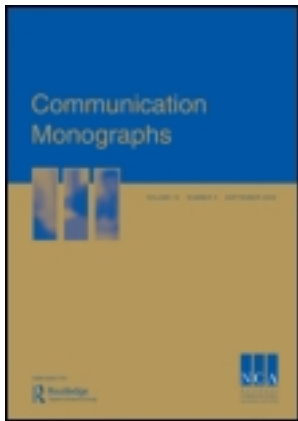


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“You can’t tell anyone but . . .”: Exploring the Use of Privacy Rules and Revealing Behaviors

Maria K. Venetis, Kathryn Greene, Kate Magsamen-Conrad, Smita C. Banerjee, Maria G. Checton & Zhanna Bagdasarov

This three-part study examines how privacy rules function to protect shared information from further revelation. Communication Privacy Management served as a theoretical framework to investigate issues related to boundary management. In the pilot study, college students (N = 409) described privacy rules and their use, and participants reported not further revealing the information when privacy rules were expressed by disclosers. In Study 1, participants (N = 167) reported on disclosing health-related information, and participants did not anticipate that recipients would further reveal especially when they used a privacy rule. In Study 2, dyads (dyad N = 257) reported on shared disclosure experiences, including both anticipated and actual boundary management. Study 2 findings include that privacy rules have limited effectiveness. The article discusses implications of privacy rule use when sharing private information.

Keywords: Communication Privacy Management; Disclosure; Explicit Privacy Rules; Implicit Privacy Rules; Disclosure Warnings; Further Revealing

Self-disclosure is an “interaction between at least two individuals where one intends to deliberately divulge something personal to another” (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006, p. 411), and the information shared tends to be of a private or secret nature. Furthermore, self-disclosure occurs when individuals reveal “thoughts and feelings about themselves” to others (Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008, p. 153). Disclosure

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research tends to focus on individuals disclosing their *own* personal and sensitive information (e.g., failing a course or a breakup) (e.g., Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993) or information that directly affects the discloser (e.g., parents' divorce) (see Mathews, Derlega, & Morrow, 2006). However, individuals also disclose others' information such as when a woman reveals her sister's HIV status at her sister's request (e.g., Greene & Faulkner, 2002; Miller & Rubin, 2007) or a man talks about his roommate's dating behavior (e.g., Baxter, Dun, & Sahlstein, 2001). Disclosing another's information is referred to as both third-party disclosure (e.g., Greene, Derlega, Yep, & Petronio, 2003) and also as gossip¹ (e.g., Baxter et al., 2001; Goldsmith, 1989; Greene & Faulkner, 2002; Petronio, 2002). Retelling of others' information, either as gossip or as third-party disclosure, is pervasive (Harber & Cohen, 2005). Gossip is rated as the third most frequent communicative behavior among undergraduates (Baxter et al., 2001) and is used not only to share information but also to entertain and develop relationships (Guerin & Miyazaki, 2006). Therefore, it is not uncommon for individuals to disclose others' personal information, but we know little about how this behavior functions in relationships.

Communication Privacy Management (CPM)

Several theories, including Communication Privacy Management (CPM) (Petronio, 2002), explain how individuals share information. CPM postulates that disclosing individuals regard their private information differently from their general and nonsensitive information and that disclosers take steps to safeguard private information when sharing it with others. CPM argues that individuals are mindful when disclosing private information and are cognizant that disclosed information could potentially result in subsequent disclosures. Individuals tend to claim "ownership" of their personal information and may establish privacy rules that attempt to define parameters of this ownership (or "linkage" through connecting and coordinating boundaries, see Petronio, 2002) and determine if or what information can be further disclosed. Petronio's (2002) conceptualization describes the recipient as *co-owner* of the information. Based on this notion, after the disclosure episode the discloser expects that the recipient will observe negotiated (or stated) privacy boundaries as conceptualized by the discloser. These privacy rules can be either implicitly stated, such as hints, or explicitly stated. The present multistage research project explores how the use of privacy rules may serve to protect information from further revelation and specifically, if there is a difference in recipients' revealing practices based on the discloser's selection of privacy rules. The study also examines if the nature of the information affects disclosers' use of implicit or explicit privacy rules. Three different studies were conducted to address these questions. The pilot is a descriptive exploratory study focusing on measurement development and explores (1) disclosure recipients' perceptions of the use of privacy rules and self-reported revealing behavior, and (2) if the information shared predicts the use of a particular privacy rule. Study 1 tests the relationship among information variables, use of privacy rules, and anticipated further revealing from the perspective of the discloser.

Study 2 is a dyadic study that replicates and extends Study 1 by including the recipient's self-reported revealing behavior (i.e., further disclosure). Taken together, these studies contribute measurement development and extend understanding of how privacy rules function in protecting information from further revealing.

Privacy Rules

Explicitly stated privacy rules are direct statements that generally accompany a disclosure and specifically address the question of boundaries or further disclosure. These statements seek to frame the interaction to communicate that the shared information must be concealed from further sharing or from specific others. Examples of explicitly stated privacy rules include *prior restraint phrases* or *disclosure warnings*² (Petronio, 2002), such as “don't tell anybody, but...” (Petronio & Bantz, 1991, p. 263). In a conversation analysis study of 150 accounts of secret-telling based on reflexive participant observation, Rodriguez and Ryave (1992) described how establishing boundaries when sharing secret information occurs in a patterned sequence that includes disclosers announcing that they have a secret, recipients accepting or rejecting responsibility of keeping the secret concealed, disclosure of the information, and recipients' response to the disclosure. Although Rodriguez and Ryave assert that privacy rules are commonly issued before the sensitive information is revealed, it seems reasonable that explicitly stated privacy rules could be issued at any time during the disclosure interaction, including immediately afterward or even in a later interaction (see disclosure warnings, Petronio, 2002).

Implicitly stated privacy rules are ambiguous and not clearly articulated. Types of implicitly stated rules include: hints at privacy during the disclosure episode, preexisting rules that are applied without an explicit prompt, or rules that are negotiated as individuals form new relationships. Petronio (2002) explains that children can be socialized to understand their family's privacy rules (see Afifi, 2003); for example, information about one family member can be freely shared among other family members but not with outside others (cf., Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997). Hence, implicitly stated rules can function so that individuals learn what types of information can be shared freely or must be concealed and from whom, but the individual has this knowledge without an overt statement explaining boundaries surrounding further revealing or concealing of that information.

