

Autonomy support in disclosure and privacy maintenance regulation within romantic
relationships

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Abstract

Romantic partners vary in their desire to share private information, and each partner must use appropriate strategies to elicit disclosure or maintain privacy from one's partner. In the present work, we propose that strategies that support the partner's autonomy, rather than being controlling, may be more acceptable and effective in eliciting disclosure and maintaining privacy in romantic relationships. In Study 1 ($N = 268$ individuals), participants rated the acceptability and effectiveness of autonomy supportive and controlling strategies presented in hypothetical scenarios. In Study 2 ($N = 78$ couples), we coded romantic partners' use of autonomy supportive and controlling strategies in recorded conversations, then assessed the acceptability and effectiveness of strategies. In both studies, autonomy supportive strategies were perceived as more acceptable and more effective than controlling strategies for eliciting disclosure and maintaining privacy from one's partner. Additionally, results of Study 2 demonstrated that eliciting disclosure using autonomy supportive strategies rather than controlling strategies resulted in greater and more personal content in partner disclosure. The results are discussed with reference to couples' interventions and the potential of autonomy supportive strategies to improve the quality of couples' communication and relationship quality.

Keywords: autonomy support; disclosure; privacy; communication; romantic relationships

Broader Impact Statement

This study examined the acceptability and effectiveness of autonomy supportive and controlling strategies in navigating discrepant desire for disclosure and privacy maintenance in romantic relationships. The present findings extend on the emergent literature on the positive effects of autonomy supportive practices for couples' relationship quality, and specifically add to the nuanced understanding of how couples can better support one another through positive communication patterns.

Autonomy support in disclosure and privacy maintenance regulation within romantic relationships

Romantic partners often express their desires for disclosure and privacy maintenance to regulate how they share private information. In intimate relationships, higher rates of disclosure have been associated with benefits for both partners in the relationship, including greater intimacy and better relationship quality between the couple (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Aron et al., 1997; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). However, despite the benefits of disclosure, partners may also prefer to maintain privacy in certain life domains. The different strategies that partners rely on to negotiate their different desires for disclosure or privacy maintenance can impact how both partners experience their relationship (Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Hawk et al., 2009). In two related studies, we assessed how one form of potentially positive strategies—autonomy supportive strategies—may help couples elicit disclosure or maintain privacy in an acceptable and effective manner, allowing them to maintain positive perceptions of the relationship.

Disclosure and Privacy Maintenance in Romantic Relationships

In romantic relationships, couples must continually navigate each partner's desires for self-disclosure and for keeping to oneself, which fluctuate across situations. As described by Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT; Baxter & Braithwaite, 2010), there is a tension between willingness to disclose and maintenance of privacy in intimate relationships. Disclosure refers to the willingness to share information about internal and private experiences, while privacy maintenance identifies the desire to maintain separate, private thoughts about such experiences. RDT suggests that couples can differ in their desires to share and communicate with one another through communication such as disclosure, and in this divergence exists a tension between disclosure and privacy-maintenance that they must continually negotiate.

Despite potentially divergent desires for disclosure, greater disclosure may have benefits for the couple. According to Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), greater breadth and depth of disclosure between romantic partners result in greater closeness and intimacy towards one another. Accordingly, research suggests that the desire to disclose and be open between partners directly influences couples' subjective intimacy (Laurenceau et al., 2005; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). Specifically, greater rates of actual disclosure within the couple are associated with an array of positive relationship characteristics, including greater satisfaction, love, commitment, stability, and trust (Greene et al., 2006; Meeks et al., 1998; Sprecher, 1987). Thus, disclosure may have inherent benefits for both subjective and partner-perceived relationship quality.

On the other hand, maintaining privacy rather than disclosing has been associated with negative relationship characteristics such as relationship dissatisfaction (Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Laurenceau et al., 2005). Despite this potential negative impact, individuals may decide not to disclose to their partner for a myriad of reasons, including due to fears of ridicule, rejection, or potential manipulation through the shared information; to self-reflect; to avoid hurting the partner; or simply due to the irrelevance of or noninterest of the partner in the topic (Derlega et al., 2008; Dillow et al., 2009). Whether an individual chooses to disclose or maintain privacy appears to vary across partners, over time and contexts, and on a daily basis (Ben-Ari, 2012; Greene et al., 2006). Given this variation in the reasons and contexts for disclosure and privacy-maintenance, couples may recurrently navigate opposite desires regarding disclosure (Canary & Yum, 2016; Montgomery, 1993).

When partners' desires for disclosure and privacy differ, their respective efforts to satisfy their own desire for disclosure or privacy can be perceived negatively by the other partner,

especially when these efforts are interpreted as insensitive or inappropriate (e.g., Hawk et al., 2009; Finkenauer et al., 2009). For example, indirect strategies to elicit disclosure from one's partner, such as disclosing in the hope that the partner may reciprocate or intrusive snooping, are often used by new couples even if these are considered less effective than direct strategies (Vinkers et al., 2011; Hawk et al., 2009). However, Berger and Kellerman (1994) have suggested that, in established romantic relationships, direct and open questions are most effective for eliciting disclosure despite often being considered confrontational and inappropriate.

Similarly, strategies to maintain privacy must be used carefully, as although they serve to withhold information, the ultimate relationship goal is to preserve the relationship (Hess, 2002). Despite their potentially negative impact, knowledge on positive privacy-maintenance strategies in romantic relationships is limited. We know however that poor privacy-maintenance strategies—such as being inattentive or unavailable, or providing short answers to requests for disclosure and ridiculing such requests (Boker & Laurenceau, 2006; Hess, 2002)—can create doubts and uncertainties in relationships (Caughlin & Golish, 2002; Noller & White, 1990). Meanwhile, when romantic partners are inattentive or unsupportive of previous disclosures, individuals may further regulate how much to maintain privacy from their partners (Dillow et al., 2009).

Given these tensions in the desire for disclosure and privacy maintenance, couples must be able to successfully negotiate their desires—for example, using strategies that will maintain and perhaps even enhance relationship quality. Developing effective and sensitive communication strategies to regulate diverging desires for disclosure or privacy maintenance can therefore be crucial to ensure the successful negotiation of this tension in couples.

Autonomy Support and Controlling Strategies for Regulating Disclosure and Privacy

In the present study, we rely on Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2000) to propose that a distinctive feature of positive disclosure-eliciting and privacy-maintenance strategies is the extent to which they are autonomy supportive (AS). SDT is a motivational theoretical framework emphasizing the central role of autonomy support in creating more optimal interpersonal exchanges. SDT defines autonomy as the need to feel a sense of agency and ownership of one's behaviors (as opposed to feeling pressured by internal or external forces). In the context of intimate relationships, autonomy support involves demonstrating consideration and respect for the partner's individuality (Deci et al., 2006). AS partners empathize with and acknowledge the other's ideas and feelings. They also encourage initiatives and active participation in problem solving or decision-making. Finally, they interact with their partner in an informational way as opposed to an evaluative one (Mageau et al., 2015).

In contrast, when partners thwart the need for autonomy, they are described as controlling (CTL). CTL behaviors aim at making partners think, feel or be in a certain way, regardless of partners' own desires and feelings. These behaviors may take the form of internal or external pressures, such as threats, guilt-inductions, tangible rewards, controlling language, directives and commands (Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010). Regardless of form, CTL behaviors share the distinct features of being pressuring, dominating, and intrusive (Grolnick & Pomerantz, 2009).

In the context of romantic relationships, autonomy support has been shown to have considerable implications for the state and stability of the relationship (e.g., Deci et al., 2006; Patrick et al., 2007). Individuals who feel that their partner supports their autonomy report more secure attachment, are more willing to rely on their partner, are more satisfied and committed to their relationship, and show a more efficient and open conflict resolution pattern (La Guardia et al., 2000; Patrick et al., 2007; Ryan et al., 2005). In contrast, CTL behaviors appear to undermine

individual and relational functioning. Romantic partners who feel controlled report less honesty and trust within their relationship, are less comfortable during disclosures, and generally feel less satisfied, intimate, vitalized, and secure (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008).

Given the important role of autonomy support for couples' optimal functioning, it seems likely that autonomy support may also play a role in how disclosure-eliciting strategies and privacy-maintenance strategies may be received by partners. Indeed, Ben-Ari (2012) suggests that when partners communicate a mutual understanding and respect for each other's varying desires for disclosure and privacy (i.e., a behavior that may be conceptualized as AS), the process of coordinating disclosure and privacy maintenance can even increase intimacy within the relationship.

Based on these earlier works, we proposed that couples' attempts at resolving tension in discrepant desires for disclosure and privacy may be translated into AS or CTL strategies, which in turn could impact relationship outcomes. Figure 1 summarizes this process and each partner's role within it. When partners (disclosers and investigators) in a relationship have discrepant goals to keep vs. obtain information, they can achieve their goal through AS or CTL strategies. For example, discloser partners can restrict how much information they share while also maintaining the relationship by using AS strategies that acknowledge the partner's affection and desire to help. On the other hand, investigator partners can attempt to obtain information from their partner while also maintaining the relationship by using AS strategies that demonstrate support, open up the conversation, and convey choice (e.g., noticing their mood, asking about their day, showing availability). When used in situations of tension in disclosure, AS strategies are expected to support relationship functioning and information sharing, while CTL strategies are expected to thwart these outcomes.

