction among planning, valence, and importance (see Table 9 for detailed results). This suggests that the relationship between planning and regret varies across levels of the combination of valence and importance. Full understanding of the results requires analysis of types of disclosure content and the interaction of each with planning, as reported next.

Table 9: Planning Moderates the Relationship between Disclosure Content & Post-disclosure Regret

DV = regret, standardized ($M = 0$, $SD = 1.00$, 95% CI = [-.04, .04])						
<u>Predictor</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>95% CI on B</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
Planning	-0.31	-0.34, -0.27	0.02	2843.52	-17.35	<2e-16
Importance	-0.28	-0.32, -0.25	0.02	2877.04	-16.76	<2e-16
Valence	-0.28	-0.32, -0.25	0.02	2245.33	-15.11	<2e-16
Planning × Importance	-0.08	-0.11, -0.05	0.01	2845.29	-5.4	7E-08
Planning × Valence	0.03	-0.003, 0.06	0.02	2828.43	1.75	0.08
Importance × Valence	0.01	-0.02, 0.04	0.02	2820.89	0.47	0.64
Planning × Importance × Valence	0.05	0.02, 0.08	0.01	2815.35	3.75	0.0002

Importance and planning. Three two-way interactions were analyzed, of which the interaction of planning and importance contributed most to variance in post-disclosure regret/gladness, $b = -0.08$, 95% CI = [-0.11, -0.05], $SE = 0.01$, $t(2845.29) = -5.40$, $p < .0001$ (for full results, see Table 9). The highly significant result from the two-way interaction between

planning and importance cannot be fully interpreted without considering the presence of a significant three-way interaction between valence, planning, and importance. However, results from the two-way interaction tentatively suggest that regret following disclosures of content rated as more important (as opposed to content rated as less important) is particularly dependent on the level of planning associated with them.

Importance, valence and planning. To interpret the three-way interaction, the simple slopes of the relationship between planning and regret were plotted at high and low values of valence and importance (see Figure 6), in accordance with plotting techniques discussed by Aiken et al. (1991) and Jaccard and Turrisi (2003). Simple slope analysis for moderated regression was performed by using the `apa.lmer/simple slopes for continuous variables` function from the R package `apastats` (Slepian, 2016). These results were duplicated via analysis with the `simpleSlope` function from the R package "Pequod: Moderated Regression Package" (Mirisola & Seta, 2016). The `simpleSlope` function was also performed to conduct a difference slope test for the three-way interaction with Bonferroni correction to the p-values (Dawson & Richter, 2006).

All simple slopes indicated in Figure 6 were highly significant ($p < .001$), supporting the concept that planning is associated with reduced regret across all levels of content valence and importance. The three-way interaction hypothesized to exist between planning, importance, and valence (H11) was significant (Table 8), $b = 0.05$, 95% CI = [0.02, 0.08], $SE = 0.01$, $t(2815.35) = 3.75$, $p = .0002$. H11 postulated that planning is associated with especially decreased regret in the disclosure of low valence but important content. This suggests that the difference in simple slopes between high valence (i.e., positive) content and low valence (i.e., negative) content that are both of high importance would be highly significant, and it was ($p < .001$, see Figure 6). In the context of sensitive disclosure, this suggests that the effect of high levels of planning are

associated with lower regret more substantially when the content is rated as negative by the discloser than when it is rated as positive.

