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Abstract

The aim of the study was to explore adolescents' perceptions of their parents' behaviors that inhibited or facilitated adolescents' self-disclosures to them. Four focus groups with 16 girls and 16 boys from Croatia (13–14 year olds) were conducted. Results indicate that adolescents perceive their self-disclosures to be influenced by a variety of specific parental actions and reactions in disclosure-related situations. According to adolescents' views, not only can parents hinder adolescent's disclosure by unfavorable reactions, but they can also prompt the adolescent to disclose by behaving in certain manner. Identified parental behaviors and emotional states (labeled as "inviters", "inhibitors", "negative reactions", and "positive reactions") are discussed in terms of contemporary perspectives on optimal parenting based on children's psychological needs and children's rights.

Keywords

adolescent self-disclosure, facilitating disclosure, focus groups, parent–adolescent communication, parenting

The importance of self-disclosure within close relationships was recognized a long time ago (Jourard, 1971). It allows the discloser to receive social validation, gain social control, achieve self-clarification, exercise self-expression, and enhance relationship development (Derlega & Grzelak, 1979). Self-disclosure may be generally defined as any information

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about himself/herself that a person communicates verbally to another person (Cozby, 1973). The content of self-disclosure may include highly sensitive information, as well as less intimate, everyday, or even superficial information (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006).

Research on parenting adolescents has identified adolescents' spontaneous disclosures about daily activities as the main source of parental knowledge, an important predictor of adolescents' good adjustment (Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Although self-disclosure represents a voluntary activity that depends on the adolescent's characteristics and readiness to disclose to a parent, it is reasonable to expect certain parental emotional states and actions in disclosure-related situations to encourage or discourage this process. Furthermore, according to dynamic transactionalist perspectives of relationship development (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006), an adolescent expects parents to behave in certain ways on the basis of their behaviors in similar past interactions. While many studies linked general parenting dimensions (such as responsiveness and control) with youth disclosure (e.g., Snoek & Rothblum, 1979; Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Luyckx, & Goossens, 2006), only a few of them dealt with parental actions in the specific context of youth disclosure (Kerr, Stattin, & Trost, 1999; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010). Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to explore parental behaviors that inhibit or facilitate adolescents' self-disclosures to parents about their whereabouts, problems, and concerns, as well as activities of which parents might disapprove.

Adolescents' self-disclosure to parents

Within the context of the parent-adolescent relationship, adolescents' self-disclosure to parents is suggested to contribute to relationship development by regulating three aspects of interdependence (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995). First, self-disclosure *prompts intimacy*, while withholding confidences limits closeness and creates distance. Second, by withholding or disclosing information about daily activities and plans, adolescent can limit parental opportunity to control or shape these activities, thus *regulating their own autonomy*. Third, disclosing attitude, taste, or interest independent and distinct from that of parents may *enhance adolescents' individuation*. This is in line with the propositions of the contemporary self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000), suggesting that in different relational contexts all individuals strive to fulfill their basic psychological needs for relatedness, autonomy, and competence.

Although the bulk of research in the latest three decades focused on self-disclosure processes in adults, relatively little attention had been given to examining these processes in children and adolescents (Rotenberg, 1995). However, in recent years, particularly after the reconceptualization of parental monitoring into parental knowledge (Kerr & Stattin, 2000), adolescents' disclosure of their daily activities to parents was repeatedly studied as a potential source of parental knowledge about adolescents' whereabouts and activities (Purcell, 2008; Soenens et al., 2006) and was actually found to be its dominant source (Blodgett Salafia, Gondoli, & Grundy, 2009; Kerr & Stattin, 2000).

High parental knowledge about adolescents' daily activities was shown to be linked to multiple measures of adolescent adjustment, including both lower problem behavior (e.g., Jacobson & Crockett, 2000; Soenens et al., 2006) and higher well-being (e.g., Jacobson & Crockett, 2000). Expectedly, self-disclosure to parents was also found to

be positively related to adolescents' good adjustment. Thus, disclosure of personal issues to parents was associated with less anxiety and depression (Smetana & Metzger, 2008), and well adjusted individuals generally wanted parental involvement and disclosed more (Trost, Biesecker, Stattin, & Kerr, 2007).

On the other hand, secrecy from parents (a form of non-disclosure) has been associated with physical complaints, depressive mood (Finkenauer, Engels, & Meeus, 2002), and behavioral problems (Frijns, Finkenauer, Vermulst, & Engels, 2005). This is in accordance with Jourard's (1971) famous statement that openness in at least one significant relationship is a prerequisite for a healthy personality. However, the relationship between adolescents' disclosure to parents and adolescents' adjustment is rather complex. Tilton-Weaver and Marshall (2008) point to potential positive functions of non-disclosure, linked with development of autonomy and maintenance of privacy boundaries (Petronio, 2007) within the family. In line with that, several studies found adolescents' secrecy to be linked to their emotional autonomy (Finkenauer et al. 2002; Frijns et al. 2005). Regardless of the outcome of the ongoing debate in the literature about the amount or content of disclosure to parents that is healthy for adolescents' development, adolescents' self-disclosure to parents is recognized as a crucial concern in the literature on parenting adolescents, and thus warrants further research.

Factors influencing adolescents' self-disclosure to parents

The extent to which adolescents disclose their feelings, concerns, and everyday life experiences to parents seems to be a function of multiple factors. Buhrmester and Prager (1995) distinguish between intraindividual factors and contextual factors influencing adolescents' self-disclosure. The *intraindividual factors* include the issues and concerns that preoccupy children's attention and give rise to needs for social input, which is often sought through self-disclosing interactions. These are determined by adolescents' biological development, cognitive maturity, cultural pressures, and individual experiences. Thus, self-disclosure is related to the discloser's age (see Buhrmester & Prager, 1995, for a review), cultural background (see Hargie & Dickson, 2004, for a review), and personal characteristics determining their willingness to disclose, such as extraversion (Cozby, 1973), lower shyness level (Kalliopuska, 2008), etc.