In two studies, we assessed the acceptability and effectiveness of AS and CTL strategies for regulating disclosure. In Study 1, participants rated the acceptability and effectiveness of AS strategies and CTL strategies in eliciting disclosure or maintaining privacy in hypothetical interactions involving their romantic partner. In Study 2, partners from existing romantic couples were assigned the role of investigator or discloser and discussed topics of their choosing, and the effectiveness of AS and CTL strategies in their recorded conversations was assessed. Further, given knowledge that both autonomy support and disclosure in a relationship are related to positive relationship characteristics such as intimacy, we assessed how AS and CTL strategies would be associated with partners' perceptions of their relationship in Study 2. Based on SDT and the numerous benefits associated with autonomy support (Deci & Ryan, 2000), we expected that, overall, AS (vs. CTL) strategies would be more acceptable and effective in disclosure-eliciting and privacy-maintenance situations to navigate discrepant desires for disclosure between romantic partners.

Study 1

Our objective in Study 1 was to examine the perceived acceptability and effectiveness of hypothetical AS and CTL strategies for eliciting disclosure and maintaining privacy in couples. Using two hypothetical scenarios, we examined acceptability and effectiveness of these strategies from the perspective of the person who is on the receiving end of these strategies. That is, in the disclosure-eliciting scenario, participants rate the effectiveness of partners' use of AS/CTL strategies to obtain information from them without risking the state of the relationship (perspective of disclosers who rate strategies for eliciting disclosure from hypothetical investigators). In the privacy-maintenance scenario, participants rate the effectiveness of partners' use of AS/CTL strategies to keep some information private without risking the state of

the relationship (perspective of investigators who rate strategies for maintaining privacy from hypothetical disclosers). We expected that:

H1: participants would perceive AS strategies from hypothetical partners as more acceptable and effective than CTL ones to successfully obtain information (disclosure-eliciting scenario) and to manage to keep information private (privacy-maintenance scenario).

In secondary analyses, we explored the moderating role of disclosure-eliciting versus privacy-maintenance goals (i.e., disclosure-eliciting vs. privacy-maintenance scenarios) on perceptions of acceptability and effectiveness of AS and CTL strategies. Given that privacy-maintenance strategies may represent a threat to the relationship (Knee et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2006), we expected that the impact of favoring an AS approach would be greater for these strategies:

H2: participants would perceive greater differences between AS and CTL strategies for privacy-maintenance strategies from hypothetical partners than for disclosure-eliciting strategies.

Method

Participants

Participants were 286 young adults (85.1% female), with a mean age of 23.66 years ($SD = 4.84$) who had been romantically involved with their partner (not participating in this study) for an average of 42.14 months ($SD = 41.81$). Approximately half of the sample (57.5%) reported being in a relationship but not living with their partner, 32.5% were cohabiting/common-law, and 10.0% were married. Most participants reported being heterosexual (94.4%), with some reporting same-sex (2.6%) or bisexual (3.0%) orientations. Most participants identified as French Canadian (83.2%), with a few identifying as French (7.5%), Arabic (2.6%), Hispanic (1.5%), or

having other heritage (5.2%). The sample was highly educated: 52.8% obtained a pre-university or technical diploma and 43.1% received a university degree, with the rest being high school educated. Possibly due to overrepresentation of university students, income was low, with 41.7% reporting an annual income below CAD\$10,000, 41.1% earning between CAD\$10,000 and CAD\$29,999, and 17.2% earning CAD\$30,000 or more. A socioeconomic status (SES) index was calculated by averaging the standardized scores for education level and income.

Procedure

All procedures were approved by the institutional ethics board at the authors' home university, and data was collected from July to September 2014. Participants were recruited (1) in undergraduate psychology courses at a major university in Canada, (2) by sending emails to members of the Quebec Society for Research in Psychology, and (3) via Facebook. Potential participants were required to be in a romantic relationship to participate and all participants provided written consent. As compensation, participants were invited to enter their name into a draw for eight \$25 CAD Amazon gift certificates. Questionnaires took 30- to 45-minutes to complete and were completed in-class in psychology courses (45.1%) or online (54.9%). Compared to the undergraduate sample, online participants were older, had higher SES, were dating for a longer period of time, and reported higher relationship quality and autonomy support from their partner. No difference was observed on how participants perceived the proposed strategies in terms of AS, acceptability and effectiveness, and thus participation method was not controlled in the main analyses.

Scenarios. In the questionnaire, participants first read two scenarios representing interactions between romantic partners. The *disclosure-eliciting* scenario read: "You come home from a hard day at work, you went through an intense conflict with some colleagues, and you are

preoccupied. Your partner notices your state of mind and would like to encourage you to talk about it.” Following this scenario, participants were presented with AS and CTL strategies that their partner could use to solicit disclosure (Table 1). The *privacy-maintenance* scenario read: “Your partner comes back home after a hard day at work. He/she is obviously preoccupied and, although you want to know what happened, he/she does not want to talk about it”. Participants then read AS and CTL strategies that their partner could use to maintain privacy (Table 2). The selection of AS and CTL strategies is described in preliminary analyses.

Measures

Participants were asked to imagine themselves in each scenario and to evaluate each hypothetical strategy on perceived autonomy support, acceptability, and effectiveness to reach its goal on a 7-point Likert scale (1 “do not agree at all”; 7 “strongly agree”). Participants rated each strategy individually, prior to moving on to the next one. After rating each strategy for each scenario, they reported on their actual partner’s autonomy support and their relationship quality. Internal consistency for all measures (Cronbach’s α) ranged from good to excellent (see Table 3).

Perceived autonomy support. The three-item Autonomy Need Satisfaction subscale of the Basic Need Satisfaction in Relationships questionnaire (La Guardia et al., 2000) was used to evaluate the extent to which each strategy would be successful in satisfying participants’ need for autonomy (e.g., “I could voice my opinion and have a say in what happens”).

Acceptability. The acceptability of each strategy was evaluated using the item “I would find this strategy acceptable” in both disclosure-eliciting and privacy-maintenance scenarios.

Effectiveness. Effectiveness was evaluated for each strategy in the disclosure-eliciting scenario with the statement “Following this answer, I would be inclined to disclose information about myself”, and for each strategy in the privacy-maintenance scenario with, “Following this

answer, I would be inclined to question him/her further". Privacy-maintenance scores were reversed, with higher scores reflecting more effectiveness in reaching privacy goals.

Plan of analyses

We first verified the validity of the AS and CTL strategies in the disclosure-eliciting and privacy-maintenance scenarios using factor analyses. We also examined descriptive statistics and correlations. Second, we ran our primary analyses to test the main effect of strategy type (AS vs. CTL) on acceptability and effectiveness perceptions using MANOVA and subsequent ANOVAs (H1). Finally, we explored the moderating effects of scenario type on acceptability and effectiveness perceptions of AS and CTL strategies (H2).

Results

Preliminary analysis

Selection of AS and CTL strategies. We first created various AS and CTL strategies based on SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and past research (e.g., Berger & Kellerman, 1994; Hess, 2002). For each scenario, strategies were formulated for each prototypical AS (i.e., providing choice, acknowledging feelings and perspective, and giving rationales) and CTL behavior (i.e., invalidations, guilt induction, use of threats, intrusions, criticisms; see Mageau et al, 2015). All relevant strategies that could be found in past research for each scenario were then added to complete our initial list of strategies (from Berger, 1979; Berger & Kellerman, 1983; Hess, 2000; Kellermann & Berger, 1984; Miller, 1996; Miller & Jablin, 1991; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985; Reeve et al., 2006; Vinkers et al., 2011). Three SDT experts then rated these strategies on a response scale ranging from 1 "controlling" to 7 "autonomy supportive" and the most autonomy-supportive and controlling strategies were kept. Inter-rater agreement on ratings was high ($ICC = .97, p < .001$).

Factor structure of AS and CTL strategies. The validity of the selected strategies was further tested using participants' evaluation of how autonomous each strategy would make them feel in each scenario. Two exploratory factor analyses using Maximum Likelihood (ML) and oblimin rotation were performed to evaluate the factorial structure of disclosure-eliciting and privacy-maintenance strategies respectively. Strategies, factor loadings, eigenvalues, and percentage of explained variance for AS and CTL are presented by scenario type in Tables 1 (disclosure-eliciting) and 2 (privacy-maintenance). In the disclosure-eliciting scenario, one strategy failed to load on either factor and was thus excluded. In order to retain the same number of AS and CTL strategies, the lowest loading CTL strategy was also removed. After the deletion of these two strategies, the scree test suggested the presence of two factors, which corresponded to AS and CTL strategies. All disclosure-eliciting strategies correlated with their respective factor, with loadings above .44. All cross-loadings fell below .31. In order to retain an equal number of items across the two scenarios, the AS and CTL strategy with the lowest loading were also deleted in the privacy-maintenance scenario. After deleting these two items, the scree test suggested the presence of two factors, labeled AS and CTL privacy-maintenance strategies. All items correlated with their respective factor, with loadings above .53. All cross-loadings fell below .29.

