

Dispositional Pathways to Trust: The Interactive Effects of Self-Esteem and Agreeableness on
Trust and Negative Emotional Disclosure

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Expressing our innermost thoughts and feelings is critical to the development of intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), but also risks negative evaluation and rejection. According to risk regulation theory (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006), trust—confidence in a partner’s love and caring—provides people with the sense of security needed to reach out to intimate partners. Past research has identified self-esteem, one’s global feelings of self-worth, as a key dispositional predictor of trust. However, I suspected that there may be more to the story. Specifically, trust may consist of two components: the belief that one is worthy of others’ love and the belief that others are trustworthy people. Although self-esteem governs the first component, I propose that agreeableness—a trait that concerns one’s level of communal orientation to others—governs the latter. I examined this possibility by exploring how both self-esteem and agreeableness may predict a particularly risky and intimate form of self-disclosure: the disclosure of emotional distress. In six studies using correlational, partner-report, and experimental methods, I demonstrate that self-esteem and agreeableness interact in a catalytic manner to predict disclosure: People who are high in *both* self-esteem and agreeableness are most openly disclosing of their emotional distress. I also found evidence that trust mediates this effect: High self-esteem, highly agreeable people are most self-revealing, it seems because they are especially trusting of their partner’s caring. Self-esteem and agreeableness were particularly important for the disclosure of vulnerable emotions (i.e., sadness; Study 5) and disclosures that were especially risky (Study 6). These findings indicate that self-esteem is not the only trait that governs risky relationship behaviours and illustrate how dispositional variables can work together to explain behaviour in close relationships.

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Introduction

“A person will permit himself to be known when he believes his audience is a man of goodwill. Self-disclosure follows an attitude of love and trust.” (Jourard, 1971, p. 5)

Negative experiences are a part of life. We have conflicts with our dearest friends, we are passed over for coveted jobs, we face breakups, illnesses, and even the deaths of loved ones. Although these events can cause considerable emotional distress, it is how we cope with them that largely shapes their impact on our well-being (Folkman & Moscovitz, 2004). People who express their emotions tend to experience greater physical and emotional health (Clark & Finkel, 2004; Gross & John, 2003; Pennebaker, 1999, 2003) and more positive relationship outcomes (Graham, Huang, Clark, & Helgeson, 2008; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). By disclosing their distress to others, people can better process and cope with their emotions (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001; Stanton & Low, 2012), receive social support (Graham et al., 2008; Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001), and increase closeness and intimacy in their relationships (Graham et al., 2008; Reis & Shaver, 1988).

But, opening up to others is not always easy. Self-disclosure also imposes certain risks, such as making oneself exposed and defenseless, appearing weak or fragile, a loss or reduction of one's autonomy and power, and the possibility of negative evaluation or rejection (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Omarzu, 2000; Petronio, 2002). This is especially true of negative disclosures (disclosures that reveal negative self-information or emotions), which are by nature more intimate (Howell & Conway, 1990) and more likely to expose personal flaws, weaknesses, or failures. As Jourard (1971), one of the pioneer researchers on self-disclosure, noted, to take such a risk is an act of trust. Doing so requires faith that the disclosure will be met with care, understanding, and support, and people express themselves most openly

and intimately when they feel assured of the other person's concern for their well-being and responsiveness to their needs (Clark, Reis, Tsai, & Brissette, 2004, as cited in Reis, 2007; Gaucher et al., 2012; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Laurenceau, Barrett, & Rovine, 2005; Lemay & Clark 2008). People who struggle with trust may therefore face the most challenges in times of stress because they lack the security needed to reach out and seek the support of intimate partners. Those who have chronically high trust, in contrast, should be better equipped to open up to others and to reap the benefits of that disclosure.

In the current research, I explore how two dispositional traits—self-esteem and agreeableness—shape chronic feelings of trust in a partner's care and, in turn, facilitate the disclosure of distress. Specifically, I theorize that self-esteem and agreeableness represent distinct and independent underlying bases for trust, both of which play a critical role in this domain. Whereas self-esteem facilitates security in a partner's care through beliefs about one's own worth and value to others (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Murray et al., 2006), I believe that agreeableness facilitates this same security through beliefs about the kindness and benevolence of others. Because each of these factors should affect a person's overall level of confidence that a partner will respond with caring and support, I posit that self-esteem and agreeableness may in fact work together to promote this particularly risky and vulnerable form of intimate self-disclosure.

In the following sections, I first explain the importance of trust for self-disclosure and other intimate relationship behaviours from the perspective of risk regulation theory (Murray et al., 2006), a model of how people regulate intimacy in response to interpersonal risk. Next, I build a case for self-esteem and agreeableness as distinct dispositional foundations for chronic

interpersonal trust. Finally, I consider the various ways in which self-esteem and agreeableness may mutually influence the disclosure process via their effects on trust.

Trust and Risk Regulation in Close Relationships

Trust—defined as feelings of confidence and security in a partner’s care (Murray et al., 2006; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985)—is central to the development of happy and healthy relationships. Trust predicts greater relationship closeness, intimacy, satisfaction, commitment, and stability (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Rubin, 2010; Derrick, Leonard, & Homish, 2012; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Murray et al., 2006; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), and people with strong trust tend to think, feel, and act in ways that promote the quality and success of their relationships. For example, they make positive attributions for partner behaviour (Rempel, Ross, & Holmes, 2001; Holmes & Rempel, 1989), they downplay the severity of partner transgressions (Luchies et al., 2013), they accommodate to their partners’ needs (and overestimate their partners’ accommodation) (Shallcross & Simpson, 2012), and they behave constructively when resolving conflicts (Campbell et al., 2010).

How does trust shape such broad relationship behaviours and outcomes? According to risk regulation theory (Murray et al., 2006), trust modulates the degree of interdependence and intimacy people seek with others by signaling when it is safe to rely on a partner’s responsiveness. People draw closer to partners (in thought, feeling, and action) only when they feel certain that the partner truly values them and will therefore promote their best interests and look out for their needs. When they doubt their partner’s love, people instead adopt a more cautious, self-protective stance, withdrawing their psychological investment in the relationship (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000; Murray, Holmes, Griffin, Bellavia, & Rose, 2001; Murray et

al., 2011). This regulatory role of trust is most evident in situations that pose some degree of interpersonal risk, as is the case with disclosure. Although disclosing one's thoughts and feelings is fundamental to the development of intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988), it also leaves the discloser vulnerable to social pain if the partner is disapproving, dismissing, or otherwise rejecting. Indeed, avoiding rejection is one of the primary reasons people report for withholding disclosure and keeping secrets (Caughlin, Afifi, Carpenter-Theune, & Miller, 2005; Derlega, Winstead, Mathews, & Braitman, 2008). Here, trust provides critical assurance that expressing oneself and seeking a partner's support will not result in a painful rebuff.

A number of findings are consistent with the idea that trust regulates the willingness to disclose intimate information to others. In general, people tend to be more expressive of their thoughts, feelings, and opinions when they believe that an interaction partner values them (Gaucher et al., 2012) and will be responsive to their needs (Clark, Reis, Tsai, & Brissette, 2004, as cited in Reis, 2007; Forest & Wood, 2011; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Lemay & Clark, 2008), when the relationship is characterized by emotional closeness and high trust (Derlega et al., 2008), and when they believe that the other person is particularly trustworthy in character (Wheless & Grotz, 1977). Lemay and Clark (2008) found that people are also more willing to express relationship vulnerability (i.e., hurt feelings that are caused by a partner) when they feel certain that the partner cares about them.

In the current research, I focus on the disclosure of emotional distress about upsetting life events. The disclosure of distress is one of the most intimate forms of disclosure (Howell & Conway, 1990), both because it is emotionally intense (Reis & Shaver, 1988) and because it consists of potentially negative or embarrassing information. As such, it provides an opportunity for both substantial gain and substantial loss. On the one hand, expressing emotional

vulnerability provides partners with an opportunity to support and validate core aspects of the self, and emotional disclosures are considered to be most important for the development of intimacy (Reis & Shaver, 1988). On the other hand, negative disclosures may be more likely than positive disclosures to be met with negative or rejecting responses (Howell & Conway, 1990; Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Taylor & Belgrave, 1986), and the emotional vulnerability of the discloser may further amplify the pain of any potential rejection. Distress disclosure thus ideally highlights the precarious balance between connection and self-protection needs, and trusting that a partner will respond with constructive caring and support should be of paramount importance.

Dispositional Predictors of Trust

Where does trust come from? Theory suggests that trust is based on observations of a partner's caring or uncaring behaviour toward the self (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Shallcross & Simpson, 2012; Simpson, 2007a, 2007b), and people may therefore experience different levels of trust across time, situations, and relationships. Nevertheless, some people have a greater propensity to trust than others, and these dispositional influences can overshadow the actual level of caring and security that a partner provides (Murray, Griffin, Rose, & Bellavia, 2003; Murray et al., 2006). Dispositionally insecure people may well misinterpret a partner's responsive behaviour as uncaring or unloving, forming unfortunately misguided conclusions about their partner and relationship (Cameron, Holmes, & Vorauer, 2009). It is thus important to understand the core propensities for trust that shape relationship perceptions and behaviour. In this research I focus on self-esteem and agreeableness as fundamental dimensions of personality that I believe govern two primary components of trust: believing that one is worthy of others' caring, and believing that others are caring people.

Self-esteem. Much of the research on risk regulation has focused on dispositional self-esteem—one’s global feelings of self-worth—as a proxy for interpersonal trust and security. From the perspectives of both sociometer and risk regulation theories (Leary & Baumeister, 2000; Leary, Tambor, Terdel, & Downs, 1995; Murray et al., 2006), feelings of self-worth are intimately tied to feelings of relational value, the extent to which one is accepted and valued by others. People with high self-esteem (HSEs) believe that they have qualities worth loving and that other people see them as important relationship partners. This confidence in their own social value provides HSEs with a sense of security that their partners truly care for them and will be responsive to their needs, allowing them to take the risk of pursuing intimacy and dependence (Murray et al., 2006). People with low self-esteem (LSEs), on the other hand, inherently doubt their own worth and drastically underestimate their partners’ love (Murray, Griffin, et al., 2003), causing them to behave in a more cautious and self-protective manner.

Drawing on these insights, Gaucher and colleagues (2012) proposed that HSEs—bolstered by their feelings of interpersonal security—should feel more comfortable expressing themselves to others than their LSE counterparts. Indeed, they found that HSEs were more likely than LSEs to express their emotions and disclose their personal thoughts and opinions to friends and romantic partners, and this difference was explained by HSEs’ higher levels of trust. When trust in a partner was experimentally enhanced, they found that LSEs became more willing to express imagined negative emotions in hypothetical scenarios and to discuss past negative experiences with close others. These findings are consistent with prior research showing that HSEs are more likely to express (vs. mask or suppress) their emotions compared to LSEs (Graham et al., 2008; Gross & John, 2003, 2008).

One goal of the current work is to replicate and extend these findings by exploring the disclosure of distress. Specifically, I focus on whether people disclose negative or upsetting experiences that are causing current emotional distress. Because of the enhanced risks of distress disclosure compared to disclosure and expressivity more generally, dispositions that facilitate trust may be of particular importance. Moreover, to the extent that negative experiences activate a sense of self-doubt—for example, if they are perceived as being one’s fault or reflecting poorly on the self—self-esteem should be particularly relevant. Murray, Holmes, MacDonald, and Ellsworth (2008) showed that self-doubts (e.g., guilt over a transgression or fear of being inconsiderate or intellectually inept) trigger LSEs’ insecurities about their partners’ care, which makes them more likely to distance themselves from their partner and relationship. Unfortunately, then, situations in which LSEs could most benefit from a partner’s care may be the most threatening for them and the least likely to promote support-seeking.

Agreeableness. Although self-beliefs have powerful effects on interpersonal life, they nevertheless represent only one piece of the puzzle in determining people’s trust. Given that a primary foundation of trust is the expectation of another’s caring behaviour (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Simpson, 2007), perceptions of the other person should also play a role. That is, is he or she seen as a fundamentally *trustworthy* person, a person of benevolence and goodwill? Research in both the organizational and close relationships traditions supports the idea that partner perceptions are important for trust. It is a central tenet of attachment theory that having a positive working model of others is critical for relationship security (Bowlby, 1982), and people high in attachment avoidance, who are presumed to hold negative mental models of intimate partners, report less trusting and loving relationships (Collins & Read, 1990; Overall & Sibley, 2009a; Simpson, 1990; Tan, Overall, & Taylor, 2012). People also report greater trust when they

perceive specific trustworthy traits in an interaction partner (e.g., loyalty, benevolence, self-control) (Butler, 1991; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Righetti & Finkenauer, 2011). Thus, a second goal of the current research is to explore how chronic beliefs about others' trustworthiness may act in concert with self-esteem to influence trust and disclosure. I focus on agreeableness as a major dimension of personality that largely shapes these other-beliefs.

Agreeable people are known for their interpersonal positivity. They are kind, friendly, considerate, and cooperative; they like other people, and people like them in return (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997; Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996; Jensen-Campbell et al., 2002; Jensen-Campbell, Gleason, Adams, & Malcom, 2003). Although theorists have primarily focused on the motivation to maintain harmonious relationships as the root cause of this interpersonal warmth (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997), some research suggests that it is actually agreeable people's positive beliefs about others that enable their prosocial behaviours. Agreeable people tend to rate others highly on positive social traits such as kindness, cooperation, generosity, and warmth (i.e., agreeableness) (Beer & Watson, 2008; Graziano & Tobin, 2002; Wood, Harms, & Vazire, 2010), and they assume that other people have prosocial intentions and will behave in positive and rewarding ways (Graziano et al., 1996; Graziano, Hair, & Finch, 1997; Perunovic, 2008). However, it is not the case that agreeable people just see others as similar to themselves—they judge others positively across a variety of traits. Indeed, Wood et al. (2010) found that agreeableness was associated with positive evaluations of others across all Big Five dimensions, and the strongest perceiver effects were consistently found for self-reported agreeableness. Agreeable people also rate members of stigmatized groups more positively and show less prejudice than their less agreeable counterparts (Graziano, Bruce, Sheese, & Tobin, 2007; Graziano & Habashi, 2010). These results suggest that there is something more

fundamental to the agreeable personality than just a projection of one's own traits that shapes these positive other-beliefs.

