

The word *feel* as a linguistic device in self-disclosure and enacted social support

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore how people make sense of the word *feel* in their communication across different social relationships and contexts. Assuming the use of the word *feel* is linked to the act of emotional expression, a secondary purpose is to examine how the perceived management of the word *feel* may be linked to well-being. Fifteen individual participants shared their perceptions about how they use the word *feel* over eight types of interpersonal relationships. Discourse analysis revealed that the function of the word *feel* was to self-disclose emotions or to inquire about them in others. The word *feel* emerged as a tool that can be wielded to achieve catharsis, intimacy, or social support while framing several subject positions within a discourse of emotional disclosure. When the word *feel* was reciprocated with others, participant perceptions showed how social status influenced how it was managed in relationships. In particular, the vulnerable disclosing parties were required to take risks in order to achieve the benefits of disclosure. Ruptures in the discourse occurred when participants who did not have opportunities to self-disclose experienced an unwanted emotional tension, an interest in receiving social support, or a drive to find closeness. These instances led to a use of the word *feel* outside of its emergent social rules. Finally, the beliefs of participants showed it was not just status that played a role in its management but gender as well. The findings show that although the deployment of *feel* requires judicious management of the risks inherent in emotional self-disclosure, the use of this can indicate the exchange of social resources known to have positive effects on well-being.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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Introduction

The social rules which guide what can be said, how it can be said, by whom, to whom, and at what moment allow certain ways of being over others, potentially restricting healthy modes of expression while enabling others. Emotional expression can be a healthy act and a pervasive need (Rimé, Corsini, & Herbette, 2002). Conversely, emotional inhibition research has revealed many deleterious effects of repressing or suppressing feelings (Pennebaker, 1995) while, at the same time, notes the social risks taken in emotional disclosure (Farber, 2006). The purpose of this research is to explore how people make sense of the word *feel* in their communication across different social relationships and contexts. Assuming the use of the word *feel* is linked to the act of emotional expression, a secondary purpose is to examine how the perceived management¹ of the word *feel* may be linked to well-being.

Initially, my attraction to the word *feel* did not come as a researcher. As a consultant in training, my coursework in the psychology of health and high performance revealed several precepts by which to guide how to work with clientele. Some of these principles were considered to be evidence-based practice while others appeared to be only anecdotally supported or driven by stereotypes. My curiosity piqued when, during one graduate-level seminar, one instructor shared that certain gender differences need to be accounted for in language use during a consultation. Specifically, when referring to emotions or feelings, we discussed that it is likely best to use the word *think* rather than *feel* with men. Going forward, I consciously applied this advice in my work with performers and health-seekers. However, as it became embedded in my repertoire of communication, I became curious for why this word had to be managed in this way.

¹ Management refers to the variation in how or when a person uses the word *feel*. While perceptions may depict this behavior to be conscious and deliberate, it is difficult to determine how active managing language is.

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Moreover, I wondered if such linguistic management could be promoting emotional suppression when expression was potentially valuable in the consultation process.

Shortly thereafter, I commenced research into a heuristic model called the Resonance Performance Model (RPM) (Newburg, Kimiecik, Durand-Bush, & Doell, 2002) which guided an emergent approach to consultation for performance or health called Resonance-Based Intervention. The purpose of this work was to develop and explore a consulting framework which focused on people answering the question, *How do you want to feel?* as it applied to their daily lives and specific performance domains. Guided by this model, I conducted intervention-based research with four developmental track and field athletes. Our work together revolved around this question and, based on their responses, we co-constructed a process of performance which overtly articulated the identification, communication, and management of feelings experienced during or around the track. This framework extended to include the identification of preparation activities which helped performers to feel desired feelings between their performances. The purpose of this intervention-focused research was not to prescribe ways for the athletes to feel but to observe and inquire how such a question may inspire or motivate self-regulation. In essence, this guiding framework facilitated the construction of performance through a discourse of feelings.

This discourse included the regular self-disclosure of feelings between the athletes and the consultant-researcher (myself). That is, athletes met with a consultant knowing that they were going to be asked to share how they felt about their process of performance. Voluntary, or unprovoked, self-disclosure was also a part of this process. Self-disclosure, in this sense, is defined as an interaction between at least two individuals where personal information is deliberately divulged (Derlega, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993). The word *feel* played an

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instrumental role in this process, used prominently throughout consultations with participants. Imperatively, the word *feel* had clear connotations for both the communication and the experience of a process of well-being and performance since it encouraged the sharing of past or current feelings and elucidated prospective emotional aspirations (i.e., feeling how you want to feel in the future).

Feel-based inquiry depicted by the questions of the Resonance-Based Intervention opened pathways into private experiences (i.e., feelings or emotions) that ultimately mattered to performing well and well-being. While the context of this research was highly specific (i.e., sport), one of the conclusions was that there was breadth to which identifying and disclosing desired feelings can be applied to a person’s life. Participants shared that their reflections about how they wanted to feel permeated beyond sport and into their relationships, schooling, and their health habits (Doell, Durand-Bush, & Newburg, 2006). In effect, the emotional processes that *feel*-based inquiry focused upon brought this word into conscious awareness on a regular basis and eventually transcended the original context in question. In short, the word *feel* appeared to have unique properties in this process, so much so that I was moved to investigate it further.

While the question *How do you want to feel?* was reported by participants as novel to ponder (Doell et al., 2006), it is the word *feel* that makes it truly distinctive. This word acts like a prism for self-disclosure (e.g., *I feel*, *I want to feel*). A prism, by definition, is a transparent body usually with triangular ends, used for separating light passed through it into a spectrum. Like a prism does, this word casts proverbial light onto the private experience of an individual. Through just one word, many private, inner experiences can be conveyed (e.g., *I feel tired*, *I feel shocked*, *I feel embarrassed*). Given how the question *How do you want to feel?* impacted a small cluster

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of four athletes, the use of the word *feel* in self-disclosure became compelling enough to wonder more about its character in interpersonal communication.

Importance of Studying Language

Emotions, including their expression, inhibition, or consideration as future-focused aspirations are connected to health. Beyond genetic or biological factors which can dictate this behavior (Pennebaker, 1995), social norms also influence decisions to share feelings with others (Hochschild, 1979). In interpersonal communication, emotion can be construed as a social performance, creating and maintaining certain identities and social positions through how, when, and with whom it is performed (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1979; Searle, 1979). Ultimately, communication creates social support and disperses valuable health information, both of which have been linked to health and well-being (Viswanath, 2008). More specifically, language has a special function toward understanding the sharing of emotion as a social practice and, in turn, how health can be influenced through the resources certain language can make available.

There are many approaches to studying language. Of particular interest is how language can be studied to understand the forces that shape the social realities and truths to which people ascribe (Fairclough, 1995). Language is a source for making sense of discourse. Discourses construct and circulate the implicit or explicit truths (i.e., rules) about social behaviours (Foucault, 2000; Hall, 1997). Truths about emotional disclosure will change over time. Meanwhile, they also create and communicate what emotions can be disclosed, where, when, by whom, to whom (Hochschild, 1979, 1983).

In analyzing discourse, these rules can be elucidated, contextualized, and evaluated for the purposes of understanding a variety of social acts important to daily life (Potter & Weatherall, 1987; Weatherall, Watson, & Gallois, 2007). Power is everywhere (Foucault, 1998)

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and part of an analysis of these truths leads to understanding its effects. That is, exploring the rules of language use can reveal how power is exercised. What are shared collectively as social rules shows that not everyone is free to be or act like the person they may wish to be. The notion that people are not socially allowed to express themselves authentically (i.e., unabated or naturally) reinforces this. The norms by which societies or groups judge the suitability of its members' behavior are very powerful. Scholars who have diligently contemplated how these rules originated and proliferate show that certain people (or groups of people) at certain times have been in positions to create these rules and actively (e.g., through institutions) or even passively enforce them, often observed in how people manage their own behavior (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1982b; Weedon, 2004). Importantly, some rules become complicit as if taken for granted while others are resisted, consciously or unconsciously, by those subjected to them (Foucault, 1982a; 1982b).