When an individual receives self-disclosure, the discloser may perceive that the receiver has accepted responsibility to protect the information (Petronio, 2002; Rodriguez & Ryave, 1992). However, the receiver may not share the perceived agreement to protect the information. For example, one study of hypothetical HIV disclosure asked participants to read an HIV disclosure and to write a response as though speaking with the discloser (Caughlin et al., 2009). The responses of the participants who were asked not to share the HIV disclosure did not demonstrate a pattern of accepting the privacy boundaries (Caughlin et al., 2009), suggesting potential misalignment of privacy expectations. Petronio and Bantz (1991) similarly found that recipients and disclosers anticipate the further telling of low, medium, and

high private information both when privacy warnings are and are not used. People can also predict to whom the information will be further shared: within the discloser's family, particularly to female relatives (Greene & Faulkner, 2002), or with the recipient's best friend or significant other (e.g., McAndrew, Bell, & Garcia, 2007; Petronio & Bantz, 1991). Even knowing that disclosure recipients may share the disclosed information, people expect that informed parties will be trustworthy and that the information will be largely protected from public distribution (Petronio & Bantz, 1991). Thus, it is clear that we need to further understand how privacy rules function in relationships. Although we have theorizing on this issue, data addressing these questions are minimal.

Information Assessment

Individuals disclose information of varying degrees of sensitivity, extending from less personal to highly guarded information (Petronio, 2002). Information management theories argue that individuals may differ in their patterns of disclosure based on assessment of the information (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Afifi & Steuber, 2010; Greene, 2009; Petronio, 2002). Furthermore, theorists differ in how they operationalize disclosers' information assessment. For example, Greene (2009) proposes five dimensions of information assessment: stigma, preparation, prognosis, symptoms, and relevance. Other methods of information assessment include information valence, such as positive or negative (e.g., Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Caughlin, Afifi, Carpenter-Theune, & Miller, 2005; Greene, 2009) or centrality of the information to the discloser's identity (e.g., Derlega et al., 1987; Petronio, 2002). Additionally, research has differentiated the information as *private* versus *secret* information (e.g., Kelly, 2002). Private information is personal and is not readily shared with others, and secret information is actively concealed from others (Derlega et al., 1993). Furthermore, secrets contain information that individuals strive to conceal because the information is negative and may be stigmatizing, embarrassing, and/or shameful (e.g., Derlega et al., 1993; Kelly, 2002).

As indicated with the distinctions of secret and private, disclosure practices can differ according to the effort expended to conceal the information from further revealing (Derlega et al., 1993; Kelly, 2002). Thus, disclosers may take special care to ensure that recipients understand exactly how they are expected to manage the secret/negative/central-to-identity versus private/less negative/less central-to-identity information. Articulating privacy boundaries for more sensitive (or secret) information is likely to differ from erecting boundaries for less sensitive (or private) information. Potentially further revealing practices may differ, and be more prevalent, if the boundaries are more permeable. However, the relationship between further revealing and information assessment has not been explored.

This three-part project examines both discloser and recipient views to explore assumptions concerning implicit and explicit privacy rules, ownership, further revealing, and information perceptions. These studies also develop measurement and

allow for future exploration. The literature review leads to the following initial questions and hypothesis for the pilot:

RQ1: Do disclosure recipients acknowledge both implicit and explicit privacy rules?

RQ2: Does the discloser's choice of privacy rule (either explicitly stated or implicitly understood) affect the recipient's further revealing of the shared information (i.e., do recipients' further revealing practices differ if the discloser uses an explicit rather than an implicit privacy rule)?

H1: Disclosers will use explicit privacy rules when sharing more sensitive information and will use implicit privacy rules when sharing less sensitive information.

RQ3: Are recipients' perceptions of shared information as more or less sensitive related to recipients' further revealing (i.e., if recipients perceive the information as more sensitive, are they less likely to further reveal the information; if recipients perceive information as less sensitive, are they less likely to safeguard the information and further reveal)?

Pilot Study

We initially conducted a pilot, exploratory study examining if individuals report using different forms of privacy rules when sharing sensitive information with others, and if information assessment affects the type of privacy rule used. Because of the absence of data in this area, the pilot study emphasized the recipient's perception of the phenomenon under study. Other studies reported here build on this initial pilot study, in particular for measurement development. A University IRB approved procedures for all studies. Pilot study analyses and coding procedures, including kappas, are available from the authors.

Participants and Procedure

Participants were 409 university undergraduate students at a large, Northeastern university. The sample included 145 men (35%) and 264 women (65%) ranging in age from 18 to 27 ($M = 21.09$, $SD = 1.54$). Participants self-identified primarily as Caucasian (63%).

Procedure, Coding, and Results

Introductory communication students were recruited to complete a survey (~25 minutes) outside of class for minimal extra credit. Participants, focusing initially on disclosure recipients, recalled an instance when another person shared private information with them. We generated coding categories and developed measures for Study 1 based on inductive examination of the data.

Privacy rules. For RQ1, participants responded to the following question: “Did the person ask you to keep the information private? If yes, what did he or she say?” Participants acknowledged the use of both explicit and implicit privacy rules in addition to a new category of no rules. *Explicit rules* ($n = 168$) included responses such as “Don’t tell anyone.” *Implicit rules* ($n = 90$) included responses such as “He didn’t have to tell me, I knew to keep it private.” *No rules* ($n = 109$) included responses such as “No.”

Further revealing. For RQ2, receivers responded to the following question: “Did you tell someone?” *Yes* ($n = 175$) included affirmative responses such as “Yes. I told my mom.” *No* ($n = 214$) included responses such as “No” and “I didn’t say anything.” A higher proportion of recipients who reported *No rules* did further reveal ($n = 77$) than those who did not ($n = 32$). A higher proportion of those who perceived *Explicit rules* did not further reveal ($n = 110$) than did further reveal ($n = 58$), and a higher proportion of recipients who perceived use of *Implicit rules* did not further reveal ($n = 63$) than did further reveal ($n = 27$).