However, apart from individual differences in needs and willingness to disclose, *contextual factors* play a significant role in predicting individual's self-disclosure. Those were defined in terms of opportunities and constraints created by the immediate socio-cultural environment (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995), and mostly refer to the target of disclosure and appropriateness of disclosure content. By deliberately filtering content they disclose to parents, adolescents redefine parental legitimate authority over certain issues in their lives (Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006) in order to establish their privacy boundaries within the relationship. In line with that, adolescents feel most obligated to tell parents about prudential behavior (e. g. drinking alcohol, smoking etc.) and least obliged to disclose about personal issues. As adolescents grow older, disclosure is generally seen as less obligatory, and, although disclosure of personal issues may contribute to the quality of parent-adolescent relationship, it is crucial that such disclosure is discretionary rather than required (Smetana & Metzger, 2008).

The “target effect” was illustrated in a laboratory study of interaction between strangers, which showed that generally low disclosers revealed more to high “openers” (individuals who elicit intimate self-disclosure) than to low openers (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983). “Openers” were characterized as good listeners, inspiring trust, accepting, facilitating, relaxing, and sympathetic. In the parent–adolescent relationship context, the association between adolescents’ self-disclosure and targets’ behavior has already been studied by Snoek and Rothblum (1979), who found a positive relation between adolescents’ perception of their parents as warm and affectionate and disclosure to them, and Rosenthal, Efklikes, and Demetriou (1988), who found an inverse relation between adolescents’ self-disclosure and parental criticism. More recently, Kerr et al. (1999) showed that adolescents who were more disclosing viewed their parents as more trusting of them and less likely to react negatively to their spontaneous disclosures (with sarcasm, judgments, or ridicule). Those adolescents also did not feel overly controlled by their parents (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Similarly, adolescents from authoritative homes were more likely to disclose disagreement and less likely to lie (Darling, Cumsille, Caldwell, & Dowdy, 2006).

In line with those are the findings of Soenens et al. (2006), who examined the links between parenting style dimensions and adolescents’ self-disclosure and found high responsiveness, high behavioral control, and low psychological control to be independent predictors of self-disclosure. Smetana et al. (2006) yielded similar results with respect to parental acceptance being positively related to disclosure, but, contrary to previous studies, they found psychological control by parents also to predict more disclosure of personal issues. However, the largest effect on self-disclosure, of all three parenting dimensions, was found for parental responsiveness (Soenens et al., 2006), or the degree to which adolescents experienced a warm and affective relationship with their parents. These cross-sectional findings were confirmed by a recent longitudinal study, which showed greater maternal warmth in sixth grade to predict adolescents’ self-disclosure in seventh grade (Blodgett Salafia et al., 2009).

The current study

The reviewed research addressed parents’ role in explaining adolescents’ self-disclosure by determining contributions of general parenting dimensions, such as parental acceptance, responsiveness, behavioral control, and psychological control. However, less is known about the links of self-disclosure with particular parental behaviors specifically involved in disclosure-related interaction. Only a few studies explored parental reactions to youths’ disclosures of something that parents disliked (Kerr et al., 1999; Tilton-Weaver et al., 2010). According to dynamic transactionalist perspectives of relationship development (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006), people expect others to behave in certain ways on the basis of the behaviors in similar past interactions. Therefore, adolescents’ calculations of whether to disclose or not are likely founded, in part, upon the history of parental reactions to their disclosures in the past. Accordingly, two recent qualitative studies revealed that one of the most prominent reasons youths gave for withholding information was expecting negative reactions from parents (Marshall, Tilton-Weaver,

& Bosdet, 2005; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008). However, none of the cited studies thoroughly described and classified adolescents' perceptions of such parental reactions.

Apart from reactions following adolescents' disclosures, there might be certain parental emotional states or behaviors taking place prior to actual self-disclosure that may invite or prevent adolescents' opening up to a parent. It remains unknown what these particular parental behaviors are, and it is reasonable to expect that the most precise answer to that could be given by adolescents themselves. Since we deal with an ongoing, complex process, and to our knowledge, there have been no similar studies trying to identify such parental disclosure-related behaviors, qualitative methodology may give some insight above the scope of a quantitative approach (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006). We intended to identify the specific parental behaviors that adolescents perceive as: (1) inhibitors of their self-disclosure to parents; and (2) facilitators of their self-disclosure to parents. We were interested both in behaviors proceeding disclosure, and past or anticipated parental reactions following disclosure.

Method

Participants and procedure

In order to examine the adolescents' perceptions of parental behaviors affecting their disclosure, we conducted four focus group interviews with adolescents aged 13–14. We targeted adolescents of this age, because by this particular age self-disclosure to parents had already started to decrease (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995) and the adolescents had oriented more to their peers (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984) in comparison to the middle childhood period. Therefore it becomes relatively more difficult for parents to track their child's activities, but also to gain knowledge from the child's spontaneous self-disclosure and identifying parental strategic behaviors that may help the child to open up in this period of adolescence might be of outmost importance.

In total, 32 pupils participated in the study. We recruited them from an elementary school in Zagreb (the capital of Croatia) by randomly choosing four girls and four boys from each seventh and eighth class in that school. Parental informed consent and adolescent assent were obtained for their participation. Four adolescents in our sample lived in one-parent families, while others lived in two-parent families. Each group consisted of eight members, and participants were homogenous by grade and gender. The interviews with boys and girls were done separately, because single-sex groups increase adolescents' comfort in discussing their views (Hoppe, Wells, Morrison, & Gillmore, 1995).

