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2022

Examining Trust and Its Influence on Emotional Self-Disclosure

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Demetria Thomas-Masso

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Abstract

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Demetria Thomas-Masso

MA, Argosy University, 2008

BA, University of South Florida, 2005

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

February 2022

Abstract

Communication is an important aspect of a relationship of any kind as thoughts, feelings, and ideas are conveyed from one party to the other. However, communication styles vary, which can contribute to lack of comprehension of content among individuals resulting in misinterpretation. This study focused on examining whether trust, an identified variable indicative of a secure relationship, could influence individuals' willingness to emotionally self-disclose within a romantic relationship. One hundred fifty-eight individuals were randomly placed into one of three groups (two were priming groups) for the purpose of assessing whether trust influenced their willingness to disclose their emotions to their significant other as measured by the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale. It was hypothesized that priming a feeling of trust would result in a greater willingness to emotionally self-disclose compared to the no-priming condition as well as a relationship priming condition. One-way analysis of variance was conducted to analyze the data. The overall test was not significant. Exploratory analyses demonstrated that the mean for the trust prime group was statistically higher than for the no-priming condition, but those results should be cautiously interpreted. This study contributes to positive social change and current knowledge on emotional disclosure within relationships and makes an original contribution by using a casual design.

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Dedication

  I want to dedicate this laborious dissertation to God, first and foremost, as He is The One that provided me with the strength, fortitude, ability, and wisdom to complete this. I would not have been able to accomplish this without the help of The Lord. Secondly, I want to dedicate this to my beloved mother, Shirley, who was undoubtedly my biggest supporter since I was in her womb. She called me her "little doctor" since I was a child but left this Earth in the midst of this journey, before seeing it come into full fruition. Fortunately, I know her spirit lives on. Lastly, I would like to dedicate this to myself, as there were many times when I mentally gave up on myself, but I did it, despite all odds—multiple chronic and acute medical issues, multiple losses, multiple life changes, the pandemic, etc. Therefore, I am dedicating this to myself; I actually did it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Imagine going to a place where the people around you could not understand anything you said to them regardless of the tone, volume, language spoken, or gestures made. No matter how hard you try to make them understand you, they just look completely puzzled; all of your efforts are failed attempts. The thought of this alone could be frustrating. However, some people can relate to the feeling of being misunderstood, not heard, or even ignored due to a lack of effective communication. Communication is an important tool in society as it bridges the gap between the thoughts, opinions, feelings, and ideas of different individuals. For that reason, it is beneficial to learn how to accurately communicate with others to increase knowledge, enhance relationships, and continue the overall evolution of social interaction.

Communication occurs in many different forms, including verbal, nonverbal (e.g., body language, sign language, etc.), and written, thus allowing multiple ways to transmit a message. Nonetheless, individuals may struggle with poor or underdeveloped communication skills; this has been the focal point of many research studies to date. Some researchers (e.g., Brashier & Hughes, 2012; Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006; Frye-Cox & Hesse, 2013) have linked communication as a variable with relational contentment, thus demonstrating the importance of effective communication. While communication in general is important within relationships, there are several variables that could affect the quality of communication and/or the way in which individuals communicate with one another. This study focused on trust and its influence on emotional self-disclosure within the context of romantic relationships. Thus, one of the biggest social change implications

of this study is that it was the first of its kind to address whether thoughts of trust can influence emotional self-disclosure.

This chapter provides further information about the research at hand by providing background information, stating the problem and purpose of the study, identifying the research questions and hypotheses, explaining the theoretical foundation, and describing the nature of the study. Key definitions, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations are also addressed, along with the study's significance. This chapter concludes with a concise summary of the aforementioned areas.

Background

Research within the scope of this topic has focused on various aspects of self-disclosure such as disclosure recipients, consequences of disclosure, and confidentiality (e.g., Ignatius & Kokkonen, 2007). While an in-depth review of the literature is provided in the following chapter, this section includes a brief summary of the research.

Erwin and Pressler (2011) examined correlations among emotional self-disclosure, shyness, and love styles (i.e., passionate, superficial, calm, intense, rational, and selfless). They found that shyness was not linked with patterns of emotional self-disclosure. However, there was a noted association between emotional self-disclosure and some of the love styles. Bareket-Bojmel and Shahar (2011) explored the emotional and interpersonal consequences of online self-disclosure. In their first study, communication partners who knew the identity of the other person had an increased willingness to continue disclosing information. They found in their second study that individuals who negatively self-disclosed (i.e., shared negative event experienced) had increased levels of

negative affect, and those who positively self-disclosed (i.e., shared positive event experienced) had increased levels of positive affect.

Rogers et al. (2009) conducted a comparative study of emotional self-disclosure among internet users who preferred face-to-face therapy and those who preferred internet therapy. Individuals who preferred face-to-face therapy had a greater willingness to disclose unpleasant feelings than those who preferred internet therapy. No significant differences were found among the groups in relation to disclosing pleasant emotions. Corcoran (1988) investigated confidentiality as a predictor of self-disclosure and found that confidentiality was positively correlated with increased self-disclosure. Steel (1991) explored the association between trust and self-disclosure as well as factors (i.e., gender, race) that could influence this association. They noted that there was a positive correlation between interpersonal trust and self-disclosure within the context of romantic relationships. Additionally, they concluded that women self-disclosed more than men and that there was a stronger correlation of trust and self-disclosure among the Caucasian participants in comparison to the Asian participants. Foubert and Sholley (1996) conducted a correlational study wherein they examined how reported self-disclosure to parents and best friends was related to gender, gender role (i.e., masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated per sex role inventory/assessment), and individualized trust. Individuals with higher levels of trust self-disclosed to a greater extent than those with lower levels of trust. In addition, feminine females self-disclosed more than feminine males (i.e., demonstrated gender differences regardless of gender roles).

Despite such research efforts, there is still a gap in the literature, which this study addressed. Specifically, there is a lack of research that concentrates solely on trust and one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose within romantic relationships. More importantly, there are no studies that have demonstrated a causal relationship, as all have been correlational research.

Problem Statement

Communication is an inevitable part of society and has been heavily researched due to the variation of styles, languages, modalities, and so on. It is a tool that allows individuals to share their feelings and perspectives with others. Despite the universal nature of communication, people still have difficulty effectively transmitting information. Because a romantic relationship can arguably be considered one of the closest types of relationships due to the intimate nature of it as well as research linking communication with relational contentment, it is important to better understand how trust influences one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose.

Communicating information with sentimental significance is especially prone to misrepresentation (Trommsdorff & John, 1992). Fundamentally, there are multiple means whereby communication regarding one's feelings can be misinterpreted in relationships, such as hurt being perceived as anger or fatigue being mistaken as lack of motivation. To illustrate, a person could have made dinner for their significant other, and upon the significant other's arrival learned that they had already eaten after work with a coworker. The significant other might view the reaction of the significant other who cooked as

angry, whereas the underlying emotion could be hurt that they weren't considered prior to plans being made to go out to eat with the coworker.

Relational conflict in general, regardless of marital status, can have an adverse effect on individuals. In fact, Slater and Haber (1984) posited that increased conflict within a household produces lower self-esteem, heightened anxiety, and a reduced sense of control among children exposed to parental conflict. The adverse effects are heightened within maladjusted children, as demonstrated by manifestations in later life. The adverse effects adds to the realm of poor communication and/or a reduced ability to effectively identify and express one's emotions. Divorce is a widespread occurrence (Frank, 2007) for which communication problems are the most identified reason (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2004). As such, children who witness their guardians in conflict (regardless of marital status) and/or demonstrate poor communication skills receive firsthand exposure of ineffective communication, which can be detrimental, as noted above. Hence, this study added to the current literature concerning communication by using an experimental research design (i.e., one that allowed for causal inferences) to more clearly understand the causal mechanisms for self-disclosure within a romantic relationship.

Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to use an experimental research design to determine whether trust, an identified variable indicative of a secure relationship as described by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988a), had an influence on an individual's willingness to emotionally self-disclose within romantic relationships as measured by the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS; Snell et al., 1988), modified in

wording with permission to make it applicable to population of this study. The specific aim of this study was to determine whether priming feelings of trust, using a visualization task, would influence an individual's willingness to disclose their emotions to their romantic partner. A relationship priming condition was also included in this study in which individuals who were randomly assigned to that condition visualized their significant other to address an alternative explanation. Specifically, it allowed a distinction to be made concerning responses on the ESDS being made based on an individual's thoughts and/or feelings concerning their significant other (i.e., without regard to trust). A manipulation check was included in the study to assess the degree to which trust was thought of among all the participants during the study. Accordingly, the priming condition was the independent variable while the ESDS score was the dependent variable.

Research Question and Hypotheses

The research question posed for this study was the following: Does trust within a romantic relationship influence one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose? Accordingly, the hypotheses were as follows:

Null Hypothesis 1: There will be no difference between the trust priming condition and the no-priming condition with respect to willingness to emotionally disclose, as measured by the ESDS.

Research Hypothesis 1: Priming a feeling of trust will result in a greater willingness to emotionally self-disclose than in the no-priming condition, as measured by the ESDS.

Null Hypothesis 2: There will be no difference between the trust priming condition and the relationship priming condition with respect to willingness to emotionally disclose, as measured by the ESDS.

Research Hypothesis 2: Priming a feeling of trust will result in a greater willingness to emotionally self-disclose than in the relationship priming condition, as measured by the ESDS.

Theoretical Framework

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988b) provides an understanding of interpersonal attachment. Interpersonal bonds stem from bonds formed with caregivers in early life (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). Attachment theory stresses the role that early experiences have in assembling the beliefs that children formulate regarding the responsiveness and trustworthiness of important individuals in their lives. Thus, these formed expectations (as a result of the child's experiences) aid in the regulation of their future attachment behavior, which ultimately affects their social development and overall relationship with others (Fraley et al., 2013).

As individuals grow from infancy into adulthood, they compile a mental record of their favorable outcomes of obtaining adequate comfort from their attachment figures, commencing with their primary caregivers and continuing with close friends and partners (Simpson & Rholes, 2017). These mental accounts, or working models (Bowlby, 1969, 1973), have two elements: significant others, inclusive of their responsiveness to the individual's requests for comfort in previous interactions, and the self, inclusive of information concerning the individual's ability to obtain adequate comfort as well as the

individual's value as a relational partner. Thus, how individuals are treated by others during childhood and beyond helps shape how they view others as well as themselves.