One possibility is that positive social perception helps agreeable people to achieve their social goals: Perceiving positivity in others affords a social atmosphere in which one can pursue positive and harmonious relationships. While this may be true, another possibility is that positive beliefs about others *underlie* agreeable people's prosocial motives—that agreeable people are motivated toward interpersonal positivity because they believe that other people are basically good and will behave in kind and rewarding ways. This idea is consistent with evidence that people learn agreeableness through the early modeling of prosocial behaviour, when parents and early role models set up expectations for positive and caring behaviour from others (Herrera & Dunn, 1997; Michalik, 2005; Smith et al., 2007). In a recent investigation, Perunovic, Holmes, and Wood (2014) sought to explore this possibility from a risk regulation perspective. If the crux of the agreeable personality is positive interpersonal beliefs and expectations—*trust* that others are good and caring people—then agreeable people, like HSEs, should feel more secure in their partners' love and regard, and should be more willing to pursue connection and intimacy even in the face of risk. Consistent with this idea, they found that not only did trust mediate the association between agreeableness and important relationship quality variables, agreeable people also responded to relationship threats more constructively. Whereas disagreeable people engaged in symbolic distancing when threatened (by devaluing their partner and relationship), agreeable people instead pulled closer to their partners (similar to HSEs).

Past research has thus demonstrated that agreeable people do see others as positive and trustworthy people, and these positive perceptions influence both their relationship security and

their responses to interpersonal risk. I test an important outcome of this: whether agreeable people are more willing to express their intimate thoughts and feelings when faced with distress.

The Combined Effects of Self-Esteem and Agreeableness

If self-esteem and agreeableness indeed reflect distinct underlying bases for trust, then both should predict trust-based behaviours such as disclosure. However, the question remains of how they may mutually influence the disclosure process and what their combined effects may look like. I propose three possible models of these combined effects. First, according to a *Substitutability or Either/Or* model, being high in either trait is sufficient to promote disclosure, because each trait is independently predictive of trust. That is, people high in *either* self-esteem *or* agreeableness will show high levels of emotional disclosure. A second possibility is an *Additive or Incremental* model, in which the combined effects of the two traits are more predictive of behaviour than the effects of either alone. That is, although both self-esteem and agreeableness may independently promote trust and disclosure, being high in *both* traits promotes the greatest confidence in a partner's love and caring, and in turn, the most willingness to disclose emotional distress to a partner. In this view, both traits provide incremental increases in both trust and disclosure. Finally, a third possibility is a *Catalytic or All-or-Nothing* model, in which the effects of each trait critically depend on the strength of the other, and either trait on its own is insufficient to promote disclosure. From this perspective, believing that one is worthy of others' caring and believing that others are caring people are both necessary for disclosure and either alone is an insufficient condition for disclosure. Indeed, even those who firmly believe in their own worthiness of love may struggle to trust a partner whom they see as cold, uncaring, or unmotivated to treat them well. Thus each trait has a moderating influence on the other's effects.

This model is consistent with attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), which suggests that positive models of both self *and* others are critical for achieving relationship security.

The Current Research

In this research, my primary aim is to examine how these two independent, dispositional sources of trust may combine or interact to predict an important relationship behaviour, the disclosure of emotional distress. Experiences of distress may be unavoidable, but their effects on well-being are not inevitable. Disclosure can improve both physical and psychological health (Clark & Finkel, 2004; Gross & John, 2003; Pennebaker, 1999, 2003) and is a critical ingredient in relationship intimacy and well-being (Reis & Shaver, 1988). In exploring this question, I hope to extend previous findings demonstrating the robust effects of self-esteem on both trust and trust-based behaviours (see Cavallo, Holmes, & Murray, 2014 for a recent review) by considering the complementary role of another dispositional variable that is relevant to this domain—namely, agreeableness. Although decades of research have supported the importance of self-esteem for relationship processes, no research to my knowledge has tested exactly how these relational dynamics may be influenced by other dispositional factors. Agreeableness is one of the major dimensions of personality that is most relevant to interpersonal life, and past research suggests it plays a key role in facilitating relationship success (Donellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Heller, Watson, & Illies, 2004; Janicki, Kamarck, Shiffman, & Gwaltney, 2006). Little research, however, has directly explored the mechanisms by which agreeableness influences relationship behaviour. I believe that at least one such mechanism is its effects—in concert with self-esteem—on interpersonal trust. In exploring these combined effects, I hope to contribute to a more complex picture of how personality shapes interpersonal life by considering how different dispositions work together to influence relationship beliefs and outcomes.

To this end, I present the results of two correlational studies, one partner report study, and three experiments that examine how a person's self-esteem and agreeableness influence their distress disclosure with close relationship partners. In Study 1, I explored lay beliefs about disclosure, and specifically whether self-esteem and agreeableness predict the perceived risks of both negative and positive emotional disclosures. In Studies 2 and 3, I obtained self-reports of negative emotional disclosures to romantic partners and roommates, exploring how people have disclosed real life experiences of distress. In Study 3 I also tested the mediating role of trust. I adopted a measure of trust that includes three primary components based on previous conceptualizations of partner caring and responsiveness (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004)—namely, the extent to which a partner understands, validates, and reacts supportively to core aspects of the self. In Study 4 I obtained romantic partner reports of disclosure to rule out the possibility of self-perception effects, and again examined the mediating role of trust. In Study 5 I tested the role of trust experimentally, and also explored whether the importance of self-esteem and agreeableness may differ depending on the specific negative emotion being expressed, sadness versus anger. Finally, in Study 6 I manipulated the riskiness of disclosure to determine whether self-esteem and agreeableness are especially important for high-risk disclosures.¹

¹ Data collection was completed prior to data analysis for each study.

Study 1: Lay Beliefs about Disclosure

In Study 1 I explored people's lay beliefs about the consequences of emotional disclosure. Lay theories represent a structured and coherent set of beliefs, rules, and concepts that people use to understand, interpret, and predict their social world (Fletcher, 1995; Fletcher & Thomas, 1996). Understanding the content of people's lay beliefs about disclosure can offer insight into the knowledge structures that motivate and shape their behaviour. Specifically, I asked people about the relational costs and benefits of disclosing both positive and negative emotional experiences to close relationship partners. When good or bad things happen in life, do people believe that talking about these experiences and expressing their emotions will enhance closeness and intimacy with others, or that it will instead deteriorate relationships and drive people away? Theorizing on trust suggests that trust shapes not only behavioural responses to risk, but also the subjective appraisal of risk and the anticipation of whether a partner will respond in a rejecting or accepting manner (Murray & Holmes, 2009). To the extent that they trust in others' caring and responsiveness toward the self, people high in self-esteem and agreeableness, compared to those low in these traits, should see emotional disclosure as less risky. I expected that this would be the case particularly for negative emotional disclosure, which has greater potential to be construed as risky.

Method

Participants and procedure. A sample of 141 participants (121 female, 20 male; *M* age = 20 years) recruited from an undergraduate psychology participant pool completed the study for course credit.² Participants were told that we were interested in exploring "beliefs about self-expression." They first completed measures of trait self-esteem (collected in a mass testing session at the beginning of the term) and agreeableness. They were then randomly assigned to

² Analyses excluded 5 additional participants who did not complete the predictor or dependent measures.

one of two conditions. In the *negative expressivity* condition ($n = 68$), participants reported their beliefs about the consequences of disclosing negative emotional experiences to close others. In the *positive expressivity* condition ($n = 73$), participants reported their beliefs about the consequences of disclosing positive emotional experiences to close others. In both cases, participants were asked to think about experiences that occur when the other person is not around; therefore, these reports reflect beliefs about sharing personal distress or happiness with others, rather than expressing negative or positive feelings about the other person. Participants were also instructed to think about close relationship partners in general, rather than a particular person or relationship type.

Materials.

Self-esteem. Participants responded to the 10 Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem items (e.g., “I feel like a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others”) on a 1 (*very strongly disagree*) to 9 (*very strongly agree*) scale ($\alpha = .90$).

Agreeableness. Participants completed the 20-item Big Five Aspect Scale (BFAS; DeYoung, Quilty, & Peterson, 2007) measure of agreeableness. This measure includes 10 items that assess the Politeness dimension of agreeableness (e.g., “Avoid imposing my will on others”) and 10 items that assess the Compassion dimension of agreeableness (e.g., “Feel others’ emotions”). Items were rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale ($\alpha = .87$). The Politeness and Compassion dimensions were highly correlated ($r = .59$).

Beliefs about emotional disclosure. Participants completed an 8-item measure assessing beliefs about the consequences of negative or positive emotional disclosure (e.g., “Pushes people away,” “Is risky,” “Builds strong relationships,” “Brings us closer to the important people in our lives”). Items were rated on a 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*completely true*) scale. To ensure that

higher scores reflected greater perceived riskiness of emotional disclosure, I reverse scored positive-valenced items (e.g., “Builds strong relationships”) and averaged across items (negative expressivity $\alpha = .90$; positive expressivity $\alpha = .93$)

Results

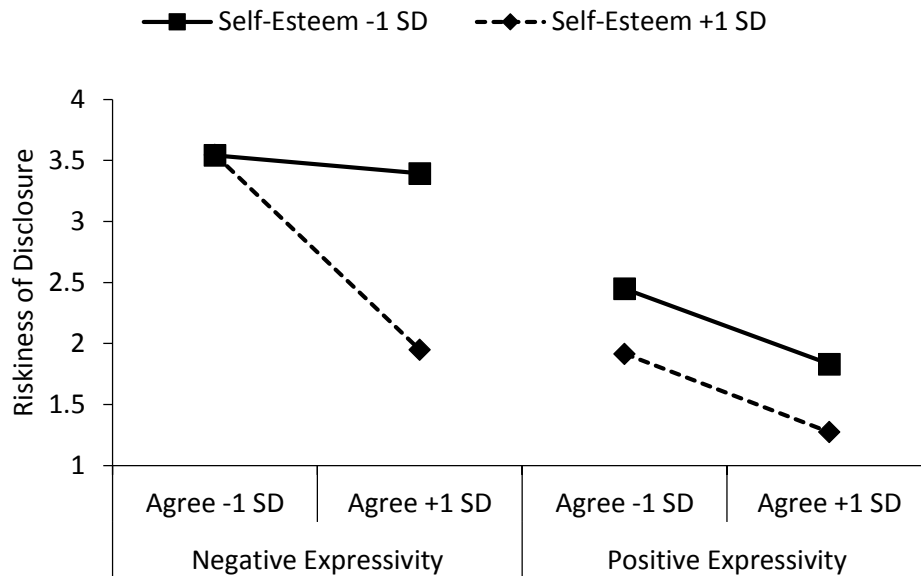
I regressed beliefs about emotional disclosure on expressivity condition (effects-coded: -1 = negative; 1 = positive), self-esteem (mean-centered), and agreeableness (mean-centered), including all possible two- and three-way interactions (notably, self-esteem and agreeableness were only marginally correlated, $r = .14$, $p = .098$). A main effect of condition, $b = -0.62$, $t(133) = -8.58$, $p < .001$, indicated that negative emotional disclosure was seen as riskier ($M = 3.02$) than positive emotional disclosure ($M = 1.88$). As expected, main effects of self-esteem, $b = -0.21$, $t(133) = -4.37$, $p < .001$, and agreeableness, $b = -0.78$, $t(133) = -5.12$, $p < .001$, confirmed that people higher in these traits perceived disclosure to be less risky.

These effects were qualified by a significant Condition x Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction, $b = 0.24$, $t(133) = 2.14$, $p = .034$. To interpret this interaction, I conducted supplementary regressions to examine the negative and positive expressivity conditions in turn. I examined conditional effects following procedures recommended by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003). In the negative expressivity condition, a significant Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction predicted beliefs about negative emotional disclosure, $b = -0.48$, $t(133) = -3.04$, $p = .003$ (see Figure 1). First, I examined effects of self-esteem at high and low levels of agreeableness. HSEs rated negative disclosure as less risky than did LSEs when they were high in agreeableness (1 *SD* above the mean), $b = -0.47$, $t(133) = -4.96$, $p < .001$, but not when they were low in agreeableness (1 *SD* below the mean), $b = -0.01$, $t(133) = -0.06$, $p = .955$. Next, I examined the effects of agreeableness at high and low levels of self-esteem. Agreeable people

rated negative disclosure as less risky than did disagreeable people when they were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = -1.64$, $t(133) = -4.52$, $p < .001$), but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $\beta = -0.18$, $t(133) = -0.63$, $p = .533$. These results suggest that the effects of each trait critically depend on the level of other. In other words, people high in either self-esteem or agreeableness perceived negative emotional disclosure to be relatively safe and low in risk only when they were also high in the other trait.

In contrast, for the positive expressivity condition, the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction was not significant, $b = 0.01$, $t(133) = 0.05$, $p = .961$; instead, only main effects of self-esteem, $b = -0.18$, $t(133) = -2.81$, $p = .006$, and agreeableness, $b = -0.66$, $t(133) = -3.11$, $p = .002$, emerged.³

Figure 1: Beliefs about the riskiness of emotional disclosure as a function of emotion valence (negative vs. positive), self-esteem, and agreeableness (Study 1).



³ There were insufficient men in this study to meaningfully detect gender differences. Analyses including gender were explored in Studies 2, 3, 5, and 6 with more men.

Discussion

One of the primary questions of this research is how self-esteem and agreeableness may mutually shape the disclosure process, and specifically, whether they have interactive effects that suggest a strong benefit of possessing both sources of interpersonal security. In Study 1, I found evidence of such an interactive effect on beliefs about the risks of negative emotional disclosure. People high in self-esteem and agreeableness reported positive beliefs about negative emotional disclosure—that it would bring them closer to loved ones and not harm the quality of their relationships—only when they were also high in the other trait. For positive emotional disclosure, a less risky form of disclosure, I found no such evidence of an interactive effect. Instead, I found two main effects, with those high in either self-esteem or agreeableness reporting more positive beliefs about disclosure compared to those low in these traits, regardless of their standing on their other trait. When it comes to low-risk forms of disclosure then, it may be that either source of interpersonal security is sufficient to promote feelings of safety in expressing oneself; for high-risk disclosures, on the other hand, both may be necessary. I examine this issue further in Studies 5 and 6 when I explore the role of risk, first by looking at different types of negative emotions that are more or less risky to express (Study 5) and second by manipulating the degree of personal responsibility or blame for a negative experience (Study 6).

Study 2: Disclosure with Romantic Partners

Study 1 demonstrated that people high in both self-esteem and agreeableness perceive the least risk in disclosing emotional distress to others. In Study 2 I looked at what people actually do when they experience distress. In other words, do these lay beliefs translate into behaviour? Participants were asked to think back to a recent upsetting experience and to report how openly they expressed their thoughts and feelings about the event to their current romantic partner. Based on the results of Study 1, I expected to find an interaction between self-esteem and agreeableness such that those high in *both* traits would report the most emotional disclosure.