The focus groups were moderated by the authors (each interviewed one male and one female group) and the length of each session varied from approximately 60–90 minutes. To standardize the procedure, we created a semi-structured interview guide, which consisted of a written introduction to the session (recap on the project, the procedure to be followed), planned questions, and closing comments (summary of the session and reiteration of thanks). At the beginning of each session, the moderator told participants that the main topic of the research was communication between adolescents and their parents and that we had invited them to the focus group interview as experienced "experts" in that subject. They agreed to be audiotaped during the discussion. We

emphasized to the participants that the data were confidential and would be used strictly for the purpose of research.

We asked participants to recall a situation in which they disclosed to their parent (mother and/or father) and to describe parental behaviors (if any) that encouraged them to do so. We also invited them to recall a situation in which they decided not to disclose to their parent and to report about parental behaviors that discouraged them from disclosing. In order to cover different types of situations in which disclosure to parents may occur (disclosure of daily activities, intimate self-disclosure) the questions referred to the following situations in which adolescents: (A) decided to disclose to mum or dad about themselves or their life; (B) decided to confide some problems and concerns to parents; (C) decided to disclose information for which they were not sure if parents would approve; (D) experienced something that they could disclose to parents but they decided not to. To avoid “putting words in adolescents’ mouths” questions were first formulated in general and then in a more specific way. Finally, three blocks of general questions about how parents should and should not react to adolescent’s disclosure were asked.

Analysis

Audiotapes were transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were then read by the authors in order to gain a general impression about the information provided by participants (Creswell, 2003). At this stage, both coders agreed that adolescents did distinguish between parental reactions and parental behaviors anteceding their disclosure, which was in accordance with the initial idea to position the identified behaviors into the framework of two-axis categorization (Table 1).

After overall data preparation and examination, we conducted *content analysis*, a commonly used approach to analyzing qualitative data that involved coding participants’ open-ended talk into closed categories that summarized and systematized the data (Wilkinson, 2003). These categories may be derived either from the data itself (“bottom-up” approach) or from the prior theoretical framework (“top-down” approach). The ad hoc categorization of parental behaviors into four categories positions our analysis approach somewhere in between “bottom-up” and “top-down” approaches, where open-code categories of parental behaviors are derived from the data and simultaneously positioned into the a priori formed four-category scheme.

Table 1. Categorization of parental behaviors in relation to occurrence time (before, or after adolescents’ self-disclosure) and behavior valence (self-disclosure facilitation or inhibition).

		Occurrence time	
		SD antecedents	SD postcedents
Behavior valence	Facilitate SD	A) Facilitators (inviters)	C) Positive reactions to SD
	Inhibit SD	B) Inhibitors	D) Negative reactions to SD

Open coding, a process of organizing the material into “chunks” and bringing meaning to those “chunks” (Creswell, 2003), was performed independently by two researchers. It resulted in a great number of categories, which were in the next steps reduced by merging meaningfully similar codes. In the process of coding we used the *constant comparative method* (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), developing new codes in cases when data did not fit to the existing codes. The researchers regularly discussed coding categories, compared codes, and resolved discrepancies. This iterative process resulted in successive refinements and elaborations of the coding scheme. The final coding scheme is presented in Tables 2 and 3. It is important to emphasize that categories were formed not as mutually exclusive, but as representing the dominant idea of a group of answers (“chunks”), whenever possible by using adolescents’ own words also in the category descriptions. Thus, there are conceptually overlapping categories, but we did not want to merge them at the cost of the richness and descriptiveness of our findings.

Results

While recalling situations in which they disclosed to their parents, all groups referred to topics such as school (mostly grades) and activities of which parents did not approve. In comparison to boys, girls in focus groups talked noticeably more about disclosing problems (e. g. conflicts with peers, boyfriends, love) to their parents (mostly to mothers). In contrast, discussions in male focus groups spontaneously focused more on disclosing bad grades and misbehavior, both to mothers and fathers. Although moderating roles of adolescents’ gender, parents’ gender and disclosure topic could be a significant subject for another detailed analysis, the main goal of this paper is to identify parental behaviors that adolescents believe to facilitate or inhibit their disclosures in general.

Mentioned parental behaviors were ad hoc categorized in higher-order categories (Table 1): (1) *parental behaviors and states that inhibit self-disclosure* (antecedents and reactions to adolescents’ self-disclosure); and (2) *parental behaviors and states that facilitate self-disclosure* (antecedents and reactions to adolescents’ self-disclosure). The categories within each higher-order category, derived from data by content analysis, are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Parental behaviors and states that inhibit adolescents’ self-disclosure

In referring to parental behaviors that discourage them from disclosure, adolescents described both parental states and behaviors preceding disclosure, and past or anticipated parental reactions to disclosure that influence the probability of their future disclosures (Table 2). Both antecedents and reactions are grouped around the following themes: lack of interpersonal involvement, involvement in an autonomy unsupportive manner, providing structure in an autonomy unsupportive manner, lack of autonomy support, and providing structure.

Table 2. Derived categories of mentioned parental behaviors and states which *inhibit* adolescents' self disclosure – *antecedents* and *reactions* to disclosure.

Parental behaviors and states that inhibit adolescents' self-disclosure		
Theme	Inhibitors	Negative reactions
Lack of interpersonal involvement	Negative affective state Unavailability/Inaccessibility Reluctance for conversation	Distraction
Autonomy unsupportive involvement Lack of autonomy support	Intrusive questioning Frivolous behavior	Teasing and frivolousness Showing mistrust in adolescent Interrupting Lack of understanding Unreceptivity for adolescent's influence Breaking confidentiality
Autonomy unsupportive structure	Nagging	Anger and yelling Punishment "Lecturing" Disappointment and sadness Silent treatment
Structure	Expressing disapproval in advance	Disapproving adolescent's request

Inhibitors

Inhibitors refer to the parental behaviors and states that adolescents mentioned as those that usually preceded or coincided with the adolescents' decision-making process whether to disclose to parents or not, and discouraged adolescents' disclosure. Content analysis of adolescents' responses resulted in seven categories of parental behaviors and states that matched the "inhibitors" higher-order category definition. The response categories are illustrated by representative quotations from the data.