In secure relationships, individuals feel assured of the other's accessibility, responsiveness, and concern (Bowlby, 1988a). Simply stated, they feel that the individual is a reliable source of support. As noted previously, a romantic relationship is arguably one of the closest relationships that one can have due to its intimate nature. Accordingly, it is within reason to assume that an individual's romantic relationship could potentially be their securest relationship. As such, romantic relationships were examined from the lens of a secure attachment; focusing on trust, as it is considered to be a component of secure relationships.

Nature of the Study

The nature of this study was quantitative in which a randomized experiment was conducted. In the interest of the research question being rooted in causality, the methodological approach was felicitous to address the inquiry. After consenting to participate in the research study, participants were randomly placed into one of three groups: no-priming condition, a group in which they were asked to think of a relationship (relationship priming condition), or a group in which they were asked to think of a feeling of trust (trust priming condition). By having a relationship priming condition, the potential presumption that the mere notion of thinking of a romantic relationship could increase emotional self-disclosure was addressed, thus strengthening the evidence of the influence that trust has on an individual's willingness to emotionally self-disclose.

The participants in the no-priming condition completed the ESDS (Snell et al., 1988) right after reading the consent information. In contrast, those in the relationship priming condition and the trust priming condition completed the ESDS right after completing the priming (visualization) task (detailed in Chapter 3). Hence, the independent variable in this study was priming condition while the dependent variable was the ESDS score. Upon completion of the questionnaire, all participants completed a demographic sheet (i.e., including their relational status, duration, etc.) to further address external validity and received information on available resources in the event that the study evoked any feelings of discontentment beyond their level of comfort. A manipulation check (i.e., question assessing the extent to which participants thought about "trust" during the study) was also included in the study to address whether the manipulation was successful.

The participants in this study were students, faculty, and staff of an online institution who were involved in a romantic relationship during the time of the study regardless of their marital status. They were recruited using the university's research participant pool. Participants were also recruited via LinkedIn via invitation to two of the psychology-based groups as a means of increasing the ability to generalize to the population (i.e., by potentially increasing the diversity by including others who were not necessarily affiliated with the online institution), as well as to increase the number of participants. In order to address the hypotheses, planned contrasts were conducted.

Definitions

To provide a clearer understanding, key terms used throughout this study are defined below:

Self-disclosure is what a person orally divulges about themselves, such as cognitions, sentiments, experiences, and so on (Cuming & Rapee, 2010). Taken further, it is the act of making oneself fully known to another person (Jourard, 1971).

Emotional self-disclosure (Snell et al., 1988) occurs when an individual communicates their emotional experiences to another individual.

Trust is one's anticipation that the word, agreement, or oral or composed statement of another person can be relied upon (Rotter, 1967). Additionally, it demonstrates assurance about one's significant other's caring, loyalty, and dedication to one's needs (Uysal et al., 2012).

Willingness to disclose is allowing another person to know one's actions, feelings, and so on (Jourard, 1971).

Priming is visualizing something in accordance with the instructions provided (Luke et al., 2012).

Assumptions

In this study, it was assumed that the research participants understood the meaning of the emotions presented in the ESDS (Snell et al., 1988). It was also assumed that the participants had at least a moderate degree of self-awareness in relation to their appraisal of their emotions. Moreover, it was assumed that participants were truthful in

their responses, which was supported by their anonymity, confidentiality, and ability to withdraw from the study at any point.

Due to participants being recruited from an online institution's research participant pool, it was also assumed that not only would all participants have computer and internet access, but also they would be representative of the general population, as the university has students enrolled from every state in the United States as well as over 150 countries (Laureate International Universities, 2017). It was also assumed that all participants recruited from LinkedIn had access to the internet through a computer, smartphone, or tablet (i.e., as many people have the social media platform as an application on their device) and would be reflective of the general population. According to LinkedIn Corporation (2020), LinkedIn is "the world's largest professional network with nearly 660+ million users in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide" (About LinkedIn section, para. 1). However, it is acknowledged that neither the participant pool nor LinkedIn may actually be representative of the general population.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included individuals who were in a romantic relationship, regardless of marital status, because it allowed the opportunity to accurately reflect current emotional disclosures, trust, and willingness to emotionally disclose through perceived readily accessible memory retrievals. There are many factors that contribute to self-disclosure, such as characteristics of the discloser and the individual receiving the information, culture, and so on (Ignatius & Kokkonen, 2007). For the parameters of this study, trust was the only variable examined.

In contrast, the scope of this study did not include individuals who were not involved in a romantic relationship at the time of the study due to potential memory bias, which involves recalling things as more or less frequent and/or severe than they originally were when they occurred (Luchies et al., 2013). Due to the possible lack of readily available recollection of memories surrounding a past relationship, individuals who were not currently involved in a romantic relationship were not included in this study, as it may have increased memory bias. The generalization of these findings can be applied to people across the globe of varying ethnicities, age groups, and gender, albeit only to those affiliated with the online university and those within two of the psychology-based groups on LinkedIn.

Limitations

The lack of generalizability of the findings to individuals in romantic relationships who are not affiliated with a university as well as those who are affiliated with a different university (including brick-and-mortar) is a limitation to this study. A further limitation of this study is that it only included participants who were registered in the research participant pool and those who were members of two of the psychology-based groups on LinkedIn. It is possible that the results of this study may only generalize to those perceived to have at least a moderate degree of self-awareness and/or emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is having the ability to observe the feelings and emotions of oneself and others, distinguish them, and apply the information as an aid in one's thoughts and behaviors (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). An individual with a lessened degree of emotional intelligence may lack the insight to accurately assess their emotions,

let alone those of another. As such, the participants' responses may not be reflective of their genuine thoughts, feelings, and/or perceptions in relation to emotional self-disclosure, as they may have responded based on limited awareness. Additionally, it may only generalize to those who have not had a history of multiple unhealthy relationships that severely impacted their ability and/or willingness to trust others. Unfortunately, there is essentially no way known to the author to truly account for the limitations, given the nature and design of the study, even beyond the point of asking them those things specifically, as they might not have categorized those relationships as such due to denial, limited awareness/insight, and so on, which will also be addressed in the discussion.

Significance

It was important to research the influence that trust has on one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose in romantic relationships, as romantic relationships are arguably among the most important relationships that an individual will encounter due to their intimate nature. This randomized experiment was consistent with research designs needed to advance knowledge in the discipline, making it an original contribution because it surpassed correlational studies, which can only demonstrate a relationship among variables due to the absence of a manipulation of independent variables (Rumrill, 2004), whereas experimental designs aim to establish whether a particular treatment persuades an outcome (Creswell, 2009).

The enhancement of communication in relationships has been noted to bring improvement to the quality and satisfaction of the identified relationship (e.g., Brashier & Hughes, 2012; Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006; Frye-Cox & Hesse, 2013) due to an increased

understanding of the other person. The social change implication of this study is that it was the first of its kind to address whether thoughts of trust can influence emotional self-disclosure. The information obtained from this study may spark future studies of this kind, which may further enrich the literature. In demonstrating trust to be a significant component of individual's willingness to disclose their emotions to their significant other, the study would have highlighted the meaningfulness of having trust in a relationship. Clinicians who work with individuals and couples can still use the results of this study to focus strategies for enhancing trust. Breuer et al. (2016) asserted that team trust is associated with perceived team connectedness, commitment, and effort. Accordingly, clinicians could hone in on therapeutic assignments that require reliance on one another, such as team building exercises. As the members of a couple interact with one another on an identified activity in dependence on one another, trust will increase. If they are unsuccessful with the activity, it provides evidence of an area of improvement, such as maintaining an open dialogue with one another or increasing individual effort.

Summary

Communication is a heavily researched subject, as is the role of communication within romantic relationships. However, there is no research known to me that has specifically examined the influence that trust has on an individual's willingness to emotionally self-disclose that is not founded on correlational findings. As such, this study provides causal relationship data that can enhance the current body of literature surrounding this subject. Chapter 2 will provide a more detailed review of that literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Communication is undoubtedly linked with relational contentment based on scholarly literature to date, which has deemed this area as a topic of interest. As a result of individuals getting divorced almost as often as they are getting married, further exploration of communication and relationships using an experimental design is warranted. According to National Marriage and Divorce Rate Trends (2011), the marriage rate was 6.8 per 1,000 of the total population, whereas the divorce rate was 3.6 per 1,000 of the total population, based on reporting from 44 states and the District of Columbia.

The purpose of this research study was to determine whether trust, an identified variable indicative of a secure relationship (Simpson, 1990), influences the willingness to disclose emotions within romantic relationships using the ESDS (Snell et al., 1988). The specific aim of this study was to determine whether priming (through a visualization task) feelings of trust would influence individuals' willingness to disclose emotions in the context of a romantic relationship. A relationship priming condition (also a visualization task) was also included in the study for comparison purposes (i.e., alternative explanation).

The literature covered in this chapter (e.g., Frye-Cox & Hesse, 2013; Brashier & Hughes, 2012) provides evidence that there are correlations among communication and relational quality, relational discontentment and poor communication skills, verbal communication and sexual satisfaction, and intimate communication and greater relational quality. Thereafter, the literature will be more reflective of the specific

concentrated interests of this study, such as trust, confidentiality, and emotional self-disclosure, demonstrating that there is a connection between trust and/or confidentiality and increased self-disclosure. Of note, the referenced studies (i.e., apart from the priming studies) were all based on correlational findings; thus, causal conclusions cannot be drawn from their findings. This chapter also includes the strategy used to search the literature, an outline of the theoretical foundation and conceptual framework, and a concluding summary.

Literature Research Strategy

Library databases that were accessed throughout the course of this research were PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Academic Search Complete, Google Scholar, and Thoreau (multiple database search). Key search terms included *attachment*, *attachment style*, *attachment theory*, *secure attachment*, *communication*, *trust*, *self-disclosure*, *emotional self-disclosure*, and *priming*. Key search terms for the researched population (individuals in a romantic relationship) included *relationships*, *secure relationships*, *romantic relationships*, *couples*, *marriage*, and *intimate relationships*. The timeframe on which I focused during the search was 2010-2016. However, searches were also completed without a timeframe to yield seminal literature.

