

# Diminishing Self-Disclosure to Maintain Security in Partners' Care

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Six studies demonstrate that perceivers' desire to bond with targets motivates perceivers to misconstrue their own self-disclosure in ways that maintain perceivers' security in targets' care and commitment. Perceivers who strongly valued relationships with targets reported high levels of global self-disclosure, consistent with many findings suggesting salutary effects of disclosure. However, these same perceivers reported low self-disclosure of needs and desires in hypothetical (Study 1) and actual (Study 2) situations characterized by targets' unresponsive behavior. Similarly, in daily report (Study 3) and behavioral observation (Study 4) studies, perceivers who valued relationships with targets perceived high levels of self-disclosure when targets were responsive, but they perceived low self-disclosure when targets were unresponsive, and these perceptions seemed partly illusory. In turn, these perceptions of low self-disclosure in situations characterized by partners' unresponsive behavior predicted decreased perceptions of diagnosticity of targets' behavior (Studies 1–3) and buffered the negative affective and interpersonal effects of unresponsive behavior (Study 4). Experimental manipulations (Studies 5 and 6) demonstrated the motivational nature of perceived self-disclosure. Collectively, the results suggest that a desire to bond with targets motivates perceivers to downplay the diagnosticity of targets' unresponsive behavior through diminishing their self-disclosure, in turn preserving perceivers' trust in targets' care and commitment.

**Keywords:** trust, responsiveness, disclosure, bias, motivation

Trust that a partner values and cares for the self is an important determinant of relationship quality (Clark & Lemay, 2010; Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). This trust facilitates the development of intimacy (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998; Reis & Shaver, 1988), bolsters relationship satisfaction (Lemay, Clark, & Feeney, 2007; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 2000), motivates accommodating responses to interpersonal difficulties (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003; Shallcross & Simpson, 2012; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999), and improves the likelihood of relationship persistence (Arriaga, Reed, Goodfriend, & Agnew, 2006; Downey, Freitas, Michaelis, & Khouri, 1998).

Where does this trust come from? Theorizing on interpersonal trust suggests that perceivers' trust is based on their repeated

observations of target partners' behavior in diagnostic situations—situations in which partners' behavior is thought to be indicative of their sentiments toward perceivers (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kelley et al., 2003; Shallcross & Simpson, 2012; Simpson, 2007a, 2007b). Although the conceptualizations of these situations vary, self-disclosure (i.e., the expression of information about the self) of needs and desires may be an important feature of diagnostic situations. That is, perceivers may view situations as more diagnostic of partners' relationship motivations when they have disclosed needs or desires to their partners, relative to situations in which they have not disclosed. When perceivers have disclosed needs or desires, they have the ability to gauge their partners' motivation to respond to those needs and desires, and these observations could impact perceivers' trust.

But is trust so serendipitous, so dependent on the information gleaned from these weighty interactions? Are perceivers helpless victims (or beneficiaries) of diagnostic situations and the messages they convey? Or perhaps is diagnosticity itself in the eye of the beholder? In the current research, we test the prediction that perceivers selectively perceive diagnosticity, including whether they have disclosed their needs and desires to partners, in a manner that supports desired conclusions regarding partners' care and commitment. In our view, people are not passive observers of diagnostic situations. Rather, the perceived diagnosticity of situations, like most interpersonal cognitions, can be driven by perceivers' goals.

## Self-Disclosure and Situational Diagnosticity

We propose that perceivers are more likely to perceive partners' behaviors as diagnostic of partners' relationship sentiments and

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motivations when perceivers believe they have disclosed their needs and desires to partners. The perception of this self-disclosure may contribute to their belief that partners were aware of an opportunity to respond in a supportive or otherwise prorelationship manner, which narrows the range of attributions for partners' unresponsive behavior. That is, when partners behave in a cold, selfish, or neglectful manner, the perception that one disclosed needs and desires reduces the perceived likelihood that partners' behavior was due to partners' lack of awareness, increasing the likelihood that perceivers interpret this behavior as the result of partners' lack of care, lack of commitment, or unwillingness to sacrifice for the self and relationship. In contrast, when perceivers believe they have not communicated their needs and desires to partners, lack of awareness may be a viable explanation of partners' negative behaviors. Hence, people may often use the clarity of their own self-disclosure of needs and desires as a way of discerning whether situations should be considered diagnostic of partners' sentiments.

A number of findings are consistent with our argument that self-disclosure serves as a source of information regarding situational diagnosticity. When needs for support arise, people tend to express those needs to their partners, and this expression tends to elicit support provision from their partners (Clark & Lemay, 2010; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Laurenceau et al., 1998). Moreover, people often use self-disclosure to build close relationships (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979; Omarzu, 2000). These findings suggest that people know that disclosure sometimes elicits responsiveness, especially from partners who value and care for them. On the other hand, by revealing potentially negative information or vulnerabilities that could be exploited, disclosure also increases the risk of rejection and loss of power, and people also seem to be aware of this risk (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Kelly & McKillop, 1996). For instance, people with a high need for approval (Brundage, Derlega, & Cash, 1976) and who perceive a high risk of rejection (Omarzu, 2000) are reluctant to disclose personal information about themselves, and people seem to calibrate their self-disclosure of emotion with their confidence in their partner's care, taking the risk of revealing emotional vulnerabilities only to the extent that they are confident that this disclosure will not be met with rejection (Lemay & Clark, 2008). Hence, people do seem to be aware that self-disclosure can create a situation that reveals the partner's sentiments toward the self and relationship, whether positive or negative.

### Motivated Perceptions of Lack of Disclosure

When people desire to maintain a close, communal relationship with a particular partner, as indicated by strong relationship commitment (Rusbult & Buunk, 1993) and care for the partner's welfare (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004), they usually want the partner to reciprocate these sentiments (Holmes & Rempel, 1989). Indeed, care for partners' welfare coincides with interest in partners' reciprocating care (Clark, Dubash, & Mills, 1998), and commitment is dependent on partners exhibiting signs of reciprocated commitment (Wieselquist et al., 1999). Perceiving such reciprocation may satisfy evolved needs to forge stable bonds characterized by mutual care (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). As these relationships depend on the motivation of both partners (Attridge, Berscheid, & Simpson, 1995; Drigotas, Rusbult, &

Verette, 1999), events that signal partners' lack of care or commitment may threaten perceivers' goals to maintain these relationships. Moreover, perceivers' commitment and care toward a partner reflect dependence on the relationship and heighten their feelings of vulnerability to emotional pain and more tangible losses when they are confronted with the threat of abandonment or mistreatment by the partner (Lemay, Overall, & Clark, 2012; Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006; Wieselquist et al., 1999). People engage in a variety of strategies to reduce these feelings of vulnerability (see Murray et al., 2006). For instance, they may engage in prorelationship behaviors that make partners feel similarly dependent on the relationship, which may restore power imbalances and reduce the perceived likelihood of rejection (Murray et al., 2009). Alternatively, they may withdraw their psychological investment in the relationship and devalue their partner as a source of connection, which could also restore power imbalances and reduce the sting of anticipated rejection (Murray et al., 2000).

Most relevant to the current research, people may regulate their feelings of vulnerability through the use of motivated cognitive strategies that govern the appraisal of situations and interpretation of partners' behaviors (see Murray et al., 2006). For instance, people who protect themselves from the threat of rejection by reducing dependence and devaluing the partner may interpret the partner's behaviors in negative ways that facilitate and justify this distancing decision, whereas people who decide to manage feelings of vulnerability by seeking greater connection with the partner may interpret the same behavior in positive ways that provide reassurance regarding the partner's trustworthiness and therefore motivate and justify continued dependence (see Murray et al., 2006).

These cognitive strategies may target perceptions of situational diagnosticity. Strategies involving reduction of dependence on the partner may involve perceiving cold, neglectful, or selfish behaviors as especially diagnostic of the partner's underlying sentiments and motivations. Strategies that involve maintaining connection and trust may instead include perceiving such unresponsive behaviors as irrelevant to the partner's true feelings and relationship motives, which would help justify a decision to maintain connection. Of course, motivated perceivers could also try to regulate trust by altering their views of whether partners behaved in unresponsive ways, and some findings suggest that people do have biased perceptions (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay et al., 2007) and memories (Lemay & Neal, 2013) of partners' responsiveness. However, the presence of unresponsive behavior may sometimes be so clear that the occurrence of the behavior is undeniable, requiring perceivers to rely on other strategies to facilitate their connection goals, such as redefining the situation. Under these conditions, altering perceptions of situational diagnosticity may be a commonly used method of reaching the desired conclusion that the partner still cares for the self and relationship.

However, motivation does not have an unfettered influence over cognitive process (otherwise people would never experience undesired cognitions). Perceivers' ability to reach desired conclusions is constrained by their ability to construct seemingly reasonable justifications for those conclusions (Kunda, 1990). This constraint may be relevant to perceivers' attempts at redefining situations. Perceivers would likely have nagging doubts about their own objectivity if they were to deny the diagnosticity of partners' unresponsive behavior without a seemingly rational justification.

To achieve a sense of conviction in the conclusion that unresponsive behaviors are nondiagnostic, they must be able to point to seemingly supportive evidence. We expect that perceivers often underestimate their own self-disclosure of needs and desires as a way of supporting the claim that partners' behaviors lack diagnosticity.

For a number of reasons, this strategy may be especially compelling. First, this strategy depends on a judgment regarding own behavior (whether one clearly communicated needs and desires to partners). Judgments regarding one's own behavior tend to be made with less accuracy and clarity than judgments of one's own internal states or others' behavior (Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998; Vazire, 2010), and this may indicate greater leeway for cognitive distortion of perceivers' own behavior relative to other strategies, such as those that involve altering perceptions of the behaviors enacted by partners. Second, insufficient disclosure may be argued on the basis of asymmetries in information regarding needs and desires conveyed to partners versus information that is privately experienced. Given that people do not usually express every nuance of their internal experiences, they may easily generate counterfactual thoughts regarding the information that would have elicited partners' responsiveness, if only it were conveyed (e.g., "I should have expressed how important it was to me"). Third, attributing partners' unresponsive behavior to perceivers' own lack of disclosure shifts the responsibility for partners' unresponsive behavior from partners to perceivers, leaving intact perceivers' sense of control regarding partners' responsiveness in future interactions (i.e., next time, if I more clearly disclose my needs, my partner will be responsive) and circumventing potentially destructive feelings of anger (Lemay et al., 2012; Quigley & Tedeschi, 1996; Weiner, Graham, & Chandler, 1982).

Perceivers' chronic relationship motives may determine the use of these strategies. Strong desires to maintain bonds may shift the perceived utility of the available risk-regulation strategies, such that strategies that manage vulnerability by bolstering connection and security, including underestimating disclosure of needs and desires in the face of partners' unresponsive behavior, are preferred over strategies that manage vulnerability by reducing dependence on the partner. This prediction is consistent with interdependence theoretical perspectives on motivated interpersonal cognition. According to interdependence theory, people who strongly want to maintain close relationships (i.e., people who are high in commitment) are motivated to defend their relationships from threat (Rusbult & Van Lange, 1996; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Consistent with this framework, highly committed individuals perceive their relationships as superior to others' relationships (Rusbult, Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000), and they devalue alternative romantic partners (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989), both of which can maintain their feelings of commitment. Moreover, these commitment-enhancing perceptions are strengthened when perceivers are under threat, suggesting that they reflect motivated processes (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Rusbult et al., 2000). Similarly, individuals who care for their partners' welfare tend to perceive their partners as similarly caring in return, even when this does not reflect partners' true sentiments (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Lemay et al., 2007). Research examining positive illusions in relationships (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b) similarly suggests that people view their partners in ways that are consistent with their romantic ideals to justify their own

commitment and that these illusions can enhance relationship quality for both partners. Research on motivated inaccuracy in close relationships also suggests that people are inaccurate at reading their partners' minds when inaccuracy protects them from recognizing threatening information and that this process promotes relationship longevity (Ickes & Simpson, 2003; Simpson, Ickes, & Blackstone, 1995).

Hence, in the current research, we expect that motivated perceivers exhibit a bias in which they underestimate their own self-disclosure in unresponsive situations—situations in which partners behave (or are perceived to behave) in a cold, selfish, or neglectful manner. That is, perceivers who strongly value targets should perceive less disclosure of their needs and desires following targets' unresponsive behavior relative to other situations (i.e., situations in which the partner does not behave in an unresponsive manner), and comparison of disclosure perceptions to external indicators of perceivers' disclosure should suggest that perceivers underestimate their disclosure in these unresponsive situations. In turn, underestimating disclosure should facilitate the conclusion that partners' behavior is not diagnostic of their sentiments. In other words, motivated perceivers may exhibit a backward logic (backward relative to the logic implied in most theorizing on trust) in which they judge situations as diagnostic based on their implications for trust. They see situations as diagnostic, and as characterized by the self-disclosure of needs and desires that makes them so, when partners behave in a caring or otherwise pro-relationship manner, but they claim inadequate disclosure to see situations as nondiagnostic when partners behave in unresponsive ways that could undermine trust. In addition to being consistent with research on biased judgments of interpersonal relationships, this prediction coincides with research on diagnosticity biases, which suggests that people see events as conveying desired information (Vorauer & Ross, 1993) and with general research on motivated reasoning, which suggests that people construct biased impressions, beliefs, and evaluations that support desired conclusions (Kunda, 1990). Hence, it seems plausible that motivations to maintain relationships with targets can bias perceptions of self-disclosure, as these perceptions could support the desired conclusion that targets' unresponsive behavior is not diagnostic, which could protect trust and maintain interdependence.