Assessment of information and revealing. For H1 and RQ3, participants responded to the following item: “Did you consider this information to be a secret?” Responses included *Yes* ($n = 232$) and *No* ($n = 177$). Recipients reported that disclosers shared secret information with *Explicit rules* ($n = 141$) more often than expected, disclosed with *Implicit rules* ($n = 54$) as expected, and with *No rules* ($n = 23$) less than expected. Participants disclosed private information with *No rules* ($n = 86$) more often than expected, with *Implicit rules* ($n = 36$) as expected, and with *Explicit rules* ($n = 27$) less than expected. A higher proportion of recipients who perceived the information to be secret did not further reveal ($n = 159$) than did those who further revealed ($n = 73$). Further, a greater proportion of recipients who perceived the information to be private did further reveal ($n = 112$) than those who did not further reveal ($n = 65$). In examining data, it was clear that some recipients viewed the same topic as private and others as secret information. Thus, in the subsequent studies, we explore more nuanced information assessment dimensions.

Pilot Discussion

The pilot was an exploratory examination of the use of privacy rules and serves as foundation for measurement development for the subsequent studies. Participants (disclosure recipients in this study) reported that disclosers used both explicit and implicit privacy rules. Thus, recipients recognize boundary structures even when the discloser does not specifically request these boundaries, and this has not been investigated previously. Results indicate that the expectation that the recipient should not further share the information, either via explicitly stated requests or implied understandings, generally serves to protect the shared information from further revealing; however, if receivers perceived that no rules are used, then they are likely to further reveal. As expected, participants report use of explicit privacy rules with perceived highly sensitive/secret information, but contrary to prediction, these rules

are also used with less sensitive/private information. This relationship, as well as privacy rule use with private information, requires further investigation and is addressed subsequently in Studies 1 and 2.

Consistent with past research (Kelly, 2002), we found that the same information can be perceived as secret to one individual while private to another. We propose that other factors, such as information valence and information importance, may provide a superior approach to evaluating information (see multidimensional structure proposed by Greene, 2009 and tested in Greene et al., 2012), thus augmenting generalizability of these findings. Adaptations for Studies 1 and 2 include: (1) changing information assessment dimensions from private and secret to valence, sense of information ownership, and importance to the discloser; (2) exclusion of the function of “no rules” (not pertinent to the remainder of the project but addressed in future research); (3) more sophisticated, quantitative measurement of privacy rule use; and (4) in Study 2, dyadic reports to include both disclosers’ perception of anticipated further revealing as well as recipients’ self-reported revealing behaviors.

Study 1

Study 1 develops and tests measures to assess relationships between privacy rules, characteristics of the disclosed information, and further revealing, as well as to allow for model building. In addition to the privacy rule measure, we included a measure to assess the perception of degree of information ownership. Petronio (2002) explained that individuals assert ownership of their information, and we posit that this sense of ownership may be related to the type of privacy rule used. To examine ownership and privacy rules, we initially limited the context of the disclosure to health disclosures. Sharing a piece of health information provides a specific instance to examine how privacy rules are managed; this context was selected because health disclosures have practical implications based on stigma (Leary & Schreindorfer, 1998) as well as implications for how people manage relationships for social support (cf. Checton & Greene, 2012; Greene et al., 2012).

Hypothesized Model

Based on the preceding rationale and results of the pilot, the following model is hypothesized (see Figure 1).³ Stronger perceptions of information importance are associated with use of explicit privacy rules (H1a), and weaker perceptions of information importance are associated with use of implicit privacy rules (H1b). Similarly, more negative perceptions of information valence are associated with use of explicit privacy rules (H2a), and more positive perceptions of information valence are associated with the use of implicit privacy rules (H2b). Greater perceptions of ownership of information are associated with the use of explicit privacy rules (H3a), and weaker perceptions of ownership are associated with the use of implicit privacy rules (H3b). The use of an explicit privacy rule is associated with the perception that

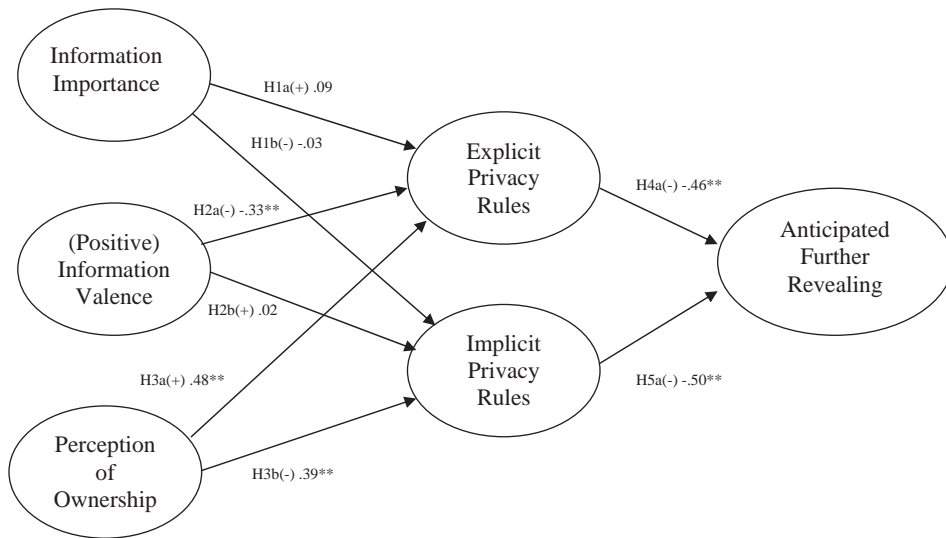


Figure 1 Hypothesized model and results for Study 1. Note: the first indicator is the model hypothesis (hypothesized direction in parentheses) followed by path weight. **Path significant at $p \leq .001$. *Path significant at $p \leq .01$.

the recipient did not further reveal (H4a). The use of an implicit privacy rule is associated with perceptions that the recipient did not further reveal (H5a).