Negative affective state. Many adolescents reported that they avoided self-disclosing when parents were moody, nervous, unhappy, or tired: "When my Mum comes home from work, when she's nervous, when she's irritated, when she's tired . . . Then I decide to do it tomorrow and then I just keep putting it off . . ."; "When someone at work gets them angry, then I never talk to them because I would only make it worse by telling something bad . . .".

Unavailability/inaccessibility. Several adolescents mentioned that the reason for non-disclosing was sometimes that their parents were preoccupied – they lacked time or were just not attentive enough: "Every time I talk to Mum, Dad's like, nothing, as if he's not listening to that conversation and watching TV . . ."; "I mean, every day they ask me what's new, but that's in a hurry . . . They don't have time to listen . . . They work and ask for the sake of asking, just so I wouldn't feel neglected, I guess . . ."

Reluctance for conversation. Some adolescents pointed out that their parents were sometimes “not in the mood” for talking, or consistently avoided specific topics: “Mum doesn’t like talking about sex, she avoids the topic”; “It depends on their openness to a conversation. When they know they must talk about something, about a grade, but they don’t even feel like it”.

Intrusive questioning. Some adolescents emphasized that they were annoyed when parents bothered them with persistent questions: “. . . like, she’s pushing me to talk about it . . . And I’m like, come on Mum, I don’t feel like talking about it anymore, and she’s like, go on, tell me, tell me . . .”; “I mean, really, sometimes they can be annoying. I’m not in a good mood, I’ve had an argument with someone and I really don’t want to tell them because I think it wouldn’t mean anything to them. And then they’re like, a hundred times a day: ‘What’s the matter, what is it?’”

Frivolous behavior. Adolescents mentioned that they were reluctant to disclose to parents if they felt that they were not taken seriously: “I won’t tell you until you stop teasing me. And then he keeps teasing me all the time and then I never tell him . . .”.

Nagging. A couple of adolescents described how annoyed they were when parents were nagging about (to them) irrelevant matters, which immediately demotivated them from disclosure, even if they had planned to disclose: “Also, when I come home from school and then Dad tells me . . . I like walking around barefoot.. And he’s like: ‘Ana, where are your slippers?!’, and this and that . . . and then it sort of like stops me . . . and I was just about to tell him something . . .”.

Expressing disapproval in advance. A few adolescents responded that when their parents expressed disapproval on some issue prior to its disclosure, in the example of the third person or directly, it discouraged adolescents from disclosing regarding the issue: “I sort of had a boyfriend before and then I wanted to tell it to my Mum . . . And then the topic came up how my Mum had seen this girl who also, like, she was too young and already had a boyfriend . . . And then I was like, I’m not going to tell her . . .”.

Negative reactions to disclosure

Except for antecedent parental behaviors inhibiting self-disclosure, adolescents were naming certain parental reactions to disclosure that discouraged them from subsequent disclosures. These are summarized in the following 13 categories.

Distraction. Some adolescents reported that their parents reacted to their disclosure by not paying attention, and doing something else at the same time: “With my Dad, it bothers me that when I’m telling him something, he’s reading the newspapers or a book, and I go – Are you even listening to me? – And yesterday I was talking to my Mum and she was sending SMS messages, so I had to wait for her to finish . . .”

Teasing and frivolousness. Many adolescents reported parents making fun of their self-disclosure reacting by teasing and not taking adolescent seriously: “I would like her to be more serious sometimes, like, she finds it funny when I fight with a friend because she knows we’ll make up the same day...”; “So I had this...hmmm... ‘boy-friend’... And I wasn’t afraid to tell them, but I was, I don’t know, uncomfortable because they’d start laughing: ‘Oh how cute!’, and then they’d start to tease me...”

Showing mistrust in the adolescent. Some adolescents stated that their parents doubted or even checked on the information they disclosed to them, showing mistrust: “and then they, like, shut you up even more because they don’t trust you, and then you don’t know if next time you should tell them anything or not. If they’ll check on what you told them again, if they’ll trust, and then you end up not telling them what you’d like to say”.

Interrupting. Several individuals reported that their parents tended to interrupt them and jump to conclusions, giving adolescents no chance to explain the disclosed matters to the end: “When I say something, she often interrupts, which gets to me and then I am quiet after the conversation”; “My parents interrupt me and I mean, they immediately start yelling and stuff, and then I’m like, I don’t care, now I won’t tell you. Then I shut up and leave. I don’t want to finish telling them. If I can’t speak my mind, then...”

Lack of understanding. Several adolescents refrained from confiding in their parents because parents had shown a lack of understanding to adolescents’ thoughts and feelings: “I can’t confide in them at all, they don’t understand me and it’s all a mess”.

Unreceptivity for adolescents’ influence. A few adolescents complained about parents not hearing their arguments, being reluctant to accept their explanations or to admit own mistakes: “I don’t even try to persuade them because I know that’s not possible”; “Because my parents are, you know, quite stubborn. And it’s more like, Mum listens to Dad, and Dad to Mum”; “Even if I told them, I have a feeling that I wouldn’t achieve anything with it, therefore I don’t want to say anything”.

Breaking confidentiality. Several adolescents reported that their parents revealed to third persons some information they gained from their children in confidence. As the result, adolescents refrained from their subsequent disclosures: “And from then on I don’t tell them anything, because Mum always tells Dad...”; “So they wouldn’t tell other parents, who then tell their kids who are in my class, and embarrass us...”

Anger and yelling. Adolescents most frequently named parental emotional outbursts (anger, yelling) as unfavorable reactions to their self-disclosures: “Well I fear the reaction, for example, when I say something, and she’s like – ‘Oh, how could you?’... I’m afraid of that sort of reactions”; “Parents should... not yell at us, then we would just close down and won’t even talk”.