Foucauldian perspectives fit well with the interests of this research for several reasons. Foremost, Foucauldian-style discourse analysis not only examines the role of language in how people perform certain identities but it looks closely at how people conform and resist to social norms. Since relationships can be examined by the relativity of social status, discourse analysis can uncover how people act powerfully to maintain the rules or, conversely, act powerfully to resist them. In helping professions, characterized by a status differential between an expert (e.g., counsellor, physician, nurse, and consultant) and client (e.g., clients or patients), the expert is in a position to implement the rules and, indeed, has the most influence over their significance. In this way, my interest in Foucault includes how people may resist the rules for *feel*. Ultimately, a Foucauldian approach excavates the rules for using *feel* and can even introduce other inherent norms not yet considered or made explicit. In turn, Foucault's work could have applied relevance

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since it can, through identifying discursive rules, help establish best practices for the deployment of the word *feel* in socially supportive relationships.

About the Word “Feel”

The word *feel* has some unique qualities. *Feel* is, first, referred to as physical touch (i.e., to feel a pen with your fingers) in dictionaries². Physical-based definitions describe the word *feel* as a sense used to acquire information about the world. *Feel* is further described as a sentiment (i.e., having a gut feeling) or to be conscious of an inner experience. These perspectives allude to *feel* as duplicitous, pertaining to either physical or emotional worlds.

Past research suggests noteworthy accounts of the word *feel* which frame its position for deeper inquiry. Literature on emotional disclosure reveals a vast amount of research spanning disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and psychology. Some research has framed the communication of emotions from the gender perspective that *men are cognitive* and *women are emotional* (Fischer, 2000; Hilton, Emslie, Chapple, & Ziebland, 2009; Ragins & Winkel, 2011). Ragins & Winkel (2011) succinctly described that *women are emotional* while *men have emotions*.

However, specific inquiry into the word *feel* is extremely limited. This word has emerged in persuasion research by Mayer and Tormala (2010) which compared the effects of different words on those with different dispositions (i.e., being cognitively or affectively oriented). They determined that the word *think* is better received by men than the word *feel* because men are more cognitively oriented. While their work may have somewhat resolved my original curiosity

² The online version of the Merriam-Webster Dictionary’s [primary definition of feel](http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feel) is “to handle or touch in order to examine, test or explore”. Among others, *feel* is also portrayed as “to be conscious of an inward impression, state of mind, or physical condition” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feel>).

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for using the word *think*, it fell short in elucidating what qualities of the word *feel* may fashion such a conclusion and whether exceptions exist.

Other specific accounts of the word *feel* have analyzed it as a speech act, an utterance with a specific performative function. Performativity refers to language’s capacity to construct identity, such as that of the aforementioned emotional woman or the cognitive man. The capacity of language in this way creates and perpetuates social norms (Butler, 1997). Examples of speech acts are to greet, to promise, or to request, all of which are represented by the specific use of certain words or phrases. Austin (1962) depicted the word *feel* as representative of disclosure. That is, using the word *feel* often performs an act associated with revealing information, usually emotional, about oneself. Similarly, Fiehler (2002) portrayed the word *feel* as a declarative expression.

While the focus of this word from these two perspectives is on the social sharing of information, the word *feel* can also be used as a means to acquire emotional information from others. For example, as mentioned previously, Newburg et al. (2002) portrayed *feel* as a question in intervention-based research in the use of the question “How do you want to feel?” Meanwhile, Pham (2008) cited the value of the word *feel* for its role in gathering information about consumer decision-making. Pham used, “How do you feel about it?” as a key question in conducting market research on how a product impacts a consumer.

Of course, as a part of a question, the word *feel* can be used in past, present, and future tenses. For instance, the question “How did that make you feel?” draws upon something that has happened in the past. “How do you feel about that?” focuses on the current inner experiences of a person. Finally, *feel* can be deployed prospectively like how Newburg et al. (2002) used it.

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Mechanically, these tenses can be applied to acts of disclosure as well. “I felt”, “I feel”, “I want to feel” represent the various tenses. Of the three, “I feel” represents a very direct disclosure of present, real-time inner experiences. This type of statement is, according to Forey (2009), a projective clause. A projective clause exposes points of view of the speaker. In essence, the word *feel*, used in this way, acts as a window into a person’s unseen feelings³. Using *feel* in this way appears to be the most exposing in that there is little temporal distance between the felt experience and the social sharing of it, a gap observable in the other tenses like “I felt” (the past) or “I want to feel” (the future). In addition, Forey contended that certain grammatical decisions can influence how a word like *feel* constructs meaning in communication. *It* statements are much less personal than those using *I*. For example, in her work with written communication in the workplace, workers used statements such as *it is believed* rather than *I believe* or *we believe* in order to create a distance between themselves and the topic at hand, often to avoid assuming responsibility over the message being conveyed. Similarly, using the verb *to be* in disclosing information puts it at a greater distance than the active tense, *I feel*. For example, *I feel anxious* is unlike *I am anxious*.⁴ Overall, these grammatical choices can matter in how disclosing messages are interpreted.

The options to verbally self-disclose are various. However, it is challenging to identify comparable words that represent such an obvious act of emotional disclosure as the word *feel* in the disclosing lexicon (Austin, 1962; Clore, Ortony, & Foss; 1987; Ortony, Clore & Foss, 1987).

³ The word emotion is used often throughout this document. Unless otherwise identified, emotions will be used to represent similar terms such as affect or feelings. Importantly, its use is intended to represent the private, inner feelings of a person.

⁴ This observation is highly subjective. While I argue the difference between these two declarations is significant, it is fair to argue that they are indeed very similar. However, *I am* has such a vast utility in communication that choosing to use *I feel* in its place is, in my opinion, quite significant. Verbally communicating emotions can occur in a variety of ways but when it is clear that the word *feel*, in most circumstances but not all, signifies an impending emotional disclosure it is curious why people would use alternatives in its place. The review of literature will present research that examines, in part, how and why people may choose some verbal disclosing devices over others.

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Many words can represent an act of cognitive disclosure like *think*, *believe*, or *know* but few are so clearly representative of emotions. For reference, the words *hope*, *wish*, *yearn*, or *desire* could have some link to *feel* but, while constituting a self-disclosing speech act, they do not represent an emotionally self-disclosing act as blatantly as *feel* does (Fiehler, 2002).

This argument, along with the current research findings related to the perceptions and attitudes towards the word *feel*, will be presented and discussed over the following six chapters. First, in the review of literature, the word *feel* will be contextualized as an emotionally disclosing speech act. This situates *feel* amidst a body of work comprised of research on social support, self-disclosure, and self-presentation. In addition, the word *feel* will be presented as a link between social relationships and health pathways. Secondly, a chapter on the methodological approach used to explore *feel* will be offered. This section is followed by three articles which summarize the perceptions and attitudes towards *feel* via three separate analytical perspectives. In the first article named, *The word “feel” as an indicator of enacted social support in personal relationships*, the word *feel* is examined for its perceived use in communication across several interpersonal affiliations. The second article entitled, *Perceptions of the use of the word “feel” in the workplace* concentrates on the influence of context on its perceived use. Finally, this package of articles is completed with a piece focusing on gender called, *The construction of gender through attitudes towards the use of the word “feel”*. Collectively, how the findings of this research apply to current theory and possible applied practice is presented in the final discussion chapter.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

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Exploratory research is characterized by its wide-casting nature in the process of contextualizing a research question (Stebbins, 2001). Consequently, this review of literature draws upon a variety of related concepts from a range of domains in order to situate a specific interest in one word to a broader background. While it seeks to be thorough in accounting for the applicable concepts which can situate *feel*, it cannot be fully comprehensive.

There are several areas of research which help frame the current study. As such, this chapter is segmented into four sections. Drawing upon several disciplines such as public health, health psychology, sport psychology, social psychology, and sociology, the word *feel* will be rooted amidst the concepts of social support, self-disclosure, self-presentation, and subjectivity.

Situating Social Support

Social capital spiked in interest amidst health researchers from the late 1990's to the early 2000's (Schafft & Brown, 2003). With the advent of population health as a legitimate academic discipline, social capital has found a place as a social determinant of health (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2005). One of the most unifying characteristics of many perspectives on social capital is that relationships matter to the health and well-being of individuals, groups, and communities. In this chapter, social capital is considered for its relationship with three concepts; social support, emotional self-disclosure, and social norms.