Method

Participants and procedure. A sample of 161 participants (101 female, 60 male; *M* age = 32 years) recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform completed the study in exchange for \$0.50.⁴ Participants were involved in exclusive romantic relationships (40% married, 6% engaged, 17% cohabiting, 36% dating) that were on average 6.25 years in length (*Mdn* = 3.92, *SD* = 6.51, Range: 1 month-30 years).

Participants first completed scales assessing relationship quality, self-esteem, agreeableness, and neuroticism. They were then asked to think back to the last day that “a really upsetting event” occurred, and to remember the details about what happened and how they felt. To stimulate participants' memories about the experience, they were asked to describe, in free-response format, how they expressed (or did not express) their thoughts and feelings about the upsetting event when they saw their romantic partner later that day. They then completed a scale assessing their emotional disclosure to their partner about the event.

Materials.

⁴ Analyses excluded 5 additional participants who did not complete the predictor or dependent measures.

Relationship quality. Participants rated the items “How satisfied are you in your current romantic relationship?” and “How committed are you to your current romantic partner?” on a 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*) scale. Items were averaged to index relationship quality ($\alpha = .68$).

Self-esteem. Participants responded to the 10 Rosenberg (1965) self-esteem items as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .93$).

Agreeableness. Participants completed the 9-item Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) measure of agreeableness (e.g., “I see myself as someone who is helpful and unselfish with others”). Items were rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale ($\alpha = .79$).

Neuroticism. Participants completed the two neuroticism items of the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swan, 2003); specifically, “I see myself as calm, emotionally stable” (reversed), “I see myself as anxious, easily upset.” Items were rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale ($\alpha = .78$).

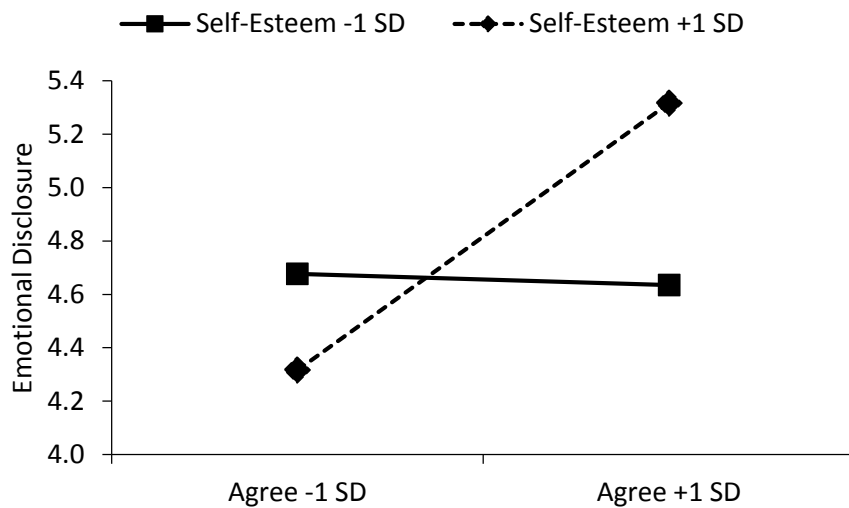
Emotional Disclosure. Participants responded to 6 items assessing how openly they talked about their upsetting experience with their romantic partner at the end of the day, such as “I fully shared what I was feeling (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) with him/her,” “I tried to keep my negative emotions to myself” (reversed), “I told my partner the details about what happened.” Items were rated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*) scale ($\alpha = .91$).

Results

I regressed participants’ emotional disclosure on self-esteem (mean-centered), agreeableness (mean-centered), and their interaction (self-esteem and agreeableness were significantly and moderately correlated, $r = .46, p < .001$). A marginal main effect of agreeableness, $b = 0.36, t(157) = 1.64, p = .103$, was qualified by the predicted Self-Esteem x

Agreeableness interaction, $b = 0.31$, $t(157) = 2.23$, $p = .027$ (see Figure 2). First, I examined conditional effects of self-esteem. HSEs reported marginally more open emotional disclosure than LSEs when they were high (+1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.26$, $t(157) = 1.81$, $p = .073$, but they did not differ from LSEs when they were low (-1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = -0.14$, $t(157) = -0.99$, $p = .324$. Next, I examined conditional effects of agreeableness. Agreeable people reported more open emotional disclosure than disagreeable people when they were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.76$, $t(157) = 2.48$, $p = .014$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = -0.03$, $t(157) = -0.12$, $p = .903$.

Figure 2: Negative emotional disclosure as a function of self-esteem and agreeableness (Study 2).



In an additional analysis, I controlled for the variance associated with participants' general emotional instability (i.e., neuroticism) and the quality of their romantic relationships. Neuroticism—a trait that primarily denotes the tendency to experience negative emotions such as anxiety and anger (Costa & McCrae, 1992)—has been strongly associated with self-esteem (they often correlate at $-.60$ or greater), and may also influence the tendency to express negativity.

With neuroticism and relationship quality included as covariates in the model, the interaction between agreeableness and self-esteem remained significant, $b = 0.40$, $t(155) = 3.20$, $p = .002$, and the interaction pattern remained the same.⁵

Discussion

The results of Study 2 provide evidence for an interactive effect of self-esteem and agreeableness in promoting the disclosure of distress. Consistent with the findings of Study 1, in which people high in both self-esteem and agreeableness perceived the least risk in opening up to their loved ones about emotional distress, in Study 2 I found that those high in both traits also reported the most open emotional expression about upsetting life events. In fact, neither self-esteem nor agreeableness was a strong independent predictor of disclosure. Looking back to the theoretical models I presented in the introduction, these findings are consistent with a *Catalytic* or *All-or-Nothing* model. Although both self-esteem and agreeableness both made important contributions to predicting disclosure, neither had a strong effect on its own. These findings suggest that it is the combination of self-esteem and agreeableness that promotes the most open disclosure of distress. Those high in both self-esteem and agreeableness may be most willing to open up because they are the most dispositionally inclined to trust that their relationship partners will be responsive.

⁵ Gender did not significantly moderate the effects of self-esteem, agreeableness, or the interaction between self-esteem and agreeableness ($ps > .46$). Replicating previous research, women reported more open disclosure ($M = 5.15$) than men ($M = 4.36$), overall $b = 0.93$, $t(153) = 3.21$, $p = .002$. The Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction remained significant with gender included as a covariate, $b = 0.33$, $t(156) = 2.47$, $p = .015$, and the interaction pattern remained the same.

Study 3: Trust and Disclosure with Roommates

Study 3 was designed to replicate the findings of Study 2 with a different relationship type and to directly test the mediating role of trust. In this study, participants who were living with a roommate were asked to think about their behaviour when they experience upsetting events (in general, rather than on a particular occasion), and to report how openly they typically express their thoughts and feelings about these events to their roommate.

Method

Participants and procedure. A total of 235 undergraduate students (145 female, 90 male; M age = 21 years) who were living with at least one roommate completed the study for course credit.⁶ Participants living with more than one roommate were instructed to report on the roommate with whom they were the closest. The majority of participants reported on same-sex roommates (15 women and 12 men reported on opposite-sex roommates). Participants had known their roommates for an average of 13.18 months ($Mdn = 8.00$, $SD = 18.57$, Range: 1 month-19 years).

Participants first responded to demographics questions and completed measures of roommate relationship quality, roommate relationship trust, self-esteem, agreeableness, and neuroticism. They were then asked to think about how they behave with their roommate when they experience an upsetting event in their daily lives. Participants were asked to first describe, in free-response format, how they express (or do not express) their feelings to their roommate when they experience an upsetting event, but unlike Study 1, this time they were asked to focus on general or typical behaviour rather than a particular instance. Finally, participants completed a scale assessing how openly they disclose their thoughts and emotions to their roommate about upsetting experiences in their lives.

⁶ Analyses excluded 6 additional participants who did not complete the predictor or dependent measures.

Materials.

Relationship quality. Participants were asked to rate “How close do you feel to your roommate?” and “How satisfied are you with your relationship with your roommate?” on 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*) scale. Items were averaged to index the quality of the roommate relationship ($\alpha = .83$).

Trust. Participants completed 6 items adapted from Reis (2006) to assess three important components of trust: understanding (e.g., “My roommate is an excellent judge of my character”), validation (e.g., “My roommate esteems me, shortcomings and all”), and caring (e.g., “My roommate is responsive to my needs”). Items were rated on 1 (*not at all true*) to 9 (*completely true*) scale ($\alpha = .95$).

Self-esteem. Participants completed the 10 Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem items ($\alpha = .89$).

Agreeableness. Participants completed the 9-item Big Five Inventory (John et al., 1991) measure of agreeableness as in Study 2 ($\alpha = .75$).

Neuroticism. Participants completed the 2 TIPI neuroticism items as in Study 2 ($\alpha = .54$).

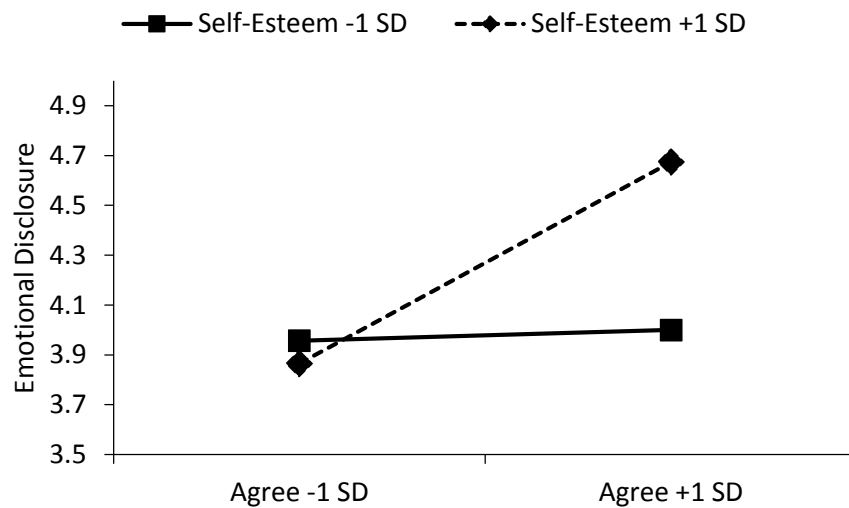
Emotional disclosure. Participants completed the same 6-item disclosure measure used in Study 2, this time modified to reflect roommate relationships and to gauge typical behaviour rather than behaviour on a particular occasion, such as “I fully share what I am feeling (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) with him/her”; $\alpha = .91$.

Results

Emotional disclosure. I regressed participants’ emotional disclosure on self-esteem (mean-centered), agreeableness (mean-centered), and their interaction (self-esteem and agreeableness were significantly but modestly correlated, $r = .35$, $p < .001$). Consistent with the results of Study 2, a main effect of agreeableness, $b = 0.36$, $t(231) = 2.05$, $p = .042$, was qualified

by the predicted Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction, $b = 0.29$, $t(231) = 2.21$, $p = .028$ (see Figure 3). First, I examined conditional effects of self-esteem. HSEs reported more open emotional disclosure than LSEs when they were high (+1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.31$, $t(231) = 2.45$, $p = .015$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = -0.04$, $t(231) = -0.35$, $p = .728$. Next I examined conditional effects of agreeableness. Agreeable people reported more open emotional disclosure than disagreeable people when they were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.67$, $t(231) = 2.98$, $p = .003$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.03$, $t(231) = 0.13$, $p = .896$.

Figure 3: Negative emotional disclosure as a function of self-esteem and agreeableness (Study 3).

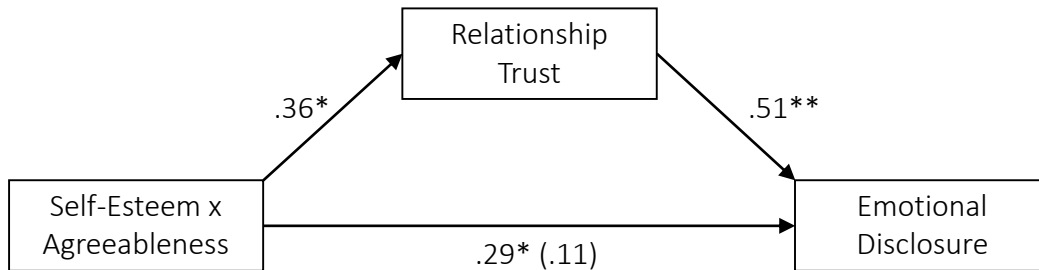


Trust. Next, I examined whether self-esteem and agreeableness also interacted to predict participants' feelings of trust in their roommate. In a parallel regression analysis predicting trust, a main effect of agreeableness, $b = 0.77$, $t(231) = 3.47$, $p = .001$, was qualified by a Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction, $b = 0.36$, $t(231) = 2.10$, $p = .036$. HSEs reported higher trust than LSEs when they were high (+1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.39$, $t(231) = 2.38$, $p = .018$, but not

when they were low (-1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = -0.05$, $t(231) = 0.29$, $p = .773$. Likewise, agreeable people reported higher trust than disagreeable people when they were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 1.17$, $t(231) = 3.99$, $p < .001$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.37$, $t(231) = 1.29$, $p = .198$.

To examine mediation, I ran a bias-corrected bootstrap mediated moderation analysis (PROCESS Model 4; Hayes, 2013). The Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction term was the predictor, emotional disclosure was the dependent variable, trust was the mediator, and the main effects of self-esteem and agreeableness were included as covariates. Using 5,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval, the indirect effect was significant, $ab = 0.181$, $SE = 0.089$, 95% CI [0.004, 0.348], and the direct effect was reduced to nonsignificance, $b = 0.111$, $SE = 0.102$, 95% CI [-0.089, 0.311]. Figure 4 displays results from this analysis.

*Figure 4: Mediation model examining the Self-esteem x Agreeableness interaction predicting emotional disclosure as mediated by trust (Study 3). Self-esteem and agreeableness were included as covariates. Path coefficients are unstandardized. The parenthetical number indicates the path coefficient before including the mediator. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$*



In additional analyses, I included neuroticism and relationship quality as covariates in the models and found that the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interactions predicting disclosure, $b = 0.24$, $t(229) = 2.29$, $p = .023$, and trust, $b = 0.26$, $t(229) = 2.30$, $p = .022$, remained significant,

and the pattern of the interactions remained the same. The indirect path for trust, $ab = 0.091$, $SE = 0.050$, 95% CI [0.008, 0.201], also remained significant.⁷

Discussion

Study 3 replicated the results of Study 2 with a different relationship type, and using a disclosure measure that asked participants to describe their typical behaviour rather than their behaviour on a particular occasion. Focusing on roommate relationships, I found that those who were high in both self-esteem and agreeableness again reported the most open emotional disclosure with close relationship partners. Moreover, Study 2 provided evidence for the mediating role of trust. People who were high in both self-esteem and agreeableness reported the most trust in their roommate's caring and responsiveness, which in turn predicted how openly they said they talk to their roommates about upsetting events in their lives. These results are consistent with the idea that self-esteem and agreeableness affect disclosure indirectly, by shaping people's feelings of trust in close others.