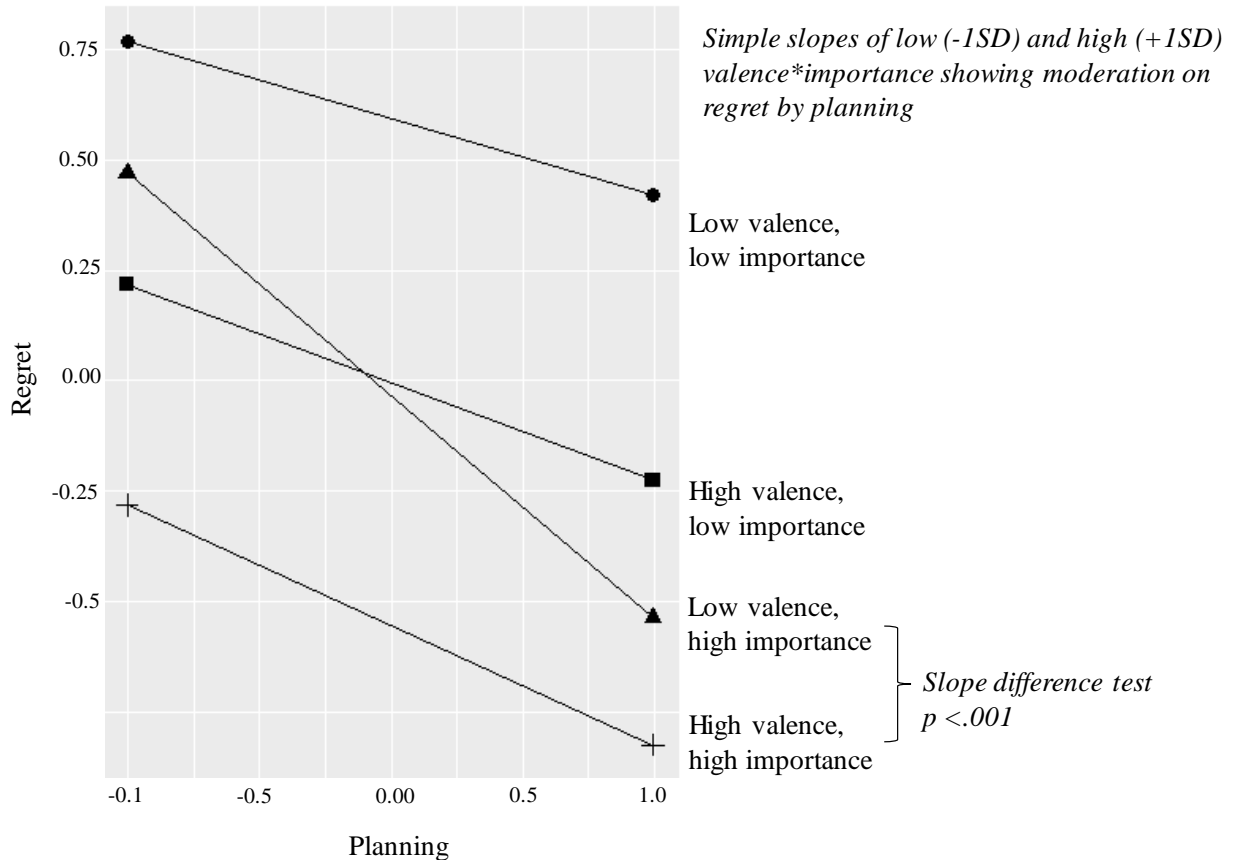


Figure 6: Planning moderates the relationship between disclosure content and post-disclosure regret. The graph depicts the simple slopes of low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) Valence × Importance, showing moderation of disclosure content's relationship to post-disclosure regret by planning.

If one accepts the assumption that planning would alleviate disclosure mistakes, the relatively strong effect of planning on lower regret suggests two specific conclusions: (1) people are under-planning for the disclosure of negative, important content, and (2) they are also making more mistakes in its disclosure. The disclosure of high valence but important information was associated with lower regret than that of low valence but important content when high levels of

planning preceded disclosure, suggesting that disclosing low valence topics may always be riskier than sharing positive ones (see Figure 6). the disclosure of negative information is not *inherently* likely to be associated with regret. When disclosure is made after extensive planning, regret is below the mean level of all disclosures (see Figure 6).

2.8: Study 5

The results yielded by Study 4 suggest that unplanned disclosures are associated with regret. Given that disclosure—even of difficult, negative content—can be a source of relief and better psychological well-being, it is important to understand what causes unplanned disclosures, so that interventions can be developed to assist people with disclosure. Hence, as a part of Study 5, the link between negative emotions (i.e., distress) before a disclosure and the intentionality of the resulting disclosure was investigated, exploring the link with and without accounting for the presence of disclosure goals. Distress is hypothesized to be associated with participants' having some predetermined disclosure goals, as strong emotions trigger social sharing (Rimé, 2009). Nonetheless, distress is also posited to be linked to unintentional disclosure, as emotions also drive impulsive actions (Bari & Robbins, 2013; Frijda, 2010). One of the Study 5 aims was thus to test for the presence of the hypothesized relationships, and to evaluate which is more strongly supported by the gathered data. In other words, distress should be positively associated with disclosure goals (H12) and unplanned disclosure (H13).