## Relation to Other Theoretical Views on Self-Disclosure

Our prediction that perceivers who most value relationships wish to see lack of self-disclosure in some situations contradicts most theoretical frameworks involving self-disclosure, which posit that disclosure has positive interpersonal consequences and plays a key role in the maintenance of relationships. For instance, Reis and Shaver's (1988) model of intimacy proposes that intimacy develops through a process of disclosing important information about the self to a partner and then receiving a responsive response. Similarly, social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) proposes that relationship closeness involves increases in the depth of self-disclosure. A number of findings support these views. Self-disclosure has a consistent positive association with relationship evaluations (e.g., Finkenauer, Engels, Branje, & Meeus, 2004; Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011; Hendrick, 1981; Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988; Laurenceau et al., 1998; Meeks, Hendrick, & Hendrick, 1998; Pollmann & Finkenauer, 2009). Moreover, meta-

analyses on self-disclosure suggest that intimate disclosures enhance attraction between disclosers and listeners (Collins & Miller, 1994). From this point of view, people who want relationships should hardly feel threatened by the perception of self-disclosure. To the contrary, their perception of disclosure may even be desired and reassuring.

We do not dispute that self-disclosure often has benefits. However, we believe that a more nuanced approach can reveal the situational factors that shape the meaning and consequences of disclosure. None of the findings described above examined perceptions of self-disclosure of needs and desires in situations characterized by the partner's lack of responsiveness. Hence, none of the findings examined the potentially threatening consequence (i.e., perceived diagnosticity of unresponsive behaviors) of perceived self-disclosure that we have emphasized. Indeed, most of the studies concluding that disclosure enhances relationships involved assessments of self-disclosure that were based on across-situation generalizations (i.e., the degree to which one generally discloses to a particular partner). We would agree that, when measured in this way, high self-disclosure should be associated with positive relationship functioning, as it would suggest the building of intimacy and general trust in the partner's responsiveness to self-disclosure (Reis & Shaver, 1988). These global measures, however, may mask important contextual effects. In specific situations, self-disclosure of needs and desires should increase the likelihood that perceivers define the situation as diagnostic of partners' sentiments. Therefore, following perceived self-disclosure, perceivers should feel trust when partners behave in a responsive manner, but lack of trust when they behave in an unresponsive manner.

### Overview

The conceptual model guiding the present research appears in Figure 1. According to this model, perceivers judge their own self-disclosure of needs and desires in accordance with their partner's responsive behavior, which includes underestimating disclosure when the partner is unresponsive. This process should be stronger when perceivers highly value their relationship with the partner. In turn, given that perceived self-disclosure of needs and desires is thought to serve as a diagnosticity cue, underestimating disclosure should be directly related to perceiving the partner's behavior as less diagnostic of the partner's sentiments. We test these views in six studies. In Studies 1 and 2, using two different methodologies, we contrasted global perceptions of self-disclosure with perceptions of self-disclosure in specific situations characterized by target partners' lack of responsiveness. Consistent with the large body of research suggesting that global self-disclosure has positive relationship consequences, we expected that motivated

perceivers (i.e., perceivers who strongly value a relationship with targets) would claim high global self-disclosure. However, consistent with our analysis of disclosure as diagnosticity, we expected that these perceivers would see lack of disclosure in situations characterized by targets' lack of responsiveness. Furthermore, we expected that this pattern of high global self-disclosure and low self-disclosure in situations characterized by partners' unresponsive behavior would be associated with the most positive relationship perceptions (i.e., reduced perceptions of diagnosticity of partners' unresponsive behavior and increased trust). In Study 3, we used a daily report study to test this model with regard to daily interactions between romantic partners. In Study 4, we tested the model using a behavioral observation study. In Studies 5 and 6, we experimentally manipulated desire to bond and reduction of threat, respectively, to test predictions regarding the motivational nature of this bias.

### Study 1: Perceptions of Hypothetical Events

In Study 1, we compared perceivers' global perceptions of self-disclosure of needs and desires with their perceptions of self-disclosure in unresponsive situations (those characterized by targets' lack of responsiveness). This comparison is central to the distinction between prior research and theory on self-disclosure and the current model. As we described earlier, prior research reveals positive associations of relationship sentiments with global self-disclosure, suggesting that the existence or perception of global disclosure can maintain and enhance relationships. However, perceiving insufficient self-disclosure in unresponsive situations may undermine the diagnosticity of partners' unresponsive behavior and therefore maintain trust in partners' care and commitment, a desirable outcome for perceivers who strongly value maintaining relationships with partners. Hence, perceivers who strongly value their partners should be much more likely to report more global self-disclosure (i.e., that they disclose generally) relative to self-disclosure in specific situations characterized by the partner's unresponsive behavior. In addition, perceivers who strongly value their partners should report more global self-disclosure in their relationships relative to perceivers who do not strongly value their partners. However, when with regard to unresponsive situations, perceivers who value partners should perceive low disclosure, perhaps just as low as the disclosure perceived by those who do not value partners. This tendency to see low self-disclosure in unresponsive situations should be associated with reduced perceptions of diagnosticity in these situations and more trust in partners' care and commitment. In contrast, and consistent with prior research on the relational benefits of global self-disclosure in most other contexts, global perceptions of self-disclosure should be associated with positive relationship percep-

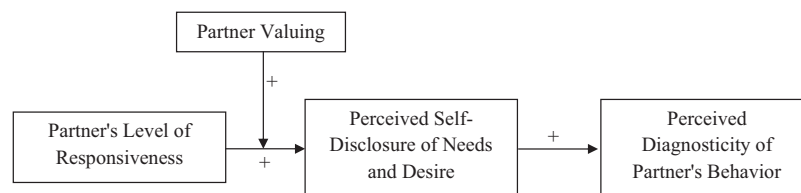


Figure 1. Conceptual model guiding the present research.



tions (i.e., perceiving unresponsive behaviors as nondiagnostic and trusting partners' care and commitment). We tested these predictions using hypothetical vignettes, which allowed us to capture general explanatory styles while holding constant the specific features of interactions. Prior research on attributions in relationships suggests that studies using this methodology produce results that are parallel to studies examining attributions of actual events (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). We directly address this issue by examining actual events in Study 2.

## Method

**Participants.** A sample of 288 participants ( $M$  age = 33 years; 90 males; 195 females) was recruited using two methods. Advertisements were posted on local Internet bulletin boards across the continental United States inviting participants to complete the questionnaire in exchange for entry in cash raffles. In addition, participants were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk, an open website that offers "workers" the ability to complete brief tasks over the Internet in exchange for a small payment. Prior research suggests that samples collected via Amazon Mechanical Turk are more demographically diverse than typical online and college student samples and that data quality is comparable (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). The racial distribution was as follows: 73.5% Caucasian, 9.1% African American, 11.3% Asian, and 6.1% other.<sup>1</sup>

**Procedure.** Participants completed a questionnaire posted on the Internet. We randomly assigned participants to complete the questionnaire with regard to a valued or devalued partner. Participants who were assigned to the valued partner condition were asked to complete the questionnaire with regard to someone they "see often and care very much about." Participants who were assigned to the devalued partner condition were asked to complete the questionnaire with regard to someone they "see often but do not care very much about." Participants then completed the measures of partner valuing and global self-disclosure described below. Next, they read four hypothetical vignettes in which this partner behaved in an unresponsive manner (i.e., the partner did not invite the participant to an event the participant wanted to attend, the partner did not seem interested in talking about the participant's upsetting experience at school or work, the partner rejected the participant's request for a ride to the airport, and the partner made a critical remark about the participant regarding a personal quality about which the participant was insecure). After each scenario, participants completed the scenario-specific measures described below. Finally, participants completed the measures of global trust described below.

### Measures.

**Partner valuing (manipulation check measures).** Participants completed a five-item measure of care for the partner that was adapted from the Communal Strength Scale (Mills et al., 2004; e.g., "Helping [partner name] is a high priority for me"; "I care for [partner name]'s needs"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ), a five-item measure of commitment adapted from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998; e.g., "I want our relationship to last for a very long time"; "I am committed to maintaining my relationship with [partner name]"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ) and a four-item measure of desire to be valued by the partner (e.g., "I want [partner name] to be committed to our relationship"; "I want

[partner name] to have positive views of me"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ). Items were completed on 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Perceived global self-disclosure.** Participants completed a three-item measure assessing global perceptions of their self-disclosure of needs, desires, and feelings (e.g., "I do not clearly communicate my desires to [partner name]"; "I do not clearly communicate my needs to [partner name]"; "I do not clearly communicate my feelings to [partner name]"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ). Items were completed on 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Items were worded in the negative direction to maximize comparability with the scenario-specific measure described below, but they were reverse-scored so that higher values indicate more self-disclosure.

**Scenario-specific measures.** For each hypothetical scenario, participants completed an item assessing perceived diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior (e.g., "[Partner name] would do this because [partner name] did not want to spend time with me"; "[Partner name] would do this because [partner name] did not care about my feelings"; "[Partner name] would do this because [partner name] did not care about me"). Items were completed on 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ) and were averaged across the four vignettes. Higher values indicate greater perceived diagnosticity of the unresponsive behavior.

Using the same response scales, participants also completed an item assessing disclosure of needs, feelings, and preferences with regard to each situation (e.g., "[Partner name] would do this because I did not clearly express my desires to go"; "[Partner name] would do this because I did not clearly express my needs to [partner name]"; "[Partner name] would do this because I did not clearly express my situation to [partner name]"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .77$ ). Items were averaged across all four vignettes and scored so that higher scores reflected greater situation-specific perceived disclosure.

**Global trust in partner's care and commitment.** Participants completed measures of perceived partner care and perceived partner commitment that were analogous to the own care and own commitment measures described above (e.g., "Helping me is a high priority for [partner name]"; "[Partner name] wants our relationship to last for a long time"; Cronbach's  $\alpha$ s = .88 and .91). Scores on these measures were averaged to create an index of global trust in the partner's care and commitment (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ).

<sup>1</sup> The challenges of conducting research over the Internet are well documented (Kraut et al., 2004). These challenges include multiple submissions by the same individual, inability to control the testing environment, which introduces noise, high dropout rates, and reductions of participants' investment of time and energy into the research tasks. We took a number of steps to address these issues. First, we tracked Internet protocol (IP) addresses and eliminated submissions that were identical to a prior submission with regard to both the IP address and the participant's age, which should address the problem of repeat responders. Second, to address issues of reduced investment of time and energy, we tracked questionnaire completion times and eliminated all responses provided by participants who did not spend more than 5 min on the questionnaire. All analyses were conducted after implementing this rule. Third, to mitigate the issue of increased noise, we collected large samples. These procedures also were implemented in the other online studies.

## Results and Discussion

**Manipulation check.** To be sure that participants selected partners who varied in intended ways, we compared scores on the measures of partner valuing (care, commitment, and desire to be valued by the partner) across the valued and devalued partner conditions. Participants reported more care for the partner ( $M = 6.03$ ), commitment to the relationship ( $M = 6.22$ ) and desire to be valued by the partner ( $M = 6.25$ ) in the valued partner condition relative to the devalued partner condition ( $M = 3.01, 2.83$ , and  $3.48$ , respectively),  $t(285) = -20.75, p < .001$ ;  $t(284) = -22.59, p < .001$ ; and  $t(284) = -17.47, p < .001$ ; respectively. Hence, the selected partners varied in intended ways.<sup>2</sup>

**Comparing global and specific perceptions of self-disclosure.** We compared global and specific perceptions of self-disclosure as a function of participants' valuing of their partner using a 2 (measure type: global or specific)  $\times$  2 (partner condition: valued or devalued partner) mixed analysis of variance with repeated measures on the measure type factor. The Measure Type  $\times$  Partner Condition interaction was significant,  $F(1, 259) = 78.10, \eta^2 = .23, p < .001$ , and qualified main effects of measure type,  $F(1, 259) = 12.21, \eta^2 = .05, p < .01$ , and partner condition,  $F(1, 259) = 32.84, \eta^2 = .11, p < .001$ . Means are presented in Figure 2. First we compared responses to the global and specific measures in the devalued and valued partner conditions. That is, do perceivers perceive less self-disclosure in unresponsive situations relative to their perceptions of global disclosure? Participants in the devalued partner condition reported less global self-disclosure relative to self-disclosure in situations characterized by the partner's lack of responsiveness,  $F(1, 130) = 15.14, \eta^2 = .10, p < .001$ , whereas participants in the valued partner condition reported more global self-disclosure ( $M = 5.27$ ) relative to self-disclosure in these unresponsive situations ( $M = 3.86$ ),  $F(1, 129) = 71.87, \eta^2 = .36, p < .001$ , consistent with our prediction that motivated perceivers would claim high global disclosure but would deny disclosure in unresponsive situations. We also compared the devalued and valued partner conditions on both global and specific measures. In other words, do perceivers who value partners report more or less global and specific self-disclosure relative to perceivers who do not value partners? Whereas participants reported more global self-disclosure to valued partners relative to devalued partners,  $F(1, 262) = 91.77, \eta^2 = .26, p < .001$ , their self-disclosure

in the unresponsive situations were just as low with valued partners as with devalued partners ( $p > .18$ ), supporting our prediction that the association between self-disclosure and positive relationship sentiments applies to global measures of disclosure, but not to measures of disclosure in unresponsive situations.