Theoretical Foundation

Bowlby (1988b) proposed a theory to explain interpersonal attachment, which is referred to as attachment theory. In short, Bowlby asserted that attachment theory is an attempt to annotate attachment behavior, with its intermittent display and departure, and the enduring attachments that adolescents and other individuals develop to specific

others. Stated differently, the theory of attachment posits that the way in which an individual bonds with others is a result of repeated interactions, or developed attachments, with their caregivers during the early stages of their life (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2008). A person's attachment style is deeply tied to how they interacted with their caregiver as a child. For example, if a mother speaks calmly to her child, is patient, and is nurturing during a great portion of their interactions, she will foster a secure attachment style, as the child will feel confident in the relationship. On the other hand, if in the majority of interactions a child's mother inconsistently tends to the child's needs, avoids the child, and/or neglects them altogether, or speaks harshly, the behavior will foster an insecure attachment style, as the child will never know what to expect from their mother, thus minimizing their trust and dependence.

Perrone et al. (2007) asserted that this developed attachment has a tremendous imprint on the varying roles (e.g., parent, spouse, etc.) in an individual's life as they emerge into adulthood. As such, attachment style could play a major role in the degree of relational contentment that individuals experience in their relationships. As communication was explored in this study, it is important to note that communication has also been a variable supported by the research to be associated with relational quality and/or relational satisfaction (e.g., Brashier & Hughes, 2012; Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006; Frye-Cox & Hesse, 2013). However, for the purpose of this study, attachment theory was used to provide a basis for understanding relational (e.g., communication, attachment, etc.) patterns.

According to the tenets of attachment theory, secure attachments are generally typified by increased degrees of trust and commitment (Simpson, 1990). Failure to express feelings is highly attributed to having an unconscious fear that the action of which the feeling is part will result in a dreaded outcome (Bowlby, 1988a). Secure attachment is associated with the ability to constructively deal with unpleasant emotions by expressing those emotions to a significant other (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Secure partners have an increased likelihood of initiating conversation about their uncertainty of perpetual patterns in the relationship (Ahn Jang et al., 2002). As such, attachment theory is a feasible perspective to use in examining the influence that trust has on emotional self-disclosure in romantic relationships.

It is speculated that willingness to communicate intimate material concerning oneself necessitates a degree of confidence that the other individual will not attempt to compromise one's security (Tolor et al., 1975). To explain this perspective, if an individual were considering disclosing information about themselves to another, they would have to believe that the recipient of the information would not share that information with anyone else. In other words, if a person decided to share a secret with another person, most likely the recipient of the information would have had to demonstrate loyalty and honesty prior to the other individual feeling comfortable enough to share with them. To illustrate (as an extreme extent of distrusting an individual with personal information), most people can relate to being called—or have called someone— a "tattletale" at some point in childhood, and it is almost a guarantee that the "tattletale" would have been the last person on the list to be told anything perceived as being

sensitive in nature due to the risk of being exposed to others. As such, it would seem that feeling and/or believing that a person can be trusted helps elicit disclosure. Trust is a major component of secure attachment (Simpson, 1990), and therefore, if trust is primed (via a visualization task evoking a feeling of trust), it is hypothesized that the willingness to disclose emotions will be greater than in instances where trust is not primed.

Literature Review

The body of reviewed literature was selected to demonstrate the importance of communication and how it can affect relationships, as this study explored emotional self-disclosure, a facet of communication, and how trust influences one's willingness to engage in such disclosure within the context of a romantic relationship. The ESDS (Snell et al., 1988) was used to examine self-disclosure among varying types of relationships (e.g., parent/child, couples, etc.) in the studies that were reviewed, which demonstrated the validity and reliability of this scale (see Chapter 3 for more information).

Intimate relationships cultivate an environment for sharing unrestrained feelings. Thus, an individual's way of sharing their feelings may suggest how close they are to another. Therefore, recognizing the influence that attachment has on interpersonal relationships is imperative (Simpson et al., 2007). The interlacing of a person's connection to others and their way of attaching is explained by attachment theory (Faber & Wittenborn, 2010). Bowlby (1988a) stated that from an attachment perspective, the capacity to create intimate emotional connections with others is revered as a cardinal component of effective personality functioning and mental health.

Communication

Anders and Tucker (2000) demonstrated that there is a positive association among a person's form of attachment and the way in which they communicate, notably in regard to verbally revealing themselves. Accordingly, the difficulty in the creation and maintenance of promising relationships as a possible result of reserved self-disclosure was also noted. Trommsdorff and John (1992) postulated that the evolution and quality of interpersonal communication are, in part, dependent upon the mutual and authentic apperception of another's purposed announcements. Acknowledging that there is any form of disintegration of content being delivered endorses there could be a misconception. Correspondingly, the inaccuracy may cause a negative impression of the other person, thus creating a potentially damaging effect among the individuals.

Bowlby (1988b) asserted that in order for a relationship between any two individuals to harmoniously proceed, it is imperative that each person is aware of the other's perspective, aspirations, emotions, and intentions and adjust their own conduct so that some proportion of goals can be negotiated. As such, each individual ought to have reasonably correct models of self and other that are frequently updated through liberal communication. For instance, if an athlete told a teammate to "tighten up" and that teammate took the statement as a criticism of his skill, it could potentially damage the relationship among the two players if the athlete who made the comment did not mean it as such. However, by maintaining an awareness of each other's emotions, intentions, and so on as Bowlby suggested, perhaps they would be able to identify that they both desire for their team to win the game, which would require everyone to be focused and play to

the best of their ability. With this in mind, both athletes would presumably be able to proceed harmoniously.

Communication and Relational Contentment

Several research studies have demonstrated an association between relational discontentment (being unhappy/dissatisfied in a relationship) and poor communication skills (e.g., Brashier & Hughes, 2012; Eğeci & Gençöz, 2006). For example, Brashier and Hughes (2012) conducted a study in which they investigated whether there were any disparities in communication and relationship and sexual contentment among lesbian and heterosexual females. Participants completed three brief Likert-type questionnaires that measured communication style (i.e., based on the Five Love Languages—receiving gifts, quality time, words of affirmation, acts of service, and physical touch), relationship satisfaction, and sexual satisfaction. In regard to sexual satisfaction, words of affirmation were valued by heterosexual women more than lesbian women. In contrast, the opposite was found with physical touch regarding relational contentment. As such, the authors concluded that the enhancement of verbal communication could result in increased sexual satisfaction among heterosexual couples, as supported by Bell and Weinberg's (1978) assertion that lesbian women typically communicate better than heterosexual couples.

Eğeci and Gençöz (2006) conducted a correlational study to explore the connection between communication skills and relational contentment after taking other significant variables of relational contentment into account such as attachment style and varying problem-solving skills. University students were recruited for this study; to be included, they needed to currently be in or have been in a romantic relationship. The

participants then completed four different questionnaires that appraised their perceived quality of relationship and relational satisfaction, perceived problem-solving abilities, communication skills, and attachment style in intimate relationships. Participants who had less communication problems had a greater likelihood of experiencing relational contentment based on data analysis (i.e., hierarchical multiple regression) when controlling for the other significant variables.

Frye-Cox and Hesse (2013) surmised that intimate communication is coupled with a finer quality of relationship. Married couples completed surveys via the internet that measured their emotional competence, interpersonal loneliness, perceptions of spousal intimate communication, marital quality, and presence of depressive symptoms. Analyses controlled for length of the participants' marriage, their age, and spousal depression scores. The findings indicated a positive correlation between intimate communication and greater marital quality.

Emotional Self-Disclosure

Erwin and Pressler (2011) conducted a study with university students to examine the correlations among emotional self-disclosure, shyness, and love styles (types of love). Specifically, the participants completed a questionnaire with four parts: demographic information, attitudes or styles regarding love, emotional self-disclosure, and shyness. Shyness was correlated positively with Eros (passionate love) and negatively with Mania (out-of-control love). However, there were no statistically significant correlations between shyness and any of the emotional self-disclosure subscales (depression, happiness, jealousy, anxiety, anger, calmness, apathy, and fear). In contrast, Ludus (game

playing or uncommitted love) correlated with depression, happiness, anxiety, anger, calmness, apathy, and fear; Pragma (practical love) was linked to happiness and calmness; and Mania was associated with anger. Eros, Storge (gradual love), and Agape (selfless love) were not significantly correlated with emotional self-disclosure. The authors anticipated that the connection between shyness and love styles would be demonstrated by correlations linking these components and patterns of emotional self-disclosure, but they were not demonstrated. The study, however, did demonstrate some correlations among emotional self-disclosure and love styles, which the authors noted could suggest the conceivable role of emotional self-disclosure in the evolution of romantic relationships, which warrants more concentrated research efforts.

Rogers et al. (2009) conducted a comparative study on emotional self-disclosure among internet users who preferred face-to-face therapy and those who had a preference for internet therapy. Participants responded to an internet advertisement on Facebook. If they met the criteria (i.e., 21-30 years old, U.S. registered user, able to navigate the internet, and able to understand English), they were able to proceed with the study after consenting. Participants completed the ESDS (Snell et al., 1988), which assessed interpersonal disclosure of depression, happiness, jealousy, anxiety, anger, calmness, apathy, and fear. More succinctly, an individual's willingness to discuss the aforementioned emotions to various disclosure recipients was measured. Based on the correlational findings, those who preferred face-to-face therapy had an increased willingness to disclose feelings of depression, jealousy, anxiety, and fear to a clinician compared to those who preferred the internet. On the other hand, there were no

significant disparities affecting either group in relation to disclosing emotions related to happiness, anger, calmness, or apathy. Overall, it was concluded that face-to-face therapy was preferred over internet therapy, although it was noted that the participants would be willing to disclose regardless of modality. Of note, the authors reported that over 50% of the participants had already engaged in face-to-face therapy in the past, and that could have been a potential limitation to the study, along with only recruiting U.S. registered Facebook users. This study demonstrated the usage of the ESDS as well as addressed a different modality of communication (i.e., online).