Punishment. Many adolescents reported restricting privileges or being grounded for something they disclosed to their parents. One boy very wittily inverted his parent’s

words: “You can tell me everything, especially when you’ve done something wrong, so I can ground you (with sarcasm, laughs)”.

“Lecturing”. Many adolescents described how annoyed they were when parents gave long speeches on some issues that adolescents disclosed to them. Reluctance to receive another “lecture” dejects them from future self-disclosing: “Maybe Mum would say we’re too young to date . . . that we’re still children (laughs) and so on . . . And then they’d give us the speech and we’d be, like, rolling our eyes (laughs) . . .”; “Or when we know we did something wrong or whatever . . . And we know how to make things right, but he still wants to give us a lecture about what we should have done and so on . . .”; “Like a broken record. They just play it over and over again, so like . . . They don’t say anything new. It’s always the same thing”.

Disappointment and sadness. Adolescents also referred to parental disappointment or sadness as unwanted reactions to disclosures: “Then I fear that she’ll get sad, that she won’t talk to me at all when I need something”.

Silent treatment. Some adolescents mentioned their parents reacted by ignoring them in a conflict situation. Therefore, fear of getting the “silent treatment” prevents them from disclosing: “For me it’s a lot easier when she shouts than when she is silent, holds it in and she’s sulking . . . I ask: ‘Mum, can I go out?’, and she doesn’t say anything. I ask again and she goes like: ‘Go out, I don’t care . . .’ It’s easier when she yells at me and we have it out . . . I hate being ignored . . .”

Disapproving adolescents’ request. Withholding permission to adolescents’ self-disclosed wish or request was also reported among parental reactions, which discouraged subsequent similar attempts: “It really makes me sad, you know, when she says no . . .”

Parental behaviors and states that facilitate adolescents’ self-disclosure

In referring to parental behaviors that encourage them to self-disclose, adolescents were describing both parental states and behaviors preceding disclosure, and past/anticipated reactions to disclosure that influence the probability of their subsequent disclosures (Table 3). Both antecedents and reactions are grouped around the following themes: interpersonal involvement, involvement in an autonomy supportive manner, providing structure in an autonomy supportive manner, autonomy support, and providing structure.

Facilitators (inviters)

Facilitators, or inviters, refer to parental behaviors and states that are mentioned by adolescents as those that usually precede or coincide with the adolescents’ decision-making process whether to disclose to parents or not, and encourage adolescents’ disclosure. Content analysis of adolescents’ responses in focus groups resulted in the following eight categories of parental behaviors and states that match the “facilitators” higher-order category definition.

Table 3. Derived categories of mentioned parental behaviors and states which facilitate adolescents' self disclosure – antecedents and reactions to disclosure.

Parental behaviors and states that facilitate adolescents' self-disclosure		
Theme	Facilitators/inviters	Positive reactions
<i>Interpersonal involvement</i>	Positive affective state Availability/accessibility Creating opportunities for adolescent's disclosure Parental self-disclosure	Emotional support Having fun Parental self-disclosure
<i>Autonomy supportive involvement</i>	Asking unobtrusive questions Recognizing adolescent's emotional state Inviting unconditional disclosure Awaiting disclosure	
<i>Autonomy support</i>		Empathic understanding Attentive listening Appreciating adolescent's disclosure Taking adolescent seriously Trust in adolescent's competence Keeping secret
<i>Autonomy supportive structure</i>		Constructive feedback Instrumental support Calm reaction Talking about problems Negotiating
<i>Structure</i>		Approving adolescent's request

Positive affective state. Many adolescents pointed out that they chose a moment for self-disclosure when parent was in a good mood, happy, relaxed, or content: “Depends on their mood. Whether they’re in a good mood, because if they are in a good mood, we’ll tell them . . .”

Availability/accessibility. Some adolescents mentioned that parents being available and not occupied with something else might prompt them to disclose: “In the evening, when my Mum isn’t busy doing something, then I can talk to her. Those conversations can last a very long time. And just as I really start talking it starts getting late and then I can’t go on. And in the morning it’s all different, it’s not the same thing anymore . . .”

Creating opportunities for adolescent’s disclosure. Some adolescents mentioned certain parental behaviors that actually created the opportunity for them to disclose, such as approaching the adolescent, initiating conversations through jokes, spending time alone

with the adolescent, etc.: “Well I am encouraged most when Mum comes and sits next to me and then starts talking to me . . .”; “My Dad likes to joke around a lot, so he always talks to me about sex, so I start joking with him (laughs), and then we start talking more seriously and so on . . .”.

Parental self-disclosure. Several adolescents reported that parents’ disclosing their own daily experiences or childhood memories might elicit them to disclose too: “To me it’s easier when, for example, she starts . . . when she starts about something that happened to her that day, that she met a school friend, then it’s easier for me to start, otherwise I feel stupid to . . . I can’t start on my own . . .”; “. . . they also confide in us what it was like for them in their childhood . . .”

Asking unobtrusive questions. Adolescents reported that parental open-ended questions, which show interest or offer help, often prompt them to disclose: “I always talk to my parents about myself when I come back from school. It’s kind of normal now: What’s new? How was at school?”; “Well, I like it when she asks me about something, I really love that, because I can see that she is interested in me . . .”; “And they should somehow encourage us, for example, ask us ‘Do you have a problem, is there something I can do to help?’”.

Recognizing adolescent’s emotional state. Many adolescents reported that their parents showed they had noticed that something happened to the adolescent, which then prompted adolescents to self-disclose about the relevant matter: “My Mum sees that something’s wrong, she notices if I’m not acting normal . . . and then something, like, some words . . . for me to tell her what happened . . .”; “. . . my Mum knows when I’m in a bad mood . . . then we always talk . . .”.