**Predicting perceived diagnosticity and trust.** We expect that perceivers who strongly value a relationship with partners are motivated to perceive low self-disclosure in situations characterized by partners' lack of responsiveness because high self-disclosure in these situations engenders perceptions of diagnosticity. Global self-disclosure, however, should reflect well-functioning relationships and positive relationship perceptions, and therefore should be associated with perceiving unresponsive behaviors as less diagnostic. To test these predictions, we regressed situation-specific diagnosticity perceptions on both situation-specific and global perceptions of self-disclosure. Situation-specific self-disclosure (in unresponsive situations) positively predicted diagnosticity perceptions,  $\beta = .29, t(258) = 5.66, sr^2 = .083, p < .001$ , whereas global self-disclosure negatively predicted diagnosticity perceptions,  $\beta = -.55, t(258) = -10.65, sr^2 = .295, p < .001$ . Consistent with our predictions, participants saw targets' negative behavior as nondiagnostic of care—a trust-protective interpretation—when they saw low self-disclosure in unresponsive situations, and when they generally perceived their relationship to be high in self-disclosure.

We tested a similar model of global trust in targets' care and commitment, which produced similar results. Whereas self-disclosure in unresponsive situations was inversely associated with perceived care and commitment,  $\beta = -.22, t(245) = -4.37, sr^2 = .046, p < .001$ , global self-disclosure was positively associated with perceived care and commitment,  $\beta = .64, t(245) = 12.90, sr^2 = .399, p < .001$ . Hence, participants were the most trusting when they perceived lack of disclosure in situations characterized by targets' unresponsive behavior and perceived high disclosure globally. These results provide strong evidence that global and specific perceptions of self-disclosure can have opposite implications for trust.

**Summary.** Results of this study supported our predictions regarding differences between global perceptions of self-disclosure and perceptions in hypothetical situations featuring partners' unresponsive behavior. Participants who strongly valued a relationship with a target person perceived high levels of self-disclosure in a global sense, but they also perceived low levels of self-disclosure in unresponsive situations. This pattern of high global self-disclosure and low self-disclosure in unresponsive situations was associated with reduced perceptions of diagnosticity of unresponsive behavior and increased trust in partners' care and commitment, which is consistent with both prior research suggesting benefits of self-disclosure generally, and the current prediction proposing benefits of perceived lack of disclosure in unresponsive

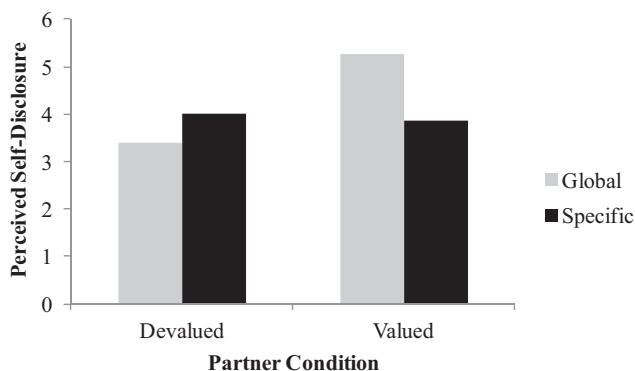


Figure 2. Perceived self-disclosure as a function of type of measure (global vs. specific) and partner valuing (Study 1).

<sup>2</sup> We argued in the introduction that people who highly value relationships with partners, as indicated by high care or commitment, tend to desire reciprocation of these sentiments. Consistent with this argument, the correlations of care and commitment with desire to be valued by the partner were very strong,  $r(286) = .84, p < .001$ ; and  $r(286) = .89, p < .001$ .

situations.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, participants who did not value a relationship with the target person exhibited a trust-diminishing tendency to see more disclosure in unresponsive situations than globally. Both patterns are consistent with the view that levels of relationship desire determine whether people hold trust-enhancing or trust-diminishing perceptions.

## Study 2: Memories of Prior Events

We conducted Study 2 to replicate results of Study 1 using a different methodology. Rather than using hypothetical scenarios, we asked participants to describe an actual prior event in which they were recipients of unresponsive behavior.

## Method

**Participants.** Study 2 included 130 participants ( $M$  age = 34 years; 34 males; 96 females) who were recruited using the same two methods described in Study 1. The racial distribution was as follows: 79% Caucasian, 8.9% African American, 8.1% Asian, and 4% other.

**Procedure.** Participants completed a questionnaire posted on the Internet. We randomly assigned participants to report on a valued or devalued partner using the same instructions used in Study 1. Participants then completed the measures of partner valuing and global self-disclosure described below. They then recalled and described a time within the last 12 months in which they experienced a stressful event and in which the identified relationship partner did not provide help or support. To facilitate participants' recall of such an event, participants first completed a checklist containing some common stressful events (e.g., moving to a new residence, problems in a relationship, a setback at school or work). Participants then completed the situation-specific measures with regard to the selected event.

## Measures.

**Partner valuing (manipulation check measures).** Participants completed the same measures of partner valuing described in Study 1, including care for the partner (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ), commitment (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ), and desire to be valued by the partner (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ). Items were completed using the same 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Perceived global self-disclosure.** Participants completed a four-item measure assessing global perceptions of their self-disclosure of needs and feelings to the partner (e.g., "I do not clearly communicate my feelings to [partner name]"; "I clearly express my needs to [partner name]"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ). Items were completed using the same 7-point response scales and were scored so that higher values indicate more disclosure.

**Situation-specific measures.** Participants completed four items assessing perceived diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior (e.g., "He/she was not helpful or supportive because he/she did not care about my well-being"; "He/she was not helpful or supportive because he/she was not concerned about what was going on in my life"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ). Items were completed using 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*).

Using the same response scales, participants also completed four items assessing their own self-disclosure during the event (e.g.,

"At the time of this event, I did not fully express a need for help or support to [partner name]"; "At the time of this event, I clearly communicated my stress to [partner name]"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ). Items were scored so that higher scores reflected greater disclosure.

## Results and Discussion

**Manipulation check.** Participants reported more care for the partner ( $M = 6.13$ ), commitment to the relationship ( $M = 6.33$ ) and desire to be valued by the partner ( $M = 6.26$ ) in the valued partner condition relative to the devalued partner condition ( $M = 3.73$ , 3.67, and 4.28, respectively),  $t(128) = -12.51$ ,  $p < .001$ ;  $t(128) = -13.48$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and  $t(128) = -9.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ; respectively. Hence, once again, the selected partners varied in intended ways.<sup>4</sup>

**Comparing global and specific perceptions of self-disclosure.** We followed the same analysis strategy described in Study 1. First, we compared global and specific perceptions of self-disclosure as a function of participants' valuing of their partner using a 2 (measure type: global or specific)  $\times$  2 (partner condition: valued or devalued partner) mixed analysis of variance with repeated measures on the measure type factor. The Measure Type  $\times$  Partner Condition interaction was significant,  $F(1, 127) = 6.21$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ , and qualified main effects of measure type,  $F(1, 127) = 31.07$ ,  $\eta^2 = .20$ ,  $p < .001$ , and partner condition,  $F(1, 127) = 14.72$ ,  $\eta^2 = .10$ ,  $p < .001$ . Means are presented in Figure 3. First we compared responses to the global and specific measures in the devalued and valued partner conditions. That is, do perceivers perceive less self-disclosure in unresponsive situations relative to their perceptions of global disclosure? Consistent with predictions that motivated perceivers are reluctant to perceive self-disclosure in unresponsive situations, the tendency to report greater global self-disclosure relative to self-disclosure in specific unresponsive situations was much stronger for participants reporting on a valued partner (global  $M = 5.26$  vs. specific  $M = 3.70$ ),  $F(1, 69) = 35.01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ; than for participants reporting on a devalued partner (global  $M = 3.78$  vs. specific  $M = 3.32$ ),  $F(1, 58) = 3.12$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .09$ . We also examined conditional effects of partner condition, which examine whether perceivers who value partners (relative to perceivers who do not value partners) report more or less self-disclosure. Participants reported more global self-disclosure to valued partners relative to devalued partners,  $F(1, 128) = 27.36$ ,  $\eta^2 = .18$ ,  $p < .001$ , but perceptions of self-disclosure in specific unresponsive situations did not vary across participants reporting on valued and devalued partners ( $p > .21$ ). Consistent with our predictions, the association between self-disclosure and positive sentiments about the partner applied to global self-disclosure, but not to self-disclosure in unresponsive situations.

<sup>3</sup> Sex did not have a significant main or moderating effect in any of the analyses ( $ps > .18$ ). In addition, sex did not have consistent moderating effects in subsequent studies. Hence, sex was dropped as a moderator. In some cases, sex did have a significant main effect, but in all cases, critical results remained significant when controlling for sex.

<sup>4</sup> Once again, care and commitment were highly correlated with desire to be valued by the partner,  $r(130) = .83$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and  $r(130) = .86$ ,  $p < .001$ ; respectively, supporting our argument that people who value relationships with partners desire reciprocation.



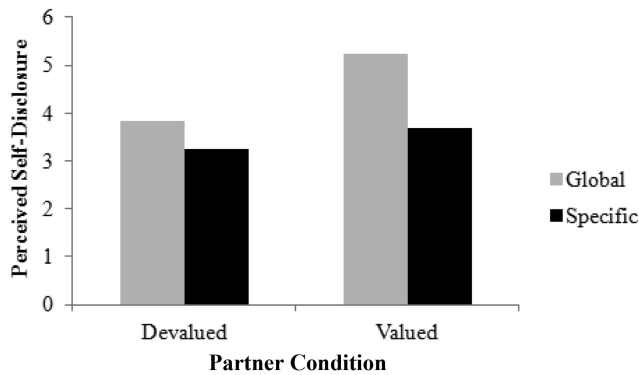


Figure 3. Perceived self-disclosure as a function of type of measure (global vs. specific) and partner valuing (Study 2).

**Predicting perceived diagnosticity.** As described earlier, we expect that perceivers who strongly value relationships with partners are motivated to perceive low self-disclosure in situations characterized by partners' lack of responsiveness because high self-disclosure in these situations should be related to perceiving unresponsive behaviors as diagnostic. In contrast, global self-disclosure should reflect well-functioning relationships and be associated with positive relationship perceptions. Therefore, global self-disclosure should be associated with perceiving unresponsive behaviors as less diagnostic.

To test these ideas, we regressed situation-specific diagnosticity perceptions on global perceptions of self-disclosure and perceptions of self-disclosure in specific unresponsive situations. Whereas self-disclosure in specific unresponsive situations was positively associated with diagnosticity perceptions,  $\beta = .42$ ,  $t(126) = 5.56$ ,  $sr^2 = .162$ ,  $p < .001$ , global self-disclosure was negatively associated with diagnosticity perceptions,  $\beta = -.52$ ,  $t(126) = -6.99$ ,  $sr^2 = .256$ ,  $p < .001$ . Hence, participants saw partners' prior unresponsive behaviors as nondiagnostic—a trust-protective response—when they saw lack of disclosure in that specific situation and when they generally perceived their relationship to be high in self-disclosure. These findings provide replication evidence regarding the divergent associations of global self-disclosure and self-disclosure in unresponsive situations.

**Summary.** Perceivers who strongly valued a relationship with targets perceived high levels of self-disclosure in a global sense, but they also perceived low levels of self-disclosure in a prior event featuring targets' lack of responsiveness. This combination was associated with reduced perceptions of diagnosticity of the unresponsive behavior, which is a trust-protective interpretation. These findings are consistent with prior research on the interpersonal benefits of global disclosure as well as with the current prediction that perceiving lack of disclosure in situations characterized by partners' lack of responsiveness can help perceivers dismiss the unresponsive behavior as nondiagnostic.<sup>5</sup>

### Study 3: Daily Report Study

In Study 3, we tested our predictions using a daily report study involving both members of romantic dyads. We expected that perceivers who valued relationships with partners (i.e., those who report a high level of commitment and care) would report more

self-disclosure in general (i.e., across the daily reports). This pattern would be consistent with prior research suggesting that self-disclosure usually facilitates closeness and is associated with positive sentiments. However, we expected a more nuanced pattern once we considered the daily context of partners' behavior. Specifically, we expected that these perceivers would judge their disclosure in accordance with partners' responsive behavior and that the tendency to report higher self-disclosure to valued partners would disappear on days when partners are unresponsive. Once again, we expected that perceptions of low self-disclosure would have a benefit, in that they would be associated with perceiving the partner's unresponsive behavior as less diagnostic of the partner's sentiments.