Study 1 Method

Procedure and participants. Students from communication research courses at a large university in the Northeastern United States recruited individuals who met study requirements. Individuals were informed (in the recruitment script and also at the data collection) that participation involved completing a survey about sharing information about their nonvisible health condition. Researchers screened health conditions,⁴ and if approved, participants completed self-report measures about disclosing their health information. The items reported here focus on one specific person to whom participants had shared their health diagnosis. Thus, Study 1 examines the discloser's perspective.

The sample consisted of 167 female ($n = 132$) and male ($n = 35$) participants ranging in age from 18 to 82 years of age ($M = 23.62$ years, $SD = 10.96$ years). Approximately three-quarters of the participants were Caucasian (73%); others were Asian (7%), Bi/multiracial (4.5%), African American (4%), and other groups (3% or less). Participants reported knowing the person to whom they had disclosed their health condition for an average of 9.5 years ($SD = 10.00$, range = less than one month to 62 years). Many participants shared the health condition with the other person a few days after the diagnosis (34%), although some reported sharing years later (25%). Participants reported the status of their relationship with the recipient as friend (51%), dating partner/spouse (27%), family member (18%), and other (4%).⁵

Measures. Variables measured include *information valence*, *information importance*, *perception of ownership*, *explicit privacy rules*, *implicit privacy rules*, and *anticipated further revealing*. We screened the data for normality and outliers and did not need transformations. Two cases were deleted because of missing data. After confirming the unidimensionality of scales, we created composite scores by averaging responses to items. For Likert items, responses ranged from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*.

Information valence. Two semantic differential items derived from Vangelisti and Caughlin (1997) with responses ranging from 1 to 7 measured disclosers' perceptions of the valence of the information. Participants rated whether the information was good/bad (R) and negative/positive. Averaged higher scores indicate more positive information valence ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.73$; $\alpha = .86$).

Information importance. Three semantic differential items derived from Vangelisti and Caughlin (1997) with responses ranging from 1 to 7 measured disclosers' perceptions of the importance of the information. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) revealed that three items loaded onto one latent construct, $\chi^2(26) = 35.41$, $p = .10$, $CFI = .99$, $RMSEA = .03$. Participants rated whether the information was a part of me, significant, and essential to my identity. Averaged higher scores indicate greater information importance to the participant ($M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.03$; $\alpha = .59$).

Perception of ownership. We developed two Likert-type items based on CPM (Petronio, 2002) and the pilot study. Items asked if participants feel like they "own" the health information and if others have the right to share their health information. Averaged higher scores indicate greater perception of information ownership ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .78$; $\alpha = .67$).

Explicit privacy rules. We developed six Likert-type items based on CPM (Petronio, 2002) and the pilot study. CFA revealed six items loaded onto one latent construct, $\chi^2(9) = 25.99$, $p = .01$, $CFI = .98$, $RMSEA = .07$. Items tapped if participants asked recipients not to share their information, clarity in issuing explicit privacy rules, and timing when issuing explicit privacy rules. Averaged higher scores indicate greater use of explicit privacy rules ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.09$; $\alpha = .90$).

Implicit privacy rules. We developed two Likert-type items based on CPM (Petronio, 2002) and the pilot study. Items assessed participants' certainty that recipients will not further share their information even if they did not explicitly ask them not to share. Averaged higher scores indicate greater expectation of implicit privacy rules ($M = 3.88$, $SD = .88$; $\alpha = .57$).

Anticipated further revealing. We developed two Likert-type items based on CPM (Petronio, 2002) and the pilot study; these items measured disclosers' expectations that the recipient did or will further reveal the shared information. Averaged higher scores indicate greater anticipation of further revealing ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .91$; $\alpha = .75$).

Table 1 Zero-Order Correlation Matrix for Study 1 Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Valence	–						
2. Importance	–.04	–					
3. Ownership	–.14*	.07	–				
4. Explicit Rules	–.28**	.10	.41**	–			
5. Implicit Rules	–.07	.01	.27**	.10	–		
6. Anticipated telling	–.09	–.05	.33**	.34**	.40**	–	
7. Relational quality	–.02	.02	.08	.09	.14*	.23**	–

* $p \leq .01$; ** $p \leq .001$, one-tailed.

Study 1 Results

Table 1 presents the zero-order correlation matrix for Study 1 variables. We tested hypotheses using maximum likelihood structural equation modeling (AMOS 17.0). This strategy accounts for measurement error in the data and makes it possible to assess hypothesized associations. We conducted CFAs on multi-item scales to ensure that items met the criteria of face validity, internal consistency, and parallelism (Hunter & Gerbing, 1982). Three goodness-of-fit indices estimated the fit of the models. The χ^2/df adjusts the χ^2 statistic for sample size (Kline, 1998). The CFI calculates the ratio of the noncentrality parameter estimate of the hypothesized model to the noncentrality parameter estimate of a baseline model (Bentler, 1990). The RMSEA accounts for errors of approximation in the population (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). We determined that the model fit the data if χ^2/df was less than 3, CFI was greater than .95, and RMSEA was less than .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Kline, 1998). We present the results of the structural equation models next.

Structural equation model results. The first step required calculation of the error variance of each variable to account for measurement error (Bollen, 1989). Initial results indicated that our hypothesized model adequately fit the data, $\chi^2(7) = 10.99$, $p = .14$, $CFI = .96$, $RMSEA = .05$. The final model is presented in Figure 1. The results are consistent with many of the hypotheses regarding associations between information valence, perception of ownership, and perceived effectiveness of explicit and implicit privacy rules. Neither of the information importance hypotheses H1 (a, b) were supported; the importance of the information and the centrality of that information to one's life does not affect the privacy rule selected when sharing the information. H2a was supported and H2b was not; information valence negatively predicts use of an explicit privacy rule, but the relationship between valence and implicit privacy rules was not significant. H3a was also supported and H3b was not; greater perceptions of information ownership are associated with the use of both explicit privacy rules and implicit privacy rules. H4a and H5a were supported, and use of both privacy rules, at approximately the same strength, are associated with the perception that the recipient will not further reveal the shared information