Differences in perceptions of autonomy across strategy and scenario types. As a manipulation check, we performed a repeated measures 2x2 ANOVA to evaluate mean differences in perceptions of autonomy across strategy types and scenarios, both as within-subject factors. Results confirmed that participants perceived AS strategies ($M = 5.45$; $SD = .04$) as generally more autonomy supportive than CTL ones ($M = 3.28$; $SD = .05$), $F_{\text{strategy}}(1, 267) = 1864.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .88$. This difference was observed in both scenarios, but it was more

pronounced in the disclosure-eliciting scenario, $F_{\text{interaction}}(1, 267) = 10.28, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .04$, with AS strategies being perceived most positively ($F_{\text{disclosure}}(1, 267) = 392.96, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .60, M_{AS \text{ disclosure}} = 5.99$ vs. $M_{CTL \text{ disclosure}} = 3.74$; $F_{\text{privacy}}(1, 267) = 205.28, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .44, M_{AS \text{ privacy}} = 4.90$ vs. $M_{CTL \text{ privacy}} = 2.82$)¹.

Descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Table 3. Overall, strategies were perceived as moderately acceptable and effective. Demographic variables were not linked to perceptions of acceptability. For effectiveness, female participants perceived all strategies as more effective than male participants, $t(266) = 3.86, p < .001$.

Primary Analyses

Differences in participants' perceptions of acceptability and effectiveness across strategy types (AS and CTL) were first tested using a repeated-measures MANOVA, followed by ANOVAs (H1). Results showed a significant effect of strategy type at the multivariate level, Wilks' $\Lambda = .09, F(2, 265) = 1347.40, p < .001, \tau^2 = .91$. This effect remained significant at the univariate level for both acceptability, $F(1, 266) = 2688.00, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .91$, and effectiveness, $F(1, 266) = 963.27, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .78$. Mean differences revealed that AS strategies were perceived as more acceptable ($M = 5.41$; $SD = .72$) and effective ($M = 5.48$; $SD = .70$) than CTL ones ($M_{\text{acceptability}} = 2.66$; $SD_{\text{acceptability}} = .68$; $M_{\text{effectiveness}} = 3.97$; $SD_{\text{effectiveness}} = .72$).

Exploratory Moderation Analyses By Scenario Type

The moderating effect of scenario type on acceptability and effectiveness perceptions of AS and CTL strategies was explored using a repeated measures MANOVAs, followed by ANOVAs (H2). A significant multivariate interaction emerged between strategy and scenario

¹ Simple effects of scenario type for AS and CTL strategies revealed that for both AS and CTL strategies, disclosure-eliciting strategies were perceived as more autonomy supportive than privacy-maintenance ones ($F_{AS}(1, 267) = 1764.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .87$; $F_{CTL}(1, 267) = 1176.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .82$) but this difference was more pronounced for AS strategies.

type. This effect remained significant at the univariate level for both acceptability, $F(1, 266) = 10.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$, and effectiveness, $F(1, 266) = 181.05, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .41$. Further analyses showed that participants perceived AS strategies as more acceptable than CTL ones, across scenarios. However, participants reported greater differences in acceptability between AS and CTL in the privacy-maintenance scenario, with CTL privacy-maintenance strategies being perceived as least acceptable.² Similarly, AS strategies were perceived as more effective than CTL ones, across scenarios. However, contrary to H2, participants reported smaller differences in effectiveness between AS and CTL strategies in the privacy-maintenance scenario than in the disclosure-eliciting scenario.³ These interactions are presented in Figure 2a and 2b.

Study 1 Summary

Results of Study 1 suggest that partners may communicate their desires for disclosure and privacy maintenance in a way that is autonomy supportive. Hypothetical strategies formed two factors—AS and CTL—and AS strategies were perceived as more acceptable and effective across scenarios, although differences in acceptability were more pronounced in the privacy-maintenance than in the disclosure-eliciting scenario while the reverse was observed for effectiveness. The present findings provide initial evidence that AS strategies may be effective for communicating diverging desires for disclosure and maintenance of privacy. However, given that hypothetical scenarios were used to investigate AS and CTL strategies, generalizability of the results were limited.

² Simple effects of scenario type for AS and CTL strategies revealed that both strategies were perceived as more acceptable in the disclosure-eliciting scenario than in privacy-maintenance scenario ($F_{AS \text{ strategies}}(1, 266) = 183.78, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .41$; $F_{CTL \text{ strategies}}(1, 266) = 268.87, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .50$) but this difference was more pronounced for CTL strategies.

³ Simple effects of scenario type for AS and CTL strategies revealed that AS strategies in the disclosure-eliciting scenario were perceived as more effective than in the privacy-maintenance scenario. In contrast, and despite CTL strategies being generally less effective than AS ones, CTL strategies in the privacy-maintenance scenario were evaluated as more effective than in the disclosure-eliciting scenario ($F_{AS \text{ strategies}}(1, 267) = 7.99, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .03$; $F_{CTL \text{ strategies}}(1, 267) = 78.64, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$).

Study 2

Building upon Study 1's findings, Study 2 investigated the role of AS and CTL strategies during romantic couples' requests for disclosure and privacy maintenance in an observed, filmed conversation. We expected that there may be important differences between how partners think they would react to a given situation and what their actual reaction would be in conversation. Thus, in Study 2, we observed conversations between romantic couples to deduce the occurrence of AS and CTL strategies in conversation. Partners were assigned roles of investigator or discloser in the conversation (see below for assignment method), and content of conversations were coded for the number of speech turns that aimed to elicit disclosure (by investigators) or to maintain privacy (by disclosers) as well as the AS or CTL quality of all statements within each turn. We assessed the effectiveness of these strategies in eliciting information sharing from disclosers (for disclosure-eliciting strategies) and reducing the number of attempts at obtaining disclosures from investigators (for privacy-maintenance strategies). Based on results of Study 1, we expected that when eliciting disclosure:

H3: the more investigators used AS strategies and the less they used CLT ones, the more discloser partners would disclose; and,

H4: the more investigators used AS strategies and the less they used CTL ones, the deeper and more personal the discloser partners' disclosures would be.

When maintaining privacy, we hypothesized that:

H5: the more disclosers used AS strategies and the less they used CLT ones, the less frequently investigator partners would attempt to elicit disclosure.

A secondary objective was to test the links between participants' use of AS and CTL regulation strategies during the live conversations and their partners' perceptions of

their relationship's characteristics, namely intimacy during the conversation, relationship satisfaction, commitment, and attachment security. Considering the benefits associated with autonomy support, we expected that:

H6: more AS and less CTL strategies would be linked to better relationship outcomes, including better intimacy, satisfaction, commitment, and security.

Method

Participants

A total of 78 couples participated. On average, participants had been dating for 2 years and 7 months ($SD = 2.8$ years, range = 1 month to 15 years) and 40% of the couples were cohabitating. Most of the participants were heterosexual (91.7%), with 3.8% and 4.5% reporting same-sex and bisexual orientations, respectively. Mean age was 22.5 years ($SD = 3.4$ years) for women and 23.4 years ($SD = 4.0$ years) for men. Participants were predominantly French Canadian (82.1%), with a few reporting French (9.6%), Arabic (1.9%) or Brazilian (1.3%) backgrounds (other: 5.0%; missing: 2.6%). Most participants were highly educated: 57.7% obtained a pre-university or technical diploma, 35.9% a university degree, and 5.1% a high school diploma as their highest diploma, while 1.3% did not complete high school. Income was lower than the population average with 57.1% annually earning less than \$10,000 CAD, 32.8% earning between \$10,000 and \$29,999 CAD, and 10.1% earning \$30,000 CAD or more. A socioeconomic status (SES) index was calculated by averaging the standardized scores for education level and income.

Procedure

All procedures were approved by the institutional ethics board at the authors' home university, and data were collected from November 2014 to February 2015. Supplemental

Material A provides a more detailed account of the procedures. Participants were recruited through advertisements posted across a major university in Canada and via email invitations to a pool of individuals interested in participating in psychology studies. Couples agreeing to participate were booked for a lab session and were emailed a copy of the consent form and an online questionnaire to be completed prior to the session.

Role Assignment. The pre-laboratory questionnaire evaluated participants' actual and desired level of intimacy in their everyday interactions with their partner, and discrepancy in actual versus desired intimacy was used to determine partners' roles during the laboratory session. Partners who reported a higher desired level than actual level of intimacy in their relationship at the time of the study were designated as the *investigator*, while the other partner was given the role of *discloser* for the lab session.