As we stated earlier, these perceptions of low disclosure and diagnosticity may be biased and constructed by perceivers to subjectively fulfill their goals. As a first step in addressing this bias aspect of our predictions, we used target partners' perceptions as accuracy benchmarks. We assessed target partners' perceptions of perceivers' disclosure and the diagnosticity of their own behavior, and we controlled for these perceptions in our analyses. Following prior research on biased interpersonal perceptions (e.g., Kenny & Acitelli, 2001; Lemay et al., 2007; Murray et al., 1996a), this procedure allows us to statistically remove the influence of targets' perceptions from analyses of perceivers' perceptions. To the extent that convergence across perceivers and targets reflects perceivers' accuracy, this procedure statistically removes the portion of perceivers' perceptions explained by accuracy.

This study also addresses some limitations of Studies 1 and 2. Study 1 examined attributions of hypothetical events, which may not reflect attributions of actual events. Study 2 examined attributions of actual events, but these events occurred in the distant past and so memory biases could have altered the results. The daily report method used in Study 3 addresses these issues by examining perceptions of everyday relationship events. Moreover, Studies 1 and 2 compared perceptions of disclosure in specific unresponsive situations to perceptions of global disclosure. Although this comparison is theoretically relevant in light of the current model and the bulk of prior research on global perceptions of disclosure, it did not address disclosure perceptions in specific situations characterized by the partner's responsive behavior, leaving open the possibility that perceived disclosure is threatening to trust in all specific situations (rather than just unresponsive situations). The current study corrects this issue by examining specific relationship events (i.e., daily interaction) that vary in terms of valence of partner behavior.

### Method

**Participants.** Study 3 included a sample of 98 heterosexual romantically involved dyads. Due to a computer error, responses from three participants were missing ( $N = 193$  participants). Participants were recruited through a variety of methods, including

<sup>5</sup> Sex did not significantly moderate any of the reported effects ( $p > .32$ ). However, sex did have a significant main effect on judgments of disclosure,  $F(1, 125) = 3.93$ ,  $p = .05$ . Women reported more disclosure ( $M = 4.15$ ) than men ( $M = 3.61$ ). The Measure Type  $\times$  Partner Condition interaction remained significant when including sex as a covariate,  $F(1, 126) = 5.92$ ,  $p < .05$ , and the pattern of the interaction remained the same.



an undergraduate psychology subject pool, flyers posted on college campuses and various retail locations, and newspaper and Internet advertisements ( $M$  age = 23 years). Most participants described their relationship as dating (75%), engaged to be married (4%), or married (13%).<sup>6</sup> The racial distribution was as follows: 80% Caucasian, 6.2% African American, 6.7% Asian, and 7% other.

**Procedure.** Participants arrived to the laboratory with their study partner and completed the baseline measures described below (in addition to measures that are not relevant to the current investigation). Participants were asked to complete daily questionnaires for seven consecutive evenings, beginning the following evening. Daily questionnaires were completed on a secure website that recorded the date and time of completion, which allowed us to screen responses with regard to timing of completion (i.e., one per evening). Due to missing or invalid (due to timing) daily reports, the total number of daily observations was 1,239. The daily questionnaires included the daily measures described below (in addition to measures that are not relevant to the current investigation).

#### Baseline measures.

**Partner valuing of targets.** Participants completed two measures of the extent to which they valued their relationship with their study partner, including a five-item measure of relationship commitment (e.g., “I want our relationship to last for a very long time”; “I am committed to maintaining my relationship with him/her”; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .87$ ), and a five-item measure of care for the partner (e.g., “Helping him/her is a high priority for me”; “I care for his/her needs”; Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .81$ ). Items were completed using 9-point response scales (1 = *extremely disagree*; 9 = *extremely agree*). In turn, responses on these two measures were highly correlated (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .77$ ) and were averaged to create an index of partner valuing.

#### Daily measures.

**Daily perception of partner’s responsive behavior.** Participants completed an eight-item measure of their perceptions of their partner’s daily responsive behavior (e.g., “Today, how considerate or thoughtful was your partner toward you?”; “Today, to what extent did your partner sacrifice [e.g., his/her time, goals, or personal wishes] to do something for you?”; “Today, how critical or insulting was your partner toward you?”). Items were completed using 9-point response scales (1 = *not at all*; 9 = *extremely*). After reverse-scoring negatively worded items, responses were averaged to create an index of daily perceptions of the partner’s responsive behavior (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .87$ ). Higher values indicate more responsive behavior.

**Daily perceptions of self-disclosure.** Participants completed a single item assessing the extent to which they disclosed their needs and desires to their partner (“Today, I clearly communicated to my partner my needs and preferences”). Participants also completed an analogous item assessing perceptions of their partner’s self-disclosure (i.e., “Today, my partner clearly communicated to me his/her needs and preferences”). Items were completed using 9-point response scales (1 = *extremely disagree*; 9 = *extremely agree*).

**Daily perceptions of diagnosticity.** Using the same 9-point response scale, participants completed a single item assessing perceptions of the diagnosticity of the partner’s behavior (“Today, my partner’s behavior toward me was a reflection of how he/she feels about me”). Participants also completed an analogous item regarding the diagnosticity of their own behavior.

## Results and Discussion

**Analysis strategy.** We tested predictions using multilevel models that accounted for the nesting of days and individuals within dyads. Random intercepts were estimated for each dyad member to account for the covariance due to making repeated daily assessments of each member. The models estimated the covariance across the two dyad members of these intercepts and of the day-specific residuals, which accounts for potential dyadic interdependence. Given the limited degrees of freedom, slopes were modeled as fixed.

#### Effects of partner valuing on average levels of self-disclosure.

First we sought to replicate prior findings suggesting a positive association between participants’ sentiments toward their partners and self-disclosure in general (i.e., averaged across the daily assessments). We regressed perceivers’ daily perceptions of self-disclosure on their chronic valuing of targets (care and commitment) as assessed during the baseline session. Consistent with prior research suggesting that self-disclosure usually facilitates relationship quality and is associated with positive sentiments, perceivers’ valuing of target partners predicted increased reports of self-disclosure across the sampled days ( $b = .42$ ),  $t(181.71) = 5$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Responsiveness-driven perceptions of self-disclosure.** Next we tested the prediction that perceivers’ perceptions of self-disclosure are especially likely to depend on targets’ responsive behaviors when perceivers strongly value relationships with targets. That is, highly valuing perceivers should perceive high self-disclosure when target partners behaved in a responsive manner, but they should also perceive low disclosure when target partners behaved in an unresponsive manner, perhaps just as low as the disclosure perceived by those who do not value targets. To test this prediction, we regressed perceivers’ daily perceptions of self-disclosure on their daily perceptions of targets’ responsive behavior, perceivers’ chronic valuing of targets, and a product term representing their interaction. We controlled for targets’ perceptions of perceivers’ self-disclosure to control for accuracy of perceivers’ perceptions (i.e., the extent to which targets agreed with perceivers’ judgments of self-disclosure).<sup>7</sup>

The anticipated interaction between perceivers’ chronic valuing of targets and perceivers’ daily perceptions of targets’ behavior was significant,  $b = .11$ ,  $t(948.01) = 3.25$ ,  $p < .01$ . Predicted values are plotted in Figure 4. We examined conditional effects following procedures recommended by Cohen, Cohen, West, and Aiken (2003). First, we examined effects of daily perceived partner responsiveness at low and high levels of chronic valuing, which address whether perceivers deny self-disclosure on days

<sup>6</sup> Although we explicitly stated that participants must bring a romantic partner to the lab, some participants (7%) described their relationship with their study partner as a friendship. It is unclear whether this term refers to a platonic friendship or a casual sexual relationship. Responses provided by these participants were retained in the data analysis.

<sup>7</sup> We centered the predictors on sample means. We did not center the daily predictors on person means because this would preclude us from comparing low valuing and high valuing perceivers when their partner’s behavior is similarly unresponsive. Centering a daily variable on person means eliminates the ability to equate participants on the daily variable. Still, the predicted interaction emerged even when centering the daily predictors on person means ( $b = .15$ ,  $t = 3.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

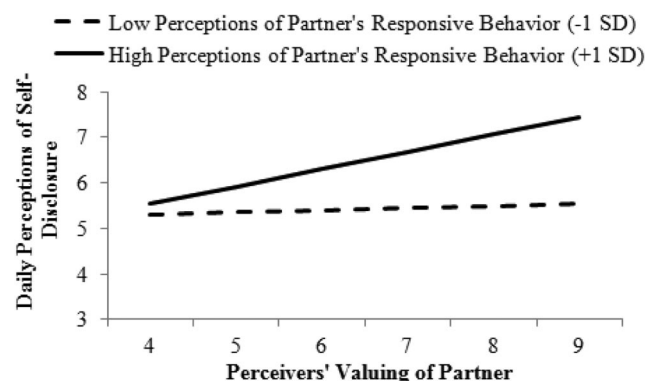


Figure 4. Daily perceptions of self-disclosure as a function of daily perceptions of partner's responsive behavior and chronic valuing of the partner (Study 3).

when partners are unresponsive but claim self-disclosure on days when partners are responsive. Daily perceptions of partners' responsiveness more strongly predicted daily perceptions of self-disclosure for perceivers who highly valued targets (1 *SD* above the mean,  $b = .62$ ,  $t(989.83) = 12.79$ ,  $p < .001$ ), than for low-valuing perceivers (1 *SD* below the mean,  $b = .38$ ,  $t(1021.39) = 6.76$ ,  $p < .001$ ). That is, perceivers who valued targets were more likely to consider targets' responsiveness when judging their own self-disclosure.

Next, we examined the effects of perceivers' chronic valuing at low and high levels of daily perceived partner responsiveness. In other words, do perceivers who value targets always see more self-disclosure relative to perceivers who do not value targets, or does this depend on whether partners behaved in a responsive or unresponsive manner that day? Perceivers' who chronically valued targets perceived more self-disclosure than low-valuing perceivers on days when they perceived that targets were relatively responsive (1 *SD* above the mean,  $b = .38$ ,  $t(409.83) = 3.88$ ,  $p < .001$ , but not on days when they thought targets were unresponsive (1 *SD* below the mean;  $p > .55$ ). These results suggest that the above effect in which partner valuing was associated with more self-disclosure only pertained to situations in which the partner behaved in a responsive manner. When partners were unresponsive, perceivers who valued partners saw just as little self-disclosure as perceivers who did not chronically value partners.

This interaction pattern was found while controlling for target partners' judgments of perceivers' self-disclosure, which also predicted perceivers' judgments of their self-disclosure ( $b = .07$ ),  $t(1078.61) = 2.55$ ,  $p < .05$ . This unsurprising effect indicates that, in addition to the bias demonstrated above, there was a small degree of agreement between perceivers and targets regarding perceivers' self-disclosure. Such agreement is an indicator of accuracy. Most important for the present research, we found evidence for the predicted bias while controlling for this agreement between perceivers and targets, suggesting that accuracy cannot explain these results. In addition, we tested another model using partners' perceptions of perceivers' self-disclosure as the outcome variable in place of perceivers' self-perceived disclosure. The interaction reported above was not significant in this model ( $p > .20$ ). Hence, the tendency for highly valuing perceivers to deny

self-disclosure on days when partners were unresponsive was not corroborated by their partner's perceptions of perceivers' self-disclosure, which also suggests that motivated perceivers' denial of self-disclosure was, at least in part, a perceptual bias.