Method

Participants and procedure

In line with the preceding studies, 202 adult participants recruited via Amazon's Mechanical Turk completed the SSQ. However, only 194 participants' data was subjected to analysis, as eight individuals provided untruthful answers. The sample comprised of 47.94% males. Participants' age averaged in the mid-thirties ($M = 37.91$, $SD = 12.65$, 95% CI = [36.12,

39.70]). Querying the 194 participants led to 1,415 of disclosures, or 7.29 on average per participant. These disclosures ranged across all 38 topics and showed considerable variation on measures of importance and valence.

Measures

Each shared disclosure was assessed by the participant on the unintentionality of the disclosure. Participants were presented with a 7-point Likert scale that prompted, "Sharing it was...", and had answers ranging from "Completely unintentional (1) --- Completely intentional (7)." Unintentionality was reverse coded.

Distress before disclosure was based on the average of the following two variables, which were separately assessed: 1) Feeling alone was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby the level of agreement with the statement "Before the conversation, I felt very alone with this information" was indicated by selecting one of the offered answers, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7). 2) Feeling burdened was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby the level of agreement with the statement "Before the conversation, I felt very burdened with this information" was indicated by selecting one of the offered answers, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7).

Disclosure goals were represented by the average of the following two variables, which were separately assessed: 1) Revealing oneself was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby the level of agreement with the statement "DURING the conversation, I wanted to reveal more about myself" was indicated by selecting one of the offered answers, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7). 2) Connecting with the confidant was measured on a 7-point Likert scale, whereby the level of agreement with the statement "DURING the conversation, I wanted to connect more to this person" was indicated by selecting one of the offered answers, ranging from "Not at all" (1) to "Very much so" (7).

Results and Discussion

Descriptives

Analyses revealed that about 60% of the disclosures were made with the aim of connecting with the confidant, with a similar percentage of disclosures associated with a goal to reveal oneself. These goals were not equally distributed across topics, as participants did not want to connect with the confidant while disclosing 1.63 of the categories, and for 4.95 of the categories, they did not wish to reveal themselves during disclosure.

As the prevalence of the two goals remained similar (~60%) across disclosures, these were averaged to create a composite goal score to be used in the analyses, as planned. About 20% of disclosures were not associated with a disclosure goal, while 20% were ambiguously associated with a disclosure goal. Among the 86.63% of respondents that had at least one such disclosure, on average six disclosures were made with a specific goal (above the midpoint 4 on the composite score).

Distress before disclosure was cited in 43% of cases (rated above the midpoint of the scale), while 49% of disclosures were not preceded by distress.

Analyses

Hypothesis 12, postulating that emotion (measured in this study as distress) is positively associated with the presence of disclosure goals, was supported by the results (Table 10), $b = 0.09$, 95% CI = [0.05, 0.14], $SE = 0.02$, $t(1117.45) = 4.36$, $p < 0001$. This is consonant with the assertion that emotion prompts social sharing. It is notable that this relationship is significant even though it represents only negative emotions. Negative emotions were the focus of this inquiry, but presumably strong positive emotions would facilitate the creation of disclosure goals as well (e.g., it is difficult to keep a surprise party or a desired pregnancy secret for long). The

presence of disclosure goals, in turn, was associated with lower unintentional disclosure, $b = -0.22$, 95% CI = [-0.26, -0.18], $SE = 0.02$, $t(1403.14) = -10.60$, $p < 0001$.

Results also support Hypothesis 13. Higher distress is associated with more unintentional disclosure, even controlling for the presence of disclosure goals (Table 10), $b = 0.1$, 95% CI = [0.07, 0.13], $SE = 0.02$, $t(720.56) = 5.99$, $p < 0001$. Considered in isolation, the results yielded by Study 5 suggest that distress is associated with disclosure, whether or not participants have formed conscious disclosure goals.