Social Capital as Context

Semantically, the term *capital* can evoke financial associations. For example, Kikuchi and Coleman (2012) depict social capital as a type of “currency that results from the social networks humans enjoy and from the resources gleaned from relationships within such networks” (p. 188). Efforts to avoid economic associations are evident by Smith and Kulynych's preference of the term *social capacity* because it “provides the same heuristic benefits as the

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term social capital without extending illusory promises of theoretical parsimony with the financial/human/social capital trinity” (p. 149). The value of relationships and their specific qualities therein has been linked to positive effects such as higher employment rates and increased social interaction but also better health (Mohan & Mohan, 2002). As a result, it is important to situate social capital as conceptually valuable not as part of an economic discourse but also as a health discourse.

To this end, the resources that are shared with one another and how people feel toward each other is reflected in the concept of social capital (Fujiwara & Kawachi, 2008). How people socially support one another is a key factor in the development of social capital. In turn, an important feature of social capital research which focuses on interpersonal communication is that it ultimately pertains to relationships between people whether these connections are referred to in the literature as ties, networks, or relations (Kikuchi & Coleman, 2012).

As background, the constituent elements embedded within the concept of social capital have been around for some time. For example, Putnam (2000) cited that this term can be traced back to 1916 in West Virginia when Lyda Hanifan used it to emphasize the cooperation required to operate a school well. Viewing health through the tenets of social capital also has deep roots. For example, Durkheim’s (1952) landmark research on suicide revealed the importance of social integration for health and well-being (Kawachi, Kennedy, & Glass, 1999). However, it was not until Bourdieu’s (1986) work that social capital offered the opportunity to interconnect many social forces which influence relationships at a variety of levels within a society. Bourdieu explained the effects of certain social activities at the societal, community, family, and individual levels previously observed mostly as independent from one another (Aguilar & Sen, 2009). Bourdieu wrote that, “capital is accumulated labor . . . which when appropriated on a private, i.e.

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exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” (p. 241). He explained that capital does not have to refer to economic capital but social as well. Social capital, he noted, is a form of capital which pertains to ideas such as social connection, mutual acquaintance, and social recognition.

Several key scholars added depth to the concept of social capital. Coleman (1990a) proposed that social capital is constituted mostly by characteristics of relationships such as trust. He regarded social capital as important due to its productive qualities whereby certain objectives could be achieved collectively that could not when individuals acted individually.

This notion was also reinforced in Putnam’s body of work. For example, Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanenette’s (1993) were guided by a more sophisticated approach to social capital, stating that the key to a population’s prosperity were its “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks” because they “improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (p. 167). He described trust, social norms, and social networks as important intermediary components of social capital, placing particular value on social relationships. Social capital, as a resource accessed by individuals and groups within a social structure, facilitates cooperation and the maintenance of norms (Fujiwara & Kawachi, 2008). In essence, the permeation of a strong social connectedness across groups of individuals is portrayed as a social prop for healthy and productive populations.

Social capital has since been explained through its vertical and horizontal characteristics. For example, Turner (2000) outlined how social capital can be viewed vertically at three different levels including macro-institutional, meso, and micro. At the macro level, Turner described social capital formation as a product of populations becoming organized to meet its collective needs through institutionalization. The meso level included the corporate units that

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influence how members of these populations are treated. Finally, the micro level formation of social capital was represented by how face-to-face interactions are conducted. Top-down analyses evaluates how a population meets its fundamental social needs at each level while bottom-up analyses consider how social encounters between individuals sustain institutional forces. Each level represents clear separators for social capital analysis but none are completely isolated from one another.

Meanwhile, several other scholars have approached social capital from a simpler two-level perspective. For instance, Portes (1998) dismissed the meso-level entirely. The micro dimension included units of analysis such as intragroup ties (i.e., bonding) and extragroup ties (i.e., bridging). At the macro level, Portes described bonding as the degree of cohesiveness between the state and society while bridging was represented by the ability of society to maintain its norms. Ferlander (2007) also collapsed social capital into two forms: individual and collective. At the individual level, researchers focus on the social connections between people and how they support each other while the collective level of analysis focuses on group norms, networks, and generalized trust. Ferlander also included a formality dimension to the quality of social relationships. Formal ties between people can be any voluntary association across organizations or vertically within an organization (e.g., church, workplace). Relationships with neighbors, friends, family, or even gangs represent informal social ties. Any type, formal or informal, may have an impact on the accumulation of social capital.

Although pioneers such as Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988, 1990a, 1990b), and Putnam (1996) discuss the same concept in their work, there are ideological differences between them. Coleman and Putnam tended to focus more on social relationships, identified by Ferlander as the social cohesion approach (Ferlander, 2007). Bourdieu, on the other hand, directed much of his

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interest on the economics which underpin social relationships writing that, “every type of capital is reducible in the last analysis to economic capital” (p. 253). This has been dubbed the network resources approach (Ferlander, 2007). For Coleman, relationships were central to social change, believing that social capital enriches relationships at small levels which then enhance connections macro-socially like at the community level (Kikuchi & Coleman, 2012). Putnam (1995) also emphasized that social norms primarily influence relationships which, in turn, impact communities. He highlighted that interpersonal relationships were being strongly threatened by less social activities like, for instance, watching television which disrupt meaningful interpersonal communication (Putnam, 2000).

There are several mechanisms which may facilitate social capital’s contribution to individual health outcomes. The more social interaction a person has with their contacts, the more likely they are to access information on how to cure or prevent disease, learn remedies, and understand where the best hospital may be (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Kawachi et al., 1999). Socially organized or well-coordinated groups are also more able to obtain tangible goods like transportation, sports facilities, and green spaces (Putnam, 2000). In addition, informal care and support are more likely to be experienced by those who are socially connected (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Kawachi et al., 1999; Putnam, 2000). Often, reciprocal assistance will take place in a social network where neighbors or friends take care of each other during illness, providing temporary financial support during a difficult time, and participate in other activities that occur outside of the formal health care system. Finally, the provision of emotional support serves as a “psychological triggering mechanism, stimulating people’s immune systems to fight disease and buffer stress” (Putnam, 2000, p. 327). Ultimately, research pinpoints that social capital is related to specific properties of social relationships (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000; Putnam, 1995, 2000)

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and the relationship between social capital and health is at least partially mediated through social support (Berkman & Glass, 2000).

At its forefront is trust. Trust has been depicted as crucial for relationships to function in healthy ways (Rocco & Suhrcke, 2012). While measurements of social capital can target the sense of belonging, volunteering activity, and mutual assistance between neighbors (Fujiwara & Kawachi, 2008), trust is the most frequently used variable for representing social capital, approaching unanimity (Crossley, 2008; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 2000). Moreover, Ackerson and Viswanath (2008) elaborated that the most significant premise of social capital is that relationships are valuable for their ability to foster trust and establish norms or reciprocity. Referring to trust, Crossley (2008) had summarized social capital as, “the manner in which networks and their emergent properties (e.g., trust and norms) can constitute a resource for their members” (p. 477). In turn, the link between relationships and health in this area of research is often made through examining self-rated health along-side reciprocation and trust between people (Ackerson & Viswanath, 2009; Fujiwara & Kawachi, 2008; Kawachi, Kennedy, & Glass, 1999). Overall, trust has continued to permeate as one of the most pertinent elements of social capital research and has been robustly held as a vital characteristic of healthy social relationships (Landry, Amara, & Lamari, 2001; Rocco & Suhrcke, 2012).

Trust is depicted at all levels of social capital. Putnam et al. (1993) approached feelings of trust as a key representative of *individual* social capital. Rocco and Suhrcke (2012) conveyed that community-level social capital is inextricably linked with individual social capital. While collective social capital focuses on the communities, neighborhoods, and workplaces, individual social capital “concerns the cognitive and structural elements related to social relationships of individuals” (Verhaeghe & Tampubolon, 2012, p. 349). At this level, trust in others is also

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deemed even more powerful when it is reciprocated between individuals (d’Hombres, Rocco, Suhrcke, & McKee, 2009).

Consequently, there is little disagreement that social relationships are important to health. However, some of the specifics of this relationship have been debated (Poortinga, 2006). This debate is concerned with whether social capital is indeed a quality of communities or societies or whether it pertains to individuals and their social relationships (Kawachi, Kim, Coutts, & Subramanian, 2004). While examining the relationship between the different levels of social capital and health, Poortinga argued that it may be positive to state that social capital benefits a community while these benefits may not be uniformly experienced by the individuals within it. This might be the result of differences in the collective supportive resources across a person’s individual network (Van der Haag & Snijders, 2012).