Snell et al. (1989) conducted three studies in which they explored emotional disclosure in relation to the recipient, culture, and gender. Specifically, the first study explored men's and women's willingness to address their feelings with their parents and therapists, the second study examined the association between gender and culture on emotional disclosure to friends and therapists, and the third study investigated the association between gender and the masculine role on willingness to emotionally disclose to parents and therapists. In all three studies, participants completed the ESDS (Snell et al., 1988) to measure their willingness to disclose emotionally. In the first study, undergraduate student participants completed the scale in relation to disclosing to each of their parents as well as to a male and to a female therapist. The findings deduced from this study were that all participants reported a greater willingness to communicate their feelings with their mother than with any other disclosure recipient. Moreover, the fathers were the least likely recipients of the participants' emotional disclosure of all of the listed emotions except for calmness. Lastly, there was a small yet consistent tendency for

participants to be more inclined to discuss their feelings with female therapists rather than male therapists. In the second study, the cross-cultural generality of emotional disclosure among individuals from Mexico and the United States was examined. In detail, the researchers recruited participants from a college in Mexico as well as a college in the United States. Those who were enrolled in the college in Mexico completed the questionnaire in Spanish (which was translated back into English to ensure maintenance of the denotative and connotative meanings), while the other participants completed the questionnaire in English. It was demonstrated that all women participants reported greater disclosure of depression, anxiety, anger, and fear to female friends than the reports of the male participants to female friends. In addition, the Mexican female participants were more apt to share all of the measured emotions with female therapists than all of the other participants were. Similarly, they were more apt to share all of the feelings, minus apathy and fear, to male therapists than all of the other participants were. Sharing personal emotions with a male friend was not affected by the participants' gender or cultural background. Likewise, there was no evidence indicating that the Mexican male participants were distinctly characterized by emotional restrictiveness. The final study investigated masculinity and the relationship with willingness to disclose emotionally to parents and therapists. In short, in addition to the ESDS, participants completed a questionnaire that measured masculine roles. Based on the findings, male participants who had inhibited affection (based on the outcome of the questionnaire) were less willing to share their feelings with their fathers, whereas the male participants who scored restrictive emotionality (based on questionnaire) were particularly hesitant to share highly

personal information concerning their emotions with their mothers as well as feelings of anger and fear to therapists regardless of the therapist's gender. On the other hand, the women participants who scored restrictive emotionality were less willing to share their feelings with their mothers or therapists regardless of gender. In essence, despite the gender of the discloser, those participants who endorsed inhibited affection and restrictive emotionality on the masculinity questionnaire were disinclined to disclose personal information of great importance concerning their feelings to others.

Ignatius and Kokkonen (2007) wrote an article to broadly explore self-disclosure from a characteristic, relational, and consequential perspective based on synthesizing self-disclosure literature and empirical findings from various areas of science. In a condensed format, these authors discussed how an individual's characteristic traits such as shyness, flexibility, and toughness can impact self-disclosure. For example, they illustrated how someone who is shy typically has the tendency of being less social which decreases their chances of establishing friendships and ultimately, also lessens their chances of expressing their thoughts and opinions. An individual's emotional state was also linked to self-disclosure such as someone who feels lonely being less likely to disclose information concerning themselves to someone else. Ignatius and Kokkonen also mentioned how the quality of the relationship among the discloser and the recipient plays a role of the self-discloser. Consequences of self-disclosure was also noted to be a factor as one has to evaluate potential benefits and pitfalls to disclosing personal information such as additional support or negative feedback (e.g., criticism, sharing information with

others, etc.). Therefore, it would appear that there are multiple variables that could potentially attribute to one's willingness to self-disclose to another individual.

The studies outlined thus far has explored the potential rationale of the varying degrees of communication, including emotional self-disclosure, chiefly using the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale. They also provided some evidence of communication being linked to relational quality, regardless of relationship type. However, in order to fulfill the objectives of this study, the focal point will now shift to examining trust and its relationship with emotional self-disclosure.

Confidentiality and Self-Disclosure

Corcoran (1988) conducted a study exploring confidentiality (i.e., participants' perception of interviewer's credibility of upholding confidentiality) as a predictor of self-disclosure. In a condensed format, Corcoran utilized undergraduates at a college university who were enrolled in an introductory psychology course to partake in the study. The participants were interviewed regarding students' habits and attitudes by a clinical psychology graduate student whom they had never interacted with. The interview comprised of 40 statements that the participants were to respond "yes" or "no" if the statements were, or were not, reflective of themselves. Thereafter, the participants completed a questionnaire measuring interpersonal trust. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the data. Discriminatory efforts among high and low trust participants were handled by classifying individuals with scores one or more standard deviations above the mean as "high trusters" and individuals with scores one or more standard deviations below the mean as "low trusters." Based on the results,

confidentiality was positively correlated with increased self-disclosure among males and females. In addition, high trusting male participants disclosed more than high trusting females. The authors proclaimed that it is necessary for the discloser to believe the assurances of confidentiality for increased disclosure.

Trust and Self-Disclosure

Steel (1991) conducted a study exploring trust, self-disclosure, and factors that could influence the relationship (i.e., gender, race). Steel recruited 100 college students that consisted of 57% Caucasian, 38% Asian, and 5% who identified as other. Participants completed questionnaires that measured their self-disclosure patterns to significant others as well as their expectations of others (i.e., trust). Based on the results, there was a positive correlation between interpersonal trust and self-disclosure. Women were noted to have higher levels of self-disclosure than men. Based on Pearson correlation, the correlation between trust and self-disclosure was three times as strong among the Caucasian participants in comparison to the Asian participants. Individuals who were of different ethnicities were not highlighted in the results. Nonetheless, it was gathered that trust is essential for self-disclosure to take place.

Foubert and Sholley (1996) proclaimed that individualized trust is the greatest influence in predicting self-disclosure. These authors came to this conclusion as the result of a correlational study that they conducted when they investigated how reported self-disclosure to parents and best friends (i.e., best male and best female) were related to gender, gender role, and individualized trust. The participants in the study hailed from a modest southern private university that were mostly populated with Caucasian students.

After consenting to participate in the study and providing their demographic information, the participants completed three questionnaires. Trust among the identified discloser recipients (i.e., mother, father, best male friend, and best female friend) were measured as well as the participants' sex role. The participants also completed a questionnaire that assessed their self-disclosure among the aforementioned disclosure recipients. The results indicated that individuals with higher levels of trust self-disclosed to a greater degree than those with lower levels of trust. It was noted that of those with higher levels of trust, feminine females self-disclosed more than feminine males. Individuals who were rated as androgynous (based on sex roles questionnaire) reported self-disclosure similar to all other participants in accordance with trust level. These authors did note that the topics of self-disclosure measured in this study were not of great intimacy. Thus, there could be a different outcome given the assessment of a topic more intimate in nature.

Priming

Janiszewski and Wyer Jr. (2014) explained priming as an experimental structure that encompasses the process of an originally experienced stimulus and the demonstration of the impact it has on a response to a later experienced stimulus. They continued by stating that it transpires because the processing of a prime stimulus generates information, and the mental processes utilized to understand and manipulate the information, more readily available. They concluded that the more readily available information and mental processes can persuade subsequent appraisals, decisions, and overt behavior. In order to modify an individual's sense of security, at least one of the three methods must be employed (subliminally or supraliminally [above the threshold

needed for conscious perception]): expose them to security-related terms, expose them to a visual aid representing attachment security, or request them to think about memories of being cared for and supported by attachment figures or requesting that they envision such scenarios (Gillath et al., 2008; Gillath & Karantzas, 2019). Momentarily activating cognitive depictions of attachment figures could induce them to be symbolically accessible, amplify an individual's sense of felt security, and therefore sustain an individual's emotional steadiness and adaptability, even under relatively taxing situations (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Security primes initiates a feeling of being securely attached by causing cognitive representations in an individual's memory more available and salient (Gillath & Karantzas, 2019).

Gillath and Karantzas (2019) conducted a systematic review of 20 studies that used security priming. All of the studies, minus a couple of longitudinal studies, were cross-sectional designs. Comparison groups included attachment avoidance prime condition, attachment anxiety prime condition, neutral prime condition, neutral prime condition (acquaintance and non-attachment acquaintance), positive mood prime condition, control condition, and distraction condition. Seven studies were conducted entirely via internet, two studies included laboratory and online methods, eight studies were based in a laboratory, one study was conducted using pen-and-paper outside of a laboratory setting, and the procedures for two studies were not adequately described (i.e., conduction location and methods of obtaining data). A supraliminal priming method (i.e., guided imagery or visualization) was utilized in nineteen studies and the way in which the participants were primed in the other study was unclear. For the studies that included

guided imagery or visualization, it was asked that participants take a few minutes to visualize an interaction with an individual whom they were close to (i.e., involving the receipt of love, comfort, and security). A security-heightening story was read by participants in one study and words and pictures were employed in two studies to invoke security priming (the names of significant others was used in one study). Significant relationships were reported among security priming and outcome variables in 95% of the studies. Outcome variables included: affect and emotional well-being (e.g., anger, anxiety, depression, etc.), prejudice and hostile attitudes (i.e., toward Israeli-Arabs criminal behavior), empathy-related processes (e.g., perceived pain in others), attitudes toward condom use (i.e., including perception of signification other as a sexual health threat), and regulatory processes (e.g., emotion regulation). Apart from the empathy-related processes which displayed mixed findings (i.e., one study yielded no connection among security priming and empathetic responding while the other two studies did), the results for the influence of security priming demonstrated considerable consistency.

Luke et al. (2012) conducted a study using priming (via a visualization task) to yield causation-based results. These authors sought to prove that securely attached relationships conduces feelings of security and energy, in addition to a willingness to explore (i.e., based on premises associated with attachment theory). In the first study, participants typed about an instructed relationship for 5-10 minutes and then were randomly assigned to a group (secure relationship prime condition, anxious relationship prime condition, or the avoidant relationship prime condition). Thereafter, they were informed that the study involved a visualization task that they needed to be alone in a

quiet environment to complete. Participants visualized (via a priming manipulation task) an individual with whom they had a secure, anxious, or avoidant relationship with (each group had their own respective visualization instructions). Next, they identified the nature of the relationship (e.g., parent, friend, etc.) and length of time they knew that particular individual. They were then allotted 8 minutes to type about the person. Subsequently, they completed a measure of both, felt security and energy. A chi-square analysis was done on the target relationships (i.e., romantic partner, family member, or friend) to ensure they were evenly dispersed across the relationship prime conditions. Separate one-way ANOVAs were done for each scale (felt security and energy). It was concluded that felt security and energy were increased by a secure attachment prime. The second and third studies were conducted similarly but the second focused on examining if felt security, energy, and exploration would be elevated by a secure attachment prime more than a neutral control prime (i.e., distant neutral relationship) and the third on if the aforementioned would be elevated by a secure attachment prime more than a positive control prime (i.e., positive affect prime in which half of the participants visualized a recently viewed humorous movie or television broadcast). The findings of both studies were consistent with the first in that a secure relationship heightened felt security and energy. In addition, it also heightened one's willingness to explore.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter demonstrates associations between communication and attachment style, relational discontentment and poor communication skills, communication and relational commitment, intimate communication and greater relational quality, emotional

and interpersonal consequences of online self-disclosure, and trust and self-disclosure. These studies provided evidence of the role of communication in relationships, how an individual's willingness to self-disclose varied by perception of the recipient and their own feelings, and how communication could affect the quality of a given relationship. Moreover, priming was supported by the literature in which an invoked sense of security and significant associations among outcome variables were consistently demonstrated.