⁷ Gender did not significantly moderate the effects of self-esteem, agreeableness, or the interaction between self-esteem and agreeableness ($ps > .25$). Replicating Study 2, women reported more open disclosure ($M = 4.56$) than men ($M = 3.60$), overall $b = 1.00$, $t(227) = 4.76$, $p < .001$. The Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interactions predicting disclosure, $b = 0.27$, $t(230) = 2.12$, $p = .035$, and trust, $b = 0.34$, $t(230) = 2.03$, $p = .043$, remained significant with gender included as a covariate, and the interaction pattern remained the same. However, the indirect path of trust was reduced to nonsignificance, $ab = 0.165$, $SE = 0.084$, 95% CI [-0.004, 0.321]. In an additional model, I tried controlling for gender, neuroticism, and relationship quality simultaneously, and the indirect effect once again reached significance, $ab = 0.086$, $SE = 0.048$, 95% CI [0.006, 0.194].

Study 4: Romantic Partner Reports

The purpose of Study 4 was to replicate the Study 2 and 3 findings using partner reports of emotional disclosure. I sought to ensure that the observed associations between self-esteem, agreeableness, trust, and disclosure were not an artifact of participants' self-perceptions. That is, perhaps those high in self-esteem and agreeableness have biased and optimistic memories of behaving in constructive ways in their relationships. I examined whether the romantic partners of those high in both self-esteem and agreeableness perceive their partners to be emotionally expressive and openly disclosing about upsetting experiences, and whether this association is explained by the discloser's feelings of relationship trust. I first obtained self-reports of target participants' (actors') personality and relationship trust, and then asked their romantic partners to report how openly the target participants disclose their thoughts and feelings about upsetting experiences.

Method

Participants and procedure. An initial sample of 177 participants recruited from an undergraduate psychology participant pool completed the study for course credit. Of the original sample, 132 (75%) had romantic partners who completed the partner portion of the study in exchange for entry in a draw to win \$50.⁸ The final sample consisted of 132 participants (114 female, 17 male, 1 unreported; *M* age = 22 years) and their romantic partners (112 male, 18 female, 2 unreported; *M* age = 23 years). All participants were involved in exclusive dating relationships that were on average 3.80 years in length (*Mdn* = 2.00, *SD* = 5.52, Range: 6 months-32 years).

⁸ Of the 45 participants whose partners did not complete the survey, one did not provide partner contact information, and 44 provided partner contact information but the partners opted not to participate. Participants whose partners completed the survey did not differ significantly from those whose partners did not in terms of relationship quality, agreeableness, neuroticism, or trust (*t*s < 1.06, *p*s > .29). However, they reported marginally higher self-esteem (*M* = 7.01) than participants whose partners did not complete the survey (*M* = 6.54), *t*(175) = 1.81, *p* = .072.

Undergraduate students were invited to participate in a study on “understanding dating relationships”. Only those who indicated that their romantic partners were willing to complete a brief survey were asked to participate. This target sample of participants completed an online survey in which they provided demographic information and completed measures of relationship quality, relationship trust, self-esteem, agreeableness, and neuroticism. They were then asked to provide contact information for their romantic partner, and they were partially debriefed. Next, researchers contacted the romantic partners of the target participants and invited them to participate in a psychology study on dating relationships. These respondents were instructed to complete the study alone and not in the presence of their partner. In an online survey, partners first provided demographic information. They were then asked to think about their romantic partner’s behaviour when he/she has had a bad day. They were asked to describe, in free-response format, how their partner typically expresses him/herself when he/she has had a bad day. Next, they completed a scale assessing how openly their partner communicates his/her thoughts and emotions about what happened when he/she has had a bad day. Finally, both partners were fully debriefed.

Actor materials.

Relationship quality. Participants rated 3 items to assess the quality of their relationship: “I am satisfied with my relationship with my partner,” “I care about my partner,” and “My relationship with my partner is very important to me.” Items were rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*) scale ($\alpha = .71$).

Relationship trust. Participants completed the same 6-item measure of relationship trust as in Study 3, modified to reflect romantic relationships (e.g., “My romantic partner is responsive to my needs”) ($\alpha = .87$).

Self-esteem. Participants completed the 10 Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem items ($\alpha = .92$).

Agreeableness. Participants completed the 10-item International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, 1999) Big-Five domain agreeableness scale (e.g., “I sympathize with others’ feelings”). Items were rated on a 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 5 (*very accurate*) scale ($\alpha = .83$).

Neuroticism. Participants completed the TIPI neuroticism scale ($\alpha = .77$).

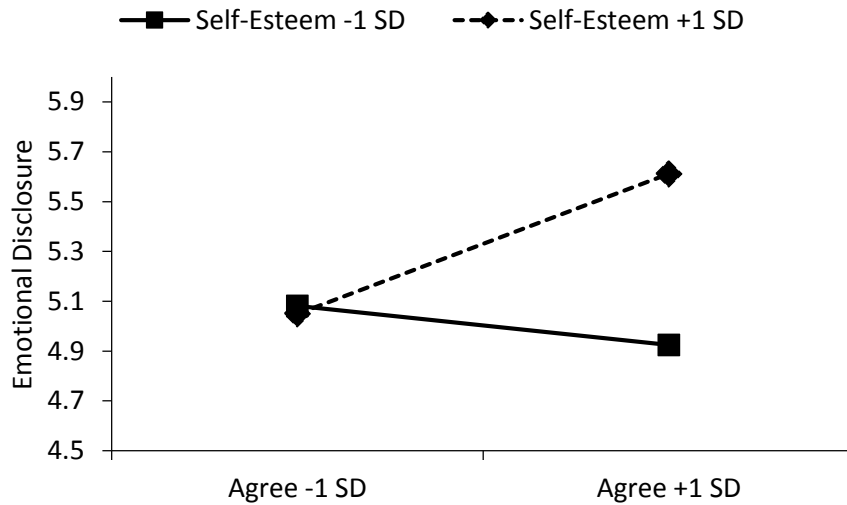
Partner materials.

Emotional disclosure. Partners rated 4 items to assess their perceptions of their partner’s emotional disclosure about upsetting events, such as “My partner shares what he/she is feeling (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) with me,” “My partner tells me the details about what happened.” Items were rated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*to a great extent*) scale ($\alpha = .86$).

Results

Emotional disclosure. I regressed partner-reported emotional disclosure on actor-reported self-esteem (mean-centered), actor-reported agreeableness (mean-centered), and their interaction (self-esteem and agreeableness were significantly but modestly correlated, $r = .38$, $p < .001$). Replicating the previous studies, there was a significant Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction predicting disclosure, $b = 0.22$, $t(128) = 2.06$, $p = .042$ (see Figure 5). First, I examined conditional effects of self-esteem. Partners of HSE targets perceived more open emotional disclosure when targets were high (+1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.24$, $t(128) = 1.98$, $p = .050$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = -0.01$, $t(128) = -0.13$, $p = .899$. Next, I examined conditional effects of agreeableness. Partners of agreeable targets perceived marginally more open emotional disclosure when targets were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.49$, $t(128) = 1.86$, $p = .064$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = -0.14$, $t(128) = -0.54$, $p = .587$.

Figure 5: Partner-reported negative emotional disclosure as a function of actor-reported self-esteem and agreeableness (Study 4).

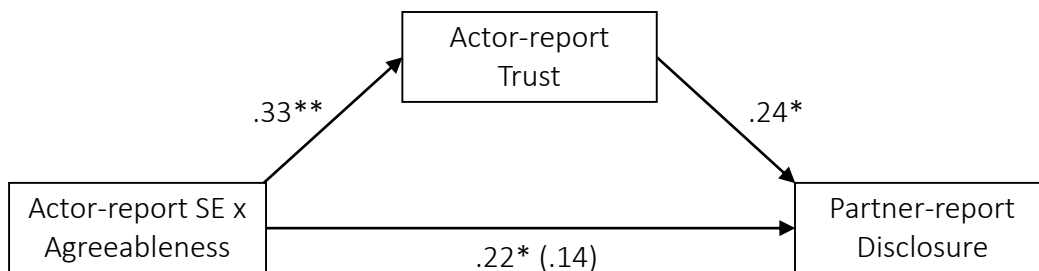


Trust. Next, I examined whether self-esteem and agreeableness interacted to predict actors' self-reported relationship trust. In a parallel regression analysis predicting trust, a main effect of self-esteem, $b = 0.41$, $t(128) = 5.05$, $p < .001$, was qualified by a Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction, $b = 0.33$, $t(128) = 3.37$, $p = .001$. HSEs reported higher trust than LSEs when they were high (+1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.59$, $t(128) = 5.33$, $p < .001$, but this relationship was weaker when they were low (-1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.22$, $t(128) = 2.63$, $p = .010$. Agreeable people reported higher trust than disagreeable people when they were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.78$, $t(128) = 3.23$, $p = .002$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = -0.16$, $t(128) = -0.70$, $p = .485$.

To examine mediation, I ran a bias-corrected bootstrap mediated moderation analysis (PROCESS Model 4; Hayes, 2013). Actor-reported Self-Esteem x Agreeableness was the predictor, partner-reported emotional disclosure was the dependent variable, actor-reported trust was the mediator, and the main effects of self-esteem and agreeableness were included as

covariates. Using 5,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval, the indirect effect was significant, $ab = 0.079$, $SE = 0.041$, 95% CI [0.009, 0.168], and the direct effect was reduced to nonsignificance, $b = 0.137$, $SE = 0.107$, 95% CI [-0.075, 0.350]. Figure 6 displays results from this analysis.

Figure 6: Mediation model examining actor-reported Self-Esteem x Agreeableness predicting partner-reported emotional disclosure as mediated by actor-reported trust (Study 4). Self-esteem and agreeableness were included as covariates. Path coefficients are unstandardized. The parenthetical number indicates the path coefficient before including the mediator. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$



In additional analyses including neuroticism and relationship quality as covariates in the models, the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interactions predicting disclosure, $b = 0.24$, $t(126) = 2.34$, $p = .021$, and trust, $b = 0.30$, $t(126) = 3.62$, $p < .001$, remained significant, and the pattern of the interactions remained the same. The indirect path for relationship trust also remained significant, $ab = 0.058$, $SE = 0.037$, 95% CI [0.001, 0.155].

Discussion

The results of Study 4 replicate my previous findings that self-esteem and agreeableness have a catalytic effect on disclosure, and that the effects of self-esteem and agreeableness are explained by relationship trust. By utilizing partner reports of disclosure, Study 4 suggests these effects go beyond a mere self-report bias. Here I found that an *actor's* self-reported self-esteem

and agreeableness predicted his/her *partner's* reports of his/her disclosure, and that this effect was mediated by the *actor's* reports of his/her own trust. These findings are particularly impressive when one considers that, to accurately report on a partner's disclosure in this situation, one first has to be aware that the partner had a distressing experience, and then gauge the degree to which he/she expresses or withholds his/her true feelings. These behavioural indicators are likely to be much more subtle than a person's awareness of his/her own emotional upset and disclosure, and yet partners see the participants' patterns of disclosure as the participants themselves see them.

Study 5: Trust Manipulation

The current studies thus far provide converging evidence across samples, relationship types, and both self- and partner-reports that the combination of high self-esteem and high agreeableness promotes open emotional disclosure by way of trust. Study 5 was designed to provide an experimental test of the importance of relationship trust. In this study, I explored the effects of enhancing trust in a relationship partner on the willingness to disclose negative emotions and on the associations of self-esteem and agreeableness with disclosure: When trust in a partner is boosted situationally, do self-esteem and agreeableness then lose their joint influence as chronic sources of trust and security? The substitute form of trust may render the personality sources less necessary. Spencer, Zanna, and Fong (2005) suggested that when it is possible to manipulate a proposed psychological process, experimental manipulation is a good test of a causal chain. Following their advice, in this study I manipulate the proposed mediator, trust.

In addition, I sought to explore whether the importance of self-esteem, agreeableness, and trust may depend on the type of emotion being disclosed. Talking about an upsetting experience can involve a number of negative emotions, such as sadness, embarrassment, anxiety, and anger. Expressing some emotions may be interpersonally riskier than others. For example, if one has been criticized by one's boss, one could be sad because one feels deserving of the criticism, or one could be angry because the boss was unreasonable and unfair. Expressing sadness in this case could make one feel more vulnerable—more at risk that the partner's caring and regard may diminish—than expressing anger. Indeed, past research suggests that expressing sadness is a sign of vulnerability (a low sense of control and a high sense of uncertainty), whereas expressing anger is a sign of strength (Greenberg & Johnson, 1990; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Here, anger is more likely to imply that the attribution for the negative event is external (i.e., the boss's

fault), whereas sadness may imply that the attribution is internal (i.e., one's own fault). Emotional disclosures that convey vulnerability (e.g., when an event reflects negatively on the self) may depend more strongly on trusting the recipient of the disclosure than do other emotional disclosures. In this study, participants were assigned to either a control condition or a condition in which I experimentally enhanced their feelings of trust for their current romantic partner. Following this manipulation, participants were asked how willing they are to openly disclose their emotions about upsetting events to their partner when they feel sad and when they feel angry.

Method

Participants and procedure. A sample of 158 participants (98 female, 60 male; M age = 35 years) recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform completed the study in exchange for \$0.50.⁹ Participants were involved in exclusive romantic relationships (32% dating; 15% cohabiting; 8% engaged; 43% married; 2% undisclosed) that were on average 7.56 years in length ($Mdn = 4.08$, $SD = 8.18$, Range: 1 month-36 years).

Participants were told that we were interested in studying “romantic relationships and communication.” They first provided demographic information and completed measures of relationship quality, self-esteem, agreeableness, and neuroticism. They were then randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the experimental ‘enhanced trust’ condition ($n = 79$), participants were presented with a list of 15 statements about their current romantic partner and relationship. These statements were written to be extremely negative evaluations of their partner or relationship, such that I expected the majority of people would not agree with them, even among those in relatively unhappy relationships. Experimental participants were then asked to indicate whether each statement was true or false, thinking of their current partner/relationship. I

⁹ Analyses excluded two additional participants who did not complete either the predictor or dependent measures.

expected that most participants would indicate ‘false’ for the majority of the statements, which would, via a contrast effect, positively enhance their perceptions of their partner and relationship. Participants in the control condition ($n = 79$) completed a standard measure of partner responsiveness (Reis, 2006). Following the experimental manipulation, all participants were asked to think about their self-disclosure with their partner when they experience an upsetting event, and to rate how willing they are to openly disclose their thoughts and emotions about events that make them sad, as well as about events that make them angry.