Inviting ‘unconditional’ disclosure. Several adolescents stated that they were encouraged by parents inviting them to tell “no matter what”: “. . . that I don’t need to hide anything, that I can tell her everything . . .”; “. . . and then she said that if I wanted to, I could confide in her and that in the future if something’s on my mind or I want to tell her something and I’m scared, to tell her anyway, no matter what . . .”.

Awaiting disclosure. A couple of adolescents mentioned how their parents, rather than bothering them with questions, let them disclose at their own pace, without putting pressure on them: “But maybe they will let you talk . . . Hmm, like, they want to let you, I mean like, she’s grown up, so she needs to decide for herself what to tell us, and what not to tell . . .”; “. . . well, my Mum simply leaves me alone and I always come to her. My Mum never puts any pressure on me . . .”

Positive reactions to disclosure

Beside antecedent parental behaviors, adolescents described certain parental reactions to disclosure that encouraged subsequent disclosures. Those are summarized in the following 15 categories.

Emotional support. Many adolescents mentioned parental emotional support and comforting as positive reactions to disclosure: "... even though she doesn't know what to say about that particular situation, it's never happened to her, but still... She simply knows what to say to make me feel better..."; "When I cry, then Mum tells me to tell her about what happened, she always, like, comforts me and says it's not worth my tears..."

Having fun. Some adolescents mentioned that they liked when parents enjoyed the humorous side of disclosure: "I sometimes tell her an anecdote... For example, the guys in our class keep fooling around and we think it's funny... So I tell it to my Mum and she laughs, too..."

Parental self-disclosure. Adolescents reported that their parents reacted to their disclosure by self-disclosing similar experiences, which they found encouraging: "Yeah, we talk a little and then maybe if she's had something like that happen to her, she tells me about that and so on..."

Emphatic understanding. Showing understanding and putting oneself in the adolescent's position were mentioned as encouraging parental reactions: "They should understand us"; "She said that it was wrong, but that she knew I was curious, that I wanted to try how it was."; "They should try to put themselves in our shoes, remember what it was like when they were our age..."

Attentive listening. Several adolescents pointed out the importance of parents' listening attentively to them without interruption: "I would like for them to first listen to my story till the end, what I have to say, and not when I start to talk that my Mum immediately says 'Why did you have to do it?'. I would like them to wait until the end, you know, calmly and not attacking".

Appreciating adolescents' disclosure. As something that might facilitate their future disclosures, adolescents reported parents expressing appreciation of adolescents' decision to disclose: "When there's a problem, I always have a desire to tell her about it and to solve it together; then I feel better for having told her and she's glad I told her instead of keeping quiet".

Taking adolescents seriously. It was often reported that when parents reacted by taking them seriously and showing respect, adolescents were more keen on providing them with information and confiding in them: "Mum, for example, takes it a lot more seriously and then I can talk to her and solve, like, a problem"; "If we've come out and said it, then we expect at least a bit of respect from them".

Trust in adolescents' competence. Adolescents spoke about parents showing trust that the adolescent would make good choices and manage to solve his/her own problems: "She said that it was wrong and so on, but she laughed and told me: be careful what you do!"; "Then she wanted to help me deal with it, instead of letting me do it on my own. And

I said I didn't want that, that I wanted to do it myself, that she should only give me advice. And from then on it was always like that . . . Because I felt silly having her solve things for me . . ."; "they should have trust in us . . ."

Keeping secrets. Adolescents mentioned keeping secrets and confidentiality as an important aspect of wished-for parental reaction to disclosure: "I always tell my Mum, and my Mum is like, when she and I talk, she always keeps it a secret. And she never tells Dad if I ask her not to . . .".

Constructive feedback. Many adolescents described their parents' actual or wished-for constructive reactions to their disclosures in the past, such as parents respectfully expressing their disagreement with what adolescent told them, not dwelling on adolescents' mistakes but moving on to providing guidance for future: "Well, they could tell us something like, you shouldn't have done it, but what's done is done, it's over now and you can't change the past, but that we could try and fix it by doing something about it, to apologize to the person we hurt or whatever . . .".

Instrumental support. Many adolescents argued that parents acted as a source of support, and that their advice, help in problem solving, and protection encouraged subsequent disclosures: "I always confide in Dad and then he gives me some advice and tries to help somehow"; "Well, I wanted to tell it to someone, I mean I told it to my friends, but I don't know, they gave me some advice, but it's not the same as to tell Mum, Mum is more like . . . I know if something bad is going on, she will protect me, I mean, friends are always here but, you know . . ."; ". . . Mum has more experience with those types of situations . . .".

Calm reaction. Adolescents agreed that when parents expressed disagreement calmly and thought before reacting to their disclosures it made the subsequent disclosures more likely: ". . . I think that parents shouldn't react impatiently but calmly say that they think what we did was wrong, they should say – I don't agree with that – and whether that's bad, and not immediately yell at us for what happened . . ."; "before they react, they should try to put themselves on our place, to think a bit how to react, not to attack the child unnecessarily"; ". . . and if they solve it calmly then we will always want to talk to them . . .".

Talking about problems. Adolescents reported that they preferred dealing with problems through dialogue: "Well my Mum never yells at me and she has never hit me, but always tries to deal with everything by talking and then if I have a problem I always want to tell her about it and then we always solve it"; ". . . my Mum always helps me with talk".

Negotiating. Adolescents emphasized that when parents accepted negotiation, changed in response to adolescents' influence, or reassessed their own decisions, adolescents were more willing to disclose: "Well if I, say, get a couple of bad marks in a row and then they say: – No more sports practice! – and I know I will correct them in the next period, and then they say: – OK, fine, but if you don't improve by such and such time then you're

grounded”; “I told him what bothered me in the way he behaved and then he promised to change that. Then he told me what he minded in the way I behaved and I promised I will change, too, and that’s how we function . . .”