Based on the above definition and the developments within this debate, an individual social capital perspective will be adopted for this study. Individual social capital presents the opportunity to frame elements of social relationships at the individual level yet can also be connected to the broader network perspectives (e.g., community level) available within population health. It also takes into account the heterogeneous experiences individuals may have with its inherent elements like trust and reciprocity.

Social support in social relationships

The concept of individual social capital recognizes that social relationships do not function in isolation but are situated within a social network (Poortinga, 2006). Relationships differ from social interactions in that they are represented by ongoing connections with other people (Reis, 2001). Examples of relationships include relationships within a community like with neighbors, friends, and acquaintances (Kikuchi & Coleman, 2012). A social network is

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considered a social structure complete with individual social actors and the dyadic links between them (Wasserman & Faust, 1994).

Originally, social networks gained attention for their role in health because of their pronounced correlation with mortality rates (Berkman & Syme, 1979; Cassel, 1976). That is, the more socially connected a person is, the longer he or she tends to live. Umberson, Crosnoe, and Reczek (2010) highlighted that:

social ties are typically considered in terms of structure and content. Structural aspects are reflected in measures of social integration and social networks, whereas positive and negative content is reflected in measures of social support and stress... (p. 141).

Specifically, a social network has since been linked to health through a host of mechanisms including, a) social support b) social influence, c) social engagement, d) person-to-person contact and, e) access to resources (Berkman & Glass, 2000). It is through these mechanisms that relationships affect major aspects of health across all of its dimensions including mental health, physical health, health behavior, and mortality (Umberson & Montez, 2010).

Kikuchi and Coleman (2012) reviewed how social relationships have been operationalized in the literature. They listed that, first, relationships can be categorized on an informal-formal dimension where formal relationships require planning for participation (e.g., a baseball team) and a dynamic-static dimension where dynamic relationships require effort (e.g., to serve, to volunteer) while static relationships do not. However, past approaches have also considered relationships through features of neighborliness, social support, sociability, size of network, public attendance, civic engagement, association membership, and residential stability (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Kawachi et al., 1999; Putnam, 2000).

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Conversely, poor social integration, represented by having few contacts or positive social ties, has been shown to have many deleterious effects on health. Social isolation is a strong predictor of adverse health outcomes (Bearman & Moody, 2004; Seeman, Singer, Ryff, Love & Levy-Storms, 2002) including higher mortality (House et al., 1988). Interestingly, Sparrevohn and Rapee (2009) found that lonely individuals are less likely to adhere to medical advice, sleep worse, and actually engage in troublesome health-behaviors such as being more sedentary, abusing substances, and having an unhealthy diet. In addition, they explained that those suffering from social phobia, a significant factor in poor integration, tend to be less emotionally self-expressive, self-disclose less often, and have less intimacy in their lives. These deficiencies highlight several of the specific mechanisms that underpin the accumulation of social capital at the individual level.

Dyadic relations (i.e., relations between two people) represent the smallest social relationship available at this level. Voluntary associations, like friendship, whereby a connection occurs outside formal institutionalized relationships, represent an advanced level of integration and incurs many positive effects (Putnam et al., 1993). Research on social dyads has generated several key findings that connect social relationships to health. For example, romantic couples who experience intimacy in their relationships have lower mortality rates than those who do not (Grove, 1973). Widows, for example, tend to experience an increase in mortality rate after losing their spouse (Elwert & Christakis, 2006). The effects are far ranging in scope, impacting physical, mental, and emotional health (Smith & Christakis, 2008).

While social networks depict the structure of social interaction, social support characterizes the resources that are shared across these structures (Ackerson & Viswanath, 2009). That is, as social integration considers the quantity of social ties and contact frequency,

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social support pertains to their positive or negative qualities (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). There are a variety of definitions for social support, albeit most differences appear subtle. For example, social support has been described as a communication behavior that plays a critical role in the maintenance or disruption of mental and physical health offered by members of a network (Segrin & Passalacqua, 2010). Others have described it as a process whereby the supporter helps the supported manage difficulties (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003). Meanwhile, Health Canada (2006) synthesized social support as:

The beneficial elements resulting from social relationships, including: emotional aid (empathy); instrumental and concrete aid; information (counselling, mentorship); accompaniment; and/or reinforcement of a sense of belonging and solidarity. (p. 18)

Ultimately, social support makes a person understand he or she is cared for, loved, or valued, and authenticates that he or she indeed belongs to a social network (Ackerson & Viswanath, 2009; Cobb, 1976; Goldsmith, 2004; Heaney & Israel, 2008; House et al., 1988). In all, social support has been shown to have many positive ties to health and well-being (Lemay Jr., Clark & Freeney, 2007; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2010; Sias & Bartoo, 2007) including living longer (Taylor et al., 2000) and has been portrayed as an instrumental mediator for individual social capital (Szreter & Woolcock, 2004; Verhaeghe, Pattyn, Bracke, Verhaeghe, & Van De Putte, 2012).

Social support is characterized by structural components (e.g., being socially integrated) and functional components (e.g., emotional transactions between individuals) (Reblin & Uchino, 2008). Furthermore, social support can be segmented into three forms; instrumental, informational, and emotional. Instrumental (or tangible) support, for example, is the provision of financial assistance, material goods, or services (Heaney & Israel, 2008). Informational support

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manifests itself in information provide by others which helps facilitate problem solving (Berkman & Glass, 2000). Emotional support relates to encouragement and other acts targeted at self-esteem or positive self-appraisal (Stansfeld, 1999).

As a whole, the social support construct has been negatively correlated with health problems and is a powerful mediator of good health (Wills & Shinar, 2000). More specifically, it has been shown to reduce and prevent stress and depression due to its hypothesized buffering effects (Cutrona, 1996; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001) and an increase in health-related behaviors (Vaananen, Kouvonen, Kivimaki, Pentti, & Vahtera, 2008). However, Goldsmith (2004) criticized that research on social support lacks validity because it attempts to measure involvement in a social network or social integration and infrequently addresses support behaviors that represent the construct in action. Well-being, she noted, is acquired through these acts, particularly through helping others cope with challenges. Segrin and Passalacqua (2010) also posed that the mechanisms by which social support imparts its positive effects “have taken longer to clarify and are still in the process of being tested and evaluated” (p. 313).

Emotional Support

Emotional support has been described as a form of enacted social support, defined as “what individuals say and do to help one another” (Goldsmith, 2004, p. 13), a communicative behavior that people perform. A social network can contain many types of relationships that professional, familial, and friend-based associations. Moreover, emotional support from many of these relationships has been identified as a contributing mechanism to individual social capital (Putnam, 2000; Verhaeghe, Pattyn, Bracke, Verhaeghe, & Van De Putte, 2012) and is viewed as a basic provision in close relationships (Cunningham & Barbee, 2000). Burlison (2008) outlined

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that emotional support is highly valued between relationship partners and the emotional support provided in these relationships is vital for the relationship’s development and maintenance.

Albrecht, Burleson, and Goldsmith (1994) defined supportive communication as communication that influences how people view themselves, their situation, and their relationship. Verbal communication has a role in preventing or addressing stress and depression and improving health-related behavior (Viswanath, 2007). In particular, it acts as a means for emotional support (e.g., conversing with friends) or information exchange (e.g., conversing with a health care provider), both pertinent to facilitating health. On the latter, Viswanath noted how “the wider your social network is, the more likely you are to be exposed to health-enhancing information” (p. 10). Interpersonal communication is paramount for its role in the construction of important social processes (Viswanath, 2008). Interpersonal communication can create, alter, foster, and terminate the social structures of networks (Ackerson & Viswanath (2009). It is the primary tool of social life. Ackerson and Viswanath emphasized,

through the interactive communication between individuals, societies collectively create (or fail to create) the social participation, norms of reciprocity, and group trust that are the hallmarks of social capital. Without interpersonal communication, these social processes would lose their meaning and indeed cease to exist. (pp. 11-12).

In general, Chen and Feely (2012) summarized that receiving emotional support has a positive effect on subjective well-being, the self-evaluation of one’s moods, emotions, and life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith (1999). Interestingly, Reinhardt, Boemer, and Horowitz (2006) suggest that emotional support has one of the clearest associations with well-being when compared to other forms of support like financial assistance. In particular, Goldsmith

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(2004) discussed how emotional support tends to address “troubles talk”. Troubles talk relates to the communication of concerns, stresses, or anxieties (i.e., problems).