In an initial pilot study, I tested the effect of my manipulation on people’s feelings of interpersonal trust. I recruited 150 participants (82 female, 66 male, 2 undisclosed; M age = 33 years) from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk platform who were currently in a relationship and completed the study in exchange for \$0.50. To obtain a baseline (pre-manipulation) index of relationship trust, participants first rated the item “How much do you think your partner cares about you?” on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) scale. They were then randomly assigned to either the enhanced trust condition ($n = 74$) or control condition ($n = 76$). Following the experimental manipulation, participants were asked to think about how they were feeling right at that moment. They were instructed to not think about or evaluate their answers, but to go with their natural feelings. They then rated three items to assess their current feelings of interpersonal trust while thinking of their partner (“At this moment I feel accepted,” “At this moment I feel valued,” and “At this moment I feel cared for”). Items were rated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) scale and averaged to index state interpersonal trust ($\alpha = .90$).

I regressed state interpersonal trust on condition (effects-coded: -1 = control; 1 = enhanced trust), baseline relationship trust, and their interaction. A main effect of baseline relationship trust, $b = 0.63$, $t(146) = 8.41$, $p < .001$, was qualified by a Condition X Baseline

Relationship Trust interaction, $b = -0.16$, $t(146) = -2.17$, $p = .032$. Participants in the enhanced trust condition reported higher state interpersonal trust than participants in the control condition only when they were low ($-1 SD$) in baseline relationship trust, $b = 0.26$, $t(146) = 2.51$, $p = .013$. When participants were high ($+1 SD$) in baseline relationship trust, there was no effect of condition on state feelings of interpersonal trust $b = -0.06$, $t(146) = -0.63$, $p = .532$. These results suggest that my manipulation is effective in boosting state feeling of trust among people who feel relatively low trust at baseline. When people already feel strong trust for their partner, there is less of a need to boost those feelings of trust.

Materials.

Relationship quality. Participants responded to the following 5 items: “How close is your relationship with your partner?”; “How committed are you to your relationship?”; “How satisfied are you in your relationship?”; “How much do you care about your partner?”; and “How important to you is your relationship with your partner?” Items were rated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) scale and averaged to index relationship quality ($\alpha = .91$).

Self-esteem. Participants completed the 10 Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem items ($\alpha = .92$).

Agreeableness. Participants completed the 20-item BFAS (DeYoung et al., 2007) measure of agreeableness, as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .89$).

Neuroticism. Participants completed the TIPI neuroticism scale ($\alpha = .75$).

Trust manipulation. To boost feelings of partner trust, participants in the experimental ‘enhanced trust’ group were presented with 15 negative evaluative statements about their romantic partner or relationship (e.g., “I can never trust my partner,” “I strongly believe that the future of my relationship is a gamble,” “Every day, I wonder how much my partner truly cares for me,” “My partner never understands anything about me”). Participants rated each of these

items as being either true or false of their current partner or relationship. Participants selected the target response of ‘false’ an average of 12.91 times ($Mdn = 14.00$, $SD = 2.83$). Participants in the control group completed an established measure of perceived partner responsiveness (Reis, 2006).

Emotional disclosure. Participants rated 6 items assessing their willingness to openly disclose their thoughts and emotions to their partner when they experience an event that makes them sad, such as “To what extent would you...share what you are feeling with him/her?”, “...keep your feelings to yourself?” (reversed), “...tell him/her the details about what happened?” Items were rated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*) scale ($\alpha = .91$). Participants rated the same six items assessing their willingness to disclose their thoughts and emotions to their partner when they experience an event that makes them angry ($\alpha = .93$). Overall, participants reported a greater willingness to disclose anger ($M = 5.22$) than sadness ($M = 5.07$), $t(157) = -1.98$, $p = .050$.

Results

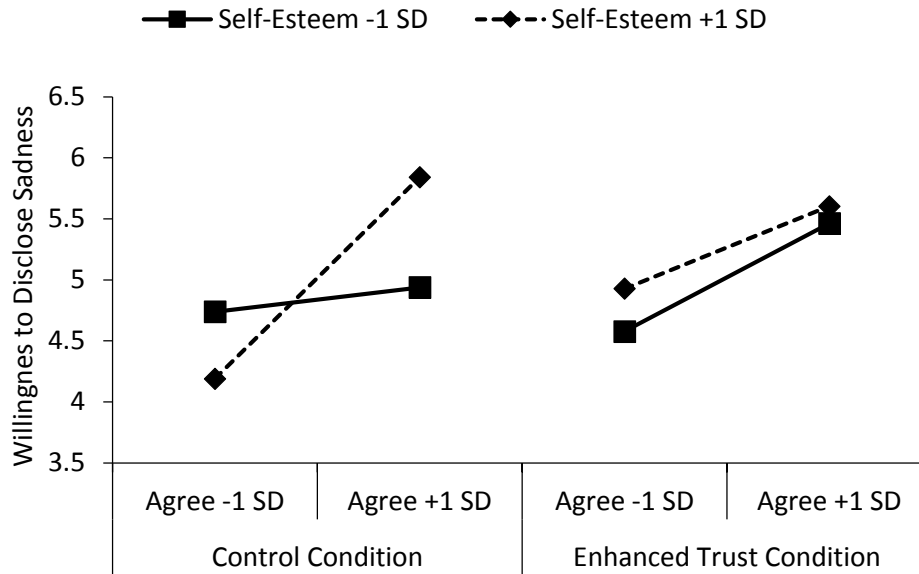
Sadness. I first examined the effects of the manipulation on participants’ reports of their willingness to disclose sadness to their romantic partner. I regressed willingness to disclose sadness on trust condition (effects-coded: -1 = control; 1 = enhanced trust), self-esteem (mean-centered), and agreeableness (mean-centered), including all possible two- and three-way interactions (self-esteem and agreeableness were significantly but weakly correlated, $r = .23$, $p = .003$). A main effect of agreeableness, $b = 0.53$, $t(150) = 3.92$, $p < .001$, was qualified by a three-way interaction between self-esteem, agreeableness, and condition, $b = -0.17$, $t(150) = -1.97$, $p = .050$. To explore this interaction, I conducted supplementary regressions to examine the enhanced trust and control conditions in turn. In the control condition, a significant Self-Esteem

x Agreeableness interaction predicted the willingness to disclose, $b = 0.29$, $t(150) = 2.55$, $p = .012$ (see Figure 7). Replicating the pattern observed in Studies 2-4, HSEs reported a greater willingness to disclose sadness than did LSEs when they were high (+1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.29$, $t(150) = 2.70$, $p = .008$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = -0.18$, $t(150) = -1.21$, $p = .229$. Likewise, agreeable people reported a greater willingness to disclose sadness than did disagreeable people when they were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 1.02$, $t(150) = 3.27$, $p = .001$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.12$, $t(150) = 0.55$, $p = .581$.

In contrast, the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction was not significant for the enhanced trust condition, $b = -0.04$, $t(150) = -0.34$, $p = .735$; instead, only a main effect of agreeableness emerged for this condition, $b = 0.48$, $t(150) = 2.80$, $p = .006$. These results suggest that when trust in a partner is experimentally enhanced, self-esteem and agreeableness no longer have an interactive effect on promoting the disclosure of vulnerable emotions. In other words, the combination of high self-esteem and high agreeableness is less important when trust is enhanced in other ways.

Anger. I next explored the effects of my trust manipulation on participants' reported willingness to disclose anger. In a parallel regression predicting the willingness to disclose anger, the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness x Condition interaction was not significant, $b = -0.07$, $t(150) = -0.78$, $p = .439$; instead, only a main effect of agreeableness emerged, $b = 0.56$, $t(150) = 4.12$, $p < .001$. Regardless of condition, self-esteem and agreeableness did not interact to predict the willingness to disclose anger (control condition: $b = 0.12$, $t(150) = 1.02$, $p = .311$; enhanced trust condition: $b = -0.02$, $t(150) = -0.13$, $p = .901$).

Figure 7: Willingness to disclose sadness as a function of condition (control vs. enhanced trust), self-esteem, and agreeableness (Study 5).



In an additional set of analyses, I controlled for the effects of relationship quality and neuroticism and found the same pattern of results. With relationship quality and neuroticism included as covariates in the model, there was a significant Self-Esteem x Agreeableness x Condition interaction predicting the willingness to disclose sadness, $b = -0.15$, $t(148) = -2.03$; self-esteem interacted with agreeableness to predict sadness disclosure in the control condition, $b = 0.35$, $t(148) = 3.48$, $p = .001$, but not in the enhanced trust condition, $b = 0.05$, $t(148) = 0.44$, $p = .658$. In contrast, the three-way interaction predicting the willingness to disclose anger was not significant, $b = -0.05$, $t(148) = -0.67$, $p = .503$.¹⁰

¹⁰ I examined the effects of gender on the willingness to disclose sadness. Gender did not interact with self-esteem, agreeableness, or condition ($ps > .13$). Women reported marginally more willingness to disclose sadness ($M = 5.31$) than did men ($M = 4.67$), overall $b = 0.44$, $t(142) = 1.93$, $p = .055$. The Self-Esteem x Agreeableness x Condition interaction remained significant with gender included as a covariate, $b = -0.18$, $t(149) = -2.13$, $p = .035$. I next explored the effects of gender on the willingness to disclose anger. Gender did not interact with self-esteem or agreeableness ($ps > .22$). However, there was a significant Gender x Condition interaction, $b = 0.46$, $t(142) = 2.01$, $p = .046$, which qualified a main effect of gender, $b = 0.52$, $t(142) = 2.25$, $p = .011$. Further analysis revealed that there was no effect of gender in the control condition, $b = 0.06$, $t(142) = 0.17$, $p = .866$, but women reported a greater willingness to disclose anger ($M = 5.65$) than men ($M = 4.56$) in the enhanced trust condition, $b = 0.98$, $t(142) = 3.02$, $p = .003$.

Discussion

Study 5 replicated the findings of Studies 1-4 that self-esteem and agreeableness play a key interactive role in promoting open emotional disclosure. Moreover, Study 5 demonstrated the importance of trust experimentally—when trust in a relationship partner was enhanced, self-esteem and agreeableness no longer interacted to predict disclosure. This finding complements the Study 3 and Study 4 finding that trust acts a mediator between self-esteem/agreeableness and emotional disclosure. That is, when trust is strengthened situationally, the chronic sources of trust become less necessary if the substitute source is sufficient. However, Study 5 also demonstrated that the effects of self-esteem and agreeableness importantly depend on the type of emotion being expressed. Although the combination of high self-esteem and high agreeableness was important for emotional disclosures of sadness, this was not the case for emotional disclosures of anger. Having a dispositional inclination to trust others may be more important for expressing vulnerable emotions such as sadness than less vulnerable emotions such as anger due to the different degree of risk involved. This is consistent with the Study 1 finding that self-esteem and agreeableness interacted to predict feelings of safety in making negative but not positive disclosures, the latter being inherently less risky.

Interestingly, not only did agreeableness predict the willingness to disclose sadness, but it also emerged as the sole predictor of the willingness to disclose anger. In some ways, this finding seems contradictory to the portrait of the interpersonally warm and affectively positive agreeable person. Agreeableness has been positively linked to general expressivity and the expression of positive emotions and intimacy, but has tended to show a negative association with the expression of negativity, anger, and hostility (Gross & John, 1995; Friedman, Tucker, & Reise, 1995; Leising, Müller, & Hahn, 2007; Marshall, Wortman, Vickers, Kusulas, & Hervig, 1994;

Martin et al., 1999). Agreeable people also report greater effort to regulate their negative emotions compared to their disagreeable counterparts, and some research suggests this regulation occurs at an automatic level after the activation of angry, hostile thoughts (Meier, Robinson, & Wilkowski, 2006; Tobin, Graziano, Vanman, & Tassinary, 2000). In light of this previous evidence, my findings highlight the distinction between different forms of emotional expression, particularly the expression of anger. Although anger expression can occur in an explosive or hostile manner—as highlighted by the findings linking disagreeableness to aggressive, overt hostility—anger can also be expressed in a more constructive manner, as a sharing of an emotional state with a responsive listener. This latter form of expression should be more likely to occur when the emotional state was not caused by the listener him/herself, as is the case in this series of studies, which always involve a distressing event that occurred outside of the relationship. Thus, when highly agreeable people experience a distressing event that triggers anger and choose to share this event with their romantic partner, it may be this more constructive form of expression that is taking place.

Study 6: Risk Manipulation

The previous studies suggest that the effects of self-esteem and agreeableness may depend on the riskiness of a disclosure. In Study 1 I found an interactive effect of self-esteem and agreeableness on beliefs about the dangers of negative emotional disclosures but not positive emotional disclosures, and in Study 5 I found an interactive effect of self-esteem and agreeableness on the willingness to disclose sadness but not anger. Study 6 was designed to provide a direct experimental test of the importance of risk. Specifically, I sought to test the effects of risk directly by manipulating the degree to which a disclosure reveals a personal flaw or failure and therefore reflects poorly on the self. Different attributions of responsibility may be one explanation for the Study 5 finding that self-esteem and agreeableness interact to predict disclosures of sadness but not anger. Feelings of sadness may be more likely to reflect internal attributions for a negative event—that the event was one’s fault and therefore reflects poorly on the self—compared to feelings of anger. Past research suggests that people generally avoid disclosures that reveal their shortcomings because they fear others’ negative appraisal or rejection (Baxter & Wilmot, 1985; Lane & Wegner, 1995; DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996). Thus, I theorized that these disclosures are seen as particularly high in risk, and that people who lack trust in others’ caring and regard would be especially sensitive to this risk. Participants were asked to think back to time when they had an upsetting experience that was either their fault or not their fault, and reported how openly they disclosed this experience to their romantic partner. I hypothesized that self-esteem and agreeableness would interact to predict disclosure in the high-fault, high-risk condition but not the low-fault, low-risk condition.

Method

Participants and procedure. An initial sample of 239 participants recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform completed the study in exchange for \$0.50.¹¹ Three participants did not describe an upsetting experience as instructed and were excluded from all analyses. The final sample consisted of 236 people (143 female, 92 male; *M* age = 35 years). Participants reported that they were involved in exclusive romantic relationships (25% dating; 21% cohabiting; 11% engaged; 42% married; 1% undisclosed) that were on average 8.26 years in length (*Mdn* = 5.33, *SD* = 8.71, Range: 1 month-45 years).