Study 1 Discussion and Extended Hypothesized Model

Consistent with the pilot study (and recipients' reports), Study 1 findings indicate that if privacy rules are in place, the disclosers anticipate that recipients will not further reveal the shared information. Also consistent with the pilot, information assessment (importance to discloser and valence of information in Study 1 and secret versus private in the pilot) do not directly predict anticipated further revealing. Rather, the use of privacy rules is the key determinant in anticipating that the recipient would further reveal (or did reveal, as in the pilot). What is less clear is if the privacy rules serve to protect the information from actual (vs. anticipated) further revealing, particularly from the recipient's perspective. Few prior studies in information management consider dyadic perspectives, and none of the limited privacy rule prior research considers the receiver's view in conjunction with the discloser. The extended hypothesized model (see Figure 2) to be tested in Study 2 replicates the Study 1 model and adds the following: the use of explicit privacy rules is negatively associated with actual further revealing (H4b); the use of implicit privacy rules is negatively associated with actual further revealing (H5b). Additionally, prior published research has not examined the relationship between anticipated further revealing and actual further revealing. Although some disclosers may expect that recipients will further reveal, conversely, others may believe that recipients, particularly close others who are the likely targets of disclosure (Greene et al., 2012), will protect the shared information (see CPM, Petronio, 2002). Thus, we predict an association between anticipated further revealing and actual further revealing (H6). CPM's predictions regarding boundary coordination and ownership have not

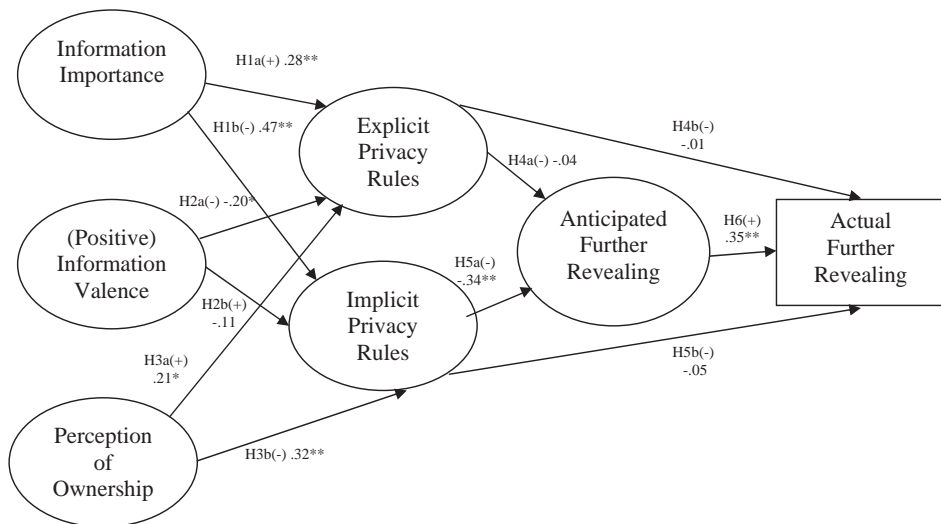


Figure 2 Hypothesized model and results for Study 2. Note: the first indicator is the model hypothesis (hypothesized direction in parentheses) followed by path weight. **Path significant at $p \leq .001$. *Path significant at $p \leq .01$.

been quantitatively tested, and Study 2 directly addresses these questions through dyadic data.

Study 2

We tested the extended model with a dyadic data set. The design allowed for the assessment of not only anticipated third party disclosure for the discloser but also the recipient's own third party disclosure (that is, did recipients report actually violating any stated or implied privacy rules?).

Study 2 Method

The sample included 514 individuals (257 dyads). Of these, 321 (63%) were female. Individuals ranged from 18 to 55 years of age ($M=21.49$ years, $SD=4.18$ years). Approximately one-half of the participants were Caucasian (55.6%); others were Asian (23.2%), Bi/multiracial (4.7%), Hispanic (4.5%), African American (4%), with others (3% or less). Dyads reported that they had known one another for an average of 4 years ($SD=5.98$ years, range = less than one month to 36 years). They characterized the status of their relationship as friend (53%), dating partner/spouse (27%), family member (10%), classmate/roommate (9%), and other (1%).⁶

Procedure. Study participation involved completing two surveys, separated by about two months. Study 2 includes data from the first wave of this longitudinal data set because the variables collected in the second phase of data collection were not germane to this study. Dyads (i.e., participants and the person who came with them) were asked to "think about a time when each of you shared personal information with the other." Unlike Study 1, the content of the disclosure was more general, representing a variety of disclosure topics.⁷ The study protocol asked participants to take a few minutes to think about a situation and to talk briefly with each other to be sure they each remembered being told the information. Once dyadic partners agreed on the two pieces of disclosed information, they individually completed self-report measures about the agreed upon information.⁸ Thus, Study 2 focuses on the perspective of the discloser and the reported further revealing behavior of the recipient.

Measures. Variables measured include information valence and importance, perception of ownership, explicit privacy rules, implicit privacy rules, anticipated further revealing, and actual further revealing. Study 2 employed same CFA and goodness-of-fit criteria as Study 1. We deleted five cases because of missing data. After confirming the unidimensionality of the scales, we created composite scores by averaging responses to items.

The following variables were measured in the same manner as in Study 1: implicit privacy rules, information valence, perception of ownership, and anticipated further revealing. Averaged higher scores of the averaged items assessing *information valence*

indicate greater positive information valence ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.78$; $\alpha = .87$). The four items measuring *information importance* indicated that one factor fit the data $\chi^2(2) = 14.48$, $p = .80$, $CFI = .99$, $RMSEA = .001$, and averaged higher scores indicate greater information importance to the discloser ($M = 5.51$, $SD = 1.27$; $\alpha = .63$). Averaged higher scores for items assessing *perceptions of ownership* indicate disclosers' greater sense of ownership ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .79$; $\alpha = .66$). The six items assessing *explicit privacy rules* indicate that one factor fit the data $\chi^2(3) = 7.54$, $p = .06$, $CFI = .99$, $RMSEA = .05$, and averaged higher scores indicate greater use of explicit privacy rules ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.12$; $\alpha = .88$). Averaged higher scores for items assessing *implicit privacy rules* indicate greater use of implicit privacy rules ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .95$; $\alpha = .60$). Averaged higher scores for items assessing *anticipated telling* indicate greater perceptions that recipients further reveal the information ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.12$; $\alpha = .78$).