When comfort from these feelings is sought, Burleson (2008) identified that messaging that is highly person-centered is the most effective and rated as the highest in supportive quality by the receiver. Comforting person-centered messages “explicitly recognize and legitimize others’ feelings, help the other to articulate those feelings, elaborate reasons why those feelings might be felt, and assist the other to see how those feelings fit in a broader context” (p. 208). Burleson concluded that the features of supportive messages carry a stronger influence toward the outcomes of the messages than other characteristics of the dyadic dynamic including emotional expressivity or gender. In support, Goldsmith emphasized that a focus on enacted social support should yield more research on its inherent use of language.

As such, the choice of language in providing support appears to be important. Yet, the effects of specific verbal approaches to support are relatively sparse. Goldsmith (2004) identified that using the phrase “I know how you feel” (p. 20) has been rated as unhelpful by receivers of support. It is this type of information which can help sharpen the linguistic tools accessible in socially supportive circumstances. This perspective reveals the need for more understanding of the mechanisms or indicators of support which underpin its contribution to individual social capital.

Related research strongly suggests that relationships function at a healthier level when the reciprocation of social support occurs. While Erickson (2003) wrote, “people are healthier and happier when they have intimates who care about and for them” (p. 25), the emotional support provided by intimates and others is transactional whereby the parties involved will both give it and receive it (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). It has been shown that strong positive bonds increase a

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sense of personal control, stave off depression, and reduce stress (Mendes de Leon et al., 1996; Veenstra, 2001). It has even been suggested that providing emotional support can be more beneficial than receiving it from one’s spouse (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur, & Smith, 2003).

Other scholars further claim that individual social capital can be affected by interpersonal communication within a social network since it directly fosters interpersonal trust, establishes norms of reciprocity, and promotes community integration (Kawachi & Berkman, 2000; Putnam, 1995; 2000). In response, Viswanath (2008) identified interpersonal communication as “one of the most dynamic areas of research in health communication” (p. 4). Ultimately, interpersonal communication is an important, if not the most important, medium through which trust, intimacy, and norms of reciprocity develop. As social penetration theory portrays, self-disclosure has unique value in interpersonal communication and individual social capital.

Although the relationship between health and social relationships is still considered complex (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2004), the nature of interpersonal communication within the relationships of a social network, and certain qualities comprised therein, are valid areas of interest toward understanding the specific mechanisms which may influence individual social capital the most or represent any of the elements of social capital in action. Overall, the dynamics of emotionally supportive relationships present reciprocation, intimacy, and trust as vital components at this micro-social level (Seeman, 2001).

Trust, Reciprocity, and Intimacy

Verhaeghe et al. (2012) presented that trust, reciprocity, and intimacy represent a significant part of the foundation of individual social capital. Each has a role in how and why

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people relate to one another, particularly in emotional support. The following briefly overviews the value of these three elements in interpersonal relations.

Trust. Trust has been conceptualized as an attitude or a behavior (Harpham, Grant, & Thomas, 2002). In general, trust is the expectation that a relationship partner will treat you fairly and honourably, has the best interests of your relationship in mind, and that promises and obligations will be upheld (Holmes, 1991; Holmes & Rempel, 1989). However, trust in social capital research has been referred to more as generalized trust, a trust in people in general. For example, Abbott and Freeth (2008) cited that the most common measure of trust in this research focuses on the question, “Generally speaking, would you say most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” (p. 875). Particularized perspectives on trust are directed at a person’s attitude towards specific groups or people. Accounts of social trust emphasize that it facilitates the cohesiveness that leads to meaningful social relationships (Welch et al., 2005). Moreover, trust is vital in upholding a healthy society (Hardin, 2002) although the specific ways by which it accomplishes this are still only vaguely understood (Abbott & Freeth, 2008).

Trust is a feeling that is also reciprocally beneficial (Welch et al., 2005). That is, when trust is mutually exchanged or shared it is positive for both parties. Reciprocated trust has been widely described as a strong factor of healthy relationships and a significant contributor towards an individual’s social capital (Miszital, 1996; Welch et al., 2005). In one description, Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1992) summarized this by saying, “if we are dominated by mistrust we cannot attend or interpret adequately, we cannot act accountably, and we will rupture, not strengthen, the solidarity of the community or communities we live in” (p. 284).

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Its role in social support and individual social capital is further reinforced by the fact that a trusting relationship is hard to acquire when someone is socially isolated (Glass & Balfour, 2003; Hardin, 2002). A glance at research on distrust, while receiving comparatively little attention in research on social capital, also shows that distrustful individuals are more likely to be socially isolated (Yamagishi, 2001). The ramifications of this are poignant according to Putnam’s (1995) reflections from *Bowling Alone*. He noted that Americans are less trusting of each other, down from 58 to 37 percent between 1960 and 1993. For context, Fukuyama (1995) shared that, “social capital is a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or in certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the nation, and in all groups in between” (p. 26). While this might not have marked the impending disintegration of the fabric of social capital, this trend may suggest that trust is being surpassed by distrust within some communities and the relationships therein.

The impact trust has on health and well-being has not reached consensus. However, there is evidence to support its role in reinforcing social networks, a concept linked to health (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Another influential quality of trust includes its ability to reduce social anxiety and stress (Wilkinson, 2000).

Reciprocity. There is a tendency to smile when someone smiles at us and feel saddened when someone we are with feels sad. Often, trust research includes the concept of reciprocity in how it manifests itself in relationships (Abbott & Freeth, 2008). Fifty years ago, Jourard (1971) determined that when one person in a relationship self-discloses, this act also tends to be returned in kind. Jourard labelled this phenomenon the dyadic effect. In all, Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti (1994) summed reciprocity as follows:

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generalized reciprocity refers to a continuing relationship of exchange that is at any given time unrequited or imbalanced, but that involves mutual expectations that a benefit granted now should be repaid in the future. (p.172)

Reciprocity has important effects for any number of social behaviors. For instance, reciprocal sharing of personal information can build trust (Prager & Bauhrmester, 1998). Typically, both parties benefit when self-disclosure is reciprocated as it catalyzes closeness typically lacking in new relationships (Manne et al., 2004; Morton, 1978). Conversely, a lack of reciprocity has been associated with poor health outcomes related to depression, sleep, and even physiological outcomes like angina (Chandola, Marmot, & Siegrist, 2007).

However, reciprocity may encounter obstacles in relationships. A relationship can be a source of multiple types of social support. In turn, one person may represent multiple support identities at once making it so “expectations of reciprocity in social relationships are also much less clearly defined and may lead to conflict where occupational and domestic roles collide” (Stansfeld, 1999, p. 157). For example, a workplace colleague may in one moment provide advice for how to complete a project (i.e., instrumental support) and, on a different day, provide comfort after a stressful workplace event (i.e., emotional support). In other words, social support can become complicated in workplace contexts. Others have noted how complex reciprocal behavior can be and that it is a difficult concept to confidently measure (Blaxter & Poland, 2002).

Intimacy. Emotional support can be an intimate act (Goldsmith, 2004) and has been long understood as a strong contributor to well-being (Coyne & Downey, 1991; Prager, 1995; Sparrevohn & Rapee, 2009). In his classic research, Abraham Maslow (1943, 1948, 1968) went as far as classifying it as a primary piece within his hierarchy of human needs. Although weak

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ties have been shown to have important uses (Wong & Shoham, 2011), Putnam (2000) noted that, “strong ties with intimate friends may be the chicken soup when you’re sick” (p. 323). By definition, intimacy has been described as a willingness to disclose personal or private information with another person and is directly associated with feelings of closeness (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Sprecher, Treger, & Wondra, 2013).

Reis and Shaver (1988) described intimacy as a process whereby one person expresses self-relevant feelings to another with the probability that they feel understood, validated, or cared for in return. Intimacy, by these accounts, is both an outcome and an interactive act which emanates from moments of self-disclosure (Manne et al., 2004). In support, Reis (2001) extended that, “the most emotionally potent interactions are those in which significant self-disclosure occurs” (p. 63) citing self-disclosure as an important component of well-being through its development of intimacy and trust. People also tend to prefer relationships that allow for the disclosure of intimate information over those that do not (Bucholtz, 2013). In all, the interaction of trust, reciprocation, and intimacy in social relationships are interwoven in socially supportive relationships, including enacted emotional support (Goldsmith, 2004).