Table 10: Distress Predicts Presence of Disclosure Goals

DV = disclosure goals ($M = 4.86$, $SD = 1.62$, 95% CI = [4.77, 4.94])						
<u>Predictor</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>95% CI on b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
Distress	0.09	0.05, 0.14	0.02	1117.45	4.36	1.00E-05

<i>Disclosure Goals Negatively Predict Unintentional Disclosure</i>						
DV = unintentional disclosure ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.25$, 95% CI = [1.86, 1.99])						
<u>Predictor</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>95% CI on b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>Df</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
Disclosure goals	-0.22	-0.26, -0.18	0.02	1403.14	-10.6	<2E-16

<i>Distress Predicts Unintentional Disclosure, Despite Existence of Disclosure Goals</i>						
DV = unintentional disclosure ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.25$, 95% CI = [1.86, 1.99])						
<u>Predictor</u>	<u>b</u>	<u>95% CI on b</u>	<u>SE</u>	<u>Df</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>p</u>
Distress	0.1	0.07, 0.13	0.02	720.56	5.99	3E-09
Disclosure goals	-0.23	-0.27, -0.19	0.02	1401.84	-11.38	<2e-16

2.9: Conclusions

Investigating the disclosure of sensitive information revealed several important insights. First, people make mistakes in disclosure that are associated with post-disclosure regret. Findings yielded by the five studies presented in this chapter revealed an outline of broad areas wherein people falter.

Study 1 replicates findings from the disclosure literature that indicate disclosure of sensitive information is beneficial (e.g., Frattaroli, 2006; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002; Pennebaker, 1990, 1997), in that regret did not follow most disclosures. Various findings in the literature also suggest that the valence of the content disclosed will moderate the outcomes of disclosure; disclosures of higher valence (i.e. positive) information are more commonly associated with beneficial outcomes than disclosures of low valence (i.e. negative) information (Choi & Toma, 2014; Lee, Im, & Taylor, 2008; Mathews et al., 2006; Rosario et al., 2009). This relationship was observed in the results of Study 1, further validating the sampling and methodological approach taken herein. Study 1 also contributed to the understanding of the relationship between the importance of disclosure content and post-disclosure gladness, which is not systematically studied in the current literature. Study 1's findings suggest a positive association between importance of disclosure content and post-disclosure gladness, even controlling for valence.

Findings yielded by Study 2 revealed links among disclosure goals, the content of disclosure, and confidant reactions. Study 2 revealed that the three goals studied—reveal oneself, connect with the confidant, and seek help—were all associated with lower post-disclosure regret than not having such goals. Furthermore, although it is important to highlight that these goals and reactions are not exhaustive, Study 2 demonstrates that the relationships between specific goals and reactions matter. For example, disclosure motivated by an other-oriented goal (i.e. to connect with the confidant) was less likely to be associated with being judged by the confidant than a disclosure motivated by a self-oriented goal (i.e. revealing oneself), even though both are considered approach goals in the literature (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010).

As being judged is an outcome that is associated with post-disclosure regret, this suggests that an intervention that asked a discloser to reframe their motivation to disclose in an other-oriented manner might lead to better outcomes for disclosers. Findings from Study 2 also suggest that, while seeking help and not receiving it from a confidant is a worse outcome, receiving help/advice when it is not sought increases the amount of post-disclosure regret a discloser feels. Presumably an intervention could be developed to help disclosers clarify their desire for help during the disclosure.

The findings from Study 3 suggest that individual "steps" of the cost/benefit calculations suggested by purposive models of the disclosure process (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Omarzu, 2000) can be empirically examined. In Study 3, the choice of a specific confidant was shown to be partially separable from the choice of a disclosure strategy, and that each was associated with variance in post-disclosure regret after controlling for the other.

Study 4 introduces the construct of planning to the disclosure literature. Planning is relatively novel as a construct tested in the literature, although related theoretical fields such as goal pursuit and cognitive reappraisal of emotions do shape extant theoretical and empirical work (e.g., Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019), and occasional studies mention rehearsal or practice (e.g., Zhang, 2017). Most important, the findings of Study 4 suggest that the outcome of disclosures is not random, but can be altered through planning for the disclosure. Specifically, the outcome of the disclosure of negative and important information depends heavily on how much that disclosure was planned *a priori*.