Approving adolescents’ request. Giving permission to adolescents’ self-disclosed wish or request or was also mentioned as facilitating subsequent disclosures: “And when I asked her, she said “O.K.”, and I felt sooo relieved . . .”

Serendipitous findings

Although the purpose of the study was not to identify all potential factors that adolescents found as influencing their disclosure to parents, but only those concerning parental behaviors, adolescents were spontaneously mentioning some factors beyond parents’ behaviors and states. They could be classified into four basic groups: adolescent related (personality traits, behaviors, states, mood, curiosity . . .), parent related (gender, personality traits, behaviors, states, mood . . .), relationship related (interaction, trust, expectations, generational gap . . .), and contextual/situational factors (self-disclosing content, offence history, outer interruption, favorable situation for disclosure, etc . . .). This is in line with Hargie and Dickson’s (2004) categorization of factors influencing self-disclosure (factors related to discloser, recipient, relationship, and context). This is an important finding because it depicts the complexity of the self-disclosure process, which is multiple determined.

Discussion

In this study, we explored and systematized adolescents’ perceptions of parental behaviors related to adolescents’ disclosures of their daily activities, problems, and concerns, as well as the issues parents might disapprove of. As expected, parental behaviors perceived to inhibit and those perceived to facilitate disclosures were identified. As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, response categories derived from adolescent’s accounts can be interpreted within the framework of the growing SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The theory proposes that parenting context, which facilitates satisfaction of the child’s psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, is marked by three dimensions: autonomy support, structure, and involvement (Grolnick, Deci & Ryan, 1997). They are relatively orthogonal, implying that parents can, for example, provide rules and expectations, or be highly involved in the adolescent’s life in an autonomy supportive or controlling manner (Grolnick, Beiswenger, & Price, 2008).

In line with the SDT proposition, adolescents in our study refrained from voluntary self-disclosure to parents in order to avoid a range of *negative parental reactions*, reflecting lack of interpersonal involvement, autonomy unsupportive involvement, lack of autonomy support in general, providing structure in a controlling manner, or just providing structure that would stop the adolescent from participating in a desired activity (Table 2). Some of the reactions were in accordance with already identified adolescents’ reasons for non-disclosing (Darling et al., 2006), such as fear of consequences (e.g., parents would be angry, lecture, punish, or stop the desired activity) and emotional reasons

(e.g., parents would worry, be disappointed, or wouldn't understand). Parents' teasing (making fun of the disclosed content) as a negative reaction to adolescents' disclosure was also suggested previously (Kerr et al., 1999). Furthermore, our findings are consistent with those from two recent qualitative studies, where the most prominent reasons youths gave for withholding information included expecting prohibitions, punishments, and conflicts over activities and friendships, as well as avoiding intrusiveness and overprotection (Marshall et al., 2005; Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008). However, our study also revealed some parental negative reactions to disclosure that had not received much attention before within the parenting literature (e.g., breaking confidentiality, interrupting, being distracted, or unresponsive to adolescents' influence), most of them representing a lack of autonomy support.

Parental positive reactions to disclosure were also identified and grouped around the themes of interpersonal involvement, autonomy support, providing structure in an autonomy supportive manner, and simply providing structure consistent with adolescents' wishes (Table 3). Many of the response categories presented in Table 3 (e.g., emotional support, empathic understanding) reflect general parenting dimensions and are consistent with the findings that self-disclosure is promoted by parents who are warm, responsive, and accepting (Grolnick et al., 2008; Smetana et al., 2006; Snoek & Rothblum, 1979; Soenens et al., 2006). However, a variety of more specific facilitative reactions (e.g., keeping secrets, negotiating, having fun with the adolescent, attentive listening, showing appreciation for the adolescent's disclosure, etc.) were also revealed, and those mostly reflected autonomy supportive parental behaviors. An example of a particularly situation-specific reaction is parental self-disclosure. Several adolescents reported that parents reacted to their disclosure of some experience by sharing a similar experience of their own, which is known in the literature on self-disclosure as the reciprocity effect (Cozby, 1973). These parental disclosures did not include highly intimate information, but daily events or anecdotes from the past.

Apart from identifying parental reactions to disclosures that possibly influence adolescents' subsequent decisions to self-disclose, the findings of this study contribute to the existing literature by pointing to parental behaviors and emotional states that take place *prior to adolescents' disclosures* and are perceived as influencing their decision whether to disclose or not, or may even discourage them from their initial decision to disclose. It seems that adolescents attempt to moderate possible parental reactions by actively choosing the "right moment" for disclosure. They observe parental states and subtle signs that determine the appropriateness of the disclosure in a given situation, as indicated in Tables 2 and 3. By sending "signals" that disclosure is welcome, parents may actively create opportunities for disclosure. These facilitative parental behaviors, that we labeled "*inviters*", refer mostly to parental involvement in an autonomy supportive manner. On the other hand "*inhibitors*", which hinder adolescents' initial attempts to disclose, are in terms of SDT best explained by either lack of involvement or autonomy unsupportive involvement.