Strengths of the published studies include an increased awareness of how communication is linked with attachment style, relational contentment, and relational commitment as well as how using priming could be influential on outcome variables. However, most studies were limited in the researchers' ability to draw causal conclusions. Despite all of the studies presented being correlational (with the exception of the priming studies being experimental), it was implied from the findings that effective communication skills were linked with improved relationships while trust was associated with increased self-disclosure. Priming was found to evoke a sense of security. While it is known that there is a positive correlation between trust and emotional self-disclosure, there were no studies I was able to identify that validated a direct causal relationship. Chapter 3 will include a more detailed description of the specific methodological approach used in this study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Communication has been linked to relational quality and is an important aspect of relationships. Trust is an essential element in the process of communicating, especially when self-disclosure is concerned. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the influence that trust had on individuals' willingness to emotionally self-disclose within a romantic relationship. As such, this chapter covers the research design and rationale, the methodology, and threats to validity.

Research Design and Rationale

For this quantitative study, a randomized experiment was conducted. The independent variable in this study was priming condition, and the dependent variable was the ESDS score. A manipulation check (i.e., question assessing the extent to which participants thought about "trust" during the study) was also included in the study to address whether the manipulation was successful.

In this design choice, there were no substantial time or resource constraints, as all participants had to meet the same criteria to be able to participate in the study. Moreover, they were randomly placed into their respective group using Survey Monkey's technological programming features (i.e., block randomization). This randomized experiment was consistent with research designs needed to advance knowledge in the discipline because it extended beyond correlational studies, which can only demonstrate a relationship among variables due to the absence of a manipulation of independent variables (Rumrill, 2004), whereas experimental designs aim to establish whether a particular treatment persuades an outcome (Creswell, 2009).

Methodology

Population

The target, or theoretical population (Trochim, 2006) for this study was adult-aged (i.e., at least 18 years old) individuals who were currently involved in a romantic relationship regardless of marital status, as the focal point of this study was to assess the influence that trust has on one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose in a romantic relationship.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

The sampling frame was students, faculty, and staff at an online university who were enrolled in the university's research participant pool, as well as individuals within two of the psychology-based groups on LinkedIn (totaling near 90, 200 members) who were at least 18 years old and in a romantic relationship. It was estimated that there would need to be at least 158 participants based on calculations yielded from the software program G*Power 3.1.9.3 (Buchner et al., 2017), utilizing a medium effect size of 0.25 ($F = 0.25$), an alpha of .05, and a power of .80, which is consistent with the literature in this area. It is notable that most similar studies included approximately 150 participants. An effect size describes the strength of the conclusions about group dissimilarities or the connection among variables in quantitative research (Creswell, 2009). Accordingly, a medium effect size was selected for this study to demonstrate average strength as a means of providing solid, well-rounded results.

Confining the investigation to individuals affiliated with an online university and those who were within two of the psychology-based groups on LinkedIn could potentially

lessen the capacity to universalize the findings to general society. However, it was

assumed that the individuals participating in this study would be representative of the

population in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender to a greater extent as attributed to the

heterogeneous culture of the online university and the social media platform. A

convenience sample was used due to the accessible nature of the participants. Creswell

(2009) asserted that in several experiments, a convenience sample is the only possible

method due to the researcher having to use naturally developed groups (e.g., classrooms,

an organization, etc.) or volunteers. The data were collected via Survey Monkey, in

which the participants completed the priming task (if applicable based on the group they

were in) as well as the self-reported measure assessing their willingness to emotionally

self-disclose (i.e., ESDS).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

A brief description and invitation to participate in the study (Appendix A) was

posted on the online university's research participant pool website and within two of the

psychology-based groups on LinkedIn. Upon meeting basic criteria (i.e., at least 18 years

old and in a romantic relationship) and consenting to participate in the study, participants

were automatically assigned to one of the groups using one of Survey Monkey's random

assignment features. After completion of the emotional self-disclosure measure,

participants completed a demographic survey.

The demographic survey (Appendix C) included the participants' age, race and

ethnicity, gender, length of relationship, relational status (e.g., dating, engaged, etc.),

living arrangements (i.e., separate, cohabitating), and proximity (i.e., within same

city/county/providence, long-distance) to address the external validity of the findings. The demographic information was collected at the end of the study to minimize any unintentional inauthentic feelings (i.e., by not making participants think of the length of their relationship, etc. while actively participating in the study). For example, if the demographics had been collected immediately before the start of the study and a participant indicated that they had been in the identified relationship for 3 years, they might have felt inclined to change their answers based on their own expectations of how their relationship should be as opposed to as how it really was at the time of the study. In contrast, the heightened awareness of their relationship could have made them idealize it and overestimate their responses. While these were assumptions, they were still valid concerns, prompting the order of obtaining the demographic information, as it was assumed that there would not be a negative impact on the study arising from not obtaining it earlier.

Upon completing the demographic survey, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they thought of trust while completing the emotional self-disclosure measure as a manipulation check. At the very end of the study, participants were thanked for their participation efforts and were provided with a brief summary of what the study was about as part of the debriefing process (Appendix D). Additionally, they were provided with information about the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) to use if the study evoked unpleasant feelings beyond their level of comfort to address and/or manage on their own. No follow-up procedures were needed for this study.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Permission was obtained (Appendix B) from the authors to use the ESDS (Snell et al., 1988) as well as to modify the wording to make it applicable to the study by changing the word "counselor" to "significant other" (no other changes were made). The ESDS assesses an individual's willingness to disclose certain emotions in interpersonal relationships; as such, it was appropriate to measure the dependent variable, emotional self-disclosure (i.e., based on the ESDS score), for this study. The ESDS is a 40-item Likert-type instrument that measures eight emotions: depression, happiness, jealousy, anxiety, anger, calmness, apathy, and fear. Snell et al. (1988) noted that the correlations between the subscales were to some extent higher for the female friend disclosure recipient (average $r = .78$) in comparison to the subjects' lovers (average $r = .70$) and male friends (average $r = .65$). In this study, the ESDS was scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, varying in intensity on willingness to disclose with 0 indicating *not at all*, 1 indicating *slightly*, 2 indicating *moderately*, 3 indicating almost *totally*, and 4 indicating *totally* on items such as "times when you feel depressed," " times when you feel anxious," and "times when you feel delightful." Scores were specifically obtained by summing the items of each subscale (five items for each subscale, eight subscales in total), with higher scores indicating greater emotional disclosure (Snell et al., 1989). All 40 items were summed, and this score was used as the dependent variable.

Snell et al. (1988) found adequate reliability scores for each subscale on the ESDS for spouse/lover (other disclosure recipients were omitted per the focus of this study). Cronbach's alpha and test-retest (respectively) for each scale were as follows: Depression

.91 and .75; Happiness .93 and .72; Jealousy .89 and .58; Anxiety .91 and .70; Anger .94

and .68; Calmness .86 and .66; Apathy .89 and .72; and Fear .95 and .71 (Snell et al.,

1988). Additionally, independent multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were

conducted for the individuals considered for the disclosed information (i.e., friends—

male and female as well as spouses/lovers). Spouses/lovers received a greater degree of

emotional disclosure (regardless of the emotion) than the other disclosure recipients (i.e.,

based on participants' willingness to disclose), while male friends were deemed the least

likely to receive emotional disclosure from the participants (Snell et al., 1988). This

information further demonstrates the general tendency to share emotions with a

significant other more readily than any other type of relationship, which further

substantiates the exploration of romantic relationships in this study.

Snell et al. (1989) conducted research with the intent of providing more evidence

to validate the ESDS. In particular, they conducted a study that focused on an

individual's willingness to disclose their feelings to their parents as well as male and

female therapists as opposed to male and female friends and lovers/spouses as seen in the

original version of the ESDS. As such, the ESDS was modified to accommodate the four

aforementioned disclosure recipients. Based on the modified ESDS, the Cronbach's

alphas ranged from a low of .88 to a high of .96, with .93 being the average, which

further demonstrates coherent and interiorly consistent subscale items. Their findings

were in alignment with the conception that females are communicative of their emotions

to a greater degree, even when taking another culture (i.e., Mexico) into account, which

demonstrates validity of the ESDS.

Multiple authors including Snell et el. (1988), Snell et al. (1989), and Purves and Erwin (2004) have reported similar findings that men are less willing to disclose emotional content than women overall, regardless of the disclosure recipient. Men tended to be less willing to discuss feelings of depression, anxiety, and fear. There were similar findings of greater willingness to disclose emotions to intimate partners than to any other disclosure recipient (Kito, 2005) based on an instrument that measures the degree of past self-disclosures (i.e., the scale was modified in verbiage to state that a participant was "willing to discuss" as opposed to "have discussed" in a study by Kito [2005] while maintaining its validity) of 10 relatively intimate topics (e.g., personal habits, most important things in life, etc.) using a 5-point Likert-type scale with a Cronbach's alpha ranging from .87 to .93 (i.e., demonstrating suitable internal consistency) known as the Self-Disclosure Index (SDI; Miller et al., 1983).

In a separate study, Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991) used the same instrument while examining attachment style and self-disclosure and found that there were positive correlations between secure attachment and self-disclosure, as opposed to those who were insecurely attached. In essence, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in alignment with attachment theory, secure attachments are generally typified by increased degrees of trust and commitment (Simpson, 1990). Hence, it was appropriate to use the ESDS, as it has demonstrated sufficient validity to serve as a measure of one's willingness to emotionally disclose in an interpersonal relationship, yielding similar results to another statistically validated instrument of a comparable nature.

Manipulation Check

In order to ensure that participants followed directions and that trust was successfully manipulated, participants were asked to complete a 1-item scale to measure the degree of which they thought about trust. Distinctly, participants were asked the following: "On a scale of 1-10, in which 1 would be 'never,' 5 would be 'sometimes,' and 10 would be 'the entire time,' rate how often you thought about trust while completing this study."

Independent Variable

The independent variable in this study was priming condition, which varied depending upon which of the three conditions (i.e., relationship priming condition, trust priming condition, or no-priming condition) to which the participant was randomly assigned. Specifically, in the relationship priming condition, participants received the following instructions prior to completing the ESDS: "Please take a minute and think about your significant other. Thoughtfully consider whatever comes to mind about your significant other. After you have done so, please proceed to the next section."