The findings from Study 5 suggest a reason that unplanned disclosures may occur: unintentional disclosure is associated with high levels of distress, and unintentional disclosures

can occur despite the presence of disclosure goals. In other words, distress may "override" the goals one holds to intentionally disclose and instead trigger an unintentional disclosure.

Taken in aggregate, the five studies offer preliminary insights into errors people make with regard to the disclosure of sensitive information. People not only disclose to suboptimal confidants, but also with suboptimal strategies. Determining the goals of disclosure in advance is associated with post-disclosure gladness, but different combinations of goals and content can provoke varied confidant reactions. Overall, it appears most advantageous to approach disclosure of sensitive information as an interpersonal process and not a one-way disclosure, as connecting with a confidant was the disclosure goal most consistently associated with post-disclosure gladness. Clarity in communication is particularly important in the context of seeking and providing help. When confidants fail to provide help when it is sought or furnish it when it is not wanted, the disclosure is associated with regret.

The principal mistake people make is failing to plan disclosure. Indeed, people can make this mistake so profoundly that they *unintentionally* disclose. The types of disclosure most associated with both unintentional disclosure *and* post-disclosure regret are both negative in valence and high in importance. Positive disclosures seem not to need forethought to end well. Yet, people consistently plan more to disclose positive content than negative content, which is the very opposite of what they should be doing. Planning is associated with lower post-disclosure regret, even for important, negative disclosures. The mechanism is presumably two sided, whereby planning reduces the number of disclosure mistakes people make and allows them to feel autonomous.

While these findings are important, the disclosure of sensitive information deserves further study. A growing body of literature on the experience of secrecy (e.g., Slepian et al.,

2017) provides new methodological approaches for sampling real-world experiences that are well-suited for the inquiry into sensitive disclosure. A robust scholarship exists on related topics that can yield relevant constructs (e.g., self-disclosure, clinical talk therapy, social sharing), but there is a paucity of work on real-life disclosure of sensitive topics. Ideas for future work in this domain are shared in the next section, which also concludes the current work by summarizing its contributions to disclosure theory and empirical inquiry.

Conclusion

Despite the many benefits of disclosing sensitive information (e.g., Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Derlaga & Berg, 2013; Omarzu, 2000; Slepian, Chun, & Mason, 2017; Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019), the current work suggests that such disclosure is often associated with regret. Chapter 1 integrated multiple lines of disclosure research to suggest a general, four-step disclosure process. Subsequently, the five studies in Chapter 2 examined factors of disclosure that are associated with regret following the disclosure of sensitive information. These studies surveyed 974 participants and assayed factors of over 11,854 of their recalled disclosures. Factors that contribute to post-disclosure regret were identified, including that people disclose unintentionally. Results from these five studies suggest that planning for the disclosure of sensitive information is associated with more post-disclosure gladness and less regret.

The aims of this conclusion are twofold. First, the contributions of the current work will be identified across two categories: theoretical and empirical. Second, directions of future work are proposed.

3.1 Theoretical Contributions

Uniting Disclosure Model Types

One gap in the disclosure literature relevant to the current study is encapsulated by Omarzu's (2000) observation that there exists a paucity of research linking outcomes of disclosure to its motivations (goals) and process (e.g. disclosure strategies), most notably across multiple types of disclosure content. In Chapter 1, the extant process models and outcomes of disclosure were analyzed. The current work proposed that the two main models for disclosure decision making (purposive and contextual) are both value-based, and thus motivationally

compatible from the point of view of the discloser. The various steps proposed by purposive models can be collapsed into four basic steps: (1) need analysis and goal formation, (2) cost-benefit analysis, and (3) the disclosure event and (4) feedback loop(s).

A theoretical contribution of the current work, is to encourage researchers to think of the sets of models as interrelated, and to focus empirical work on disentangling boundary conditions of value-based disclosure decision making processes. In addition, because the models are thus assumed to not be mutually exclusive, this suggests that researchers from either tradition (i.e. social psychology and organizational behavior scholars versus communication scholars) can employ methodologies from the other tradition (e.g., lab studies versus large-scale network analyses) to pursue this goal.