Lab session. At the lab session, couples signed the consent form and engaged in four videotaped conversations, which consisted of two practices (3 and 5 mins) and one main conversation (20 mins), and a final reconciliation (5 mins). For brevity, only the main conversation is described further. The conversation room was set up for a cozy atmosphere following procedures in Gable et al. (2006). Couples were told that they would be randomly assigned to investigator and discloser roles for the interactions (but see role assignment above). Investigators were asked to initiate the conversation and to try to learn more about their partner regarding different topics. Disclosers were informed that their partner would raise various topics and were asked to share their experience as naturally as possible or to inform their partner that they would prefer not to disclose. Investigators were provided a list of topics typically relevant to couples and instructed to choose at least four topics for the main conversation to ensure that they would have enough material to discuss for 20 minutes. Investigators were asked to choose topics

that were interesting to them and that had not been previously fully discussed with the discloser. During the conversation, they could choose how to raise each topic and when to switch to the next topic. After the videotaped interactions, each participant completed a post-interaction questionnaire. Couples received \$50 as compensation.

Measures

Pre-laboratory questionnaire. Levels of actual and desired partner intimacy were evaluated using a 14-item scale from Laurenceau et al. (1998). Four components of intimacy were examined: partner's disclosure (3 items), partner's responsiveness (3 items), self-disclosure (3 items), and intimacy (5 items). Each item was also adapted to assess desired level of intimacy (e.g., "How close would you like to be with your partner?") for a total of 28 items. Actual versus desired intimacy discrepancy was computed by subtracting desired ratings from actual ratings. Participants also identified their gender, age, primary ethnic identity, educational level, income, marital status, sexual orientation and relationship length.

Post-Interaction Questionnaire. Measures in the post-interaction questionnaire were rated on 7-point response scales unless otherwise specified in the cited work (e.g., relationship satisfaction). Internal consistency for all measures ranged from satisfactory to excellent, as depicted in Table 4.

Perceived autonomy during conversation. Each partner's perceptions of autonomy during the conversation were assessed using the Autonomy Need Satisfaction subscale of the Balanced Measure of Psychological Needs scale (6 items; Sheldon & Hilpert, 2012). For disclosers, a sample item is "I was free to reveal myself in my own way"; for investigators, a sample item is "I was free to elicit disclosures in my own way".

Intimacy during the interaction. Each partner's intimacy was evaluated by adapting the

Laurenceau et al. (1998) measure from the pre-laboratory questionnaire to target perceptions during the interaction (e.g., “During the conversation, how close were you with your partner?”).

Perceived relationship quality. Perceived relationship quality was operationalized as relationship satisfaction and commitment. Relationship satisfaction was assessed using the 16-item version of the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007), and commitment was assessed using the Investment Model Scale (IMS; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998).

Romantic attachment. The Experiences in Close Relationships Questionnaire-Short Form (ECR-S, Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007; e.g., “I try to avoid getting too close to my partners”) was used to assess each partner’s attachment representations. Six items measure attachment avoidance and six items measure attachment anxiety.

Perceived AS style of current romantic partner. Perceived autonomy support of the partner was assessed using an adapted version of the 24-item Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (P-PASS; Mageau et al., 2015), a validated measure of AS and CTL behaviors. AS subscales included: providing choice (3 items; e.g., “In general, my partner seems confident in my ability to make the right choices”), acknowledging feelings and perspectives (3 items), and giving rationale (3 items). CTL subscales included: invalidation (3 items; e.g., “My partner questions my way of thinking or feeling”), guilt induction (3 items), use of threats (3 items), intrusion (3 items), and criticisms (3 items). An AS index was obtained by averaging the AS items with the reverse-scored CTL items.

Coding of Interactions

The main conversations were coded by turn. Each turn was coded for the presence of investigators’ disclosure-eliciting statements (quantity; i.e., total number of disclosure-eliciting turns), and all coded statements were categorized as AS or CTL strategies (quality). Similarly,

each turn was coded for the presence of disclosers' privacy-maintenance statements (quantity; i.e., total number of privacy-maintenance turns), and all coded statements were categorized as AS or CTL strategies (quality). A detailed description of the coding scheme is provided in Supplement B. Quantity and quality of disclosures were coded using the Couples' Intimate Behavior Rating System (Mitchell et al., 2008). Two independent coders blind to study objectives evaluated the videos for all coding. One coder evaluated all videos ($N = 78$) and the second coder evaluated half of these videos ($n = 39$). Inter-rater agreement (ICC) across strategies' and disclosures' quantity and quality ranged from .70 to .99 (see Supplement B for all inter-rater agreement values).

Validation of AS and CTL strategies. To validate the coded strategies, we first examined their correlations with autonomy perceptions by the recipient of the strategy and with the general AS style of the user of the strategy. We retained strategies that were significantly correlated with at least one indicator of autonomy support (recipient perceptions or user style) and then applied exploratory factor analyses (with Maximum Likelihood, oblimin rotation), separately for disclosure-eliciting strategies and for privacy-maintenance strategies.

For 23 initially coded *disclosure-eliciting strategies*, 10 strategies were correlated with either disclosers' perceptions of autonomy or investigators' AS style. A scree test on the 10 strategies revealed two factors, corresponding to AS and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies. Two strategies had low loadings on the AS factor (authenticity, respectful tone), and were consequently excluded. In the final solution, all strategies correlated with their respective factor and yielded loadings above .40. Ultimately, three strategies composed the AS disclosure-eliciting strategies factor:

1. acknowledging feelings and perspective;

2. providing information regarding one's interest, concern or motives; and
3. offering choice or flexibility regarding content, depth or timing of disclosures.

Five strategies composed the CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies factor:

1. deceiving;
2. invalidating;
3. voicing person-related criticisms;
4. making rejecting comments; and
5. using a disrespectful tone of voice.

As expected, the AS and CTL factors were negatively correlated ($r = -.37, p < .001$). The AS disclosure-eliciting strategies factor was positively correlated with disclosers' perceived autonomy during the conversation ($r = .27, p = .018$) and investigators' AS style ($r = .41, p < .001$). The CTL factor was negatively related to these same constructs (disclosers' perceived autonomy, $r = -.23, p = .043$; investigators' AS style, $r = -.45, p < .001$).

For 19 initially coded *privacy-maintenance strategies*, four strategies were correlated with either investigators' perceived autonomy or disclosers' AS style. A scree test of the four strategies revealed the presence of one factor, corresponding to CTL privacy-maintenance strategies. One item showed a negative factor loading with the CTL factor (using a respectful tone of voice), and was consequently excluded. No valid AS factor could be detected as none of the initially coded AS privacy-maintenance strategies correlated with ratings of investigators' perceived autonomy or disclosers' AS style, thereby preventing further investigation of AS privacy-maintenance strategies. In the final solution, three remaining strategies yielded loadings above .60 and composed the CTL privacy-maintenance strategies factor:

1. deceiving;

2. criticizing; and
3. using a disrespectful tone of voice.

The CTL privacy-maintenance strategies factor was not related to investigators' perceived autonomy ($r = -.15, p = .181$), but was negatively related to disclosers' AS style ($r = -.47, p < .001$).

Quantity and quality of disclosure-eliciting strategies. The main conversation was thus coded for the number of speech turns containing disclosure-eliciting statements from investigators (quantity) and specific strategies (quality). Thus, for each speech turn by investigators, coders determined whether it aimed to elicit disclosure from partners, and we assessed the *quantity of disclosure-eliciting statements* via the total frequency of such turns throughout the conversation. For each of the disclosure-eliciting statements within a turn, coders then determined whether it included AS and CTL strategies or not, creating quality rating scales ranging from 0 to 3 for AS (3 potential AS strategies) and from 0 to 5 for CTL (5 potential CTL strategies). Quality scores for each disclosure-eliciting turn were averaged to obtain global scores of *AS and CTL quality of disclosure-eliciting strategies* for the full interaction.

Quantity and quality of privacy-maintenance strategies. The main conversation was also coded for the number of speech turn containing privacy-maintenance statements from disclosers (quantity) and specific strategies (quality). Thus, for each speech turn by disclosers, coders determined whether it aimed to maintain privacy, and we assessed the *quantity of privacy-maintenance statements* via the total frequency of such turns throughout the conversation. For each of these privacy-maintenance statements within a turn, coders then determined whether it included CTL strategies or not, yielding quality scores ranging from 0 to 3 (3 potential CTL

strategies). Quality scores for each privacy-maintenance turn were averaged to obtain global scores of *CTL quality of privacy-maintenance strategies* for the full interaction.

Quantity and quality of disclosures. The quantity of disclosure was calculated as the quotient of total disclosures (by disclosers) over the total number of investigators' disclosure-eliciting speech turns. For quality, each disclosure was rated on depth (Mitchell et al., 2018; 4-pt scale, 1 = superficial, 4 = highly personal), and depth scores were then averaged and divided by the total number of investigators' disclosure-eliciting speech turns.