Participants were told that we were interested in how they think about and remember past events. They first completed demographics questions and measures of self-esteem, agreeableness, neuroticism, relationship quality, and trust. They were then assigned to one of two conditions. Instructions for the high-risk condition (*n* = 118) read as follows:

In life we are often confronted with events and experiences that can be very hurtful or upsetting. We would like you to think of a recent time when you had an upsetting experience that was because of a **personal failure, weakness, or mistake**. Perhaps there was a time when you made a mistake, forgot something important, or didn't live up to your responsibilities (e.g., your boss yelled at you because you made a major error at work; you fought with a friend because you broke a promise; or you forgot to pick your child up at school). Please describe this experience.

Instructions for the low-risk condition (*n* = 118) read as follows:

In life we are often confronted with events and experiences that can be very hurtful or upsetting. We would like you to think of a recent time when you had an upsetting experience that was because of something that was **not your fault** and did **not reflect**

¹¹ Analyses exclude 4 additional participants who did not complete the predictor or dependent measures.

poorly on you. Perhaps there was a time when someone else made a mistake, when something bad happened that was out of your control, or when something unfair or unjust happened to you (e.g., your boss yelled at you because he was in a bad mood; your friend accused you of something you didn't do; or you were late to pick your child up at school because your car broke down). Please describe this experience.

After describing their negative experience, participants in both conditions reported how long ago the event occurred, the severity of the event, and the specific emotions that they experienced in the situation. As a manipulation check, participants also reported the degree to which the event was their fault. Finally, participants rated how openly they disclosed the experience and their emotions about the experience to their romantic partner.

After data collection was completed, three independent coders who were blind to hypotheses and condition also rated the written descriptions for severity, degree of fault, and the extent to which the event was caused by the participant's romantic partner.

Materials.

Relationship quality. Participants completed the same five-item measure of relationship quality as in Study 5 ($\alpha = .91$).

Self-esteem. Participants completed the 10 Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem items ($\alpha = .93$).

Agreeableness. Participants completed the 20-item BFAS (DeYoung et al., 2007) measure of agreeableness ($\alpha = .92$)

Neuroticism. Participants completed the TIPI neuroticism scale ($\alpha = .68$).

Trust. Participants completed the same 6-item measure of relationship trust used in the previous studies ($\alpha = .95$).

Risk manipulation and follow-up questions. After describing either an upsetting experience that was due to a personal failure (high-risk condition) or an upsetting experience that was not their fault (low-risk condition), participants first reported how long ago the event occurred. They then rated how upsetting, serious, and major the event was on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) scale. Items were averaged to index the severity of the event ($\alpha = .88$). Embedded in this questionnaire was a one-item manipulation check (“Thinking of the experience you just described, to what extent was it your fault?”), rated on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*) scale. Participants also rated the degree to which the experience made them feel angry, frustrated, annoyed, sad, embarrassed, ashamed, and unworthy on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*) scale.

Coders’ ratings. Undergraduate student coders rated the written event descriptions in terms of severity (“How major or serious was this event/experience?” 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*; interrater ICC = .84, $p < .001$), participant fault (“To what extent was the event the participant’s fault?” 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*; interrater ICC = .91, $p < .001$), and partner fault (“To what extent was the event the romantic partner’s fault?” 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *completely*; interrater ICC = .89, $p < .001$).

Emotional disclosure. Participants rated six items assessing their disclosure to their romantic partner about the experience, such as, “To what extent did you share what you were feeling (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) with your partner?” on a 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*) scale ($\alpha = .93$).

Results

Preliminary analyses. Preliminary analyses were conducted to test possible differences between the two conditions in terms of fault, time since the event, severity, and affect. I first looked at self-report data. Participants in the two conditions reported on events that were the

same in terms of time since the event, $t(233) = -0.65, p = .514$, and severity, $t(234) = -1.08, p = .280$. Most importantly participants in the high-risk condition rated the negative experience as being their fault ($M = 5.69$) to a much greater degree than participants in the low-risk condition ($M = 2.02$), $t(234) = -17.48, p < .001$. This result suggests that I successfully manipulated the extent to which participants recalled a negative experience for which they felt personally responsible. Participants in the high-risk condition also reported feeling more sad (high-risk $M = 4.96$, low-risk $M = 4.38$), $t(232) = -2.02, p = .044$, embarrassed (high-risk $M = 5.15$, low-risk $M = 3.60$), $t(232) = -5.27, p < .001$, ashamed (high-risk $M = 5.25$, low-risk $M = 3.08$), $t(234) = -7.63, p < .001$, and unworthy (high-risk $M = 4.23$, low-risk $M = 2.76$), $t(234) = -5.01, p < .001$, as a result of the experience compared to participants in the low-risk condition. Also consistent with my attempt to manipulate the degree of personal responsibility, participants in the low-risk condition reported feeling more angry (high-risk $M = 4.37$, low-risk $M = 5.22$), $t(234) = 3.10, p = .002$, and annoyed (high-risk $M = 4.70$, low-risk $M = 5.71$), $t(232) = 4.34, p < .001$, than participants in the high-risk condition. The two conditions did not differ in terms of reported frustration, $t(234) = 1.58, p = .115$.

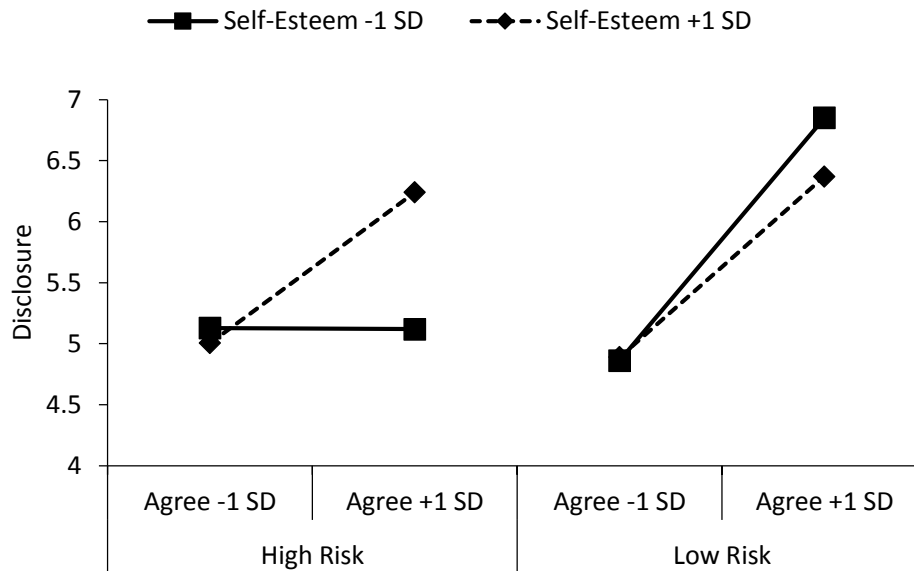
I next looked at coders' ratings of the event descriptions and found that that high-risk condition events were rated as being the participant's fault ($M = 5.25$) to a greater extent than the low-risk condition events ($M = 1.76$), $t(234) = -18.00, p < .001$. The conditions did not differ in terms of coder-rated severity, $t(234) = -1.43, p = .154$, or partner fault, $t(234) = 1.15, p = .252$.

Emotional disclosure. I regressed emotional disclosure on risk condition (effects-coded: -1 = low-risk; 1 = high-risk), self-esteem (mean-centered), and agreeableness (mean-centered), including all possible two- and three-way interactions (self-esteem and agreeableness were significantly but weakly correlated, $r = .22, p = .001$). A main effect of agreeableness, $b = 0.65$,

$t(228) = 5.88, p < .001$, and a marginal effect of condition, $b = -0.19, t(228) = -1.87, p = .062$, were qualified by a three-way interaction between self-esteem, agreeableness, and condition, $b = 0.14, t(228) = 2.36, p = .019$. To explore this interaction, I conducted supplementary regressions to examine the high-risk and low-risk conditions in turn. In the high-risk condition, a significant Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction predicted disclosure, $b = 0.20, t(228) = 2.43, p = .016$. Once again replicating my predicted pattern, HSEs reported more open disclosure than LSEs when they were high (+1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.32, t(228) = 3.65, p < .001$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = -0.04, t(228) = -0.29, p = .775$. Likewise, agreeable people reported more open disclosure than disagreeable people when they were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.68, t(228) = 3.20, p = .002$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = -0.01, t(228) = -0.03, p = .978$.

In contrast, and as expected for the low-risk condition, the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction was not significant, $b = -0.08, t(228) = -0.95, p = .345$; instead, only a main effect of agreeableness emerged, $b = 0.95, t(228) = 5.95, p < .001$. These results suggest that the interactive effects of self-esteem and agreeableness are particularly important for high-risk disclosures.

Figure 8: Negative emotional disclosure as a function of condition (high-risk, low-risk), self-esteem, and agreeableness (Study 6)



Trust. Next, I regressed trust on self-esteem (mean-centered), agreeableness (mean-centered), and their interaction. Main effects of self-esteem, $b = 0.23$, $t(232) = 5.16$, $p < .001$, and agreeableness, $b = 0.17$, $t(232) = 1.96$, $p = .051$, were qualified by a Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction, $b = .09$, $t(232) = 1.95$, $p = .052$. Replicating Study 4, HSEs reported higher trust than LSEs when they were high (+1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.32$, $t(232) = 5.61$, $p < .001$, but this relationship was weaker when they were low (-1 *SD*) in agreeableness, $b = 0.15$, $t(232) = 2.29$, $p = .023$. Agreeable people reported higher trust than disagreeable people when they were high (+1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.33$, $t(232) = 2.61$, $p = .010$, but not when they were low (-1 *SD*) in self-esteem, $b = 0.01$, $t(232) = 0.12$, $p = .903$.

I then tested whether trust mediated the effect of the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness interaction on disclosure in the high-risk condition. I used PROCESS Model 15 (Hayes, 2013), which tests moderated mediation in which a predictor variable (Self-Esteem x Agreeableness)

predicts a mediator (trust) and the path from the mediator to the dependent variable (disclosure) is moderated (by risk condition). The direct path from the predictor to the dependent variable is also moderated (again, by risk condition). I included the main effects of self-esteem and agreeableness, as well as the two-way interactions of Self-Esteem x Condition and Agreeableness x Condition, as covariates. Using 5,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval, the indirect effect for the high-risk condition was significant, $ab = 0.038$, $SE = 0.026$, 95% CI [0.0002, 0.108], and the direct effect was reduced to nonsignificance, $b = 0.138$, $SE = 0.079$, 95% CI [-0.017, 0.293]. In contrast, the direct effect for the low-risk condition was not significant, $ab = 0.023$, $SE = 0.019$, 95% CI [-0.0004, 0.078]. However, the overall test of moderated mediation indicated that the two indirect effects were not significantly different from each other, $ab = 0.015$, $SE = 0.018$, 95% CI [-0.008, 0.073]. In sum, although I found, as expected, that trust significantly mediated the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness effect in the high-risk condition, but was not significant in the low-risk condition, these effects did not differ significantly from each other, suggesting that the mediating effect of trust did not truly differ across the two conditions.

In an additional set of analyses, I controlled for the effects of relationship quality and neuroticism and found the same overall pattern of results. With relationship quality and neuroticism included as covariates in the models, the Self-Esteem x Agreeableness x Condition interaction predicting disclosure was marginal, $b = 0.11$, $t(226) = 1.84$, $p = .068$; self-esteem interacted with agreeableness to predict disclosure in the high-risk condition, $b = 0.17$, $t(226) = 2.11$, $p = .036$, but not in the low-risk condition, $b = -0.05$, $t(226) = -0.56$, $p = .573$. The indirect effect of trust was also significant in the high-risk condition, $ab = 0.030$, $SE = 0.019$, 95% CI [-

0.003, 0.084], but not in the low risk condition, $ab = 0.014$, $SE = 0.015$, 95% CI [-0.006, 0.054].¹²

Discussion

The results of Study 6 are consistent with my contention that the interactive effects of self-esteem and agreeableness are particularly important for high-risk disclosures—in this case, disclosures that reveal personal shortcomings and may be more likely to be met with disapproval or rejection. When a negative disclosure does not reflect poorly on the self and instead reveals an unfortunate stroke of luck or an injustice that one has experienced, having both high self-esteem and high agreeableness appears to be less important. Moreover, the results of the mediation analysis suggest that those high in both self-esteem and agreeableness are most likely to engage in risky disclosures because they are most trusting of their partner.

Even in less risky situations, however, trust may still be an important component of the disclosure process. The mediating effect of trust did not differ across the low- and high-risk conditions in this study. Indeed, even when a negative experience is not one's fault and does not reflect poorly on the self, talking about negative experiences and expressing negative emotions is not without risk. The disclosure may still make the listener feel uncomfortable or annoyed, and the discloser may still be evaluated negatively—for example, the discloser may be viewed as whining or overreacting to the situation. Research on disclosure norms suggests that negative disclosures in general are considered less appropriate than positive disclosures, and people who disclose negativity are seen as less emotionally stable, likeable, and attractive than people who disclose positivity (Caltabiano & Smithson, 1983). Moreover, people who share their traumatic or negative life experiences with others are sometimes met with rejection, avoidance, or

¹² Gender did not moderate the effects of self-esteem, agreeableness, or condition, and there was no significant main effect of gender on disclosure ($ps > .18$).

unhelpful feedback or advice (e.g., Coates, Wortman, & Abbey, 1979; see Kelly & McKillop, 1996 for a review). It may not be surprising, then, that trust still plays a role even when we attempt to limit the riskiness of the situation.

General Discussion

The pursuit of social bonds is intrinsically and inextricably fraught with risk. The very behaviours that increase intimacy in a relationship simultaneously leave one vulnerable to the social pain of rejection (Murray et al., 2006). It is only when people trust in a partner's love that they are willing to take the risk of drawing closer to partners and pursuing intimacy; when people doubt a partner's love, they instead behave self-protectively, withdrawing closeness and dependence. Although this symbolic distancing can serve to protect the self from the painful rejection of an unsupportive partner, it also precludes the development of satisfying relationships. This consequence is particularly troubling when one considers that a person's dispositional propensity for trust can overshadow the actual security that a partner promises and provides (e.g., Cameron et al., 2009).

In the present research, I focus on two broad personality traits that I propose shape chronic feelings of trust in a partner's love, and thereby influence a specific relationship behaviour that can have profound benefits for both the self and the relationship—namely, the disclosure of distress. Specifically, I examined the prediction that self-esteem and agreeableness represent distinct sources of chronic interpersonal security by testing their combined effects on trust and disclosure. Although disclosing distress is risky, sharing these intimate emotions and experiences with others is critical to the deepening of close relationships. If self-esteem and agreeableness indeed represent distinct underlying bases for trust, then both should be important for facilitating this risky but intimacy-promoting relationship behaviour.