Actual further revealing. For all dyads, both participants reported as a discloser and a recipient of shared information.⁹ To assess actual further revealing, we asked each participant when completing the "recipient" portion of the survey to identify (using one free-response item) the number of others with whom they shared the disclosed information. We created two categories of further revealed (one or more = 39%) and did not further reveal (0 = 61%).

Study 2 Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the zero-order correlation matrix for all Study 2 variables. We evaluated hypotheses identically as in Study 1. Initial results indicated that our hypothesized model adequately fit the data, $\chi^2(11) = 12.91$, $p = .30$, $CFI = .98$, $RMSEA = .03$ (see Figure 2). Although the model fit the data, we examined modification indices and removed four nonsignificant paths one at a time for the most parsimonious explanation. Removal of the paths did not alter model fit, so we retained changes in the final model.

The model results are consistent with many of the hypotheses regarding the factors predicting the association between information valence, and perception of ownership; however, the general effectiveness of privacy rules was not supported. H1a, H2a,

Table 2 Zero-Order Correlation Matrix for Study 2 Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Valence	–							
2. Importance	.02	–						
3. Ownership	.23	.06	–					
4. Explicit Rules	–.16**	.21**	.17**	–				
5. Implicit Rules	–.10*	.27**	.23**	.12**	–			
6. Anticipated telling	–.08	.17**	.11**	.18**	.47**	–		
7. Actual telling	–.02	–.01	–.17*	.06	–.12*	–.31**	–	
8. Relational quality	–.09*	.23**	.07	.06	.30**	.22**	–.03	–

* $p \leq .01$; ** $p \leq .001$, one-tailed.

and H3a were supported. The greater importance of the information to the discloser, more negative valence of the information, and a greater sense of ownership of the information are each related to the use of explicit privacy rules. H1b, H2b, and H3b were not supported; the greater importance of the information to the discloser and a greater sense of ownership were significantly related to implicit privacy rules opposite the predicted direction, and information valence was not significantly related to implicit privacy rules. H4 (a & b) were not supported; use of an explicit privacy rule neither creates the perception that the information will not be further revealed nor does it completely protect the information from further revealing. H5a was supported; use of an implicit privacy rule does create the impression that the recipient will not further reveal. However, H5b was not supported, indicating that use of an implicit privacy rule does not completely protect the information from further revealing.¹⁰ Although path weights between explicit and implicit privacy rules and actual further revealing did not differ, disclosers reported a stronger expectation that implicit privacy rules (as compared to explicit privacy rules) will protect the information from further revealing. H6 was supported; anticipated further revealing by the discloser and actual further revealing reported by the recipient are positively related.

Reports of actual further revealing support the limited past research (Petronio & Bantz, 1991) indicating that privacy warnings or privacy rules may alert the recipient that the disclosed information should be safeguarded and not shared freely, but they do not serve to completely protect the information from further sharing. Additional discussion about actual revealing is extended below in the context of the larger project.

Overall Discussion

The goal of this paper is to examine the use of, and effectiveness of, privacy rules in disclosure in a series of related studies. This multiphase study found: (1) individuals recognize the use of both explicit and implicit rules as well as the notion that there are times when no expectations of privacy boundaries accompany a disclosure; (2) if information is negatively valenced, disclosers tend to use explicit privacy rules; (3) disclosers have a stronger sense of ownership of their information than do recipients, and that sense of ownership does not determine if an explicit or implicit privacy rule is employed; (4) disclosing specifically health-related information may follow different patterns than disclosing more general types of private information such that (4a) disclosers of health-related information do not anticipate recipients further revealing when using either an explicit or implicit privacy rule, and (4b) the association between explicit privacy rules and anticipated further revealing is not significant with more general types of private information; and (5) anticipated and actual disclosure are related; if we anticipate that others shared our information, then we are likely correct.

The pilot revealed that many recipients report maintaining privacy boundaries and not further revealing when the discloser expressed either an explicit or implicit

privacy rule. The study also indicated that when the information was perceived as secretive, and therefore more important to conceal than less sensitive information, the information was managed differently than less sensitive information. This is consistent with CPM. Participants reported that they generally did not further reveal information perceived as secret but did further reveal others' private information.

In Study 1, we developed scales to expand variables measured via open-ended responses in the pilot, and in Study 2 we retested these developed measures with the inclusion of recipient self-report of actual further revealing/boundary violation. We begin discussion of the collective findings with analysis of *information assessment*, followed by *perception of ownership* and *further revealing*.

Information Assessment

One of the variables we explored in relation to privacy rules was perception of the disclosed information, from the perspectives of both disclosers and recipients. Because information is included in much disclosure and privacy theory and research, it was important to explore the role of information in privacy rule use. The pilot examined privacy/secretcy, and Studies 1 and 2 tested information importance and valence. The pilot study revealed that recipients recall varying degrees of sensitivity of the disclosed information (as private/secret) and also report different revealing patterns (did or did not further reveal) for differently assessed information. We now turn to a more nuanced description of information assessment utilized in subsequent studies.

Study 1 findings indicate that information importance is not a predictor of the use of either explicit or implicit privacy rules. One potential explanation for this finding is that disclosers perceive health-related information as highly important and central to the identity of the discloser, limiting the associations. However, in Study 2 with general disclosure, information importance was a significant predictor of the use of both explicit and implicit privacy rules. This inconsistency with Study 1 could be attributed to the type of information shared with general disclosure. The topics disclosed in Study 2, while sensitive, include information that may not be central to the identity of the discloser, such as disclosure of past sexual partners or family relationships (e.g., parents' divorce), allowing for greater variability in perceived ownership of information. At times, when disclosers perceived higher information importance, they expressed a privacy rule. What is less clear is why participants report implicit privacy rules (not explicit) when reporting a strong sense of information ownership, especially considering that recipients were described as "very close" in Studies 1 and 2 (see Note 3).