In general, social support can influence several health outcomes via behavioral (e.g., diet, exercise, smoking), physiological (e.g., immune system function, transmission of disease) or psychological pathways (e.g., self-esteem, depression, coping effectiveness) (Berkman & Glass, 2000). More specifically, emotional support, the form of support most relevant to this study, has been shown to influence all of these pathways. However, researchers have depicted it as most strongly tied to psychological outcomes. In particular, perceived emotional support has been identified for its role in preventing the negative effects of stressful life events (Lin et al., 1986) and depression (Bowling & Brown, 1991; Matt & Dean, 1993). Goldsmith (2004) depicted

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emotional support as a form of confrontation with life stresses and suggested that the availability of this resource will “bolster an individual’s ability to cope effectively and thereby buffer him or her from otherwise deleterious effects of stress” (p. 11).

Mental health and well-being is a substantial concern and novel ways at understanding the mechanisms at the micro-social level could contribute to better ways of intervening in this area. People are driven to emotionally disclose (Rimé, Corsini, & Herbette, 2002). Interpersonal interactions where social support, particularly its emotional form, is exchanged is still not well understood. By expanding our understanding of the specific mechanisms that are a part of the process of emotional support, more opportunities to intervene will emerge. Investigating perceptions, attitudes, and uses of the word *feel* may inspire new ways to accomplish this.

Self-Disclosure

One way people can garner emotional social support is to share what they are feeling (Greene, Derlega, & Matthews, 2006). In general, communication facilitates the diffusion of new information, reinforces social norms, mobilizes groups for social action, and creates social support (Viswanath, 2007). In doing so, interpersonal communication research provides a base for understanding the impact of disclosure on health.

Viswanath (2008) stated that, “social capital is a product of interaction between two entities and the interaction is sustained by communication” (p. 5). Verbal communication, therefore, has a fundamental role in accumulating individual social capital. Specifically, socially sharing emotions appears to have particular importance for developing and maintaining well-being. However, very little attention has been attributed to pinpointing the verbal mechanisms representative of healthy expressive language and which play a role in developing trust or intimacy. As a result, this section focuses on the processes that can contribute to experiencing trust and intimacy in social relationships, particularly through the act of self-disclosure.

The inclination to communicate emotional experiences is ubiquitous. According to Rimé, Corsini, and Herbette (2002), this urge is “elicited as soon as an emotion is experienced, whatever type of emotion. It was observed in every culture that has been investigated” (p. 185). Their work entailed evoking emotions through language. They determined that people are naturally compelled to share emotional details of the events in their lives. Support for their work transcended age, culture, and even the mode of such disclosure (i.e., through writing letters or conversation).

Meanwhile, Altman and Taylor's (1973) social penetration theory posits that intimacy is developed between two people as a process of self-disclosure. It links self-disclosure with

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relationship development by purporting that closeness develops when relations proceed from superficial to intimate levels of communication (Sprecher, Treger, & Wondra, 2013). Self-disclosure is the vehicle for this closeness, a process that can yield feelings of vulnerability. Vulnerability, they posit, is at the core of developing intimacy.

Self-disclosure

Interpersonal communication is a dynamic and complex mix of social behavior but some forms of interpersonal communication present more robust contributions to health than others. Self-disclosure is one of these forms. Self-disclosure has been defined as information about oneself that is intentionally and voluntarily verbally communicated to another person (Holtgraves, 1990) and elsewhere as “an interaction between at least two individuals where one intends to deliberately divulge something personal to another” (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006, p. 411). Stiles points out “I statements” (e.g., “I think”, “I believe”) as the primary representatives of disclosing speech acts in psychotherapy (Stiles, 1987, 1995).

In general, self-disclosure can take different forms including face-to-face, non face-to-face, or third party. It can be planned or unplanned, and may occur for many reasons (Greene et al., 2003). Greene et al. assembled these reasons into self-focused and relationship-focused categories. Self-focused self-disclosure includes catharsis, self-clarification, and support seeking. Relationship-focused motives consist of building a close relationship with a partner, to have something in common, and having a desire to increase intimacy or closeness (Greene, Derlega, & Matthews, 2006). Health and well-being can be analyzed in instances of either free or inhibited self-disclosing behavior. Green et al. (2006) explained that, “self-disclosure is important for achieving important goals (such as developing relationship closeness and gaining emotional support).” (p. 416).

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The motivation to self-disclose is typically directed toward the development of relationships (Sprecher, Treger, & Wondra, 2013) but its original proponents identified its utility for achieving psychological well-being (Jourard, 1971; Stiles, 1987). In fact, some proposed that the act of self-disclosure is a skill (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Hargie & Dickson, 2004), requiring a tact that, for instance, avoids embarrassing the listener or oneself and appears genuine (Holtgraves, 1990). If self-disclosure is a social skill, an inference can be made that self-disclosure requires the competent management of the language required to perform it.

Additionally, Holtgraves (1990) purported that verbal communication is the most significant tool for self-disclosure. However, some disclosure requires more interpretation on behalf of the listener. This has been labeled indirect disclosure. Indirect disclosure means that the listener has to look at the meaning of what is being shared, not necessarily its literal translation. On the other hand, direct self-disclosure is unmistakable since it is generally represented by “I” statements (e.g., I think, I wonder, I disagree) and requires less effort to interpret by the communication partner.

Disclosures can also be segmented into two other forms, descriptive disclosures and evaluative disclosure. Descriptive disclosures reveal facts about oneself (e.g., *I am a left-handed golfer*). Evaluative disclosures share internal states like thoughts, opinions, or feelings (e.g., *I’m a little bit upset by what Jim said in the meeting this morning*) (Holtgraves, 1990). These two forms of disclosure are considered to be independent of one another.

Technically, Hargie and Dickson (2004) listed the defining qualities of self-disclosure as (a), the use of a self-referent (e.g. I, my, mine); (b) having content dealing with facts or feelings; (c) an expression of one’s own experience or reaction to another’s experience; and (d) the past, present, or future being represented. They summarized that past research has shown that self-

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disclosure can have multiple functions. For example, self-disclosure can represent an act of overcoming a fear, an expression of concern, the sharing of an opinion, the encouragement of reciprocation or to develop relationships.

Beyond its mechanics, self-disclosure can lead to both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, Weber, Johnson, and Corrigan (2004) learned that high self-disclosure between romantic partners resulted in greater feelings of being emotionally supported. In fact, intimacy has been historically linked to self-disclosure, often considered synonymously (Archer, 1979). Originally, Jourard (1971) posited that frequent disclosure within a relationship would yield more intimacy and an overall more positive relationship. Farber (2006) also noted that self-disclosure can be cathartic, contribute to identity formation, offers opportunities to act authentically, and receive validation of one's feelings. Yet disclosure is not without risk. Farber also listed that self-disclosure can elicit feelings of increased vulnerability, feelings of shame, fear of undesirable impressions, regret of hiding information, fear of rejection, and fear of burdening the listener. He concluded:

we disclose in order to feel closer to another, to feel validated by another, to understand and strengthen the core aspects of our identity, to explore and accept multiple aspects of ourselves, to feel more genuine in the world, and to relieve the burden of unexpressed pain. (p. 13)

It is clear that disclosure may require the careful measurement of risk over reward.

Several perspectives can be assumed when exploring self-disclosure. Weber et al. (2004) listed five dimensions to its research which include taking an interest in the effects of its frequency, the intentionality of a person to self-disclose, the honesty of self-disclosure, the depth of self-disclosing messages, and/or the valence of self-disclosed messages. Interestingly,

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nowhere did they cite the role that language played in the act of self-disclosure. This is surprising since self-disclosure has been thoroughly researched in social psychology and interpersonal communication over the past 40 years (Baxter & Sahlstein, 2000). In addition, self-disclosure research has been investigated heavily in therapeutic or clinical settings with relatively little exploration outside of these settings and, even more rarely, using qualitative methods to do so (Chubak, 2012).

Inhibited Disclosure

Although certain social environments or relationships provide the opportunity, people still do not, will not, or cannot self-disclose. This communicative inhibition has been linked to several health outcomes and has been separated into three general forms; repression, suppression, and alexithymia (Pennebaker, 1995).