Six studies provided converging evidence that the combination of high self-esteem and high agreeableness promotes the open disclosure of distress to close relationship partners, and that this association is explained by trust. In Study 1 I drew on a key proposition of risk

regulation theory—that trust regulates the subjective appraisal of risk (Murray & Holmes, 2009)—and showed that high self-esteem, highly agreeable people perceived the least risk in disclosing distress to close relationship partners compared to any other combination of these traits. Studies 2 and 3 showed that people high in both traits also reported the most open emotional disclosure of distress to both romantic partners and roommates, and Study 3 showed that this association was explained by relationship trust. Study 4 replicated this pattern with romantic partner reports of disclosure, reducing the likelihood that my findings could be explained by a mere self-perception bias. In Study 5 I manipulated feelings of interpersonal trust and found that when trust was experimentally enhanced, the combination of self-esteem and agreeableness was less important for disclosure. Finally, Study 6 showed that the combined effects of self-esteem and agreeableness were particularly important for high-risk disclosures (i.e., those for which trust is especially relevant).

Overall, these results provide support for a *Catalytic* or *All-or-Nothing* model of how self-esteem and agreeableness mutually influence disclosure. That is, when we consider the effects of both traits simultaneously, we find evidence of a critical interaction: Only the right combination of the two variables, predicts disclosure. When people are high in either self-esteem or agreeableness, but low in the other trait, there is no significant effect on disclosure. Thus, both high self-esteem and high agreeableness are necessary together; both potentiate each other to facilitate the disclosure of distress. This result is in contrast to a *Substitutability* or *Either/Or* model, in which each trait alone would be sufficient to predict disclosure (i.e., both together produce no further gain), and an *Additive* or *Incremental* model, in which both variables combine in an additive manner and provide incremental increases in disclosure.

Although my focus was on negative emotional disclosures, I would expect to find this same pattern of associations for any disclosure that is high in risk. On average, negative disclosures are riskier than positive disclosures (Howell & Conway, 1990; Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Taylor & Belgrave, 1986), consistent with the Study 1 finding that self-esteem and agreeableness interacted to predict the perceived costs of sharing negative but not positive experiences. Nevertheless, the overall pattern of results suggests that the importance of self-esteem and agreeableness depends not on the valence of a disclosure per se, but rather the degree of risk. In Study 5 I found that the combined effects of self-esteem and agreeableness mattered for the willingness to disclose sadness but not anger, two negative emotions, the latter emotion being less risky to express (Greenberg & Johnson, 1990; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Similarly, in Study 6 I experimentally manipulated the riskiness of a disclosure and found that the combined traits mattered only for the disclosure of negative experiences that reflect poorly on the self and are particularly risky to reveal. Because the key variable here is risk, self-esteem and agreeableness may also predict other types of disclosures if they are perceived to be high in risk. For example, positive disclosures of news that might be threatening or upsetting to the listener may also depend on dispositions that facilitate trust.

Although I have emphasized the importance of risk, and indeed my studies showed significant self-esteem by agreeableness interaction effects only for high-risk disclosures, it is worth noting that trust may be important for disclosure even at lower levels of risk. My research provides some evidence of this possibility. In Study 6 I found that, even though self-esteem and agreeableness interacted to predict only high-risk disclosures, the mediating effect of trust did not differ between the low- and high-risk conditions. In other words, trust was a predictor of disclosure regardless of the level of risk. Thus, it may be that the more distal effects of

personality are evident primarily in high-risk situations, whereas the more proximal effects of trust are evident regardless of the degree of risk. Indeed, even relatively low-risk disclosures likely depend on at least a minimal level of trust that partner cares about what one has to say and will respond in a non-rejecting manner.

Contributions to Literature

My findings provide important contributions to the literatures on risk regulation theory, self-esteem, agreeableness, and emotional disclosure. I consider each of these in turn.

A main tenet of risk regulation theory is that a person's chronic level of trust in a partner's love serves as the basis for shifting the priority between connection and self-protection in situations of interpersonal risk (Murray et al., 2006). Much of the research on risk regulation has focused on self-esteem as a proxy for this chronic trust because of its intrinsic link to feelings of relational value, the extent to which one is accepted and valued by others (see Cavallo et al., 2014 for a recent review). Nevertheless, because it is chronic trust and not self-esteem per se that governs the regulation of risk, other dispositional variables that shape trust should have similar effects. For example, people low in attachment anxiety (i.e., more secure people) pursue connectedness when faced with interpersonal risk much like HSEs, and people high in attachment anxiety and rejection sensitivity act more self-protectively, much like LSEs (Campbell, Simpson, Boldry, & Kashy, 2005; Overall & Sibley, 2009a; Overall & Sibley, 2009b). The present research incorporates another key dispositional variable that is new to the study of risk regulation. Specifically, I show that one's level of agreeableness, the extent to which one has a prosocial, communal orientation toward others, plays an important role in shaping chronic trust, and in turn, influences how people regulate their behaviour in situations of risk. By incorporating one of the Big Five dimensions of personality into the study of risk

regulation, I demonstrate the scope and utility of risk regulation theory in explaining how even the broadest dimensions of personality shape interpersonal behaviour.

The present studies also enhance our understanding of the role of self-esteem in disclosure. Self-esteem has been one of the most widely studied constructs in the close relationships literature in recent decades, with the general consensus that high self-esteem leads to happy and healthy relationships (Kille & Wood, 2012; Leary & MacDonald, 2003; Wood, Hogle, & McClennan, 2009; but see Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003). When people have a positive self-concept and believe that they are worthwhile relationship partners, they behave constructively and have better relationships as a result. Here, I demonstrate a potential boundary condition of these self-esteem effects: one's degree of communal orientation to other people. My research suggests that, at least in the domain of disclosure, the effects of self-esteem critically depend on a person's level of agreeableness. Consistent with the findings of Gaucher and her colleagues (2012), when I examine self-esteem independently, it is often a significant predictor of disclosure (r s range from .10 to .24). When I add agreeableness to the model, however, the main effects of self-esteem do not emerge. Instead, we see effects of self-esteem only at high levels of agreeableness. These findings suggest that people with a positive self-concept are willing to share their intimate emotions with loved ones only when they also have a positive orientation to others.¹³ This work thus provides a more nuanced model of when high self-esteem facilitates positive relationship processes. In this respect, my research also

¹³ I note that the conceptual distinction I am making between self-esteem and agreeableness is similar to theoretical constructs that have been discussed in the context of attachment theory—namely, the models of self and other that are proposed to underlie attachment anxiety and avoidance (Bowlby, 1982). It is the combination of low anxiety and avoidance that is considered the hallmark of a secure attachment style, parallel to my proposition that the combination of both high self-esteem and high agreeableness leads to interpersonal trust. While attachment anxiety and avoidance are more direct indices of a person's specific relationship feelings (i.e., the extent to which one feels anxious about, or uncomfortable with, a partner's love), I am interested in the broader latent constructs that reflect general orientations toward the self and toward other people.

answers recent calls by personality researchers for “configural” models, which examine how traits work together (e.g., Graziano & Tobin, 2009).

This work also contributes to our understanding of agreeableness and its effects on relationship behaviour and well-being. Agreeableness—a trait that denotes the motivation to get along with others and maintain positive interpersonal relationships—is considered the Big Five dimension most concerned with interpersonal relations (Field, Tobin, & Reese-Weber, 2014). In a review of the literature, Jensen-Campbell, Knack, and Gomez (2010) noted that agreeableness “consistently plays a major role in the development of healthy relationships throughout the lifespan” (p. 1042). Although this statement rings true, there is surprisingly little evidence to support it. Indeed, despite its relevance to interpersonal life, agreeableness is vastly understudied by relationships researchers, and we still have much to learn about the mechanisms by which agreeableness exerts its effects on relationship outcomes. Past research has often focused on the self-regulation of negative emotions (e.g., Ahadi & Rothbart, 1994; Graziano et al., 1996; Meier et al., 2006; Tobin et al., 2000), a skill that enables agreeable people to resolve conflicts constructively and maintain smooth relations with others (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2001; Gleason, Jensen-Campbell, & Richardson, 2004; Park & Antonioni, 2007). Although this self-regulatory capacity is surely important, at a deeper level the positive social motivations of agreeable people may stem from an underlying sense of trust that other people are basically good and kind. In the current research, I replicated the past finding that agreeableness predicts trust in others’ caring and responsiveness (Perunovic, 2008), and found evidence that this trust enables agreeable people to engage in open emotional disclosure with loved ones. My research thus provides initial evidence of an important mechanism by which agreeableness may promote the development of intimacy and relational well-being.

The current research also makes important contributions to the study of self-disclosure. Past research has shown the importance of trust for self-disclosure: people tend to be more openly expressive and self-revealing when they believe in a partner's caring, responsiveness, and trustworthiness (Clark, Reis, Tsai, & Brissette, 2004, as cited in Reis, 2007; Forest & Wood, 2011; Gaucher et al., 2012; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Laurenceau et al., 2005; Lemay & Clark, 2008; Wheelless & Grotz, 1977). Gaucher et al. (2012) further demonstrated that trust mediates the effects of self-esteem on disclosure, especially negative disclosure. The current research confirms the importance of trust, both as a predictor of disclosure and a mediator of personality effects on disclosure, and shows another important route to trust—namely, agreeableness. My research also shows how dispositional variables that are important for trust may facilitate the disclosure of distinct types of emotional experiences. When people have a negative experience, they may experience a variety of different emotions—sadness, anger, fear, embarrassment, shame, and so on. Each of these different emotions has a different meaning and may communicate different messages about one's experience and about oneself. For example, expressing sadness is distinct from expressing anger, with the former conveying vulnerability and the latter conveying strength (Greenberg & Johnson, 1990; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). Because of these differences, some emotions are riskier to express than others, and personality predictors may be more or less important for disclosure depending on the specific emotion being expressed. My research shows that sadness is more commonly experienced when a negative experience is one's fault, whereas anger is more commonly experienced when a negative experience is another's fault (Study 6), and that dispositions that facilitate trust, such as self-esteem and agreeableness, are more important for expressions of sadness than anger (Study 5).

Future research should continue to explore how personality variables and trust predict the disclosure of distinct emotional experiences.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

The research presented here has a variety of strengths. I present converging results across six studies using both correlational and experimental methods, and I assess disclosure in terms of specific past experiences, general behavioural tendencies, imagined willingness to disclose, and partner-reports of disclosure. The samples I used included both undergraduate students and North American adults with a variety of relationship types (roommates, dating relationships, cohabiting couples, and married couples) and a wide range of relationship lengths (1 month to 45 years across studies). I not only examined how personality predicts an important relationship behaviour, but I also investigated the psychological process underlying these associations (trust), which I both (a) measured to examine its status as mediator in correlational analyses, and (b) manipulated to test as a causal mechanism. This package of studies also identified an important moderator (risk) and explored the disclosure of distinct negative emotions (sadness and anger).

Despite these strengths, there are also several limitations to the present research. The use of correlational designs in several of my studies makes it difficult to rule out alternative explanations. For example, it is possible that it is disclosure that leads to trust, rather than the other way around. Indeed, I imagine that this direction of effects also occurs, consistent with Reis and Shaver's (1988) intimacy process model of disclosure. Nevertheless, the results of my experimental work suggest that trust does act as a causal mechanism linking self-esteem and agreeableness with disclosure. When I boosted feelings of trust experimentally, the self-esteem by agreeableness interaction predicting disclosure was no longer significant.

It is also possible that the present findings reflect a positivity bias, such that those who are high in self-esteem and agreeableness are particularly likely to see their relationships in a positive light, so they report high levels of all positive relationship variables (sentiment override; Weiss, 1980), including trust and disclosure. However, because the pattern of results remained the same even controlling for positive relationship perceptions (i.e., relationship quality), it is unlikely that these findings could be reduced to a simple positivity bias. I also found that the romantic partners of high self-esteem, highly agreeable participants perceive them to be openly disclosing, and this association was explained by the discloser's self-reported relationship trust. There is no reason to believe that these partners were also particularly high in self-esteem or agreeableness (in general, partners show little similarity in personality; Watson et al., 2004), reducing the likelihood the likelihood that my findings could be explained by a personality bias.

In addition, the current research lacks direct behavioural evidence of disclosure. Although it is difficult to capture the phenomenon under investigation in the lab (spontaneous disclosure of real-life emotional distress), future research could examine the disclosure of lab-induced negative experiences to a partner as a behavioural measure. Currently, I am conducting a study in which I create a failure experience in the lab, and observe how openly people are willing to disclose this experience to a close relationship partner in a videotaped disclosure.

Although I explored both roommate and romantic relationships (and, in Study 1, perceptions about close relationships in general), I cannot be sure how these findings may generalize to other relationship types. Would we expect this same pattern of associations for friendships, parent or sibling relationships, or co-worker relationships? These predictors may be more or less important depending on the closeness of the relationship (e.g., family versus co-worker) and the norms for expression in the setting (e.g., home versus workplace). Future

investigations should examine whether these factors moderate the importance of dispositional variables in predicting disclosure.

The present findings may not generalize to all expressions of distress, such as those that are particularly severe or traumatic in nature (or, those that are particularly minor or trivial). In this research I asked participants about experiences that were “upsetting” or “distressing”, and some participants did refer to relatively serious events, such as losing their family’s life savings or the death of a loved one. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases participants likely did not report on events that constituted a trauma. Rimé (2009) noted that traumatic or extremely intense negative experience may be more likely to elude social sharing because these experiences often elicit avoidance. The disclosure of traumatic experiences may also be seen as a burden on the other person, which may make agreeable people *less* likely to share these experiences. Because agreeable people are particularly attuned to and concerned about the emotional experiences and mental states of others (Graziano, Habashi, Sheese, & Tobin, 2007; Nettle & Liddle, 2008), they may actually be less likely to engage in emotional disclosures as they increase in intensity.

Future investigations could also benefit from exploring the dynamic interplay between chronic, dispositionally-based trust, and the actual caring and responsiveness that a partner provides. Theorizing on trust suggests that trust is often based on a partner’s caring or uncaring behaviour toward the self (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Shallcross & Simpson, 2012; Simpson, 2007a, 2007b). Although dispositional propensities to trust can overshadow a partner’s actual love and responsiveness (e.g., Cameron et al., 2009), this does not mean that a partner’s behaviour does not also exert an effect on both trust and disclosure. For example, in the social support literature, there is evidence that both perceiver and supporter effects play a significant role in predicting perceived support (Lakey, McCabe, Fisicaro, & Drew, 1996), and Murray,

Bellavia, Rose, and Griffin (2003) found that trust predicts responses to relationship stress even controlling for global self-esteem. Thus the question remains of how dispositional propensities for trust may interact with a partner's actual responsiveness to predict trust and trust-based behaviours such as disclosure.