Synthesizing Goal Conflicts

In Chapter 1, the literature addressing disclosure goals was reviewed, and several syntheses were presented that informed the current work and can inform future work. The synthesis most directly relevant to the empirical work in Chapter 2 was to present the goal conflict inherent in disclosure (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Slepian, Halevy, & Galinsky, 2019) as not only a the result of tension between approaching social connectedness and avoid social rejection, but realize that a similar tension applies to the dichotomy of disclosing for one's own benefit and for others' benefit. In this vein, two goals that were both designated as approach goals in the literature—revealing oneself and connecting with the confidant—were theorized to have important conceptual differences. The former is an approach goal focused on the self, while the latter is an approach goal focused on the confidant. This distinction had at least one instantiation in the literature; Garcia and Crocker (2008) noted that disclosures of a history of depression or of sexual orientation went more smoothly for disclosers that held other-oriented

goals rather than self-image goals. The theoretical contribution of the current work was to link this distinction with the general proposition by other scholars (e.g. Chaudior & Fisher, 2010) that goal conflict in disclosure was primarily between approach and avoid behaviors. These two goals were both considered "approach" goals by Chaudior and Fisher (2010), but the intent of the current work was to conceptualize them as fundamentally different in theory (in Chapter 1) and empirically (in Chapter 2).

3.2 Empirical Contributions

The empirical contributions of the current work fall into three categories. First, the results of Study 1 and 2 replicate two key findings in the disclosure literature with large, novel datasets. Specifically, the studies' results suggest that disclosure outcomes are moderated by valence of content disclosed and are associated with the positivity or negativity of the confidant response. Secondly, the results from Study 3 test predictions common to purposive models of disclosure that indicate disclosure decisions are made via discrete, stepwise costs/benefits calculations (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Omarzu, 2000) and suggest partial support for this theory. Finally, the results of Study 3 and Study 6 relate to the conjecture made by contextual models of disclosure processes. This set of models emphasize that, subject to the constraints of a pre-determined social context, disclosures are often serendipitous (Petronio, 1991, 2002; Small, 2009, 2013). Study 3 aligns with this conjecture by examining the frequency of unplanned disclosures, and Study 6 asks whether disclosures may even be unintentional.

Methodological contribution

Before the empirical contributions are explored in detail, it should be noted that all five studies also feature a methodology that is relatively novel to the study of outcomes and processes of the disclosure of sensitive information (but see Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019). Across the

five studies in Chapter 2, hundreds of participants were surveyed and thousands of disclosure events were sampled.

The current studies asked participants to recall real-life disclosures of sensitive information. The goal of the current work was to relate these experiences to disclosers' reported feelings of regret and gladness about the disclosures. The survey used to collect data was the Social Sharing Questionnaire (SSQ), which is based on the Common Secrets Questionnaire developed by Slepian et al. (2017). Participants presented with the SSQ indicate topics from a list of 38 common but sensitive subjects (drug use, past trauma, emotional or physical infidelity, financial or professional discontent, etc.) which ones they had experienced and later talked about with someone (e.g., disclosed).

Instead of summarizing data per participant, individual topics disclosed were treated as units of analysis. Multilevel models were then created that tested the fixed effects of interest while including the participant and the topic disclosed as crossed random factors. This method of analyzing crossed random effects accounts for the random variance due to differences from participants and different topics of disclosure. Any remaining variance identified each model is thus attributable to relationships between the fixed effects and the dependent variable and not the result of participant or topic differences.

Replication of Outcome Associations

In Chapter 1, certain factors as recounted in the disclosure literature were seen to reliably predict the outcomes of disclosure. One prominent factor was the valence of the content disclosed. Sharing emotional content can reactive the emotions encapsulated by the content, meaning that people tend to feel positive sharing positive content and negative when disclosing negative content (Choi & Toma, 2014). In addition, the cognitive salience of the content and its

attendant emotions are reiterated during the disclosure process (e.g., Gable & Reis, 2010). This is one partial explanation for why positive outcomes almost always follow disclosure of positive information (Lambert et al., 2013; Peters et al., 2018), while the results for of negative content disclosure vary much more (Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Major & Gramzow, 1999; Slade et al., 2007). The results of sharing negative content are less consistently positive; the relationship between disclosing negative content and processing it is complicated (e.g., Stanton & Low, 2012).