Both Studies 1 and 2 found that, if information is negatively valenced, disclosers will use an explicit privacy rule. This negative valence could signal information that the discloser expressly wants to conceal from specific others, not unlike secret information from the pilot study, thus encouraging the discloser to use an explicit privacy rule. Petronio (2002) and others (e.g., Derlega et al., 1993; Greene, 2009)

argue that the riskier the consequences of the disclosure, the less permeable the boundaries surrounding the disclosure. Hence, negatively valenced information, the information that individuals may want to conceal, should have more stringent boundaries (explicit versus implicit rules) than neutral or positive information (Derlega et al., 1993; Kelly, 2002; Petronio, 2002). Consistent with this argument, neither Study 1 nor 2 found a relationship between information valence and implicit privacy rules. Future research should also more closely examine scenarios where individuals use implicit privacy rules rather than explicit privacy rules and how these implicit rules function in relationships.

Perception of Ownership

CPM describes how individuals have a sense of ownership over their own information and that disclosers may establish privacy boundaries around disclosed information to protect it from further revealing (Petronio, 2002). However, to date, research has not quantitatively examined how degrees of ownership affect attempts at boundary management, and namely how disclosers use privacy rules. As predicted within this project, a greater sense of information ownership is associated with the use of explicit privacy rules. However, contrary to expectation, this sense of information ownership is also associated with the use of implicit privacy rules. One explanation could be that disclosers perceive strong ownership over the shared information, and when they are close to the target, disclosers use implicit privacy rules because use of an explicit privacy rule could undermine the closeness of the relationship. In other words, it is possible that the closeness between participants (participants in all studies reported being very close to the target “other”) is buffering the use of explicit privacy rules because the discloser might think that being that straightforward or blunt about privacy expectations when they may be obvious to the recipient could harm perceptions of closeness or trust inherent in that relationship (e.g., Caughlin et al., 2009). In some ways, it is possible that implicit privacy rules in close relationships serve as relational maintenance or protection. Future research is needed to further explore this proposed association. In addition, we need research to address recipients’ perceptions of information ownership and how they view boundary coordination.

Further Revealing

This project explored privacy rule use in relationships, and one question raised considered if using privacy rules affects how recipients manage the information. Put another way, does using a privacy rule make any difference in receivers’ further sharing the information? In the pilot, one-third of disclosure recipients reported further revealing even after they reported use of an explicit privacy rule. Results from Studies 1 and 2 were contradictory regarding anticipated further revealing. When disclosing health-related information to others, disclosers generally did not anticipate the recipient’s further revealing. However, when sharing other private information

(such as the content of information shared in Study 2), disclosers often *did* anticipate further revealing. One potential explanation is that further revealing another's health-related information (such as diabetes or ADHD) may be neither entertaining (i.e., gossip related) nor the type of material that allows for relational development with others (Guerin & Miyazaki, 2006). However, further revealing about other topics (such as another's infidelity, sexual relations, and illegal behavior), as explored in Study 2, may lead to positive outcomes such as entertaining another or the more evaluative features of gossip (Guerin & Miyazaki, 2006). In relationships, then, people should re-evaluate their expectations regarding how others treat information they share. People tend to assume that health information boundaries will be respected, but for more general disclosure, the expectation is clearly looser. This is crucial for managing expectations, and we turn to further revealing next.

The pilot study and Study 2 included measures of the recipient's actual further revealing. While the pilot found that use of a privacy rule resulted in recipients reporting that they did not generally further reveal, participants in Study 2 did not report the same boundary coordination. Rather, the associations between privacy rules and actual further revealing were not significant. One potential explanation of these differences is that in Study 2, individuals briefly discussed the events surrounding the disclosure, perhaps prompting participants to remember more details of the disclosure and further revealing. Study 2 recipients who did further reveal reported that they generally told only one to two others (see Note 10). Thus, even though further revealing does occur in a limited way, it is likely that the expectations of privacy are somewhat preserved (e.g., Greene & Faulkner, 2002; McAndrew et al., 2007; Petronio & Bantz, 1991). Although we cannot describe with these data to whom recipients further shared this information, it seems reasonable to expect that many recipients shared with close others such as best friends, close family, or dating partners. Additional research should address to whom individuals further reveal and if and how additional privacy rules are expressed during this extended or further sharing.

Limitations

The current project contributes to understanding how boundary management is negotiated between privacy rules and types of information, and several limitations should be addressed. Participants consisted of individuals in one community and may not represent how other populations enact disclosure episodes. We asked participants to recall disclosure episodes as either a recipient or as a discloser via a self-report design. Individuals could have recalled the most vivid, striking, or most recent disclosure episode, thus dramatizing effects; conversely, participants may have concealed truly sensitive information and recalled a less "risky" disclosure episode. We asked participants if they further revealed the disclosed information, and one-third admitted further revealing even when explicit rules were used. Because gossiping has a negative connotation (Goldsmith, 1989) the term was deliberately avoided in these studies, and participants may have underreported the degree to

which they further revealed (see Note 8). An additional limitation to the design is that participants can only recall their own perception of the disclosure enactment, and the other party may or may not agree with the recalled interpretation.

This study also presented operationalization of new scales, some with moderate reliability, and these should be examined in future research. For most of the measures utilized in the present study, there was little or no prior quantitative research (part of justification for the present study, particularly the pilot descriptive study). The present studies are framed within CPM and develop measurement for under or unstudied constructs. Although CPM has been cited extensively and frames many qualitative investigations, only three published articles analyze elements of CPM quantitatively. These three studies are narrow in scope (Child & Agyeman-Budu, 2010; Child, Pearson, & Petronio, 2009; Morr Serewicz & Canary, 2008) and not related to the current emphasis. One contribution of the present studies is operationalization coupled with CFAs, and the explicit privacy rule measure performed particularly well. These measures require confirmation with varying samples beyond the three presented in this project, but to date there have been no published measures of privacy rules or ownership, limiting understanding of how they function in relationships. As is true with any initial scale development, further replication and validity information would be fruitful, and some measures could be expanded to include additional items.

Future Research

The current study highlights differences in explicitly and implicitly stated rules and how they are used in disclosure episodes. Although explicitly stated rules have relatively clear effects and protect disclosers to some extent, implicitly stated rules and using no rules require additional research. Future research should further explicate how implicitly stated rules are enacted and how the activation of implicitly stated rules differs from the perception that no rules were utilized. Another area of interest could focus on dyadic research that includes the discloser's and recipient's perceptions that implicitly stated rules are in use, as this project is the first study to report data on implicit rule usage.