**Predicting perceived diagnosticity.** We expect that motivated perceivers deviate from their typical perceptions of high self-disclosure when partners are unresponsive because the perception of low self-disclosure helps perceivers make the claim that the partner's unresponsive behavior is not diagnostic of the partner's feelings or motivations. To test whether low self-disclosure is indeed associated with low perceived diagnosticity, we regressed perceivers' daily perceptions of diagnosticity on their daily perceptions of self-disclosure. We controlled for target partners' daily perceptions of perceivers' self-disclosure and target partners' daily perceptions of the diagnosticity of their own behavior to be sure that results could not be explained by perceptions of disclosure or diagnosticity that were shared by both perceivers and targets (i.e., accurate perceptions). Perceivers' daily perceptions of self-disclosure strongly predicted their diagnosticity perceptions ( $b = .45$ ),  $t(1102.65) = 16.93$ ,  $p < .001$ . Perceivers who saw themselves as low in self-disclosure on a particular day perceived partners' behavior as less diagnostic of partners' underlying sentiments on that day, and this effect was independent of partners' perceptions of perceivers' disclosure and partners' self-perceptions of diagnosticity.<sup>8</sup>

**Summary.** Perceivers who strongly valued relationships with targets reported more disclosure across the daily reports, consistent with other findings suggesting that disclosure covaries with positive relationship sentiments. However, these perceivers had perceptions of disclosure that were contingent on partners' daily responsive behavior. They saw high self-disclosure on days when partners behaved in a responsive manner, but they saw low disclosure on days when partners were unresponsive, just as low as perceivers who did not value relationships with partners. This pattern was not corroborated by partners' reports of perceivers' self-disclosure, consistent with the hypothesis that perceivers' perceptions of low self-disclosure are, in part, illusory. Seeing lack of disclosure when partners were unresponsive was related to viewing the unresponsive behavior as less diagnostic of partners' sentiments, suggesting that these perceptions of low self-disclosure

<sup>8</sup> Partners' reports of perceivers' disclosure and partners' reports of the diagnosticity of their behavior also predicted perceivers' diagnosticity perceptions ( $b = .07$ ,  $t = 2.36$ ,  $p < .05$  and  $b = .19$ ,  $t = 6.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These effects suggest that, in addition to bias, diagnosticity perceptions were partly accurate. Again, we used variables that were centered on sample means for this analysis. However, the same key effect of perceived self-disclosure on perceived diagnosticity emerged when we instead used daily variables that were centered on person means ( $b = .40$ ,  $t = 13.78$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

Our conceptual model indicates that perceivers' valuing of partners moderates effects of daily perceptions of partners' responsiveness on their perceptions of self-disclosure. In turn, perceptions of disclosure are closely tied to perceiving partner behaviors as diagnostic, and this link is not moderated. This is why we included different predictors in models of perceived disclosure and perceived diagnosticity. Indeed, in subsequent analyses we found that the link between daily perceived disclosure and daily perceived diagnosticity was not moderated by perceivers' chronic valuing of targets ( $p > .38$ ), by daily perceptions of targets' responsiveness, ( $p > .74$ ), or by the combination of perceivers' chronic valuing and daily perceptions of targets' responsiveness (i.e., a three-way interaction;  $p > .20$ ).

had a benefit. This effect also was independent of partners' reports of self-disclosure and diagnosticity, which again suggests they were partially the result of perceivers' biased perceptions.<sup>9</sup>

#### Study 4: Behavioral Observation Study

In Study 4, we tested our predictions with regard to perceptions of support interactions involving romantic partners. To provide a stronger test of our prediction that perceivers have illusory perceptions of their self-disclosure, we compared their perceptions of self-disclosure to two external indexes of their self-disclosure, including target partners' and objective observers' judgments. In addition, we improved upon the measurement of targets' responsiveness by incorporating judgments from three sources, including judgments made by perceivers, by targets themselves, and by objective observers. Analogous to the findings reported in our prior studies, we predicted that perceivers who strongly value a relationship with the target partner would judge their own self-disclosure in accordance with the target's responsive behavior even while controlling for perceivers' self-disclosure as indexed by targets and objective observers.

We theorize that underestimating self-disclosure can reduce diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior and therefore maintain trust. Rather than directly examining diagnosticity perceptions, as we did in our prior studies, we examined whether underestimating self-disclosure would buffer perceivers' responses to partners' unresponsive behavior, including negative affect and relationship evaluations. Partners' unresponsive behavior should be less likely to elicit perceivers' negative affect or reductions in commitment and satisfaction, which are common responses to threatened trust (Murray et al., 2006) and suggest that perceivers believed the unresponsive behavior was diagnostic, if perceivers underestimate their self-disclosure.

#### Method

**Participants.** Romantically involved heterosexual couples (dyad  $N = 247$ ;  $M$  age = 21.11 years) were recruited via advertisements in local newspapers and on Internet bulletin boards, campus flyers, and through an undergraduate psychology subject pool. Relationships were predominantly described as dating relationships (73.7%) or engaged and marital relationships (15.4%). Participants received financial compensation or partial fulfillment of course requirements in their psychology course in exchange for participation.<sup>10</sup>

**Procedure.** Dyad members were escorted to separate laboratory rooms to complete the preinteraction measures described below. After completing these measures, a randomly selected member of each dyad was assigned the role of "perceiver." Perceivers were asked to identify a personal problem (not related to their relationship with their study partner) to be discussed with their study partner (assigned the role of "target"). Participants were then reunited to take part in the recorded interaction. To assist participants with feeling comfortable in the presence of the video cameras before the interaction, participants played a game for 5 min. After 5 min, the experimenter returned to the room and asked perceivers to discuss the problem they identified earlier. The experimenter then left the room for 7 min or until one of the participants notified the experimenter that the discussion was over.

Participants then returned to individual rooms to complete the postinteraction measures described below.

#### Preinteraction measures.

**Partner valuing.** Participants completed two measures designed to assess their valuing of partners, which were similar to the measures described in prior studies. These included a six-item measure of relationship commitment (e.g., "I want our relationship to last for a very long time"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ), and a 10-item measure of care for the partner (e.g., "Helping him/her is a high priority for me"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ). Items were completed on 9-point response scales (1 = *extremely disagree*; 9 = *extremely agree*). Responses to these two scales were highly correlated (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$ ) and were averaged to create an index of partner valuing.

**Relationship satisfaction.** Participants completed a four-item measure of relationship satisfaction (e.g., "I feel satisfied with our relationship"; "Our relationship makes me very happy") using the same response scales (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Negative and positive affect.** Using 9-point response scales, participants indicated the extent to which they currently felt "angry," "stressed," "worried," "sad," "disappointed," "ashamed," and "rejected." Responses were averaged to create an index of negative affect (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ). They also indicated the extent to which they felt "happy," "pleased," "satisfied," "proud," "satisfied with self," "loved," and "accepted." Responses to these items were averaged to create an index of positive affect (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ).

#### Postinteraction measures.

**Perceivers' and targets' perceptions of targets' responsiveness.** Perceivers completed 17 items assessing their perceptions of the target's responsive behavior. Items assessed emotional support (e.g., "To what extent did he/she give you reassurance to help you feel better about your problem?"), instrumental support (e.g., "To what extent did he/she give you advice or suggest a plan for you to follow to resolve your problem?"), negative behaviors (e.g., "How critical or blaming was he/she while you were discussing your problem?"), and overall responsiveness (e.g., "How concerned about your needs and feelings was he/she while you were discussing your problem?"). These items were adapted from prior research on support provision and responsiveness (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Maisel, Gable, & Strachman, 2008). Items were completed using 9-point response scales (1 = *not at all*; 9 = *extremely*). After reverse-scoring negative items, responses were averaged to create an

<sup>9</sup> Sex did not significantly moderate the critical Partner Valuing  $\times$  Daily Perceptions of Partner's Responsiveness two-way interaction on perceived self-disclosure ( $p = .73$ ) or the link between perceived self-disclosure and perceptions of diagnosticity ( $p = .98$ ). However, a significant main effect of sex indicated that women reported more self-disclosure than men ( $b = .31$ ,  $t = 2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The Partner Valuing  $\times$  Daily Perceptions of Partner's Responsiveness two-way interaction remained significant after including sex as a covariate ( $p < .01$ ).

<sup>10</sup> Despite our description of romantic involvement as an inclusion criterion, 19 relationships (7.7%) were described as friendships. It is unclear whether these relationships are casual romantic relationships or whether they are platonic friendships. Responses from these participants were retained in our analyses. Other findings from this study have been published elsewhere (Lemay & Neal, 2013), but none of the findings reported in the current article have been previously reported.



index of perceived responsive behavior (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .92$ ). Targets completed analogous items assessing their own behavior following the interaction (e.g., "How concerned about his/her needs and feelings were you while he/she was discussing his/her problem?"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Perceivers' and targets' perceptions of perceivers' disclosure.** Using the same response scales, perceivers completed six items assessing their perceptions of their own self-disclosure of needs. Items assess describing the problem (e.g., "To what extent did you describe the details of your problem with him/her"), directly asking for help (e.g., "To what extent did you directly ask him/her for help to figure out how to resolve the problem"), expressing a need for support through nonverbal behavior (i.e., "To what extent did your facial expressions or body language suggest that you were upset while you were talking about your problem"), and expressing a need for support through indirect verbal behavior (i.e., "To what extent did you complain about your problem or give subtle hints that you need help"). These items were adapted from prior research by Collins and Feeney (2000). Responses were averaged to create an index of perceivers' perceptions of their self-disclosure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .71$ ). Targets completed analogous items assessing their perceptions of the perceiver's disclosure (e.g., "To what extent did he/she describe the details about his/her problem to you?"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .76$ ).

**Perceivers' postinteraction relationship evaluations and affect.** Using 9-point response scales (1 = *extremely disagree*; 9 = *extremely agree*), perceivers completed five items assessing their current relationship commitment following the interaction (e.g., "Right now, I am committed to maintaining our relationship"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ), and four items assessing their current relationship satisfaction (e.g., "Right now, I feel satisfied with our relationship"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ). Given that analyses of these two variables produced comparable results, and given that they were highly correlated (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .90$ ), we averaged them to create an index of postinteraction relationship evaluations. Using other 9-point response scales (1 = *not at all*; 9 = *extremely*), participants again completed the measures of negative affect (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ) and positive affect (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ) following the interaction.

**Coding of video data.** A panel of 11 coders viewed the recorded interactions and rated targets' responsiveness and perceivers' disclosure using the same items and response scales that were used to measure perceivers' and targets' perceptions of targets' responsiveness and perceivers' disclosure. Inter-coder agreement was high for each item (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  ranged from .83 to .94;  $M_\alpha = .90$ ). Ratings on the same item by the multiple coders were averaged across the coders. In turn, the targets' responsiveness ratings were averaged across items (after reverse-scoring negative behavior) to create an objective index of targets' responsive behavior (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .96$ ). Likewise, the perceivers' disclosure ratings were averaged across items to create an objective index of perceivers' disclosure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ). To minimize the potential biasing effect of partners' behavior, each video captured only one of the two dyad members and coders were instructed to rate dyad members in a random, rather than consecutive, order.

## Results

**Responsiveness-driven perceptions of self-disclosure.** First we tested the prediction that perceivers who strongly value relationships with targets judge their own self-disclosure in accordance with target partners' responsive behavior. To test this prediction, we first created an index of targets' responsive behavior by averaging perceivers' perceptions of targets' responsive behavior, targets' perceptions of their own responsive behavior, and observers' perceptions of targets' responsive behavior (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .74$ ). We then regressed perceivers' perceptions of their own self-disclosure on this index of targets' responsiveness, perceivers' valuing of the target (average of care and commitment), and a product term representing the interaction of these predictors. This interaction captures whether perceivers who strongly value targets are more likely to judge their own self-disclosure in accordance with targets' responsiveness. We expect that perceivers misconstrue their own disclosure. To be sure that findings cannot be explained by their disclosure behavior that is observable to others, we controlled for targets' and objective observers' perceptions of perceivers' self-disclosure.

The Targets' Responsiveness  $\times$  Perceivers' Valuing interaction was significant,  $\beta = .14$ ,  $t(232) = 2.07$ ,  $sr^2 = .014$ ,  $p < .05$ . Predicted values are presented in Figure 5. First we examined conditional effects of targets' responsiveness. These conditional effects address whether perceivers deny self-disclosure when partners are unresponsive but claim self-disclosure when partners are responsive. For perceivers who strongly valued the target partner (1 SD above the mean), perceptions of own disclosure were predicted by the target's responsive behavior,  $\beta = .32$ ,  $t(232) = 3.48$ ,  $sr^2 = .041$ ,  $p < .01$ . Perceivers who did not strongly value the target partner (1 SD below the mean) did not exhibit this bias ( $p > .63$ ). In other words, relative to when the target partner was responsive, perceivers who strongly valued the target partner perceived themselves as being less disclosing when their partner was unresponsive.

We also examined the conditional effects of perceivers' valuing of the target partner, which ask whether perceivers who value targets see more self-disclosure relative to perceivers who do not value targets. These conditional effects were not significant when probing at just 1 SD above and below the mean of targets'

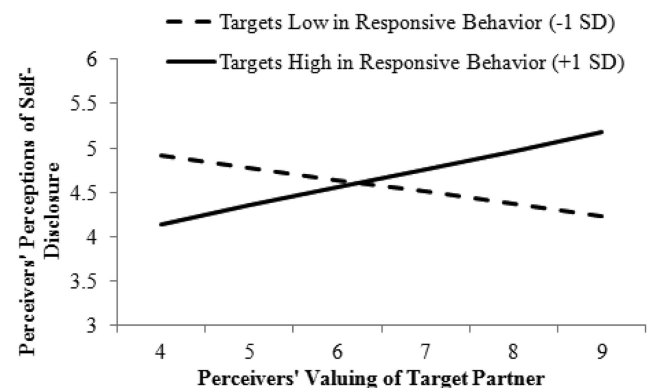


Figure 5. Perceivers' perceptions of self-disclosure as a function of targets' responsive behavior and perceivers' chronic valuing of targets (Study 4).



responsiveness,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $t(232) = 1.69$ ,  $sr^2 = .001$ ,  $p = .09$ ; and  $\beta = -.11$ ,  $t(232) = -1.31$ ,  $sr^2 = .001$ ,  $p = .19$ , respectively, but they were in the predicted direction, indicating that perceivers' valuing of the partner was positively associated with perceptions of self-disclosure when target partners were responsive and negatively associated with perceptions of self-disclosure when target partners were unresponsive. Examination of conditional effects at 2 SDs above and below the mean of targets' responsiveness provided stronger support for this pattern,  $\beta = .31$ ,  $t(232) = 1.95$ ,  $sr^2 = .013$ ,  $p = .05$ ; and  $\beta = -.25$ ,  $t(232) = -1.79$ ,  $sr^2 = .011$ ,  $p = .075$ , respectively.<sup>11</sup> These results indicate that, relative to perceivers who did not strongly value their partner, perceivers who strongly valued their partner perceived more self-disclosure when their partner was responsive and less self-disclosure when their partner was unresponsive.