The results from Study 1 reflect findings in the disclosure literature, insofar as they confirm that sharing sensitive information can benefit the discloser (e.g., Frattaroli, 2006; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2002; Pennebaker, 1990, 1997). In addition, the results suggest confirmation of the mixed benefits from disclosing negative content. Disclosures of negative content from Study 1 were not always regretted, but the variance of regret-gladness was higher for disclosure of negative content than the disclosure of positive content.

Results from Study 2 also suggest that outcome success was associated with confidant reaction. Study 2 tested whether a negative reaction from a confidant was associated with post-disclosure regret. Its results suggested that a negative reaction from a confidant was associated with more post-disclosure regret. This finding from Study 2 thus replicates a commonsense but important finding from the disclosure literature: that the confidant's response is one of the most important determinants of disclosure success (Barak & Gluck-Ofri, 2007; Chaudoir & Quinn, 2010; Rodriguez & Kelly, 2006; Rothman, Sullivan, Keyes, & Boehmer, 2012).

These findings are notable for capturing "real-life" disclosures of sensitive information from hundreds of participants across diverse age ranges and regions. This sample can be contrasted against studies drawn from the personal stigma literature, which represent a large

fraction of the studies chronicling the outcome of interpersonal disclosure of sensitive information. The topics presented by the SSQ are much broader as well; personal stigma studies tend to be organized around testing a single population with a specific stigma (e.g., HIV positivity in Brazilian youth; past abortions of expecting mothers). Thus, these findings support conclusions indicated in the stigma disclosure literature with findings from a broad, contemporary participant pool, recalling a broad array of sensitive topics.

Testing of Rival Disclosure Process Theories

The second empirical contribution of the current work is the testing of several theoretical predictions made by models of the disclosure process. The first prediction tested comes from purposive models of disclosure which predicts that disclosers undergo several mental "steps" in which they perform cost/benefit calculations judging the benefits and risks of disclosing. In discrete steps, they determine whether to disclose, to whom they should disclose, and how they should disclose. Some work has been done testing these proposed steps (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010), but Study 3 from the current work represents a significant contribution toward testing models that are largely underexamined in the literature. Study 3 of the current work tested if the decision of whom to disclose to (confidant choice) and how to disclose (disclosure strategy) were separable, as predicted by prior models. Indeed, the decisions proved to be distinct, although related. Separate cognitive pathways were shown to underpin the two decisions, suggesting that they are discrete cognitive calculations. However, it was the manner of disclosure (the disclosure strategy) and not the selection of confidant that was accountable for the most variation in post-disclosure regret, which undermines the assertion of purposive models that suggest confidant selection is the primary needed calculation (but see Chaudior & Fisher, 2010).

Communication scholars have created a rival class of theoretical models, contextual models, that emphasize the embeddedness of disclosers and confidants in social networks. These networks form contexts that expose disclosers to confidants in which they confide, and thus the choice of confidant is often exogenous, and the manner of disclosure is extemporaneous. No work to date has compared the broad predictions of contextual models (that disclosure is often unplanned) with those of purposive models (that disclosure is planned in a multi-step process). The current work does not compare these predictions directly in a single study—this remains a candidate for future work—but the individual studies of the current work address purposive model predictions and contextual model predictions. Studies 4 and 5 of the current work examine the extent to which disclosures may be unplanned (Study 4) and even unintentional (Study 5). Furthermore, the studies' results suggest that many disclosures are unplanned or unintentional, and that this spontaneity is associated strongly with increased regret. Future work could expound on the boundary conditions in which spontaneous disclosure is harmful, and explore whether it is helpful in certain contexts. For example, disclosure to a stranger unconnected to one's social circle is extremely low risk and may bring benefits (Chaikin & Derlega, 1974; Rusbult & Paul, 2003; Small, 2009, 2013).

Testing goals, strategies and outcomes together

Both Study 2 and Study 3 were designed to address this theoretical gap empirically, although it should be noted that these studies represent only an initial inquiry; addressing it fully would require many studies and is a candidate for future work. Study 2 tested associations between different disclosure goals, confidant reactions, and outcomes, while Study 3 tested the associations between disclosing with an intended disclosure strategy and post-disclosure regret/gladness. Study 2 also explicitly tested the theory generated in Chapter 1 that suggested

other-oriented goals would be associated with better disclosure outcomes, even if the goals being compared were both considered approach goals according to existing theory.