Plan of analyses

We first performed preliminary analyses to examine the relations among the variables of interest. Next, we conducted a series of multiple regression models to evaluate the unique contributions of AS and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies on 1) quantity and quality of disclosures controlling for investigators' general AS style and quantity of disclosure-eliciting speech turns, and in a more exploratory fashion, on 2) disclosers' perceptions of their relationship (relationship quality, intimacy, attachment). Finally, another set of multiple regression models evaluated the unique contribution of disclosers' CTL privacy-maintenance strategies on 1) the quantity and quality of investigators' disclosure-eliciting strategies controlling for investigators' general AS style and quantity of disclosure-eliciting speech turns, and in a more exploratory fashion, on 2) investigators' perceptions of their relationship (relationship quality, intimacy, attachment).

Results

Preliminary analyses

Descriptive statistics. Disclosure-eliciting speech turns ($M = 77.12$; $SD = 30.19$; 29.3% AS⁴; 13.4% CTL; 57.3% neither or both) were more frequent than privacy-maintenance ones ($M = 23.96$; $SD = 15.67$; $t(77) = 19.10$, $p < .001$). In addition, privacy-maintenance speech turns tended to be CTL (67.8%; $N_{\min} = 0$; $N_{\max} = 48$) rather than AS (3.9%; $N_{\min} = 0$; $N_{\max} = 6$) or either neutral or both (28.3%). Thus, relatively few privacy-maintenance speech turns occurred and even fewer included AS strategies. Correlations and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4. Demographics were not related to variables of interest, with the exception of disclosers' age and relationship satisfaction. However, given that the correlations were not consistent across relationship outcomes, demographic variables were not controlled in the main analyses. Quantity of disclosure-eliciting speech turns and investigators' general AS style were significantly correlated with the use of AS disclosure-eliciting strategies and to actual disclosure quantity and quality. Thus, we controlled for both variables in analyzing the contribution of AS and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies to disclosure outcomes.

Main analyses

Disclosure-eliciting strategies and quantity of disclosure. Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted, with AS and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies as predictors, controlling for investigators' general AS style and quantity of disclosure-eliciting statements (H3). Results showed that AS disclosure-eliciting strategies were positively associated with the quantity of disclosure. Thus, the more investigators used AS disclosure-eliciting strategies, the more disclosers shared about themselves ($\beta = .25$, $p = .044$). Contrary to expectations, CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies did not predict quantity of disclosure ($\beta = -.05$, $p = .703$). Investigators' general AS style ($\beta = .14$, $p = .260$) and quantity of disclosure-eliciting speech

⁴ These values represent the proportions of speech turns that included at least one AS strategy, one CTL strategy, none of these strategies or both a AS and a CTL strategy, respectively.

turns ($\beta = -.16, p = .149$) were no longer related to quantity of disclosure when controlling for quality of disclosure-eliciting strategies. The model accounted for 19.3% of the variance in quantity of disclosure, $F(4,77) = 4.37, p = .003$, reflecting a medium to large effect (Cohen, 1992).

Disclosure-eliciting strategies and quality of disclosure. A second hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to predict quality of disclosure, with AS and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies as predictors and controlling for investigators' general AS style and quantity of disclosure-eliciting statements (H4). Results revealed that AS disclosure-eliciting strategies were positively linked to quality of disclosure ($\beta = .33, p < .001$). Thus, the more investigators used AS disclosure-eliciting strategies, the more disclosers shared personal, deep information about themselves. However, CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies did not have a significant impact on disclosure quality ($\beta = .01, p = .973$). In addition, while investigators' general AS style did not predict disclosure quality when controlling for the effects of AS and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies ($\beta = -.03, p = .750$), the quantity of disclosure-eliciting speech turns remained a significant and negative predictor of the quality of disclosure ($\beta = -.59, p < .001$). The model accounted for 57.5% of the variance in the quality of disclosure, $F(4,77) = 24.69, p < .001$, reflecting a large effect (Cohen, 1992).

Disclosure-eliciting strategies and intimacy during interaction. Linear models tested the relations between AS and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies and disclosers' intimacy during the interaction and their perceptions of relationship characteristics (relationship quality and attachment; H6). Results indicated that CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies were negatively associated with disclosers' perceived intimacy during the interaction ($\beta = -.39, p < .001$). Thus, the more investigators used CTL strategies, the less disclosers felt intimate during the

interaction. Surprisingly, AS disclosure-eliciting strategies did not have a significant impact on disclosers' perceived intimacy during the interaction ($\beta = .11, p = .344$), although these variables were related in bivariate correlations ($r = .25, p = .013$). Thus, CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies may be a relatively more important predictor of relationship intimacy than AS disclosure-eliciting strategies. The model accounted for 19.4% of the variance in disclosers' perceived intimacy, $F(2,77) = 9.02, p < .001$, reflecting a medium to large effect (Cohen, 1992).

Disclosure-eliciting strategies and relationship quality. Results revealed that AS disclosure-eliciting strategies ($\beta = .18, p = .130$) and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies ($\beta = -.19, p = .122$) did not predict disclosers' relationship satisfaction when both predictors were entered simultaneously in the model. The fact that the correlations for both AS ($r = .25, p = .013$) and CTL ($r = -.25, p = .013$) disclosure-eliciting strategies and disclosers' relationship satisfaction were significant suggests that the AS and CTL variables may account for the same portion of variance in relationship satisfaction. A supplemental analysis of the correlation between a global AS index (computed by subtracting CTL strategies from AS strategies) and relationship satisfaction showed a positive, significant association ($r = .30, p = .007$). Thus, the more investigators relied on AS strategies without using CTL strategies to elicit disclosure, the more their partners reported feeling satisfied with the relationship. AS ($\beta = .09, p = .446$) and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies ($\beta = -.12, p = .341$) did not predict disclosers' commitment.

Disclosure-eliciting strategies and attachment. Results of the linear regression model revealed that AS disclosure-eliciting strategies were negatively associated with both abandonment anxiety ($\beta = -.36, p = .003$) and avoidance of proximity ($\beta = -.27, p = .025$), while CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies were not linked to either attachment style (anxiety, $\beta = -.02, p = .858$; avoidance, $\beta = .05, p = .700$). Thus, the more investigators used AS disclosure-eliciting

strategies, the less disclosers reported abandonment anxiety and avoidance proximity. Together, these predictors accounted for 12.6% of the variance in disclosers' abandonment anxiety, $F(2,77) = 5.41, p = .006$, and for 8.6% of the variance in disclosers' avoidance of proximity, $F(2,77) = 3.52, p = .035$, reflecting a medium to large, and a small to medium, effect, respectively (Cohen, 1992).

Privacy-maintenance strategies and interaction and relationship outcomes.

Regression analyses showed that CTL privacy-maintenance strategies did not predict any outcomes (H5 & H6). Reduced variability in privacy-maintenance strategies may have limited our ability to detect significant effects.

Study 2 Summary

Results of Study 2 echo those of Study 1, suggesting that AS strategies may be effective in regulating disclosure and maintain positive relational outcomes in existing romantic couples and their conversations. Findings showed that using AS disclosure-eliciting strategies could indeed elicit more and deeper disclosure from partners, and when paired with the absence of CTL strategies, were associated with more relationship satisfaction. AS disclosure-eliciting strategies were also linked to more positive attachment features, such as less abandonment anxiety and less avoidance of proximity. In contrast, CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies seemed to jeopardize partners' intimacy during the interaction but did not predict disclosure or relationship outcomes. Moreover, CTL privacy-maintenance strategies were not related to disclosure, nor to relational outcomes, potentially due to limited variability in these strategies. Further parallels between the two studies, as well as their theoretical implications, limitations, and future directions are discussed in the next section.

Discussion

The aim of the present paper was to assess whether AS strategies may be effective in successfully navigating discrepant desires for disclosure and privacy-maintenance between partners in romantic relationships. Study 1 showed that in hypothetical scenarios, AS strategies were perceived as more acceptable and effective than CTL ones, whether the goal was to elicit disclosure or maintain privacy. Study 2 echoed these findings in conversations in real romantic couples, with partners disclosing more (in quantity and depth) as more AS disclosure-eliciting strategies were used and reporting more positive relationship outcomes. Further, although CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies did not predict disclosure, they were negatively associated with partners' intimacy during the interaction. Thus, across the two studies, AS and CTL strategies were validated as potential strategies for successfully navigating desires for disclosure (and for privacy maintenance in Study 1).

More specifically, AS and CTL strategies formed distinct factors in both studies, with AS strategies consisting of acknowledging feelings and perspective, demonstrating one's interest or concern, and offering flexibility regarding content, timing or form of disclosures. Together, these strategies create a communication that is more empathic, informational and supportive of active participation, the three main ingredients of autonomy support (Deci et al., 2006; Mageau et al., 2015). In contrast, CTL strategies are more dominating and pressuring, and included deceiving, invalidating, voicing person-related criticisms, making rejecting comments and using a disrespectful tone of voice. In particular for eliciting disclosure (and to maintain privacy in Study 1), compared to CTL strategies, AS strategies were perceived as more acceptable and effective for communicating desires regarding disclosure in a constructive manner.