We conducted additional analyses to discern whether perceivers significantly underestimated their disclosure when they valued unresponsive targets. First, we created an index of disclosure illusions using a regression residual approach. We regressed perceivers' perceptions of their own self-disclosure on objective judges' views and targets' views of perceivers' self-disclosure. Perceivers' perceptions of their own self-disclosure were significantly predicted by both objective judges' views,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $t(238) = 4.56$ ,  $sr^2 = .072$ ,  $p < .001$ , and targets' views,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $t(238) = 2.81$ ,  $sr^2 = .027$ ,  $p < .01$ . Together, these predictors explained 17% of the variance in perceivers' judgments of their own disclosure. We used the raw residuals from this analysis as an index of disclosure illusions. Perceivers with positive residuals perceived their own self-disclosure to be greater than what could be predicted on the basis of targets' and objective observers' perceptions of perceivers' disclosure, an apparent overestimation of disclosure, whereas perceivers with negative residuals perceived their own disclosure to be less than what could be predicted on the basis of targets' and objective observers' perceptions of perceivers' disclosure, an apparent underestimation of disclosure.

We then tested the model described previously after replacing the criterion variable with this index of disclosure illusions. The intercept in this model reflects the average disclosure illusion (i.e., difference between perceivers' perceptions of self-disclosure and the value predicted on the basis of targets' and observers' perceptions) when all predictors have a score of 0. The significance test associated with this intercept indicates whether this average illusion is significantly different from 0. We re-centered perceivers' valuing of targets and targets' responsiveness on low (1 SD below the mean) and high (1 SD above the mean) values to examine average illusions as a function of these predictors. When perceivers strongly valued targets (1 SD above the mean) and targets were unresponsive (1 SD below the mean), perceivers exhibited significantly negative disclosure illusions,  $b = -.44$ ,  $t(232) = -2.37$ ,  $p < .05$ , suggesting that they underestimated their disclosure when valued targets were unresponsive. When perceivers strongly valued targets (1 SD above the mean) and targets were responsive (1 SD above the mean), perceivers exhibited significantly positive disclosure illusions,  $b = .42$ ,  $t(232) = 2.82$ ,  $p < .01$ , indicating that perceivers overestimated their disclosure when valued targets were responsive. In contrast, the intercepts were not significantly different from 0 (suggesting that perceivers had no reliable tendency to underestimate or overestimate their own disclosure) when

they did not strongly value targets (1 SD below the mean;  $ps > .32$ ).

**Buffering effects of disclosure illusions.** Next we examined whether underestimating diagnosticity buffers the negative effects of targets' unresponsive behavior on perceivers' affective reactions and relationship evaluations. To test these predictions, we regressed perceivers' postinteraction positive affect, negative affect, and relationship evaluations on the index of targets' responsive behavior, the residual-based index of perceivers' disclosure illusions, and a product term representing their interaction. We also controlled for the preinteraction assessment of the criterion variable to reduce error variance resulting from perceivers' preexisting affect and relationship evaluations. The interaction between targets' responsive behavior and perceivers' disclosure illusions predicted postinteraction negative affect,  $\beta = -.10$ ,  $t(236) = -2.25$ ,  $sr^2 = .011$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Figure 6), and postinteraction relationship evaluations,  $\beta = .07$ ,  $t(234) = 2.27$ ,  $sr^2 = .005$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Figure 7), but not postinteraction positive affect ( $p = .26$ ).

Conditional effects for these significant interactions are presented in Table 1. The left side of Table 1 presents conditional effects of targets' responsive behavior for perceivers with negative (1 SD below the mean) and positive (1 SD above the mean) disclosure illusions. These conditional effects address whether targets' unresponsive behavior elicits negative reactions (relative to responsive behavior). Targets' unresponsive behavior was less likely to elicit negative affect and diminished commitment when perceivers underestimated their own disclosure (relative to when they overestimated their disclosure). The right side of Table 1 presents conditional effects of perceivers' disclosure illusions when targets were low (1 SD below the mean) and high (1 SD above the mean) in responsive behavior. These conditional effects address whether underestimating disclosure has positive effects on affect and relationship evaluations (relative to overestimating disclosure). Perceivers' who underestimated their disclosure reported less negative affect and more positive relationship evaluations relative to perceivers who overestimated their disclosure only when targets behaved in an unresponsive manner (1 SD below the mean). That is, only in the presence of targets' unresponsive behavior did perceivers seem to benefit from underestimating their self-disclosure, in terms of lower negative affect and more positive relationship evaluations.<sup>12</sup>

**Summary.** This study provided additional support for our predictions regarding biased perceptions of self-disclosure. Perceivers who valued relationships with targets appeared to judge their own self-disclosure in accordance with targets' responsive behavior, underestimating their disclosure when targets were unresponsive and overestimating their disclosure when targets were

<sup>11</sup> Perceivers' valuing of targets did not moderate the accuracy effects (i.e., effects of objective observers' or targets' judgments of perceivers' disclosure on perceivers' perceptions of their disclosure;  $ps > .29$ ). To rule out the possibility that the interaction displayed in Figure 5 is driven only by perceivers' biased perceptions of targets' responsive behavior, rather than actual target behaviors, we tested the model again after eliminating perceivers' perceptions from the index of targets' responsiveness. The interaction pattern was still evident, although slightly weaker ( $b = .19$ ,  $t = 1.97$ ,  $p = .05$ ).

<sup>12</sup> Additional analyses revealed that these two-way interactions suggesting buffering effects of disclosure illusions were not further moderated by perceivers' valuing of partners ( $ps > .65$ ).

responsive. We found this pattern while controlling for targets' and objective observers' perceptions of perceivers' disclosure, suggesting that perceivers had biased perceptions. Perceivers' underestimation of self-disclosure appeared to serve a purpose; perceivers who underestimated their own disclosure had affective reactions and relationship evaluations that were less strongly dependent on targets' responsive behavior. They felt less upset and were less likely to devalue their relationships when they responded to their partner's unresponsive behavior by underestimating their own self-disclosure.<sup>13</sup>

### Study 5: The Effects of Affirming Perceivers' Relational Valuing

In Study 5 we attempted to establish a causal effect of perceivers' valuing of targets on perceivers' reduced perceptions of self-disclosure in situations characterized by targets' lack of responsiveness. After identifying an event in which targets were not responsive, some perceivers received an opportunity to affirm the importance of a relationship with targets. Perceivers then completed measures assessing perceptions of self-disclosure during the event. We expected that perceivers who affirmed their desire to bond with targets would see less self-disclosure in the unresponsive event relative to perceivers in the control condition, consistent with our view that underestimating self-disclosure in these situations is motivated by desire to maintain bonds.

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 114 participants ( $M$  age = 28 years; 69 males; 45 females) through offering a small payment on Amazon Mechanical Turk (see Study 1 for description). The racial distribution was as follows: 73.5% Caucasian, 6.2% African American, 12.4% Asian, and 8.1% other.

**Procedure and measures.** Participants completed a questionnaire posted on the Internet. Participants first identified a relationship partner toward whom they felt moderately close (i.e., "a person you feel somewhat close to"; "someone you have known for at least a year and you feel moderately close to, but not the closest person in your life").<sup>14</sup>

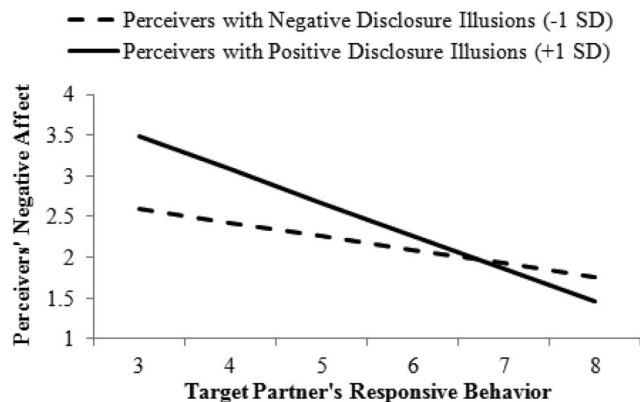


Figure 6. Perceivers' post-interaction negative affect as a function of targets' responsive behavior and perceivers' disclosure illusions (Study 4).

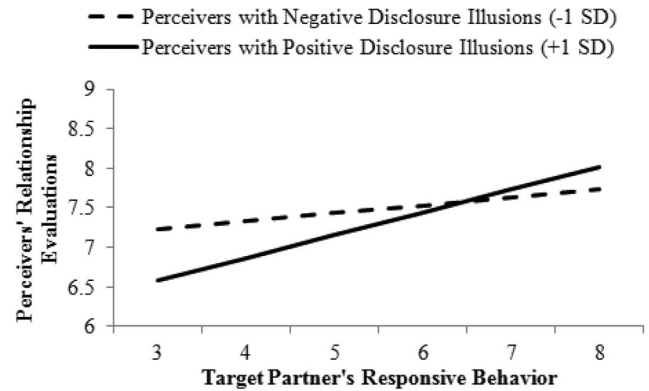


Figure 7. Perceivers' post-interaction relationship evaluations as a function of targets' responsive behavior and perceivers' disclosure illusions (Study 4).

Participants selected a stressful event in which this target did not provide support using the same procedure used in Study 2. After identifying this event, participants who were randomly assigned to the partner value affirmation condition completed this open-ended question: "There are many factors that contribute to how we feel about other people. In the space below, describe the things you like about [partner name] and explain why he/she is an important part of your life." This question led participants in this condition to expound on the importance of the partner.

All participants then completed four items assessing their own self-disclosure (e.g., "At the time of this event, I clearly communicated my stress to [partner name]"; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ) using 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Items were scored so that higher scores reflected greater perceived disclosure.

### Results and Discussion

A one-way analysis of variance revealed that participants in the value affirmation condition perceived less self-disclosure ( $M = 2.54$ ) relative to participants in the control condition ( $M = 3.24$ ),  $F(1, 105) = 5.57$ ,  $\eta^2 = .05$ ,  $p < .05$ . This pattern is consistent with our view that desire to bond can cause perceivers to diminish their self-disclosure when partners behave in an unresponsive manner.

<sup>13</sup> Sex did not have significant main or moderating effects on most outcomes ( $ps > .13$ ). However, sex did have a marginal main effect on postinteraction judgments of relationship quality, with women reporting lower quality than men ( $b = -.15$ ,  $t = -1.81$ ,  $p = .07$ ), but the buffering effect of disclosure illusions (buffering partners' lack of responsiveness) on postinteraction relationship evaluations remained significant while controlling for sex ( $p < .05$ ).

<sup>14</sup> We asked participants to select a target partner of moderate closeness because we reasoned that our affirmation of partner valuing manipulation could be less effective if participants already strongly valued the partner. That is, participants who already strongly valued the partner may be highly motivated to defend their relationship regardless of whether they had an opportunity to affirm the importance of the relationship. Moreover, if we asked participants to choose a partner toward whom they had strong negative feelings, they might have difficulty completing the affirmation task or exhibit reactance.

Table 1

*Conditional Effects for Target Responsive Behavior  $\times$  Perceivers' Disclosure Illusions Interactions Predicting Perceivers' Negative Affect and Relationship Evaluations (Study 4)*

Criterion	Conditional effects of targets' responsive behavior		Conditional effects of perceivers' disclosure illusions	
	At negative perceivers' illusions	At positive perceivers' illusions	At low targets' responsive behavior	At high targets' responsive behavior
Negative affect	-0.14 (-2.28)*	-0.33 (-4.92)**	0.16 (2.49)*	-0.03 (-0.49)
Relationship evaluations	0.07 (1.66) <sup>†</sup>	0.20 (4.26)**	-0.09 (-2.08)*	0.04 (0.94)

*Note.* Values outside parentheses are standardized regression coefficients. Values inside parentheses are *t* values. "Negative" and "low" values refer to 1 *SD* below the mean. "Positive" and "high" values refer to 1 *SD* above the mean.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .01$ . \*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Study 6: The Effects of Satisfying Perceivers' Motivation to Undermine Diagnosticity

In our final study, we attempted to diminish perceivers' tendency to see lack of disclosure in situations characterized by a valued partners' lack of responsiveness by offering perceivers other means of satisfying the motivation to reduce diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior. After identifying an event in which valued or devalued targets were not responsive (which should elicit perceivers' motivation to undermine diagnosticity when targets are valued but not when they are devalued), some perceivers received an opportunity to satisfy the motivation to undermine the diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior by endorsing a variety of explanations of the unresponsive behavior, all of which preserved the sense that targets still cared for perceivers. Hence, these explanations suggested that the unresponsive behavior lacked diagnosticity. Perceivers then completed measures assessing perceptions of self-disclosure during the event. We expected that perceivers who were offered other opportunities to reduce diagnosticity would see more self-disclosure during the unresponsive event relative to perceivers in the control condition, who were not offered these opportunities. Moreover, we expected that this pattern would pertain only to perceivers who highly valued relationships with targets. This pattern would be consistent with our view that underestimating self-disclosure is motivated by desire to reduce diagnosticity of a valued partner's unresponsive behavior, as a hallmark of motivated processes is that they decrease in strength once the motivation has been satisfied through some other means (e.g., Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001; Steele & Liu, 1983; Tesser, Crepaz, Beach, Cornell, & Collins, 2000).