The three goals tested in Study 2, which included holding a goal reveal oneself, aiming to connect with the confidant, or seeking help, were all associated with lower post-disclosure regret. In addition, disclosure motivated by a self-oriented goal (i.e. revealing oneself), was more likely to be associated with being judged by the confidant than a disclosure motivated by an other-oriented goal (i.e. to connect with the confidant), even though both are labeled approach goals in the literature (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010). Being judged is an outcome associated with post-disclosure regret. Thus, an intervention that challenged disclosers to reframe their motivation to disclose in an other-oriented manner might improve disclosure outcomes. Results from Study 2 also suggest that receiving help/advice when it is not wanted increases post-disclosure regret, although not receiving help when it is sought increases regret more. Interventions designed to help disclosers clarify their desire for help would be beneficial.

Results from Study 3 suggest that individual cost/benefit calculations posited by purposive models of the disclosure process (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010; Omarzu, 2000) are empirically tractable. The choice of a specific confidant was shown in Study 3 to be largely separable from the choice of a disclosure manner as measured by independence of their cognitive pathways. In addition, each was associated with discrete variance in post-disclosure regret.

Incorporating planning theory

Afifi and Steuber (2009) suggested incorporation of planning theory (e.g., Berger, 1997) into future investigation of disclosure, and this was a goal of the current work. Specifically, Study 5 was intended as an initial inquiry toward the incorporation of planning in disclosure

theory. Its aim was simple: to discover if many disclosures were planned, and test whether planned disclosures were associated with better outcome than unplanned ones. The results of Study 5 suggest that lower levels of disclosure planning are associated with regret, and represent a fruitful beginning toward incorporating planning theory into disclosure research. Further work in this regard would allow for incorporation of stages of readiness as in behavior change theory (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Gollwitzer, 1999), assessing how close people were to disclosing, and how these stages of readiness apply to the theoretical models of disclosure decision making (Afifi & Steuber, 2009).

Importantly, the results of Study 4 and Study 5 suggest that planning can be incorporated into disclosure interventions to improve people's lives. In aggregate, the studies of Chapter 2 suggest that changes in the process of disclosure (i.e. adding planning) may be associated with better outcomes (i.e. less regret) in real life.

3.3: Future work

Regret is a complex outcome variable. Future work may seek to measure multiple aspects of regret. Understanding *why* the disclosure is regretted will illuminate disclosure processes both leading up to and following disclosure. One particularly promising avenue would be to explore disclosure *expectations* and how they interact with confidant reactions and disclosure outcomes. One specific direction this could proceed would be to delve further into the assumption that a confidant with similar experience is an ideal candidate for a disclosure confidant. Emerging work in compassion theory suggests that people who have undergone a serious stressor can possess *less* compassion for similar others than individuals who have not (Livne-Tarandach, Plews, & Rabelo, 2018). Yet a confidant with a lack of experience with the content of the disclosure could also carry negative misconceptions or stereotypes about the concealed information. Future work

could detangle when a person with similar experience is a better confidant and when they are not.

Results from the current work suggest that an intervention incorporating planning for disclosure could raise the prevalence of positive disclosure outcomes. An effect intervention could be built and tested following a set of studies designed to identify the behavior change stages of would-be disclosers (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Madden, 1986), similar to the "readiness" to disclose that Afifi and Steuber (2009) incorporate into their model of disclosure antecedents. A short-term intervention to reduce intrusive thoughts and the distress it engenders (see Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2019) could be followed by a lengthier planning intervention, thereby reducing the unintentional disclosures observed in Study 5.

The presumed relationship between the disclosure of sensitive information and the process of identity formation and change deserves explicit examination. This relationship could be investigated by studying multiple disclosures of the same information over time. Modifications to the Social Sharing Questionnaire could permit participants to report on a single disclosure pertaining a particular topic across multiple disclosure episodes. It is likely that changes in the disclosures will capture the evolution of how strong emotions may change, and how the information may or may not be integrated into the larger context of the self. After all, disclosure not only allows us to get to know others, it is also how we get to know ourselves.

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