In psychology, the difference between these phenomena is determined by consciousness and acquisition. By definition, repression is a mental process by which distressing thoughts, memories, or impulses that may give rise to anxiety are excluded from consciousness and left to operate in the unconscious mind (Pennebaker, 1995). On the other hand, suppression is the conscious and intentional exclusion from consciousness of a thought or feeling. Meanwhile, the condition known as alexithymia represents an inherent inability to express one’s feelings entirely (Pennebaker, 1995).

In research on secrecy⁵, suppression has been described as setting into motion, “certain cognitive processes that create an obsessive preoccupation with the secret thought” (Wegner & Lane, 1995, p. 31). It is like an accumulation of energy with no place to go. Interestingly, a paradox can ensue whereby any attempt to avoid thinking about certain things actually increases

⁵ Suppression is often included in explaining acts of secrecy.

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intrusive thoughts about those things, triggering more attempts at suppressing (Wegner & Lane, 1995). From a cognitive perspective, Lepore, Ragan, and Jones (2000) purport that talking about problematic thoughts and feelings facilitates meaning-making and desensitizes people to the valence of stressful events, endorsing self-disclosure as an important outlet for release.

While the will to disclose may be present, it is commonly weighed against a series of risks. In particular, the act of self-disclosure may cause stress, the recipient may be unhelpful, and the disclosure may be invalidated or rejected. Interpersonal trust is an important factor in these considerations. Petronio (2002) noted that the recipient of someone’s self-disclosure may even feel co-ownership over the problems disclosed by the recipient and feel burdened with negative effects. By Petronio’s account, there are several motivations for keeping feelings unexpressed:

Self-focused reasons for non-disclosure deal with the psychological and physical costs based on divulging personal information and include fear of rejection and possible loss of privacy. Other-focused reasons for nondisclosure include the perception that the other person cannot or will not be helpful and protecting the relationship partner from being hurt or upset. Relationships focused reasons include losing the relationship, dissimilarity, a superficial relationship, or the information is not significant or relevant for the relationships” (p. 416).

Gable, Reis, Impette, and Asher (2004) found that disclosing positive things increased positive affect and improved intimacy and marital satisfaction. Gable et al. (2004) called this effect “capitalization”, when sharing good things with significant others has positive enhancing effects.

Self-disclosure, of course, plays a large role in psychotherapeutic settings where clients frequently both withhold and openly share personal information. Ferrara (2002) described that,

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while non-compliance with a professional's advice is a substantial problem, resisting disclosure is lesser known but additionally challenging. Ferrara defined resistance as "when clients block expressions of painful feelings and withhold personally relevant material" (p. 255). Non-compliance may manifest itself in several ways including stoically describing emotions, avoiding the recall of certain information from the past, being vague, or not sharing emotionally relevant information. Opposition to the requests of the therapist can also be an act of non-compliance. Inhibition in these settings also stifles the therapeutic process initiated by free, honest sharing. Research on professional care-giving contexts such as in counselling or in medical offices and hospitals shows how environmental factors play a role in self-disclosure (Werner et al., 2000).

Active inhibition has been touted as very stressful behavior. Pennebaker (1989, 1990) noted that restraining to not think, feel, or behave in certain ways requires a lot of psychological effort that, in turn, increases the chances for stress-related psychological or physiological problems. This restraint even hurts information processing as life experiences may not get translated into linguistic form and, therefore, can be only vaguely processed.

In all, the health effects of repressing, suppressing, and resisting are clear. Harmful effects include decreased enjoyment, decreased stamina, increased anxiety, and even increases in depression (Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Gross, 2002; Gross & Levenson, 1997; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). Pennebaker and O'Heeron (1984) also learned that when spouses of victims of suicide and accidental death coped more by ruminating and less by talking with friends they experienced health problems like headaches and weight changes. As Spokas, Luterek, and Heimberg (2009) summarized, emotional suppression is becoming more and more associated with social anxiety and those with high anxiety tend to suppress more than those who do not. Pennebaker (1989, 1995) also described that concealing thoughts and feelings may

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manifest itself as stress and increased susceptibility to getting sick. Stress, of course, has been linked to a plethora of negative health outcomes. Emotional suppression has been associated with increased activation of the cardiovascular system (Gross & Levenson, 1997), as well as poorer social support, reduced relationship closeness and sharing, and reduced feelings of rapport (Butler et al., 2003; Gross & John, 2003). These links are nowhere near exhaustive but the pattern that emotional suppression yields shows how strong the connection between inhibited emotional expression and well-being can be and how hurtful it can be to feeling closeness within interpersonal relationships (Spokas et al., 2009).

Communication Inequalities

While the effects of self-disclosure suggest that it should be embraced and supported as often as possible, the evidence on inhibition shows that many people do not act freely or are not prepared to do so. In addition, communication is a very political activity and susceptible to certain social forces that are enabling to some people over others (Fairclough, 1995, Lakoff, 1990; Shields, 2002). This means that inequalities are destined to emerge, differences that distribute opportunities to disclose in unbalanced ways.

Specifically, there are times when certain social conditions prevent people from communicating in certain ways. At its broadest level, Viswanath (2006) defined communication inequalities as the differences among social classes in the generation and distribution of information and, at the individual level, disparities in access to information and the ability to take advantage of it. Ackerson and Viswanath (2009) explored fairness and equality in communication, particularly as it pertained to health-related information, and determined that communication inequalities may be one of the most important mediators connecting social elements to certain health outcomes. In essence, disempowerment hampers communicative

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privileges, restricting access to a certain level of health or well-being enjoyed by those who are able to freely disclose emotions unabated.

Critically, this work did not attend to inequality in self-disclosure but rather focused on the inability of some groups to access information that can be empowering to their health. Yet the act of self-disclosure, while facilitative of the retrieval of health-facilitating information in certain contexts (e.g., in doctor-patient encounters), is also therapeutic in itself without the need for such a return (i.e., cathartic effects). Therefore, access to opportunities for self-disclosure can also be analyzed from a vulnerability perspective. It is likely that those in vulnerable positions in social relationships (i.e., those in need of information/knowledge/support etc.) have to disclose private feelings to obtain essential needs. Those with higher status have more opportunity to self-disclose for therapeutic reasons (e.g., by affording counsel or having a wider social network containing more contact points and/ or stronger social ties).

Taken as a whole, non-disclosure can have tremendous repercussions for the repressor or suppressor. Given how interpersonal communication is a staple contributor to individual social capital due to its ties to intimacy and trust, uncovering the possible politics or social rules which can make self-disclosure accessible becomes a useful enterprise. However, the type of disclosure that is of particular interest is not cognitive (i.e., thoughts/beliefs) but emotional (i.e., feelings). In order to target private inner feelings, the language of interest must be representative of emotional experiences as much as possible.

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Self-Presentation and Emotional Disclosure

Social relationships are complex. The variety of methods with which people manage their feelings is well-documented. Emotional management is so expected that it has embedded itself in a variety of legitimized contexts such as the workplace, the performing arts, and sports, all associated with the best practices for production (e.g. an employee deep breathing to maintain composure in a professional setting, an athlete deep breathing before a match). Meanwhile, other management techniques are more aligned with certain social norms where some emotions are more welcomed than others.

Social constructionists believe that feelings are socially constructed, developed and shaped by social contexts (Averill, 1980; Harré, 1986). Therefore, social forces can influence both the experience and expression of emotion. This means that emotions are a product of a combination of cognitive, motivational, and physiological processes (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012; Kövecses, 2002; Shields, 2005). As a result, the expression of emotion is not a free undertaking as it is subject to social norms, the rules which dictate what can be said or shown, how, and to whom in any given situation or context (Hochschild, 1979; 1983). Social rules guide the appropriateness of behavior, thoughts, and feelings. Their place in emotional communication is firm as represented by theories of emotional regulation. Concepts such as self-presentation, display rules, feeling rules, and outlaw emotions exemplify the type of role that social norms play in emotional expression.

Self-presentation

Self-presentation, the attempt to guide the impression upon others during social encounters, explains some of the processes involved in the manifestation of emotional display (Goffman, 1959). This image is manipulated through changing one's social settings, appearance,

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or mannerisms. Meanwhile, the other person in the social situation is gathering information about the presenter. Self-presentation refers to the projection of an image which acts as a representation of a certain type of person they feel they need to be in social situations (Goffman, 1959). The motive behind self-presentation is to obtain information in order to decipher what can be expected in a particular situation. In essence, as Goffman described it, self-presentation is the exchanging of information that ultimately constructs a consensus for acceptable behavior.