### Method

**Participants.** We recruited 234 participants ( $M$  age = 34 years; 121 males; 116 females) using the same recruitment technique described in Study 5. The racial distribution was as follows: 75% Caucasian, 8.5% African American, 12.7% Asian, and 3.8% other.

**Procedure and measures.** Participants completed a questionnaire posted on the Internet. Participants in the valued partner condition identified someone they strongly value as a relationship partner (someone with whom they want to maintain a close relationship). Those in the devalued partner condition instead identified someone they do not strongly value as a relationship partner.

Next, participants selected a stressful event in which this target partner did not provide support using the same procedure described in Study 2.

After identifying this event, participants who were randomly assigned to the motivation satisfaction condition completed questions designed to reduce the perceived diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior during this event. First, they completed a biased checklist. Each item on the checklist provided participants with a way to reduce perceived diagnosticity of the unresponsive behavior (besides underestimating self-disclosure), including temporal distancing (i.e., "The event in which [partner name] did not help me happened a long time ago. Our relationship is stronger now."), downplaying partner ability (i.e., "[Partner name] would have helped me during this event, but he/she was not really able to help."), direct denial of diagnosticity (i.e., "Even though [partner name] did not help me during this one event, he/she still cares for me."), diminishing importance of the event (i.e., "This event was not very important in the grand scheme of my relationship with [partner name]."), encapsulating the event (i.e., "Even though [partner name] did not help me in this one instance, he/she helps me with almost everything."), and denial of need (i.e., "The reason why [partner name] did not help me during this event was that I was not truly in need of help from him/her."). Presentation of this checklist was intended to provide participants with several ways to undermine diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior. Indeed, on average participants in this condition endorsed 2.04 statements. Hence, participants in this condition generally took the opportunity to reduce diagnosticity.

Next, participants in the motivation satisfaction condition completed this open-ended question: "Above you mentioned an event in which [partner name] did not help you. How do you explain [partner name's] failure to help, and how does it affect your relationship? For example, you might know that [partner name] still cares for you, your relationship may have grown since this event, or you may not have needed [partner name's] help during this event." We asked this question to provide participants with an opportunity to reduce diagnosticity of the unresponsive behavior in their own words, and the examples we provided were intended to lead participants to reduce diagnosticity. Most participants did reduce diagnosticity, indicating that partners were unable to help, that they did not need partners' help, that partners still cared for them, or that the partner's failure to help was unimportant and had little effect on the relationship. Participants in the control condition did not complete either of these tasks.



All participants then completed the four-item situation-specific measures of self-disclosure described in Studies 2 and 5 using 7-point response scales (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*; Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ). Items were completed with regard to the event in which the partner did not provide support, and they were scored such that higher scores represented more disclosure. Participants also completed a six-item measure of relationship commitment (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ) and a four-item measure of care for the partner (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .93$ ). Responses to these two scales were highly correlated (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .94$ ) and were averaged to create an index of partner valuing for use in some analyses.

## Results and Discussion

First we examined the validity of the partner valuing manipulation. Participants reported more care for the partner ( $M = 5.77$ ) and commitment to the relationship ( $M = 5.93$ ) in the valued partner condition relative to the devalued partner condition ( $M = 3.31$  and  $3.08$ , respectively),  $t(230) = -15.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ; and  $t(230) = -15.89$ ,  $p < .001$ . Hence, once again, the selected partners varied in intended ways.

Next, we tested our primary hypothesis, first using experimental conditions as our predictor variables. We regressed perceptions of self-disclosure in the unresponsive situation on a dummy coded variable representing the partner condition (0 = devalued partner condition; 1 = valued partner condition), a dummy coded variable representing the motivation satisfaction manipulation (0 = control; 1 = motivation satisfaction condition), and a product term representing their interaction. Preliminary analyses revealed a main effect of gender. To reduce error variance and improve our ability to detect an effect, we also controlled for gender in our analysis ( $-.5$  = women;  $.5$  = men). The Partner Condition  $\times$  Motivation Satisfaction manipulation interaction was marginal,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $t(226) = 1.65$ ,  $sr^2 = .012$ ,  $p = .10$ . Adjusted means are displayed in Figure 8. We examined the conditional effects of the motivation satisfaction manipulation, which address whether, relative to the control condition, satisfying the motivation to undermine diagnos-

ticity increases perceptions of self-disclosure (because it reduces the need to deny self-disclosure). Consistent with predictions, this manipulation did not affect self-disclosure perceptions for participants in the devalued partner condition, who lacked motivation to undermine diagnosticity in the first place ( $p > .74$ ). However, this manipulation did increase self-disclosure perceptions for participants in the valued partner condition,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $t(226) = 1.94$ ,  $sr^2 = .016$ ,  $p = .05$ . Participants in the motivation satisfaction condition reported more self-disclosure to valued partners (adjusted  $M = 3.72$ ) than did participants in the control condition (adjusted  $M = 3.03$ ). This pattern is consistent with predictions and suggests that a motivated process reduces perceptions of disclosure—participants who highly valued partners perceived more self-disclosure of their needs and desires in a situation characterized by the partner's lack of responsiveness when the motivation to reduce diagnosticity of this unresponsive behavior was satisfied in some other manner. Given that participants reporting on a devalued partner lacked a strong motivation to undermine diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior, the manipulation to satisfy this motivation did not have an effect on them. We also examined the conditional effects of the partner valuing condition, but these effects were not significant ( $ps > .20$ ).<sup>15</sup>

Given that the predicted interaction did not reach conventional significance levels in the analysis reported above, which used the dichotomous variable reflecting partner valuing condition, we sought to test the interaction using the more sensitive continuous measure of partner valuing (the average of care and commitment).<sup>16</sup> We regressed perceptions of self-disclosure in unresponsive situations on partner valuing (continuous), a dummy coded variable representing the motivation satisfaction condition (0 = control; 1 = motivation satisfaction condition), and a product term representing their interaction. We also continued to control for gender. Now the anticipated Partner Valuing  $\times$  Motivation Satisfaction interaction condition was significant,  $\beta = .42$ ,  $t(226) = 2.28$ ,  $sr^2 = .022$ ,  $p < .05$ . Predicted values are displayed in Figure 9. First we examined the conditional effects of the motivation satisfaction manipulation. Again, these conditional effects address whether, relative to the control condition, satisfying the motivation to undermine diagnosticity increases perceptions of self-disclosure (because it reduces the need to deny self-disclosure). This manipulation did not affect self-disclosure perceptions for participants who were low on valuing of the partner (1 *SD* below the mean;  $p > .30$ ). However, this manipulation did increase self-disclosure perceptions (relative to the control condition) for participants who were high on valuing of the partner (1 *SD* above the mean),  $\beta = .20$ ,  $t(226) = 2.24$ ,  $sr^2 = .021$ ,  $p < .05$ , consistent with predictions and the results reported above. We also examined conditional effects of partner valuing, which examine whether perceivers who

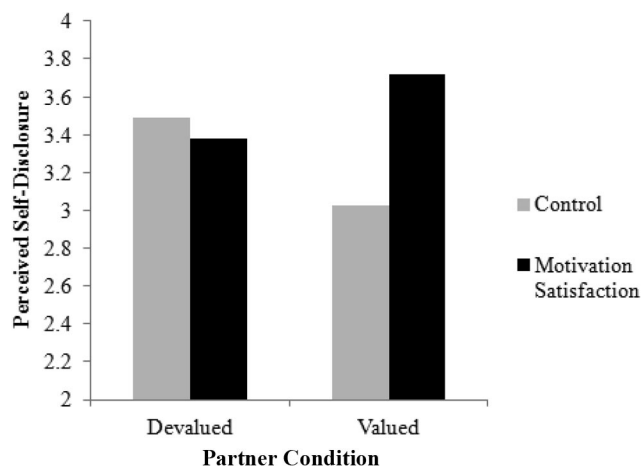


Figure 8. Perceived self-disclosure as a function of motivation satisfaction manipulation (control or motivation satisfaction condition) and partner condition (Study 6).

<sup>15</sup> When we did not control for sex, the predicted two-way interaction was no longer marginal ( $p = .13$ ). Sex did not moderate any of the effects ( $ps > .78$ ).

<sup>16</sup> In preliminary analyses, partner valuing condition explained only 54% of the variance in scores on the continuous measure of partner valuing, and scores on the continuous measure of partner valuing ranged widely in each of the partner valuing conditions (1 to 6.9 in the low valuing condition and 2 to 7 in the high valuing condition), suggesting a considerable degree of error variance in the dichotomous partner valuing condition variable. Hence, using the continuous scores in place of the dichotomous variable may result in a more sensitive analysis.



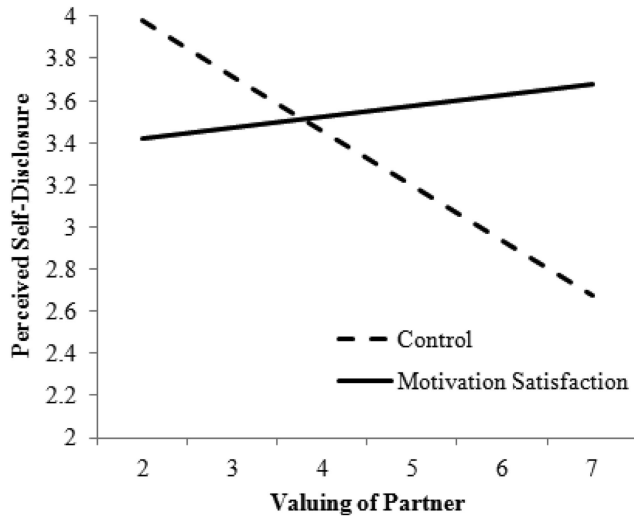


Figure 9. Perceived self-disclosure as a function of motivation satisfaction manipulation (control or motivation satisfaction condition) and partner valuing (Study 6).

value partners are more likely to deny disclosure relative to participants who do not value partners. Partner valuing was inversely associated with self-disclosure perceptions in the control condition,  $\beta = -.26$ ,  $t(226) = -2.45$ ,  $sr^2 = .025$ ,  $p < .05$ . Partner valuing did not predict self-disclosure perceptions in the motivation satisfaction condition ( $p > .56$ ). The more participants valued the partner, the more likely they were to deny self-disclosure, but this was only the case in the control condition. The motivation satisfaction manipulation—providing participants with other methods for undermining diagnosticity of the partner's unresponsive behavior—eliminated the tendency for highly motivated perceivers to deny self-disclosure.

These results corroborate the pattern in our first analysis and are somewhat stronger. In the control condition, partner valuing was inversely associated with self-disclosure perceptions, suggesting that motivated perceivers denied self-disclosure. However, this effect was eliminated and motivated perceivers admitted high self-disclosure if we provided them with other opportunities to satisfy the motivation to construe the unresponsive behavior as nondiagnostic of the partner's sentiments. In other words, motivated perceivers seemed to substitute one method of reducing diagnosticity (i.e., denying self-disclosure) with other methods that we suggested. This evidence of substitution—of reduced use of a particular strategy after using other strategies that serve the same goal—is a hallmark of a motivated process.

### General Discussion

In the current research, we tested the prediction that, when confronted with a relationship partner's unresponsive behavior, perceivers who strongly value a close relationship with the partner tend to reconstrue the situation as nondiagnostic by diminishing the extent to which they disclosed needs and desires. In turn, this process should protect feelings of trust. The overarching goal of the current research was to demonstrate the existence of this process.

Studies 1 and 2 were designed to contrast perceptions of self-disclosure in unresponsive situations (i.e., situations in which the partner behaved in a cold, selfish, or neglectful manner) with global perceptions of disclosure, the latter of which is emphasized in most research on the link between self-disclosure and relationship quality. Those who highly valued a relationship with the target partner tended to report high levels of global self-disclosure in their relationship, consistent with prior findings suggesting that positive relationship sentiments are associated with high levels of self-disclosure. However, in both hypothetical (Study 1) and actual (Study 2) unresponsive situations, these same perceivers reported low levels of self-disclosure, just as low as the self-disclosure reported by those who did not value relationships with the target partner. In turn, these two types of disclosure perceptions had opposite implications for trust and diagnosticity perceptions. Perceivers who perceived high global self-disclosure reported high levels of trust and saw partners' unresponsive behavior as less diagnostic of the partner's lack of care. Yet the pattern was reversed for perceptions of disclosure in unresponsive situations. In such situations, perceived self-disclosure was negatively related to trust and positively related to perceiving partners' unresponsive behaviors as diagnostic. These results are consistent with our view that self-disclosure of needs and desires can undermine trust if the disclosure is perceived in situations characterized by the partner's lack of responsiveness, even while perceptions of global self-disclosure have relationship-enhancing effects.