Participants who were in the trust priming condition received the following instructions prior to completing the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale:

> Please take a minute and think about feeling completely certain, without a doubt in your mind, that everything your significant other tells you is accurate. Thoughtfully consider whatever comes to mind about that feeling. After you have done so, please proceed to the next section.

The no-priming condition did not have a priming task; thus, participants in this group did not receive any specific instructions prior to completing the emotional disclosure measure.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS; IBM Corp, 2017) software program (Version 25) was utilized to analyze the data. Distinctly, planned contrasts within the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) program in SPSS were conducted to test the hypotheses. There were two planned contrasts; each involved comparing the two conditions as noted in each respective hypothesis. The same planned contrasts that were conducted for the emotional self-disclosure measure were conducted for the trust measure to analyze the successfulness of the manipulation of trust. The one-way ANOVA measured whether there was a statistical difference among the three groups regarding whether trust was thought of while participating in the study. Because trust was the identified variable being examined, it was imperative to measure whether the priming technique influenced participants to think of trust. Trust was expected to be rated higher in the trust priming condition than in the other two conditions. Rosnow and Rosenthal (1988) asserted that statistical power is heightened when a focused test of significance, or a test that attends to specific inquiries such as a *t* test, is utilized, which also decreases the chance of making a Type II error.

The research question was the following: Does trust within a romantic relationship influence one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose? Accordingly, the hypotheses were as follows:

Null Hypothesis 1: There will be no difference between the trust priming condition and the no-priming condition with respect to willingness to emotionally disclose, as measured by the ESDS.

Research Hypothesis 1: Priming a feeling of trust will result in a greater willingness to emotionally self-disclose than in the no-priming condition, as measured by the ESDS.

Null Hypothesis 2: There will be no difference between the trust priming condition and the relationship priming condition with respect to willingness to emotionally disclose, as measured by the ESDS.

Research Hypothesis 2: Priming a feeling of trust will result in a greater willingness to emotionally self-disclose than in the relationship priming condition, as measured by the ESDS.

Data cleaning is a process in which data are reviewed to identify and correct erroneous and/or inconsistent codes (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). As such, those properties embedded within SPSS that serve the function of removing invalid data, identifying missing data, and so forth were employed to fulfill the data cleaning process. Specifically, after entering the data, assignment of appropriate values, labels, and measurement levels was done in accordance with the objectives of this study. Thereafter, basic checks were conducted to pinpoint invalid cases, variables, and data values. Had there been any erroneous data detected, those data would have been investigated and corrected accordingly (IBM Corporation, 2012). An assessment to determine whether there were any outliers was also conducted by identifying scores that were notably more

different than the rest. Thus, for the purpose of this study, any score that was more than or less than three standard deviations from the mean would have been considered an outlier. Descriptive statistics reflected the means, standard deviations, and effect sizes. Tests of normality and homogeneity of variance were conducted for the dependent variable.

Threats to Validity

There are multiple threats to validity that would provoke inquiries about a researcher's ability to surmise that the examined intervention affected an outcome instead of other factors (Creswell, 2014). Specific threats to validity in this study will be described based on external threats, internal threats, and threats to construct validity.

External Validity

A convenience sampling approach was used for this study which would typically lessen the external validity. However, due to the diversity (i.e., ethnicity, race, and gender) among the online university and LinkedIn, it was thought that the aforementioned threat would be slightly reduced in this case although that is not necessarily true as those who volunteered to participate in the study may not have been representative of either entity, nor representative of larger society, as they were not necessarily representative of such in other aspects (e.g., socioeconomic status).

Internal Validity

Due to the online nature of the study, participants could have been distracted (i.e., especially depending on their environment at the time) while actively engaging in the study which could have negatively influenced their responses, with special emphasis to

those in a prime condition group; thus, causing a threat to internal validity. In addition, participants in priming conditions might not have thought about what they were asked to think about as outlined in the priming instructions. To combat this threat, a manipulation check was included to assess if the participants indeed thought of what they were prompted to think about (i.e., a single item scale inquiring if they thought about trust while completing the emotional self-disclosure measure).

Construct Validity

Construct validity requires a researcher to demonstrate that their variables can be recognized and measured by their chosen instrument (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Therefore, there were no identified threats to construct validity for the dependent variable as the selected instrument was specifically designed to measure an individual's willingness to disclose their emotions and demonstrated good reliability and validity. On the other hand, a threat to construct validity should be considered for the independent variable (priming instructions) as they were formulated by the researcher. Although, the priming instructions for trust were formulated keeping the definition (as outlined in this paper) in mind as an effort to mitigate this threat. A manipulation check was included to address if the manipulation was successful.

<div align="center">

Ethical Procedures

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Researchers have the duty of assessing potential benefits to those of potential costs to participants when conducting research (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Accordingly, careful ethical considerations were taken to safeguard the participants in this study. This study was approved on multiple levels including the dissertation

committee chair, the dissertation committee member, the university research reviewer (URR), as well as the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Data were not collected prior to all approvals were met. Authorization was not required by LinkedIn as the two psychology-based group owners already allowed relevant subject matter research to be posted and/or announced but was still requested to confirm proper approval was met. Accordingly, one of the group owners responded, "…no problem at all, please feel free to post to the group…wishing you all the very best with your research." The other group owner responded, "…sure, that sounds interesting!" Once all approvals were met, participants were informed of the intentions of the study and the voluntary nature of it (Appendix A).

Privacy and confidentiality were assured as no identifiable information was gathered or published. The information obtained will be kept in a secure file for at least 5 years at which point it will be destroyed. Lastly, individuals received a national resource (i.e., National Alliance on Mental Illness) as a support if their participation in the study unintentionally caused feelings of discomfort beyond their level of comfort.

Summary

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the methodological design of this study. As a quantitative study that used a randomized experiment, it was appropriate to examine the influence that trust has on individuals' willingness to emotionally self-disclose in a romantic relationship as this approach allowed the demonstration of a causal relationship. The following chapter provides precise details of the data collection and results, followed by the interpretation of those results in chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

The intention of this quantitative study was to explore emotional self-disclosure within romantic relationships, focusing on trust, a recognized variable suggestive of a secure relationship, as a barometer of willingness to disclose. More succinctly, the goal of this study was to discover whether or not priming feelings of trust would affect an individual's willingness to divulge their emotions to their significant other. To that end, the research question was the following: Does trust within a romantic relationship influence one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose? Accordingly, the hypotheses were as follows:

Null Hypothesis 1: There will be no difference between the trust priming condition and the no-priming condition with respect to willingness to emotionally disclose, as measured by the ESDS.

Research Hypothesis 1: Priming a feeling of trust will result in a greater willingness to emotionally self-disclose than in the no-priming condition, as measured by the ESDS.

Null Hypothesis 2: There will be no difference between the trust priming condition and the relationship priming condition with respect to willingness to emotionally disclose, as measured by the ESDS.

Research Hypothesis 2: Priming a feeling of trust will result in a greater willingness to emotionally self-disclose than in the relationship priming condition, as measured by the ESDS.

In this chapter, the collection of data is described in detail (e.g., time frame for collection, recruitment and response rates, demographic characteristics, etc.), the results are outlined (e.g., statistical analysis findings, tables, etc.), summarizations are provided, and there is a preview of the next chapter.

Data Collection

The response rate for this study led to an 8-month period of collecting data, as there were only 15 participants within the first 3 months, and there were only a total of 22 participants within the initial 7 months. Based on the rate of the participation, it was decided that an additional avenue of recruiting would be necessary in order to obtain the required number of participants in a timelier manner. As such, I received permission from the owners of two psychology-based groups on LinkedIn to post an invitation to participate in the study. Prior to collecting data from the aforementioned groups, approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (approval number 10-01-19-0348123). Around the same time, the university from which the original data were being collected created a new website for their participant pool in effort to boost the participant rate for the studies posted on their website. Immediately after posting the invitation within the two psychology-based groups, the number of participants had soared to 85. Approximately 2 weeks later, there were 197 participants, which prompted me to deactivate the link leading to the study, as there only needed to be at least 158 participants based on calculations yielded from the software program G*Power 3.1.9.3 (Buchner et al., 2017), utilizing a medium effect size of 0.25 ($F = 0.25$), an alpha of .05, and a power of .80, which is consistent with the literature in this area. The data were

collected from individuals who were at least 18 years of age and in a romantic

relationship at the time that they participated in the study.

An analysis was conducted using the tools accessible in SPSS to identify missing

data. In addition to the program identifying missing data, I manually analyzed the data to

ensure accuracy. As a result, there were exactly 158 participants who completed the study

in its entirety. Specifically, there were 55 participants in the no-priming group (i.e.,

34.8% of the participants), 54 in the relationship priming group (i.e., 34.2% of the

participants), and 49 in the trust priming group (i.e., 31% of the participants). There were

149 individuals who identified themselves as female (94.3%) and 9 individuals who

identified themselves as male (5.7%). Four participants each in the no-priming group and

the relationship priming group and one participant in the trust priming group identified

themselves as male. Thus, there were 51 female participants in the no-priming group, 50

in the relationship priming group, and 48 in the trust priming group. There was at least

one participant in each demographic category (i.e., age, race, nationality, relational status,

duration of relationship, relational proximity, and living arrangements). Approximately

82.3% reported being between 25 and 49 years of age, 67.1% reported as being White,

88.6% were of non-Hispanic origin, 63.3% reported being married, 25.3% had been in

their relationship for 5 to 10 years, and 80.4% reported living together/cohabiting.

The breakdown of participants who did not complete the study in its entirety

included a total of 13 from the no-priming group, 14 from the relationship priming group,

and 12 from the trust priming group. The original data would have consisted of 185

participants in the study who identified as female and 12 who identified as male. No one

in the study identified themselves as transgender in the original data or the analyzed data.

In essence, there were 39 participants excluded from the study due to missing data (i.e.,

36 females and three males). These participants were excluded from the study because

the study included sum scores and therefore it was imperative that all participants

completed all parts of the survey, as sum scores with missing data would not have made

sense to include. This was not assumed to have a negative impact on the study, as there

were still enough participants to demonstrate statistical significance.

Findings

The highest obtainable score on the ESDS is 200. A higher score on the ESDS

indicates higher emotional self-disclosure. After analysis of the data, the no-priming

group had a mean sum score of 126.49 with a standard deviation of 30.22, the

relationship priming group had a mean sum score of 136.48 with a standard deviation of

41.95, and the trust priming group had a mean score of 143.14 with a standard deviation

of 33.41.