Additionally, Study 2's findings demonstrated that AS disclosure-eliciting strategies were effective in eliciting more and deeper disclosure from the partner. Particularly when paired with

an absence of CTL strategies, AS disclosure-eliciting strategies were also related to greater relationship satisfaction and less anxious or avoidant attachment. Given past research on the positive impact of autonomy support on motivational processes (Patrick et al., 2007), disclosure-eliciting strategies could influence relationship satisfaction through their impact on partners' intrinsic motivation to disclose, and in a more general manner, for being in the relationship. That AS but not CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies were linked to attachment also suggests that it is not partners' expression of a desire for disclosure that reduces insecurities but rather that this desire is communicated in an AS way. Potentially, AS disclosure-eliciting strategies may help anxious or avoidant individuals embrace more closeness with their partner or turn to their partner for support in times of distress (Ryan et al., 2005).

Meanwhile, CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies were considered not acceptable or effective (Study 1) and were related to disclosers' perceptions of less intimacy (Study 2), echoing past research showing the detrimental impact of invalidating responses and controlling behaviors on relationship intimacy and connectedness, respectively (La Guardia & Patrick, 2008; Reis & Shaver, 1988). In some instances, a downward spiral may occur if partners perceive threatened relational bonds within their relationship, triggering more controlling strategies to regain emotional proximity (Bowlby, 1969), which in turn may further increase partner distance.

Privacy-maintenance strategies were overall considered low in acceptability and effectiveness in Study 1, with CTL strategies less acceptable and effective compared to AS strategies. Echoing these trends, Study 2 demonstrated that AS privacy-maintenance strategies could not be validated. However, the fact that CTL privacy-maintenance strategies were not related to relationship outcomes was surprising. This finding may reflect the tendency for higher relationship well-being and stability amongst couples who together participate in research studies

(Barton et al., 2020). That is, couples who participated together may already have had positive communication characteristics that included AS and open sharing, rather than CTL or closed communication. Indeed, there was little evidence of or variability in AS and CTL privacy-maintenance strategies in our observational study. It is also possible that all privacy-maintenance strategies are considered highly negative, with negative implications for the stability and intimacy of the relationship. This hypothesis would be congruent with Study 1's findings that privacy-maintenance strategies were perceived more negatively than disclosure-eliciting strategies. As a result, disclosers in Study 2 may not have felt comfortable using privacy-maintenance strategies during a filmed conversation that would later be analyzed (i.e., due to social desirability).

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations must be considered in interpreting the present results. First, our studies were hypothetical (Study 1) or correlational (Study 2), and it is not possible to draw causal or directional conclusions regarding the actual impact of AS vs. CTL strategies. Second, the studies overrepresented French-Canadian participants, and thus the generalizability of the results may be limited. For example, Zhang & Kline (2020) highlight that the link between communication and relationship satisfaction may be stronger for Western than non-Western couples. Third, the topics of disclosure in Study 1 and conversation in Study 2 were not measured for relative importance for the couple. Considering that willingness to disclose or maintain privacy can differ even within the same couple depending on the topic domain (e.g., see Knobloch & Carpenter-Theune, 2004), it is possible that the observed effects may have been different if, for example, the topics directly concerned the relationship. Fourth, we did not assess other perceptions of investigators or disclosers, such as perceived rudeness of the strategies

presented in the hypothetical scenarios (Study 1) and of coded statements (Study 2) or perceived anger that could correlate with AS vs. CTL perceptions. These perceptions could thus pose as confounds in our results.

Further limitations regarding Study 2 include the use of a holistic coding scheme rather than a sequential analysis that can consider the dynamics involved in the conversations. Recorded conversations also took place in the lab, and as such may not fully reflect patterns of conversations of these couples in the real world as do more naturalistic methods such as daily diary entries. Additionally, roles attributed to each partner in Study 2 required a different set of independent variables to be assessed for each partner. Although this procedure allowed us to assess a sufficient number of disclosure-eliciting strategies during the conversation, we could not test if partners' outcomes were influenced by both their own score on the independent variable (i.e., actor effect) and their partner's score on that same variable (i.e., partner effect). In line with the actor-partner interdependence model (Cook & Kenny, 2005), future research may use a design in which both partners assume the roles of investigator and discloser.

Conclusion

In sum, the present studies highlight the necessity to better understand AS strategies within daily intimate interactions as partners express their desire for disclosure and privacy maintenance. By identifying concrete and readily applicable AS strategies, this study provides key recommendations on how romantic partners can navigate their discrepant desires for disclosure successfully. Understanding optimal disclosure-eliciting and privacy-maintenance strategies is particularly important considering that communication problems and lack of intimacy are the most commonly reported reasons for seeking therapy for couples (Doss, Simpson, & Christensen, 2004). Collectively, the present paper provides initial evidence that AS

conversation strategies can foster deeper and better sustained interactions in couples as well as more positive relationship perceptions.

Disclosure Statement

As part of IARR's encouragement of open research practices, the authors have provided the following information: This research was not pre-registered.

The data used in the research are available by emailing: [masked for review]. The materials used in the research are available by emailing: [masked for review].

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Table 1.
Study 1 Summary of Factor Analysis for disclosure-eliciting strategies

Item	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
Autonomy-supportive strategies		
15. ... tells you that he/she has the feeling that something is the matter and asks you if you want to talk about it with him/her	.85	
9. ... informs you that he/she is available if you want to talk about it	.67	
14. ... asks you how things are going at work these days	.63	
2. ... tells you that you seem preoccupied	.62	
11. ... tells you that if you talk about it with him/her, he/she could maybe help you	.57	
6. ... asks you how was your day	.57	
5. ... tells you that if you talk about it with him/her, it could maybe make you feel better	.55	
13.... suggests that you take a moment and sit down together	.53	
Controlling strategies		
7. ... tells you that he/she talks to you when something is wrong, thus you should do the same		.84
16. ... tells you to talk to him/her about it because that way you could move on to something else afterwards		.70
1. ... mentions that as a couple you should tell each other everything		.67
12. ... questions you unceasingly until there is nothing left to say about it		.66
3. ... tells you that you are usually able to disclose what is wrong		.62
4. ... tells you that he/she is in a hurry and to tell him/her quickly what is wrong		.51
10. ... asks you what was so terrible in your day to make you preoccupied like that		.46
8. ... tells you to talk to him/her about it (e.g., Tell me what's wrong)		.44
Alpha	.85	.84
Eigen Value	1.76	5.30
% of Explained Variance	11.00	33.14

Table 2.

Study 1 Summary of Factor Analysis for privacy-maintenance strategies

Item	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
Autonomy-supportive strategies		
14. ... tells you that it is very nice that you care for him/her, but that he/she would prefer not talk about it	.73	
7. ... tells you that he/she understands that you are concerned by what is happening to him/her, but that at the moment he/she prefers to think about something else	.72	
1. ... tells you that he/she understands that you wish to know what happened. But on the other hand, he/she really does not feel like talking about it	.71	
11. ... tells you that he/she is not disposed to talk about it now but that you will get to talk about it later	.71	
15. ... tells you that it has not been a good day but that he/she does not feel like talking about it further	.67	
10. ... tells you that he/she does not wish to talk about it, but he/she proposes a way that you could help him/her (e.g., help to get his/her mind off things)	.62	
13. ... asks you in a respectful way (e.g., using the I word) to stop questioning him/her about this because he/she prefers not to talk about it	.59	
4. ... tells you politely that he/she does not feel like talking about it	.58	
Controlling strategies		
9. ... tells you that you always want to know everything		.82
12. ... tells you that this does not concern you		.79
16. ... tells you that you should not ask questions about this		.77
2. ... tells you to stop always worrying with his/her work matters		.72
6. ... tells you to stop questioning him/her about this		.69
8. ... pretends not to have understood your question		.67
3. ... makes you feel that he/she prefers doing something else rather than having this conversation (e.g., he/she looks elsewhere)		.54
5. ... turns your question into a joke (e.g., you are funny to always worry)		.53
Alpha	.88	.88
Eigen Value	2.35	5.66
% of Explained Variance	14.69	35.40

Table 3.
Study 1 descriptive statistics and correlations

Variables	M	SD	α	2	3	4	5
<i>Strategies</i>							
1. Autonomy support	4.36	.59	.88/.90	.68*	.34*	-.01	-.11
2. Acceptability	4.13	.56	.82/.86	-	.41*	-.04	-.08
3. Efficacy	4.80	.60	.86/.88		-	.05	-.23*
4. Age	23.66	4.84				-	.08
5. Gender	-	-					-