It is also important to consider whether disclosure will always have positive consequences, particularly among people who have chronically low trust. Research suggest that disclosure benefits both the self and the relationship (Reis & Shaver, 1988; Graham et al., 2008; Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 2001; Laurenceau et al., 1998), and this association has been a key theoretical motivation for investigating the factors that promote the disclosure of distress with close relationship partners. There is evidence, however, that chronically insecure people may actually experience negative consequences when they open up to loved ones about distress. For example, Cameron, Holmes and Vorauer (2009) found that when LSEs revealed personal failures to romantic partners, they were more likely than HSEs to feel that they were devalued and unsupported, and were more likely to distance themselves from their partner. This finding suggests that although disclosure is often portrayed as a behaviour that heightens intimacy, these positive consequences may be less likely for the dispositionally insecure. It would be valuable for future to research to explore how to make the disclosure process a more rewarding and valuable experience for low self-esteem, low agreeable people who may otherwise be unable to benefit from sharing their experiences of distress with intimate partners.

Conclusions

Intimate and satisfying relationships are critically important to well-being. They not only promote personal happiness and health for the individual (e.g., Cohen, 2004; Reis et al., 2000), but also lead to greater productivity and success in the workplace (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008;

Stinson et al., 2008). Social cohesion even helps build safe neighborhoods, economic prosperity, and democratic participation (Putnam, 2000). It is thus essential to understand what promotes good relationships. One factor that has been identified as a key building block to the development of intimate and satisfying relationships is disclosure (Reis & Shaver, 1988). In the present research, I demonstrate that intimate emotional disclosures often depend on a person's dispositional inclination to trust—specifically, their levels of self-esteem and agreeableness, which, together, promote feelings of confidence and security that a partner will respond responsively. My findings thus critically highlight the importance of personality in promoting positive relationship outcomes. Even when they can most benefit from a partner's love and support, those with chronic insecurities may struggle to engage in the behaviours that can strengthen their most important relationships.

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Appendix A

Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (Studies 1-6)

Think about each statement that follows and rate the degree to which you agree or disagree with it on the following scale.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Very strongly disagree		Moderately disagree		Neutral		Moderately agree		Very strongly agree

1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.
2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
3. All in all I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.
7. On the whole I am satisfied with myself.
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. I certainly feel useless at times.
10. At times, I think I am no good at all.

Appendix B

BFAS (DeYoung et al., 2007) Agreeableness Scale (Studies 1, 5, and 6)

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not describe you. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement listed below. Be as honest as possible, but rely on your initial feeling and do not think too much about each item.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Strongly agree

1. Am not interested in other people's problems
2. Respect authority
3. Feel others' emotions
4. Believe that I am better than others
5. Inquire about others' well-being
6. Hate to seem pushy
7. Can't be bothered with others' needs
8. Take advantage of others
9. Sympathize with others' feelings
10. Avoid imposing my will on others
11. Am indifferent to the feelings of others
12. Rarely put people under pressure
13. Take no time for others
14. Insult people
15. Take an interest in other people's lives
16. Seek conflict
17. Don't have a soft side
18. Love a good fight
19. Like to do things for others
20. Am out for my own personal gain

Appendix C

Beliefs about Disclosure Condition Instructions and Scales (Study 1)

Condition 1: Negative Expressivity

We are interested in your beliefs about effective communication in close relationships (e.g., with romantic partners, friends, roommates, etc.). There is no right or wrong answer; we are simply interested in your beliefs/opinions.

We all experience negative or frustrating events. We are interested in your beliefs about the potential benefit or harm of expressing your emotions about these events to close relationship partners. Sometimes people choose to hide or hold back their negative emotions—for example, sadness, embarrassment, anger, shame, etc.—while other times they openly express the emotions they are feeling.

The following questions refer to talking to the close and important people in our lives about negative events that happen when the other person is *not* around, and therefore the other person otherwise would not have known about the event. For example, if Sarah loses out on a promotion at work, she has the choice to tell the people in her life about it. But if she doesn't tell them, they would NOT know about her loss of promotion. These are events that occur outside of our close others' knowledge.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements, using the scale provided:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all true						Completely true

1. ___ Expressing negative emotions to those close to us builds strong relationships
2. ___ Telling those close to us when we are feeling badly builds intimacy in our relationships
3. ___ Expressing negative emotions brings us closer to the important people in our lives
4. ___ Expressing negative emotions is important for maintaining satisfying relationships
5. ___ Expressing negative emotions to others weakens relationships.
6. ___ Expressing negative emotions to others pushes people away.
7. ___ Expressing negative emotions to others is risky.
8. ___ Expressing negative emotions to others damages relationships.

Condition 2: Positive Expressivity

We are interested in your beliefs about effective communication in close relationships (e.g., with romantic partners, friends, roommates, etc.). There is no right or wrong answer; we are simply interested in your beliefs/opinions.

We all experience positive events. We are interested in your beliefs about the potential benefit or harm of expressing your emotions about these events to close relationship partners. Sometimes people choose to hide or hold back their positive emotions—for example, happiness, excitement, pride, joy, etc.—while other times they openly express the emotions they are feeling.

The following questions refer to talking to the close and important people in our lives about positive events that happen when the other person is *not* around, and therefore the other person otherwise would not have known about the event. For example, if Sarah gets promotion at work, she has the choice to tell the people in her life about it. But if she doesn't tell them, they would NOT know about her promotion. These are events that occur outside of our close others' knowledge.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements, using the scale provided:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all true						Completely true

1. ___ Expressing positive emotions to those close to us builds strong relationships
2. ___ Telling those close to us when we are feeling good builds intimacy in our relationships
3. ___ Expressing positive emotions brings us closer to the important people in our lives
4. ___ Expressing positive emotions is important for maintaining satisfying relationships
5. ___ Expressing positive emotions to others weakens relationships.
6. ___ Expressing positive emotions to others pushes people away.
7. ___ Expressing positive emotions to others is risky.
8. ___ Expressing positive emotions to others damages relationships.

Appendix D

Big Five Inventory (John et al., 1991) Agreeableness Scale (Studies 2 and 3)

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement using the scale provided.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Strongly agree

I see myself as someone who...

1. Tends to find fault in others
2. Is helpful and unselfish with others
3. Starts quarrels with others
4. Has a forgiving nature
5. Is generally trusting
6. Can be cold and aloof
7. Is considerate and kind to almost everyone
8. Is sometimes rude to others
9. Likes to cooperate with others

Appendix E

Emotional Disclosure Instructions and Scale (Study 2)

In life we often face events that can be very upsetting or distressing. At the end of the day we often have to interact with other people, such as a romantic partner, and choose how much or how little of what happened that we will share, or express, to them.

Think back to the last day that a really upsetting event occurred. Think about what happened and how you felt. Try to remember, to the best of your ability, what happened when you later saw your romantic partner. When you saw your romantic partner, how did you express (or not express) to him/her that something bad happened or that you were upset? Please describe in your own words.

(Participants enter free response description)

When I saw my romantic partner later that day...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Completely

1. I told my partner the details about what happened
2. I fully shared what I was feeling (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) with him/her
3. I tried to keep my negative emotions to myself
4. I tried to control my negative emotions about what happened by not talking about them
5. I told my partner directly that I had a bad day
6. I told my partner directly that I was feeling badly

Appendix F

Trust Scale (Studies 3, 4, and 6)

Thinking of your current romantic partner (roommate), rate your agreement with the following statements using the scale provided.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all true				Somewhat true				Completely true

My partner (roommate)....

1. Is an excellent judge of my character
2. "Gets the facts right" about me
3. Esteems me, shortcomings and all
4. Values my abilities and opinions
5. Really listens to me
6. Is responsive to my needs

Appendix G

Emotional Disclosure Instructions and Scale (Study 3)

In life we often face events that can be very upsetting or distressing. At the end of the day we often have to interact with other people, such as our roommate, and choose how much or how little of what happened that we will share, or express, to them.

When you experience an upsetting event, how do you typically express it (or not express it) to your roommate?

(Participants enter free response description)

When I experience an upsetting event and come home to my roommate...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Completely

7. I tell my roommate the details about what happened
8. I fully share what I am feeling (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) with him/her
9. I try to keep my negative emotions to myself
10. I try to control my negative emotions about what happened by not talking about them
11. I tell my roommate directly that I had a bad day
12. I tell my roommate directly that I am feeling badly

Appendix H

International Personality Item Pool (IPIP; Goldberg, 1999) Agreeableness Scale (Study 4)

Here are some phrases that describe people's behaviours. Please use the rating scale below to indicate how accurately each statement describes **you**. Describe yourself as you generally are now, not as you wish to be in the future. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself.

1	2	3	4	5
Very inaccurate		Neither accurate nor inaccurate		Very accurate

1. Am interested in people
2. Feel little concern for others
3. Sympathize with others' feelings
4. Am not interested in other people's problems
5. Have a soft heart
6. Take time out for others
7. Insult people
8. Feel others' emotions
9. Am not really interested in others
10. Make people feel at ease

Appendix I

Emotional Disclosure Instructions and Scale (Study 4)

Everyone experiences upsetting or distressing events from time to time. At the end of the day we often have to interact with other people, such as a romantic partner, and choose how much or how little of what happened we will share with, or express to, them. When your partner has a bad day, how does he/she typically express it (or not express it) to you?

(Participants enter free response description)

When your romantic partner sees you at the end of a bad day...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Completely

1. My partner tells me the details about what happened
2. My partner shares what he/she is feeling (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) with me
3. My partner tells me directly that he/she has had a bad day
4. My partner tells me directly that he/she is feeling badly

Appendix J

Trust Manipulation Instructions and Items (Study 5)

Enhanced Trust Condition

Now, we'd like to ask you some questions about your romantic partner. Please indicate whether the following statements apply to you by selecting *TRUE* or *FALSE*. After this section, we will show you a summary of your responses to the true or false questions.

1. I can never trust my partner.
2. I never feel comfortable confiding in partner, no matter what it is about
3. I can't think of a time when my partner provided me with as much support as I would have liked.
4. I strongly believe that the future of my relationship is a gamble.
5. My partner is extremely unpredictable. I never know how he/she is going to act from one moment to the next.
6. My partner is never dependable, especially when it comes to things that are important to me.
7. Every day, I wonder how much my partner truly cares for me.
8. Although I wish my partner would share things with me, he/she usually doesn't.
9. My partner typically reacts negatively when I expose my weaknesses to him/her.
10. When I share my problems with my partner, I know he/she will be critical of me even before I say anything.
11. My partner frequently breaks the promises he/she makes to me.
12. My partner never understands anything about me.
13. My partner never listens to anything I say.
14. Usually my partner doesn't seem at all interested in what I'm thinking and feeling.
15. My partner is never responsive to my needs.

After participants responded to these 15 items, they viewed a page displaying their pattern of responses to highlight how many times they selected *FALSE* versus *TRUE*.

Sample of summary page:

<i>Please indicate whether the following statements apply to you, by selecting TRUE or FALSE</i>		15/15	
	TRUE	FALSE	
1. I can never trust my partner.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
2. I never feel comfortable confiding in my partner, no matter what it is about.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
3. I can't think of a time when my partner provided me with as much support as I would have liked.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
4. I strongly believe that the future of my relationship is a gamble.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
5. My partner is extremely unpredictable. I never know how he/she is going to act from one moment to the next.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
6. My partner is never dependable, especially when it comes to things that are important to me.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
7. Every day, I wonder how much my partner truly cares for me.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
8. Although I wish my partner would share things with me, he/she usually doesn't.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
9. My partner typically reacts negatively when I expose my weaknesses to him/her.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
10. When I share my problems with my partner, I know he/she will be critical of me even before I say anything.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
11. My partner frequently breaks the promises he/she makes to me.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
12. My partner never understands anything about me.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
13. My partner never listens to anything I say.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
14. Usually my partner doesn't seem at all interested in what I'm thinking and feeling.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
15. My partner is never responsive to my needs.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Control Group

Completed Reis (2006) Perceived Responsiveness scale.

Next, we'd like to ask you some questions about your romantic partner. Using the scale below, please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements about your partner.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Not at all true				Somewhat true				Completely true

My partner...

1. ... is an excellent judge of my character.
2. ... sees the "real" me.
3. ... "gets the facts right" about me.
4. ... "esteems me, shortcomings and all"
5. ... values and respects the whole package that is the "real" me.
6. ... focuses on the "best side" of me.
7. ... is aware of what I am thinking and feeling.
8. ... understands me.
9. ... really listens to me.
10. ... expresses liking and encouragement for me.
11. ... seems interested in what I am thinking and feeling.
12. ... is on "the same wavelength" with me.
13. ... respects me.
14. ... is responsive to my needs.
15. ... cares about me.
16. ... has a genuine interest in my well- being.
17. ... is concerned about how I am feeling.
18. ... values my abilities and opinions

Appendix K

Emotional Disclosure Instructions and Scale (Study 5)

We'd like to ask you some questions about how you communicate with your romantic partner when you feel different emotions. When you experience an upsetting event that makes you *angry* or an upsetting event that makes you *sad*, how willing are you to talk about what happened and express your feelings to your partner?

**Note: We would like you to think about how willing you are to communicate openly with your partner when these emotions are caused by something other than your partner. That is, please don't tell us how willing you are to communicate with your partner when he/she makes you angry, but rather when something or someone else makes you angry.

When you feel ANGRY (SAD), to what extent would you...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Completely

1. Tell your partner the details about what happened/why you feel that way
2. Share what you are feeling with your partner
3. Keep your feelings to yourself
4. Control your negative emotions by not talking about them
5. Keep the details about what happened to yourself
6. Tell your partner directly about how you are feeling

Appendix L

Emotional Disclosure Instructions and Scale (Study 6)

(After describing an upsetting experience that was either their fault or not their fault)

We are interested in your communication with your romantic partner about this experience. Some people choose not to talk about these kinds of experiences, while other people tell their partner about what happened and openly express their emotions. Please think about your own communication with your romantic partner when you had this upsetting experience.

To what extent did you...

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not at all						Completely

1. Tell your partner the details about what happened?
2. Share what you were feeling (e.g., anger, frustration, sadness) with him/her?
3. Keep your feelings to yourself?
4. Control your negative emotions by not talking about them?
5. Keep the details about what happened to yourself?
6. Tell your partner directly that you were feeling upset?