Data cleaning and screening procedures included running analytics to determine if

there were any outliers. There did not appear to be any notable outliers, although a few

points appeared slightly away from the line per the normal Q-Q plots. The boxplots did

not illustrate any outliers. Thus, there did not appear to be any outliers.

There were no statistically significant differences between group means as

determined by a one-way ANOVA, $F(2,155) = 2.902$, $p = .058$ (see Table 1). Therefore,

the null hypotheses were retained. Generally, there is not a need to run a post hoc test

when a p-value is greater than 0.05 (Laerd Statistics, 2018), but in this case, given that

the *p*-value was so close to .05, I opted to conduct some exploratory analysis to find out where the differences between the groups may have been. To test the hypotheses, a Tukey post hoc test was conducted (see Table 2), and results yielded that the trust priming group was willing to disclose their emotions statistically significantly more than the no-priming group (p = .048). There were no statistically significant differences between the no-priming group and the relationship priming group (p = .310) or between the relationship priming group and the trust priming group (p = .610).

Table 1

Results of the Analysis of Variance Test

	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	Sig.
Between groups	7349.007	2	3674.504	2.902	.058
Within groups	196257.227	155	1266.176		
Total	203606.234	157			

Table 2

Post Hoc Test Multiple Comparisons (Tukey HSD)

(I) Participant groups	(J) Participant groups	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
No-priming group	Relationship priming group	-9.99057	6.81682	.310	-26.1222	6.1411
	Trust priming group	-16.65195*	6.99011	.048	-33.1937	-.1102
Relationship priming group	No-priming group	9.99057	6.81682	.310	-6.1411	26.1222
	Trust priming group	-6.66138	7.02054	.610	-23.2751	9.9524
Trust priming group	No-priming group	16.65195*	6.99011	.048	.1102	33.1937
	Relationship priming group	6.66138	7.02054	.610	-9.9524	23.2751

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

A manipulation check was included in this study to ensure that the participants followed directions and that trust was successfully manipulated. The manipulation check consisted of a 1-item scale to measure the degree to which participants thought about trust (i.e., *never*, *sometimes*, *the entire time*). The manipulation check for this study was analyzed using a one-way ANOVA, as an independent sample *t* test was not appropriate as there were more than two groups being compared. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between groups ($p = .025$; see Table 3). Therefore, the priming aspect of the study was successful.

Table 3

Analysis of Variance Results—Manipulation Check

Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale sum score (manipulation check)					
Stub heading	Sum of squares	*df*	Mean square	*F*	Sig.
Between groups	95977.591	57	1683.817	1.564	.025
Within groups	107628.643	100	1076.286		
Total	203606.234	157			

Summary

The research question for this study was the following: Does trust within a romantic relationship influences one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose? Based on the results of this study, the answer to this question is, no, as the null hypotheses were retained. However, it must be acknowledged that this could be a sample size problem, which is a limitation of the study that will be addressed in the next chapter. The next chapter will also include a discussion of the interpretation of the findings, additional limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and the final conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This quantitative, randomized experimental research design study was conducted to examine whether trust, an acknowledged variable symbolic of a secure relationship, would have an impact on a person's willingness to share their feelings with their significant other. Precisely, the aim of this study was to determine whether priming a feeling of trust, through utilization of a visualization task, would influence an individual's willingness to disclose their emotions to their romantic partner, as measured by the ESDS (Snell et al., 1988), which was modified in wording, with permission, to make it applicable to the population of this study. The key findings did not demonstrate that trust does have an influence on one's willingness to emotionally disclose to their significant other.

Interpretation of Findings

The findings did not confirm conclusions drawn from previous research indicating that there is a connection between trust and/or confidentiality and increased self-disclosure (e.g., Corcoran, 1988; Foubert & Sholley, 1996; Steel, 1991). As a brief recap, Corcoran explored confidentiality as a predictor of self-disclosure (i.e., based on the participant's perception of the interviewer's credibility in upholding confidentiality) using undergraduate college students who were enrolled in an introductory psychology course. The participants were interviewed by a clinical psychology student whom they had never interacted with. Upon completion of the interview, they completed a questionnaire measuring trust, and it was concluded that confidentiality was positively correlated with increased self-disclosure. These results were almost statistically enhanced

by the current study, as the focal point was examining the influence that trust has on one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose. As such, participants admitted their willingness to disclose a variety of emotions within their relationship, which only yielded similar results of an increased willingness to disclose when there are higher levels of trust through exploratory analysis. Due to the experimental nature of this design, the results are causal, which is the first of its kind known to me that tests the relationship between trust and self-disclosure.

Foubert and Sholley (1996) explored how reported self-disclosure to parents and best friends was related to gender, gender role, and individualized trust. Participants completed three different questionnaires that each measured a variable being tested. It was demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of trust self-disclosed to a greater degree than those with lower levels of trust based on the results. The current study failed to solidify the conclusions drawn from Foubert and Sholley's study, as there were no statistical differences between group means based on the one-way ANOVA.

Steel's (1991) study focused on trust, self-disclosure, and factors that could influence the relationship (i.e., gender, race), in which participants completed questionnaires that measured their self-disclosure patterns to significant others as well as their expectations of others (i.e., trust). Interpersonal trust and self-disclosure were positively correlated, women were demonstrated to have higher levels of trust than men, and self-disclosure was 3 times as strong among the Caucasian participants in comparison to the Asian participants. Based on the limited number of male participants in the current study, it is unknown if females indeed disclose to a greater extent than men. Likewise,

due to the limited cultural diversity reflected in the current study, it is unknown if Caucasian individuals disclose more than other cultural groups.

The priming aspect of this study demonstrated a possibility that individuals may develop trust schemas that either include one's significant other or not. Janiszewski and Wyer (2014) asserted that priming is an experimental structure that encompasses the process of an originally experienced stimulus and the demonstration of the impact that it has on a response to a later experienced stimulus. In order to modify an individual's sense of security, at least one of the three methods must be employed (subliminally or supraliminally [above the threshold needed for conscious perception]): Expose them to security-related terms, expose them to a visual aid representing attachment security, or request that they think about memories of being cared for and supported by attachment figures or that they envision such scenarios (Gillath et al., 2008; Gillath & Karantzas, 2019). Security primes initiate a feeling of being securely attached by causing cognitive representations in an individual's memory to be more available and salient (Gillath & Karantzas, 2019). Thus, while the current study did not incorporate priming on a subliminal level, thereby providing even richer evidence, supraliminally priming participants is deemed to have a similar effect.

Limitations of the Study

The current study contains numerous limitations. It is important to note the limitations of this study as a means of providing a holistic overview. First, the fact that the sample size barely met the required statistical power was a limitation. This small sample size may have been the cause of the null hypotheses being retained as evidenced

by the nearly significant ANOVA. The exploratory analysis provided statistical evidence
of the trust priming group having higher emotional disclosure than the other two groups,
but these data have to be cautiously interpreted.

The lack of generalizability of the findings to individuals who are not affiliated
with a university as well as those who are affiliated with a different university (including
brick-and-mortar) is a second limitation to this study. Third, it only included participants
who were registered in the research participant pool and those who were members of two
of the psychology-based groups on LinkedIn. To elucidate, by having participants who
are members of psychology-based groups be included in this study, it is possible that they
might have a degree of familiarity with the subject matter, priming techniques, or some
variables known to influence emotional disclosure (e.g., characteristics of the recipient,
confidentiality, etc.).

A fourth limitation, which is very specific to this study based on the data
collected, is that the results may potentially be only applicable to young, non-Hispanic
White women, as they were the largest group of participants. However, it is important to
note that Steel (1991) found that the correlation between trust and self-disclosure was 3
times as strong among the Caucasian participants in comparison to the Asian participants
in her study, which investigated trust, self-disclosure, and factors that could influence the
relationship (i.e., gender, race). Thus, there is the potential that Caucasian participants are
the largest group of self-disclosers. In contrast, Snell et al. (1989) explored emotional
disclosure in relation to the recipient, culture, and gender, and found that the Mexican
female participants were more apt to share all the measured emotions than all the other

participants. As this study included priming, there may indeed be a stronger cultural impact, in that some cultures may value disclosure more than other cultures. In order to thoroughly explore this phenomenon, it would be essential for a study reflective of a more diverse population to be conducted. A fifth and final identified limitation to the study at hand is that it is also possible that the results may only generalize to those perceived to have at least a moderate degree of self-awareness and/or emotional intelligence.

Recommendations

The most recognizable strength of this study is the fact that it was a randomized experimental research design that appears to be the first of its kind to focus on trust and an individual's willingness to emotionally disclose within a romantic relationship. By default, a key recommendation is that research in this area be extended, utilizing the same type of research design. Another recommendation would be to have a much larger sample size in order to truly gather rich data that would allow for a stronger statistical analysis. It is believed that with a larger sample size, the results would be more promising.

Including a group of individuals who are not currently in a romantic relationship is also recommended in order to gather more causal data on trust and emotional self-disclosure in general. If a group of individuals who are not in a romantic relationship were included in a future study of this design type, it would provide more definitive, supporting evidence to pre-existing research studies that focused on trust/confidentiality and self-disclosure in general. This would also provide excellent comparison data among groups within the study.

A final recommendation would be to recruit from multiple sources of varying categories (e.g., universities, social media, organizations, etc.) to minimize the sample being overly representative of any one group. For example, in this current study, close to 70% of the participants were young, non-Hispanic White women, and previous studies in this area were also heavily reflective of nearly the same population, despite the studies noted above being inclusive of other ethnicities (i.e., Asian and Mexican). The lack of diversity within these studies hinders the ability to legitimately generalize the results to society at large.

Implications

There are a few implications that arose from this study. A primary implication is the potential impact for positive social change, as this was the first experimental study using priming to address whether thoughts of trust can influence emotional self-disclosure. A secondary implication is that while this study does not statistically highlight the meaningfulness that trust has in a relationship, it could serve as founding research geared toward better understanding the fundamental nature that trust has in one's willingness to be emotionally expressive and essentially vulnerable with another person.