Note. α represents Cronbach's alpha reliability. α for Autonomy Support, Acceptability, and Efficacy shows the disclosure/privacy scenarios. Gender is coded 0 = Women, 1 = Men. Relationship length is measured in months. * $p < .05$

Table 4

Study 2 descriptive statistics and correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>Observational</i>													
<i>Disclosure eliciting</i>													
1. AS strategies		-.37*	-.33*	.38*	.51*	-.21	-.27*	.28*	.09	.26*	-.19	-.13	.29*
2. CTL strategies		-	.17	-.23*	-.21	.40*	.26*	-.10	.07	-.37*	.08	-.06	-.34*
3. Quantity of speech turns			-	-.28*	-.70*	.12	.58*	-.02	-.01	.11	-.07	.01	-.07
4. Quantity of disclosure				-	.54*	-.07	-.61*	.23*	-.01	.25*	-.12	.03	.23*
5. Quality of disclosure					-	-.13	-.45*	.13	.00	.06	.04	.01	.09
<i>Privacy maintenance</i>													
6. CTL strategies						-	.12	-.10	.00	-.11	-.01	.03	-.47*
7. Quantity of speech turns							-	-.13	-.04	-.12	.08	-.08	-.21
<i>Participant-reported</i>													
8. Relationship satisfaction	.25*	-.25*	-.13	.23*	.16	-.28*	-.27*	.65*	.57*	.39*	-.29*	-.36*	.44*
9. Commitment	.14	-.15	-.05	.10	-.05	-.28*	-.26*	.73*	.41*	.22	-.09	-.47*	.21
10. Intimacy	.25*	-.43*	.06	.21	.03	-.51*	-.14	.53*	.43*	.49*	-.10	-.16	.42*
11. Anxiety	-.36*	.11	.19	-.26*	-.26*	.18	.12	-.29*	-.13	-.13	.06	.09	-.16
12. Avoidance	-.29*	.15	.18	-.22*	-.18	.22	.35*	-.67*	-.65*	-.43*	.00	.19	-.30*
13. Perceived partner's AS style	.41*	-.45*	-.19	.30*	.22*	-.46*	-.34*	.71*	.56*	.69*	-.21	-.67*	.64*
										<u>Investigators</u>			
<i>M</i>	.34	.19	77.12	.67	.08	.15	23.96	5.41	6.50	5.77	3.34	1.95	6.10
<i>SD</i>	.16	.20	30.19	.16	.06	.19	15.67	.58	.68	.74	1.03	.71	.68
<i>α</i>								.95	.81	.89	.69	.61	.86/.90
										<u>Disclosers</u>			
<i>M</i>								5.32	6.18	5.74	3.27	2.30	5.95
<i>SD</i>								.76	.93	.77	1.09	.95	.84
<i>α</i>								.97	.82	.88	.69	.73	.88/.93

Notes. Correlations above the diagonal represent investigators, below the diagonal represent disclosers. Correlations on the diagonal represent investigator-discloser correlations. α represents Cronbach's alpha as a measure of interitem reliability. α for Perceived partner's AS style shows the AS/CTL subscales. AS/CTL subscales for AS style were significantly correlated (disclosers, $r = -.72, p < .001$; investigators, $r = -.55, p < .001$). * $p < .05$

Table 5

Study 2 Linear models predicting disclosure and relationship quality reported by disclosers

a) Disclosure (by disclosers)

	Quantity of disclosure			Quality of disclosure		
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t
<i>Control variables</i>						
Perceived investigator's general AS style	.14	.02	1.14	-.03	.01	-.32
Quantity of disclosure-eliciting speech turns	-.16	.00	-1.46	-.59	.00	-7.33***
<i>Disclosure-eliciting strategies</i>						
AS strategies	.25	.13	2.05*	.33	.04	3.69***
CTL strategies	-.05	.10	-.38	.00	.03	.03
Model						
	<i>F</i>	4.37**		24.69***		
	<i>R</i> ²	.19		.58		

Note. SE = standard error, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

b) Disclosers' perceptions of relationship quality

	Relationship Quality									Attachment						
	Intimacy			Satisfaction			Commitment			Abandonment anxiety			Avoidance of proximity			
	β	SE	t	β	SE	t	β	SE	t	β	SE	t	β	SE	t	
<i>Disclosure-eliciting strategies</i>																
AS strategies	.11	.54	.95	.18	.56	1.53	.09	.72	.77	-.36	.80	-3.12**	-.27	.71	-2.29*	
CTL strategies	-.39	.43	-3.49***	-.19	.45	-1.57	-.12	.57	-.96	-.02	.64	-.18	.05	.57	.39	
Model																
	<i>F</i>	9.02***			3.82*			1.19			5.41**			3.52*		
	<i>R</i> ²	.19			.09			.03			.13			.09		

Note. SE = standard error, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1

Autonomy supportive and controlling strategies to navigate discrepancy and tension in disclosure management

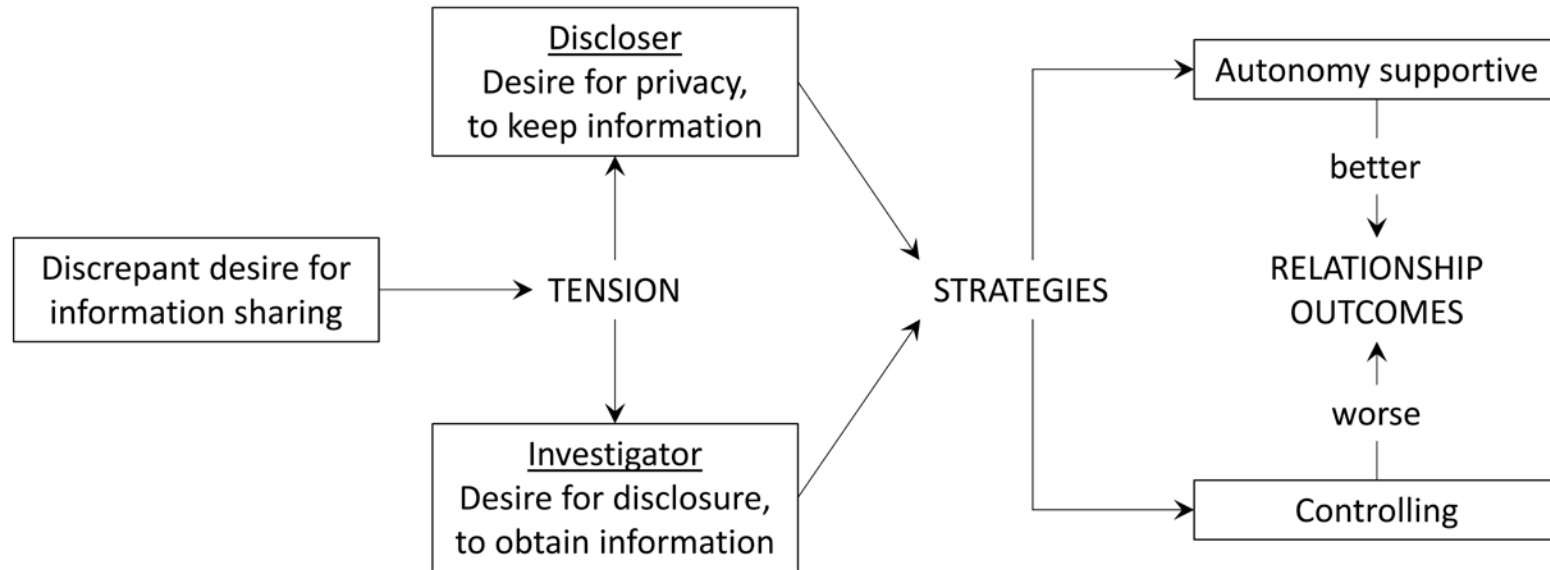
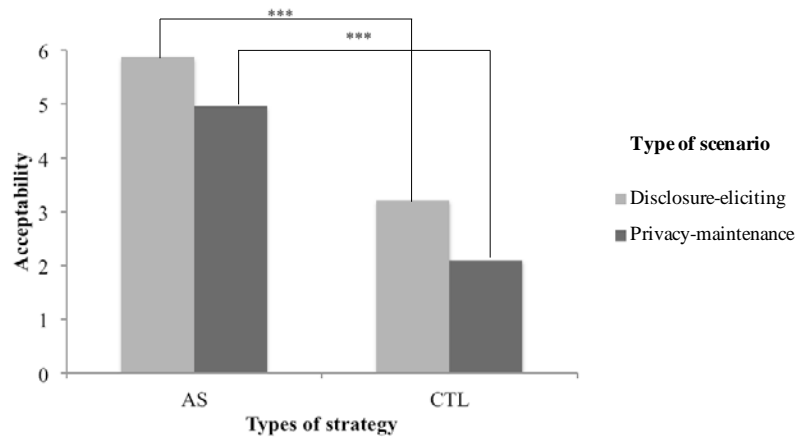