Why the drop in perceptions of self-disclosure in these unresponsive situations? In part, this effect may reflect the fact that perceivers actually disclose less in these situations. We also believe that individuals who highly value their relationships are motivated to construct illusory perceptions of self-disclosure in ways that render unresponsive behaviors nondiagnostic. This issue of bias was addressed in the remaining studies.

Study 3 replicated results from the first two studies using a dyadic daily report methodology and while statistically controlling for partners' perceptions of self-disclosure and diagnosticity, which provides stronger evidence for perceivers' perceptual bias. Independently of partners' perceptions of perceivers' self-disclosure, perceivers reported high self-disclosure on days when partners behaved in a responsive manner, and they reported low self-disclosure on days when partners behaved in an unresponsive manner. This pattern was especially strong when perceivers highly valued a relationship with partners. In addition, perceivers' valuing of partners was associated with perceptions of self-disclosure only on days when partners behaved in a responsive manner. Perceivers' valuing of partners did not predict self-disclosure on days when partners were low in responsive behavior. On these days, highly valuing perceivers saw just as little self-disclosure as low-valuing perceivers. Hence, once again, the pattern of self-disclosure associated with positive relationship sentiments, which is reported in most studies of self-disclosure and relationship evaluations, was not observed in unresponsive situations. Moreover, perceivers dismissed partners' behavior as not diagnostic of their sentiments on days when perceivers reported low self-disclosure, replicating the link between situation-specific self-disclosure and diagnosticity perceptions reported in Studies 1 and 2. This effect also was independent of partners' perceptions of disclosure and diagnosticity. This pattern suggests that motivated perceivers protected against targets' unresponsive behavior by

downplaying self-disclosure, substantiating the conclusion that partners' unresponsive behaviors do not convey lack of care.

In Study 4, we conducted stronger tests of our model by incorporating objective observers' judgments of the behaviors enacted during a social support interaction. Relative to perceivers' self-disclosure as perceived by 11 objective observers and by target partners, perceivers who strongly valued a relationship with targets appeared to exaggerate their own self-disclosure when target partners behaved in a supportive manner and downplay their self-disclosure when targets were unresponsive. In addition, this study provided evidence for buffering effects of underestimating self-disclosure. Underestimating their own self-disclosure appeared to reduce perceivers' negative affective reactions and negative relationship evaluations following targets' unresponsive behavior, suggesting that this underestimation stripped the potency from the unresponsive behavior.

Studies 5 and 6 provided stronger evidence for the role of motivation. In Study 5, some perceivers had an opportunity to reaffirm their valuing of target partners before completing the measures of self-disclosure with regard to an unresponsive situation. This affirmation of valuing resulted in perceiving less self-disclosure in the unresponsive situation, suggesting that desire to bond is a driving force in denying self-disclosure in these situations. In Study 6, some perceivers had an opportunity to satisfy the motivation to undermine diagnosticity of a partner's unresponsive behavior in other ways before completing the measures of self-disclosure in the unresponsive situation. Relative to a control condition, presentation of this opportunity increased perceptions of self-disclosure, but only if participants strongly valued relationships with partners. Hence, for people who valued partners, perceptions of self-disclosure appeared to be suppressed in the control condition to satisfy the goal to reduce diagnosticity of the valued partner's unresponsive behavior. Apparently, self-disclosure no longer needed to be denied when this goal to undermine diagnosticity was satisfied in some other way. These results suggest that the motivation to maintain trust by undermining the diagnosticity of valued partners' unresponsive behavior, when not satisfied through other mechanisms, prompts people to underestimate self-disclosure.

These findings have important implications for the psychological determinants of trust, as well as the existing literature on self-disclosure and motivated cognition in relationships. Theorizing on trust proposes that trust is formed over time from repeated observations of a target partner's behavior in diagnostic situations (Holmes & Rempel, 1989; Kelley et al., 2003; Shallcross & Simpson, 2012; Simpson, 2007a, 2007b), which are situations in which the partner's sentiments toward the self and relationships. Self-disclosure of needs and desires appears to be a central characteristic of these situations. That is, it is primarily when people have expressed a need or wish to their partner that people can determine whether the partner is motivated to fulfill needs and wishes, a central component of trust. Theorizing on these diagnostic situations suggests that they are risky—that sometimes these self-disclosures elicit responses from partners that damage trust and communicate partners' selfishness. Indeed, rejection risk is a primary reason for avoiding self-disclosure (Omarzu, 2000). This view on trust is rather “bottom-up” or “data driven” in that it suggests that trust is the result of accumulated observations of

partners in “test” situations. However, the current findings suggest the origins of trust are more complex. In addition to experience-driven processes involving the observation of partners' behaviors in diagnostic situations, trust appears to be the result of “top down” processes that stem from perceivers' motivation to bond with targets.

The current model and findings are somewhat counterintuitive. Most theoretical perspectives on self-disclosure suggest that disclosure is associated with positive relationship functioning (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Finkenauer & Righetti, 2011; Reis & Shaver, 1988). However, the current model suggests something different. Because self-perceived disclosure of needs and desires heightens perceptions of situational diagnosticity, disclosure is not inherently positive or negative, and does not inherently facilitate closeness. To understand the interpersonal consequences of self-disclosure and whether self-disclosure is a pleasant interpersonal perception, we would argue that partners' responses to the self-disclosure must be considered (see also Reis & Shaver, 1988). Studies that examine only global perceptions of self-disclosure, and those that examine self-disclosure in specific situations but ignore how effects are moderated by partners' responses, may mask important negative components of specific disclosure episodes, such as the painful and trust-undermining experience of disclosing needs and desires and receiving an unsupportive response. Theorizing and empirical studies on self-disclosure should consider contextual factors that alter (i.e., moderate) its meaning and consequences, especially how partners respond to disclosure.

The bias we studied most likely has boundary conditions. The nature of motivated cognition is such that perceivers' ability to arrive at desired conclusions is constrained by their ability to rationally justify those conclusions (Kunda, 1990). We expect that features of individuals, situations, and relationships may constrain perceivers' abilities to underestimate self-disclosure. For example, sometimes perceivers' disclosures may be so clear that it is virtually impossible to deny them. Under these conditions, most perceivers may abandon the strategy of diminishing self-disclosure and either perceive partners' behaviors as diagnostic or adopt other strategies to undermine diagnosticity. The substitutability of strategies to undermine diagnosticity of negative behaviors demonstrated in Study 6 likely works in the reversed direction as well, such that perceivers more heavily rely on other strategies to undermine diagnosticity when diminishing disclosure is not feasible. Motivated perceivers may instead cling to beliefs that partners were unable to enact responsive behaviors, that they did not need partners to enact responsive behaviors, or that situational factors accounted for unresponsive behaviors. Identifying the factors of situations, perceivers, and relationships that guide the selection of these trust-regulation strategies is an important task for future research.

We expect that the reason why self-disclosure heightens perceptions of diagnosticity is because this disclosure leads perceivers to believe that partners were aware of their needs and desires. However, this perception of partners' awareness could arise from processes other than self-disclosure. For example, in some instances, perceivers may believe that partners know their needs and desires as a result of a transparency illusion—the tendency for people to believe that internal states are more observable to others than they really are (Gilovich, Savitsky, & Medvec, 1998). This illusion of transparency may create the false sense that needs and

desires have been communicated to others even when no disclosure has occurred, resulting in the perception that situations are more diagnostic than they are (Vorauer, Cameron, Holmes, & Pearce, 2003). When people believe their needs and desires are understood through such a process, diminishing perceptions of self-disclosure may do little to reduce perceptions of diagnosticity. More generally, denying self-disclosure may not be an effective means of supporting the belief that partners' behavior is irrelevant to partners' relationship motives if, for reasons other than self-disclosure, perceivers believe that partners know their needs and desires. By the same logic, perceivers who acknowledge that they have engaged in self-disclosure may still believe that a situation is irrelevant to a partner's motives if they have reason to believe that the partner did not understand their needs and desires.

However, we do not propose that perceivers usually protect trust by directly denying unresponsive partners' awareness. Claiming that partners did not know needs and desires, even when one engaged in clear self-disclosure, would likely involve attributing undesirable qualities to partners involving their lack of ability or motivation to attend to and interpret self-disclosures (e.g., the partner is not very astute or caring). Moreover, unlike denying self-disclosure, downplaying partners' understanding may jeopardize perceivers' sense of optimism and control regarding future support interactions. That is, if they adequately self-disclosed but partners did not understand, what could they possibly do next time to ensure they receive responsive support? Diminishing understanding would likely need to be done in a manner that instead preserves trust that future expressions of need will be met with responsiveness. For instance, perceivers could make situational attributions for partners' lack of understanding (e.g., the partner did not understand this time because he/she was preoccupied with his/her own stressors but will be understanding and responsive next time; see Bradbury & Fincham, 1990).

Trust, in addition to desire, likely determines whether people downplay disclosure and diagnosticity in unresponsive situations. According to the risk-regulation model (Murray et al., 2006), people who are chronically confident in their partner's regard are comfortable with choosing strategies that minimize feelings of vulnerability by increasing connection with and dependence on the partner. Those who doubt their partner's regard find these strategies to be overly risky and unjustifiable. We have instead emphasized the role of chronic relationship desire, predicting that perceivers who strongly want to maintain communal relationships with partners choose strategies that are consistent with this goal, including making positive appraisals of the partner's behavior, and we have viewed trust as the consequence of adopting these strategies. We expect that a more complete understanding of the bias we have examined (and interpersonal cognition more generally) would require the consideration of trust and desire as independent predictors of interpersonal perception. Congruence with broader desires to maintain connection and perceived riskiness of maintaining connection may jointly determine the adoption of trust-enhancing cognitive biases. Moreover, these biases may contribute to future desire and trust, suggesting feedback loops.

Such a possibility suggests that the bias we identified is useful for perceivers and enhances their well-being, but this may depend on a number of other factors. Perceivers who downplay their own self-disclosure in unresponsive situations may perceive their partners to be caring, and this perception of care may contribute to

subsequent prorelationship behaviors (Lemay & Clark, 2008; Murray et al., 2000; Wieselquist et al., 1999). From this vantage point, diminishing disclosure would seem to have positive consequences for perceivers. However, this bias, like other biases, could mask important relationship problems, which could interfere with resolution of those problems (McNulty, O'Mara, & Karney, 2008) or prevent perceivers from abandoning a harmful relationship. From this view, the bias we identified could seem to be harmful for the well-being of relationships or perceivers. A complete understanding of the consequences of this bias may require understanding of relationship context. Are there significant problems in the relationship that require explicit acknowledgment and resolution, which are impeded by the bias? Alternatively, does the bias motivate behaviors that can improve the relationship, even if problems are glossed over? One possibility is that the extent of bias is proportional to the severity of relationship problems. Severe or harmful relationship problems may extinguish positive biases for most perceivers. As we stated earlier, perceivers must be able to rationally justify the conclusions they make, which may be difficult when relationships are extremely problematic, and this may often provide a safeguard against entertaining biases in the face of realities that render them harmful.

Our research provided evidence for a second bias: perceivers who highly valued relationships with targets appeared to overestimate their disclosure when targets behaved in a prorelationship manner. This is the converse of the underestimation of disclosure bias we emphasized. Perhaps motivated perceivers capitalized on targets' responsive behavior by exaggerating self-disclosure and, in turn, diagnosticity, essentially inflating the intentional supportiveness behind their partners' positive acts (e.g., my partner's helpfulness was not just because of a good mood or general helpful character but was instead the result of a strong motivation to respond to the needs I communicated). This bias may enhance perceptions of partners' care and commitment. Future research should consider the motives and benefits of this apparent exaggeration of self-disclosure.

Our findings have implications for the relative importance of perceived self-disclosure and trust in partner's care. As we have already mentioned, plenty of evidence suggests that optimal relationship functioning is characterized by the presence of each of these components. However, as we have demonstrated, perceived self-disclosure increases the perceived diagnosticity of situations and therefore introduces a tradeoff with perceived partner care when partners have behaved in an unresponsive manner. In these situations, what is the more desirable trade? Our findings consistently suggest that when it comes to perceiving inadequate disclosure versus perceiving inadequate partner care, inadequate disclosure is viewed as the lesser of two evils. That is, people may be willing to forgo the conclusion that needs and desires have been effectively disclosed if this maintains the perception that valued partners care for those needs and desires. Perhaps this is a sensible trade. After all, many of the benefits of self-disclosure, and of relationships more generally, depend on having a caring partner. Hence, in certain situations, people may have good reason to embrace the perception that their relationships are riddled with communication difficulties and misunderstandings; sometimes it is better to concede a small loss en route to a larger victory.



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