Further, in line with the SDT proposition that structure and involvement can be provided in an autonomy supportive or controlling manner (Grolnick et al., 2008), we found that adolescents referred to certain parental behaviors as both inhibitors and facilitators of their disclosure, such as asking questions or using humor. Previous

research mainly found a small-to-moderate positive link between parental solicitation and youths' disclosure (Crouter, Bumpus, Davis, & McHale, 2005; Keijsers, Frijns, Branje, & Meeus, 2009; Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Our results suggest that whether parental asking questions will serve as facilitator or inhibitor of adolescents' self-disclosure mostly depends on the manner of soliciting. If questions are (perceived to be) asked in an intrusive and controlling manner, adolescents might feel overly controlled (Finkenauer et al., 2002; Hawk, Hale, Raaijmakers, & Meeus, 2008; Kerr & Stattin, 2000) and try to restrict parents controlling efforts in order to maintain their privacy by filtering their self-disclosure to parents (Buhrmester & Prager, 1995; Marshall et al., 2005). On the other hand, if parents ask questions in an unobtrusive manner showing their interest, care, and respect, adolescents tend to respond by self-disclosure. Parental involvement is viewed as desirable, but only in the case of the autonomy supportive climate (Grolnick et al., 2008). For parents, it is a matter of finding a delicate balance, as illustrated by the following quotation: "I don't tell my mum straight away directly, I do it somehow in guidelines, and then she puts it together, and then she tells me, and then I am glad when she gives me some advice or something. Then, when she starts to go on about this, then it becomes annoying". Our results also indicate that in some situations simply awaiting adolescents' spontaneous disclosure (without any questions) is perceived as the most favorable parental strategy. Similar sensitivity is required for using humor, where initiating delicate conversations through jokes might sometimes facilitate adolescents' opening up. However, if parents' use of humor invades adolescents' private boundaries (Petronio, 2007) or takes the form of teasing, frivolous behavior, and not taking the adolescent seriously, it might have a counter effect and hinder the adolescent's disclosure.

Thus, our findings point to the importance of the manner in which parents carry out their relational and regulatory functions, which supports the SDT perspective on the moderating effect of parental autonomy support on adolescents' perception of parental involvement and structure (Grolnick et al., 2008). This is also consistent with another recent conceptualization of the facilitating parenting environment – the concept of positive parenting, based on the United Nations (UN) Convention of the Rights of the Child (Pečnik, 2007). It highlights providing recognition and acknowledgement (e.g., that the child is seen, heard, and valued as an individual) and enabling empowerment (e.g., that the child's sense of competence, personal control, and the ability to affect others are enabled by the relationship with their parents), in addition to the more frequently cited dimensions of nurturing behavior and providing structure. Each of these components of positive parenting can be found among parental behaviors connected with adolescents self-disclosure identified in our study. Beside emotional support and corrective feedback and advice, adolescents' accounts emphasize the importance of being listened to, understood, and taken seriously by parents, as well as the importance of parents' supporting adolescents' influence and problem solving.

Generally, adolescents' accounts demonstrate that they perceive and interpret parents' behaviors and emotional states and make their decisions about self-disclosure accordingly. Thus, adolescents' behavior towards a parent (disclosure or non-disclosure) is influenced by adolescents' making sense of current parental actions, as well as by adolescents' expectations about parental reactions to disclosure, based on the history of their interactions. According to the social relational theory (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2006),

cognitive representations of past interactions (i.e., perceived relationship) are the filter through which all new interactions with parents are viewed. The presented adolescents' views illustrate the reciprocal influences between parents and adolescents, emphasized within a dynamic transactionalist perspective. By "opening up" or "shutting up", adolescents respond to (perceived) parental interest, availability, mood, support, receptivity to adolescents' influence, etc. However, adolescents also influence their parents' responses. By actively calculating when and what to tell their parents, adolescents solicit positive parental reactions and avoid negative reactions (Tilton-Weaver & Marshall, 2008). Furthermore, by disclosing or refraining from disclosure, they actively regulate parental involvement and the opportunity to provide structure and guidance, as well as their sense of autonomy in the relationships with parents.

Limitations and directions for future research

It is important to acknowledge that results may be limited by the method of data gathering (focus groups) only to behaviors adolescents were willing to report on in front of their peers. Perhaps one-to-one interviews or open-ended questionnaires would result in some additional categories of parental behaviors influencing youths' decisions to self-disclose.

Another limitation is the self-reported nature of the data, warranting future studies to establish links between identified parental behaviors and adolescents' self-disclosing behaviors. However, adolescents' own perceptions of parental behaviors, according to the transactionalist perspective, have a very salient role in motivating their actions (e.g., self-disclosure).

Furthermore, an important shortcoming of this study is that it has been conducted on a relatively small sample of 13- and 14-year-olds from an urban setting in Croatia. Future studies should test if similar parental behaviors would be seen as facilitating or inhibiting disclosure by adolescents of different backgrounds, and also need to address gender-specific processes at play in dyads of mother–daughter, mother–son, father–daughter and father–son.

Despite the mentioned weaknesses, this study adds to the conceptualization of parents' own role in acquiring knowledge about adolescents' daily activities, problems, and concerns, which has, so far, been a topic of mostly quantitative research. Qualitative data gathered in this study provides an insight into adolescents' experience of aspects of parenting relevant for self-disclosure and adolescents' interpretations of their parents' behaviors and emotional states. A wide range of parental actions, preceding or following disclosure, were experienced as influencing adolescents decisions (not) to disclose. The identified categories of parental behaviors contribute to a more refined understanding of the processes through which adolescents' information management is moderated by parents. In addition, these categories demonstrate more specifically what autonomy (un)supportive involvement or structure actually means in terms of concrete parental behaviors, as perceived by 13–14 year olds. Our findings may also contribute to the operationalization of parental behaviors related to adolescents' self-disclosure in future quantitative research.

In summary, our findings propose that apart from individual differences in adolescents' proneness to disclose (as suggested in the serendipitous findings section), adolescent's self-disclosures to parents depend on what parents do in the concrete

disclosure-related situations. According to adolescents' views, not only can parents hinder adolescents' disclosure by unfavorable reactions, but they can also prompt adolescents to disclose by behaving in a certain manner. Having identified such parental behaviors and states that moderated adolescents' tendency to disclose, we have offered an additional support to contemporary perspectives on optimal parenting based on psychological needs (Grolnick et al., 2008) and children's rights (Pečnik, 2007). The results also provide further insight into the parent–adolescent communication process and some guidance on how parents can listen so that adolescents will talk.

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