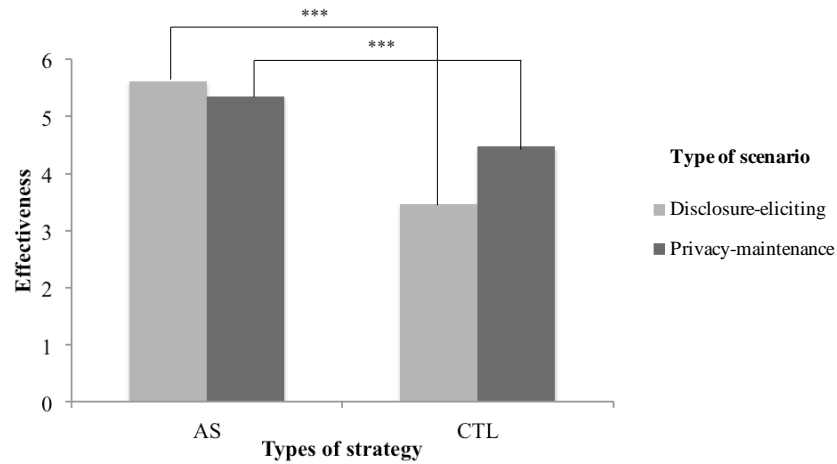
Figure 2

Study 1 Interactions predicting acceptability and effectiveness of strategies

a) Interaction between types of strategy and types of scenario in the prediction of acceptability



b) Interaction between types of strategy and types of scenario in the prediction of effectiveness



Supplemental Material A: Study 2 Full Procedures

Title: Autonomy support in disclosure and privacy maintenance regulation within romantic relationships

Participants were recruited through advertisements posted on the walls of a major university in Canada and via email invitations to a pool of individuals interested in participating in psychology studies. The recruitment material specified that couples were invited to attend a one-hour laboratory session where they would engage in filmed conversations as well as complete questionnaires. Each partner of a couple interested in participating was sent an informational email containing an online pre-laboratory questionnaire. The questionnaire assessed demographic variables and participants' actual and desired level of intimacy in their everyday interactions with their partner. Discrepancies between reports of actual and desired levels of intimacy were then used to determine partners' roles during the laboratory session. Partners who reported the larger discrepancy between desired and actual level of intimacy indicating that they would like more open communication (i.e., disclosure) in their relationship (desired level of intimacy > actual one) were designated as the "investigator", while the other partner was given the role of "discloser".

Each couple was then invited to a laboratory session at the authors' home university. The experimental room was equipped with two small tables, one of which was covered by a tablecloth and featured a small bedside lamp. Two comfortable chairs were set beside it, angled to face each other to create a cozy atmosphere. The camera was set up on the second table, outside of the participants' field of vision, and captured both partners. A similar procedure has been demonstrated in Gable et al. (2006). Upon a couple's arrival, the experimenter welcomed each partner and gave them consent forms. Participants were informed that different roles would be randomly attributed (although these roles were attributed based on actual-desired intimacy discrepancies) and that they would participate in four videotaped interactions. These four interactions included: two practice interactions (3 and 5 mins), one main interaction (20 mins), and a final reconciliation interaction (5 mins). Investigators were asked to raise different topics of conversation during the session and to try to learn more about their partner regarding these topics. Disclosers were informed that their partner would raise various topics and were asked to share their experience as naturally as possible or to communicate to their partner that they would prefer not to disclose. The first two videotaped interactions were used as practice to increase participant familiarity with the procedures.

Practice conversation. In the first 3-minute practice session, couples were asked to discuss the last time they went to a restaurant together. During this practice, the experimenter stayed in the room to answer participants' questions, and to offer guidance when participants seemed unsure of their roles. In the second 5-minute practice session, couples were asked to keep their roles and discuss their first date for five minutes, without the experimenter. These practice trials were meant to help couples behave in the most natural way possible during the main conversation by increasing familiarity with the procedures. These trials are not discussed further.

Main conversation. For the main conversation, investigators read a list of topics typically relevant to couples and were asked to choose at least four that had not been fully discussed with their partner and that would be of interest to them. Four topics was considered a sufficient number of topics to fill 20 minutes without completing the interaction task too early.

Investigators could choose how to raise each topic and when to switch to a different one if they were not learning anything new or if their partner was reticent to discuss a particular topic. Couples engaged in a 20-minute conversation without the experimenter. All couples conversed for the full 20 minutes.

Questionnaire. After the conversation, participants were asked to complete a post-conversation questionnaire that assessed perceptions of autonomy during the conversation, relational outcomes, and the partner's AS style in general. Participants answered the questions independently, after being assured that their partner would never have access to their responses.

Reconciliation and debriefing. Partners were then reunited and asked to engage in a final, five-minute interaction, without the experimenter. They were instructed to ignore their attributed roles and to take turn describing their partner's most prized qualities. This interaction was designed to elicit positive emotions and to reduce any negative responses to the main conversation. Couples were then informed of the study's purposes and hypotheses, although the way roles were attributed to each partner was not revealed to preserve the confidentiality of each partner's relative intimacy ratings. Couples were thanked and given \$50 as compensation.

Supplemental Material B: Study 2 Detailed Coding Scheme

Title: Autonomy support in disclosure and privacy maintenance regulation within romantic relationships

Coding of conversations. Each speech turn in the main conversation was coded to assess the quantity and quality of the disclosure-eliciting strategies used by investigators, the quantity and quality of information shared by disclosers, and the quantity and quality of privacy-maintenance strategies used by disclosers. Two independent coders blind to study objectives were trained to evaluate the videos. Coders first determined whether a strategy demonstrated by an investigator indicated a disclosure-eliciting speech turn. The discloser's response to the investigator's speech turn was then coded as demonstrating disclosure, privacy-maintenance, or neither. One coder evaluated all videos ($N = 78$) and the second coder evaluated half of these videos ($n = 39$). The quantity and quality of disclosures were coded using the Couples' Intimate Behavior Rating System (Mitchell et al., 2008).

Investigators: Disclosure-eliciting strategies. The total number of disclosure-eliciting speech turns was counted by each coder to assess the *quantity of disclosure-eliciting responses*, with excellent interrater reliability ($ICC = .99$). Then, for each disclosure-eliciting speech turn, coders determined which AS and CTL strategies were present. Only strategies whose validity was supported were retained to assess the *quality of disclosure-eliciting strategies*. AS disclosure-eliciting strategies included: acknowledging feelings and perspective; providing information regarding own interest, concern or motives; and offering choice and flexibility regarding content, depth or timing of disclosures (3 AS strategies). CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies included: deceiving; invalidating; voicing person-related criticisms; making rejecting comments; and using a disrespectful tone of voice (5 CTL strategies). Coders determined if each disclosure-eliciting speech turn by investigators included an AS or CTL strategy using "Absent" (0) or "Present" (1) ratings. An AS disclosure-eliciting strategies score (theoretical range = 0 to 3) was obtained for each speech turn by adding the scores of the three AS strategies. AS scores for each speech turn were then averaged across all disclosure-eliciting speech turns to obtain a global AS quality score for the full interaction. The same procedure was applied for CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies (theoretical range = 0 to 5). Coders showed good inter-rater agreement for AS ($ICC = .73$) and CTL disclosure-eliciting strategies ($ICC = .86$).

Disclosers: Disclosure responses. The quantity of disclosures reflected the amount of information that disclosers shared in proportion to the number of disclosure-eliciting speech turns by investigators. This was calculated by dividing the total number of disclosers' disclosures by the total number of investigators' disclosure-eliciting speech turns. The inter-rater reliability was excellent ($ICC = .95$). The quality of disclosure assessed depth of disclosure (Mitchell et al., 2008). Coders rated each disclosure on a 4-point scale reflecting the extent to which each disclosure was of a personal nature (1 = *Superficial*; 4 = *Highly personal*). Quality scores were averaged across disclosures and divided by the number of disclosure-eliciting speech turns by investigators. Inter-rater reliability was excellent ($ICC = .99$).

Disclosures: Privacy-maintenance strategies. The total number of privacy-maintenance speech turns by disclosers represented the *quantity of privacy-maintenance responses*. Inter-rater reliability for quantity was good ($ICC = .84$). Then, for each privacy-maintenance speech turn, coders determined which AS and CTL strategies were present. Only strategies whose validity

was supported were retained to assess the *quality of privacy-maintenance strategies*. CTL privacy-maintenance strategies included: deceiving; voicing person-related criticisms; and using disrespectful tone of voice (3 strategies). The validity of AS privacy-maintenance strategies could not be ascertained, and AS for privacy-maintenance was dropped from further analysis. Coders determined if each privacy-maintenance speech turn by disclosers included a CTL strategy using “Absent” (0) or “Present” (1) ratings. A CTL privacy-maintenance strategies score (theoretical range = 0 to 3) was obtained by adding the scores of the three CTL strategies. CTL scores for each speech turn were then averaged across all privacy-maintenance speech turns to obtain a global CTL quality score for the full interaction. Intra-class correlation for quality was good (ICC = .70).