Learning how important trust is regarding emotional disclosure can increase individuals' insight through seeking out an individual to share their feelings with whom they feel is trustworthy. Instead of suppressing their emotions and potentially engaging in maladaptive coping strategies, individuals can learn healthy strategies for processing and expressing their emotions if they were to seek out a person with clinical experience. Naturally, this step would help mitigate poor communication skills within a relationship

regardless of the person's level of trust with the other. As such, by improving an individual's emotional acuity, it would aid in the facilitation of improved communication skills, as the individual would be better equipped to articulate their emotions in a more concrete and assertive manner. It is in my opinion that if this individual continues practicing assertive communication, a deeper level of respect may be fostered, and over time, trust can increase. As trust increases, the willingness to emotionally disclose will become greater and will occur more organically.

Clinicians who work with couples can use the results of this study to explore this area further and can implement strategies for enhancing trust, such as focusing on therapeutic assignments that require reliance on one another. The very act of working with others requires a level of vulnerability to accept another person's contributions and to potentially modify one's own thoughts, beliefs, and so forth for a larger mission of completing the given activity at hand. This point can be illustrated by individuals of uniformed services, athletes, and so on and can certainly be applied to romantic relationships.

This study also has empirical implications that further solidify attachment theory if one cautiously accepts the exploratory analysis, as those results were aligned with the tenets of attachment theory, namely secure attachment. In essence, those results provide a firmer foundation for attachment theory. They provide a clearer depiction of how individuals with secure attachment bonds are more likely to maintain an open dialogue on their experienced emotions with their significant other. Again, the results from the

exploratory analysis should be cautiously interpreted but provide direction for future research, nonetheless.

Conclusion

This was a quantitative, randomized experiment in which I sought to answer the following question: Does trust have an influence on one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose? This study comprised three conditions: a no-priming condition, a relationship priming condition, and a trust priming condition. It was hypothesized that the trust priming condition would result in a greater willingness to emotionally self-disclose than the no-priming condition and the relationship priming condition; this was not statistically confirmed to be accurate.

Steel (1991) concluded that women were noted to have higher levels of self-disclosure than men, which was similar to findings by Snell et al. (1989). Those studies could provide insight into the results of this study, as a majority of the participants were women. It would be interesting to see if there would be a similar outcome with a larger number of male participants.

In general, the findings from this study extend the knowledge in this discipline, as previous research has all been based on correlational research, which did not yield causal results as this study did. The findings of this study barely missed the mark in highlighting the importance of trust in individuals' willingness to emotionally disclose to their significant other, which would have supported the findings from Steel (1991) that demonstrated that there was a positive correlation between interpersonal trust and self-disclosure. Similarly, Foubert and Sholley (1996) concluded that individuals with higher

levels of trust self-disclosed to a greater degree than those with lower levels of trust. Corcoran (1988) ascertained that it is a necessity for the discloser to believe the assurances of confidentiality for increased disclosure. The priming, or visualization task, of trust used in this study provided a direct causal relationship between trust and one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose in romantic relationships.

In secure relationships, individuals feel assured of the other's accessibility, responsiveness, and concern, per attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988a). In essence, they feel that the individual is a reliable source of support. Restating an earlier point, romantic relationships are debatably one of the closest kinds of relationships that a person can have due to their intimate nature. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that an individual's romantic relationship can potentially be their securest relationship. Simpson (1990) held that in accordance with attachment theory, secure attachments are generally typified by increased degrees of trust and commitment. Snell et al. (1989) conducted studies that explored emotional disclosure in relation to the recipient, and the results were suggestive of individuals having an increased willingness to emotionally disclose to their mother as opposed to a therapist or friend, which supports attachment theory, as an individual's attachment style is formed as a result of their repeated interactions with their caregivers, which, in most cases, would be their mother. In a similar vein, if an individual's significant other is a person whom the individual has a secure attachment to, it further explains how trust within romantic relationships is influential on one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose. Nonetheless, this study was unable to soundly demonstrate the

influence that trust has on one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose within a

romantic relationship.

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Appendix A: Brief Description and Invitation to Participate in Study

Greetings all,

I am a doctoral student working on my dissertation as my remaining task in order to graduate. Specifically, my study involves communication in romantic relationships.

Participation is completely voluntary, with the right to discontinue your participation at any point in the study without obligation. If you are willing to sacrifice a short amount of your time, please proceed with this study as long as you are at least 18 years of age and are currently in a romantic relationship. Additionally, there will be no release of any identifiable information as this is a confidential study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this invitation; your consideration and/or participation is greatly appreciated!

Warmest regards,

Demetria Thomas-Masso, LMHC, NCC, CCMHC

Appendix B: Permission to Use the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale

Walden University Mail - RE: The Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS) -
From: Demetria Thomas-Masso 6/16/17, 9:54 AM
https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=bbd9cd2a3f&view=pt&…154462c8d74
b873d&siml=1543e6ddd89356ad&siml=154462c8d74b873d Page 1 of 3
Demetria Thomas-Masso <demetria.thomas-masso@waldenu.edu>
RE: The Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS) - From: Demetria Thomas-
Masso
2 messages
Snell, William Fri, Apr 22, 2016 at 10:28 AM
To: Demetria Thomas-Masso
Cc: "Snell, William"
Dear Demetria,
You are more than welcome to use any of my instruments in your work, including
the Emotional Self-Disclosure
Scale (ESDS; you have my permission). You can find all of the information that
you need at the following websites
(see below), where I have summarized that information in an "electronic book"
(the first website below) and where
copies of my psychological instruments can be found as well as the scoring
procedures for these instruments (the
second website below). Also, feel free to translate the ESDS if you need/want to.
If I can be of any future assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me. Good
luck with your project/work.
http://cstl-cla.semo.edu/snell/books/
http://www4.semo.edu/snell/TESTING.HTM
In addition, the following website should make downloading the instrument
easier:
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/William_Snell
Take care,
Bill Snell
Dr.$$William$(Bill)$E.$Snell,$Jr.
Walden University Mail - RE: The Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS) -
From: Demetria Thomas-Masso 6/16/17, 9:54 AM
https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=bbd9cd2a3f&view=pt&…154462c8d74
b873d&siml=1543e6ddd89356ad&siml=154462c8d74b873d Page 2 of 3
From: Demetria Thomas-Masso
Sent: Thursday, April 21, 2016 11:49 PM
To: Snell, William
Cc: Demetria Thomas-Masso
Subject: The Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS)

Dr. Snell,

My name is Demetria Thomas-Masso and I am currently working on my dissertation for my doctoral degree in

psychology with a specialization in social psychology at Walden University. I am sending you this email as I would like

to utilize your instrument, The Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS) as part of my study.

I am asking permission to copy, distribute, reproduce, and use The Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS) as well as

the scoring sheet.

If you are in agreement with this request, please acknowledge permissions received. If any other permissions are

required, please advise.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Demetria Thomas-Masso

Demetria Thomas-Masso Sat, Apr 23, 2016 at 10:50 PM

To: "Snell, William"

Dr. Snell,

Thank you so very much for your permission and your prompt response. I truly appreciate everything. You are a gem.

Respectfully,

Demetria Thomas-Masso

Walden University Mail - RE: The Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS) -

From: Demetria Thomas-Masso 6/16/17, 9:54 AM

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?ui=2&ik=bbd9cd2a3f&view=pt&…154462c8d74

b873d&siml=1543e6ddd89356ad&siml=154462c8d74b873d Page 3 of 3

[Quoted text hidden]

Demetria Thomas-Masso

Thu 6/13, 12:32 PM

Snell, William

Dear Dr. Snell,

You may remember that I emailed you in April of 2016 seeking approval to use your Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale, which you granted. However, I wanted to make sure that it is also okay for me to modify your scale to change some of the wording (e.g., "counselor" to "significant other," etc.) in order for it to be fully applicable to my dissertation. Specifically, I am exploring the influence that trust has on one's willingness to emotionally self-disclose within a romantic relationship. Therefore, I would need to

adjust the wording and directions of the scale to fit the aim of my study. As such, do I have your permission to also change the wording of the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS)? Lastly, are there any other permissions I must obtain in order to fully use, modify, reproduce, and distribute the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale as well as the scoring sheet?

Thank you again for your time, attention, and any assistance that you provide.

Respectfully,

Demetria Thomas-Masso

Snell, William E

Thu 6/13, 1:09 PM
Demetria Thomas-Masso
Dear Demetria,
   Yes, you have my permission to modify and use the ESDS in the manner you mentioned. Good luck with your work.
Take care
Bill Snell

Sent from my iPhone
Dr. William (Bill) E. Snell, Jr.

Thu 6/13, 1:14 PM
Thank you so much, Dr. Snell.

Respectfully,
Demetria Thomas-Masso

Appendix C: Demographic Survey

Please provide the following information:

Gender: Male   Female   Transgender

Age: 18-24   25-29   30-34   35-39   40-44   45-49   50-54   55-59   60 or older

Race: American Indian or Alaska Native   Asian   Black or African American

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander   White   Bi-Racial   Multi-Racial   Other

Nationality: Hispanic Origin   Not of Hispanic Origin

Relational Status: Dating   In a long-term relationship   Engaged   Married

Duration of Relationship: Less than 3 months   3-6 months   7-11 months   1-2 years   2-5 years   5-10 years   10-15 years   More than 15 years   More than 25 years

Relational Proximity: Live in same city/county   Live in same state/province   Live in different state/providence   Live in different country

Living Arrangements: Live together/co-habitat   Live separate from one another   Occasional overnight stays

Appendix D: Debriefing Statement

Thank you again for participating in this study. Your time is of great value and appreciation. As a recap, this study focused on communication within romantic relationships. Specifically, this study sought to examine if trust influences one's willingness to disclose their emotions to their significant others. As such, you were randomly selected to be in one of three groups: a group in which you were asked to complete the Emotional Self-Disclosure Scale (ESDS), a group in which you were asked to think of your significant other for a moment and then complete the ESDS, or a group in which you were asked to think about the feeling of trust for a moment and then complete the ESDS.

Thereafter, all participants were asked the extent to which they thought about the feeling of trust while completing the study as means of helping assess whether or not 'trust' was being appropriately measured. Lastly, all participants were asked to complete a demographic survey to help researcher gain more insight into the results yielded from this study.

Once again, the time sacrificed and decision to participate in this study is greatly appreciated. The confidential information that you provided will aid in greater understanding of communication within romantic relationships. While this study was not intended to provoke any ill or discomforting thoughts or feelings, it is understood that it is a slight possibility that it did. Therefore, if you feel this in the case with you, I sincerely apologize and would like to offer you a national resource to help you cope: National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) at 800-950-6264 or, www.nami.org.

If you have any general questions, or would like to request a summary of the findings, please feel free to contact me.