Individuals anticipate that recipients will further reveal disclosed information (see Greene & Faulkner, 2002; Petronio & Bantz, 1991), yet disclosers expect that this third party will respect privacy boundaries and protect the information from widespread distribution. Perhaps an understanding exists that a recipient can or will share the disclosed information with a trusted third party (such as a spouse/partner or best friend) but will adhere to the negotiated privacy rules for all other persons (for disclosure in families, see Vangelisti & Caughlin, 1997; Vangelisti, Caughlin, & Timmerman, 2001). If such an understanding does exist, perhaps participants did further reveal the information to an intimate third party such as a spouse but reported that the person did not further reveal because disclosure to that particular third party was understood or "did not count." Future research is needed to measure more specifically to whom and to how many people the information was further

disclosed. The current studies extend our understanding of further revealing of disclosed information, yet there are a number of fruitful avenues for continued exploration.

Notes

- [1] Unintended third-party disclosure is similar to gossip in that the receiver is sharing information with a third party. However, unlike gossip, intended third-party disclosure could occur when the original source directly requests that the receiver share information with a third party (e.g., Afifi, 2003; Greene et al., 2003; Miller & Rubin, 2007). For example, a sister may ask her brother to tell their parents that she is pregnant. Furthermore, Petronio (2002) defines gossip as revealers telling information that “may only be partly true . . . or may not be true at all” (p. 193). Further, revealers frame the information to suggest that they are entitled to sharing or concealing the information, known as the “pretend factor” (p. 193) and therefore have the right to reveal the information. The shared information must appear to be true and is circulated without the original discloser’s knowledge among those who know the target of the disclosure. Hence, gossip is not information that original disclosers have asked to be circulated on their behalf (see also Miller & Rubin, 2007).
- [2] The term disclosure warnings replaced prior restraint phrases (Petronio & Bantz, 1991) in CPM (Petronio, 2002). Prior restraint phrases were conceptualized as issued by the discloser to the recipient before disclosing the information, yet disclosure warnings do not appear to have constraints about when rules are negotiated or stated in the disclosure episode. Although a time frame is not specified, disclosure warnings could be types of explicitly stated privacy rules that occur before, during, or even after the disclosure episode, but they have not yet been studied.
- [3] Initial conceptualizations of the hypothesized model included the variable “relational quality.” This variable was ultimately excluded from analyses because the pilot found that all participants rated the disclosure recipient as “extremely close.” Both Studies 1 and 2 initially included the variable “closeness” as a predictor in the model. However, in both studies disclosers reported that recipients were extremely close ($M = 6.2, 6.3$, on a 7-point scale). Due to the lack of variability of the closeness measure, it was excluded from both Study 1 and 2 hypothesized models. Future research could sample a wider range of relational types to explore these questions.
- [4] Examples of qualifying nonvisible health conditions included: epilepsy, STIs, eating disorders, ADHD, and lupus. Nonqualifying conditions included: asthma, allergies, high blood pressure, migraines, and learning disabilities. We focused on nonvisible health conditions because we wanted to ensure a focus on disclosure rather than visible conditions such as weight or physical disability.
- [5] In Study 1, disclosure recipients were friends, dating partner/spouse, and family members. One-way ANOVAs by relational type for study variables (information importance and valence, perception of ownership, explicit privacy rules, implicit privacy rules, and anticipated further revealing) revealed no significant differences. Therefore, we combined all relational types for analyses.
- [6] In Study 2, recipients were friends, dating partners/spouses, family members, and classmates/roommates. One-way ANOVAs by relational type for study variables (information importance and valence, perception of ownership, explicit privacy rules, implicit privacy rules, anticipated further revealing, and actual further revealing) revealed only differences between dating partners and classmates on two variables. To explore these differences, we ran the model with and without classmates included in the sample. Because there were no significant differences between models, all data were retained. Although there

- were four categories of relationship type in Study 2, the small variance accounted for by classmates did not increase the variance on relational quality sufficiently to allow use in the model.
- [7] Examples of topics of disclosure included sexual relations, adoption, abuse, substance use/abuse, and illegal behavior.
- [8] In order to prevent contamination, participants were asked to only identify the topic that each shared with the other, and they were specifically instructed not to discuss the disclosure in depth with each other. Dyads who discussed the disclosure identification for more than 3 minutes were asked by a researcher if they understood instructions and were reminded not to discuss the disclosure in depth; these few dyads completed the identification in an additional 1–2 minutes and proceeded with the rest of the study. To complete surveys about the identified disclosure information, participants were sent to different areas to preserve confidentiality and promote truthfulness of responses. The Study 2 design may have resulted in under-reporting of “further disclosure” (not at threat for the pilot study) if participants were concerned that the discloser might discover the “betrayal” (further disclosure) through the study. This potential threat was reduced by two features: (1) all participants were informed twice orally, in the study announcement, and at the start of the survey that their responses would not be shared outside the research team; (2) the longitudinal feature of the design only required that one dyad member return at Time 2 (both dyad members knew this at recruitment, restated at the start of the study), thus it is unlikely that participants could believe that they might have to discuss or share their responses later (including the further sharing responses).
- [9] Each dyad contributed two cases to Study 2 (one where each person was discloser and another where they were the recipient); the design required that they identify the episode that each chose as “discloser” to the other initially (to ensure clarity). For analyses, however, we addressed independence by each dyad contributing only one “case.” This approach has the added benefit of allowing a replication. Thus, we ran the model a second time in which the participant roles were reversed such that the prior discloser served as a recipient (a second data set), and there were no significant differences in path weights or fit indices between models.
- [10] In terms of the further revealing in Study 2 and examining all participants (including disclosers who reported using an explicit privacy rule and those who reported using an implicit privacy rule), about two-thirds of recipients reported that they did not further reveal to anyone, but about one-third did report further disclosure. However, of those who admitted further revealing, one-third of these revealers reported further sharing with only one other person, and 9% reported telling two other people, leaving approximately 60% (of the third) who told at least three others. Thus, disclosers and recipients may not coordinate boundaries or understand linkage rules (Petronio, 2002) in the same way, and future research could explore both disclosers’ and recipients’ perceptions of this further revealing.

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