It is significant to note that disclosing personal information can be face-threatening for the recipient as well (Coupland, Coupland, Giles & Wiemann, 1988a). A person receiving self-disclosed information from another person can be put in a position where they act in a way opposite to how they feel to stay in a certain regard with the other person. For example, a person who discloses too much information may invoke discomfort in the other person but, in order to maintain a positive face, the other person may act empathetically or supportively despite not necessarily feeling like doing so.

Goffman (1959) argued that everyone plays different roles depending on the situation. In his analyses of groups, for example, he suggested that voice characteristics and other nonverbal cues shift depending on the formality of the situation, the nature of the audience, and the degree to which the speaker is integrated with or excluded from the other actors. Although he did not focus on the words people used, his work served as an important foundation, particularly for its perspectives on the possible factors which influence how people present themselves in social encounters.

Undoubtedly, Goffman's influential work has had a significant impact in social psychology. Conceptually, self-presentation has led the way for many accounts of the development, maintenance, and dismantling of the social "rules" which dictate what is and is not

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socially acceptable behavior, including how people manage their communication of emotions. According to Goffman (1959), self-disclosure is sensitive and may create a face-threatening situation whereby the speaker's communication acts in opposition to their intention (e.g., to appear funny or smart). That is, as Brown and Levinson (1987) outlined in their work on politeness, there are two basic wants: the desire to be well regarded (positive face) and a desire to not be imposed upon (negative face). They described that:

In disclosing negative information, a speaker is threatening his or her own positive face, and the recipient is placed in the role of helping to manage the speaker's spoiled identity, an imposition that can be regarded as threatening the recipient's negative face. (p. 197)

Generally, self-presentation theory supposes that people desire to present a certain identity in social encounters and must put in a certain amount of effort to do so (Tracy, 1990). Whether or not to express emotions or how to express emotions is part of this process.

Display Rules

Some of the most recognized work in this area is on display rules. According to Eckman and Friesen (1975), children learn to manage their emotional expressions as they develop. In this sense, expression is a part of socialization. The rules learned during a child's upbringing govern how they are expressed in later life. Culture, Eckman and Friesen noted, may influence which rules are learned. Some rules enable and some restrict, encouraging concealment of some emotions and not others (Eckman, 1972). General display rules can give way to personal display rules with individual expressivity patterns of emotions assumed to have been learned through familial culture or experiences rather than from larger cultural forces. This offers an explanation for the variations in observable emotional display.

Feeling Rules

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Similarly, the work of Arlie Hochschild (1979) accounted for the social appropriateness of emotion. She believed that social rules were seen too often as applying to behaviors and thoughts but not to inner feelings and emotions. Emotion, she argued, “can be and often is subject to acts of management. The individual often works on inducing or inhibiting feelings so as to render them ‘appropriate’ to a situation” (p. 551). In turn, she examined the social ordering of emotional experience. Her analyses produced a framework for what she called “feeling rules”.

Hochschild contrasted the idea of feeling rules against popular views on instinct and impulse. Instincts and impulses, she argued, were:

...strips of experience in which there is no conflict between one and another aspect of the self; the individual “floods out”, is “overcome”. The image that comes to mind is that of a sudden automatic reflex syndrome – Darwin’s instant snarl expression, Freud’s tension discharge at a given breaking point of tension overload (...) the perception of which is also unmediated by social influences. (p. 553-554)

Historically, social factors had not been included in how emotions are shared as the discourse likened them to uncontrollable reflexes. These accounts were assembled as part of an “organismic” model of emotional expression, typified by unencumbered, reactive, or free expressive behavior.

By comparison, interactive theories considered emotions more socially (Lazarus, 1966). Social perspectives approach feelings as if the self is their manager. This manager acts as a filter for the expression of emotions and, theoretically, imposes a judgement of their appropriateness for the social situation the person is situated in. A person can manage how they express *or* manage what they feel in the first place.

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Interactionists purport that the relationship between personality and social situations is of utmost importance to emotional life. Hochschild (1979) acknowledged the value in this departure from organismic accounts but stopped short of granting it uncurtailed explanatory power in how emotions are influenced by social life. She pressed that the ways people try to manage their inner feelings (and not just observable outer emotional expressions like facial displays) required more effort. Hochschild concluded her attempts at integrating social factors into the experience of emotions with, "We are left knowing about "suppression work" as a final result, but knowing nothing of the process or techniques by which it is achieved" (p. 557). These processes or techniques can include language choices.

Similarly, Freud concerned himself with the idea of involuntary management of emotions and was credited with introducing the notion of "inappropriate affect". However, as Hochschild criticized, Freud's work did not reference appropriateness as being guided by social rules. Hochschild used Freud's work as the rationale for her interest in the conscious or deliberate shaping of feelings. Where Freud delved into subconscious workings, Hochschild was interested in how people exert conscious control over their behaviors and how they choose to self-represent. Appropriateness, by her account, must consider social elements. That is, at this point, a comparative for normal emotional behavior based on social factors had been absent. To depart from Freud, Hochschild called attention to "how people consciously feel and not, as for Freud, how people feel unconsciously" (p. 560).

The efforts to manage or work on the inner feelings is what Hochschild (1979) referred to as emotion work. Emotion work extends beyond Freud's focus on repression to include, "the act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing, feeling in oneself" (p.560). This work manifests itself in cognitive, bodily, or expressive "work" whereby efforts are made to shape

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how or what is displayed to others. Most importantly, Hochschild identified that emotion work, sometimes called deep acting, becomes apparent when a person finds themselves in a social situation with which their feelings do not resonate (e.g., feeling indifferent at a funeral). These discrepancies are what opened a theoretical door for her concept of feeling rules⁶ described as social guidelines that direct how we want to try⁷ to feel (Zapf, 2002).

The highlights of Hochschild’s theory of feeling rules are plentiful. However, at its core, Hochschild discerned rules for what one can be *expected* to feel and rules for what *should* be felt in certain social situations (Warner & Shields, 2009). She described that the dissonance a person feels between how he or she feels in reference to inferred norms is the reinforcement for the existence of such rules. The motivation behind “ought to”, “want to”, and “try to” partly explains the fact that people attempt to shape how they feel against some social standard. Ultimately, feeling rules are the social rules which determine the fit between feelings and situations⁸. Unto itself, Hochschild’s theory marked a significant lurch in the history of emotion research.

By all accounts, the fit between feelings and social situations is not dictated by a set of stable rules. These rules are socially constructed and may change over time and across context. Faking emotions that do not align with one’s identity is difficult⁹. In theory, faking being happy, like a restaurant server may as an act of professionalism, when they are typically a “happy person” is also different than if they were typically a cantankerous one (Tracy, 2005). In fact, the concept of emotional labour offers one example of how social context may influence emotional expression. Interestingly, staying aligned with the dominant discourse (i.e., the social rules) and

⁷ The word “try” here is of particular interest. This notion of effort, at least theoretically relies upon some form of mental or physical effort by the individual.

⁸ Norms can also relate to language used in expression – this is covered in a later section.

⁹ As per the previous footnote, this form of effortful self-management has been generally described as burdensome to the actor involved.

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its associated dissonance can be tolerated in the workplace when opportunities to resist it exist (i.e., to act authentically). The “back stage” at work, for example, represents one of those opportunities (Tracy, 2005).

Outlaw Emotions

If feeling and expressing emotions were completely free¹⁰, uninhibited even, emotion work or suppression would be theoretically unnecessary. However, the politics of emotion requires a degree of self-management in order to stay within social norms. Outlaw emotions (Jaggar, 1992) are socially constructed in this way. An outlaw emotion is an unconventional emotional response experienced by “subordinated individuals who pay a disproportionately high price for maintaining the status quo” (Jaggar, 1992, p. 160). The price is paid when someone feels something different than the rest of a social group with which they are engaging. As a result, the group attempts to “norm” these outlying feelings to match theirs. Jaggar (1992) extended that:

every emotion presupposes an evaluation of some aspect of the environment while, and conversely, every evaluation or appraisal of the situation implies that those who share the evaluation will share, *ceteris paribus*, a predictable emotional response to the situation.

(p. 153)

An example of an outlaw emotion is when someone experiences or shows anger as a response to a joke that, intended to be humorous, is taken in offense. The politics of this situation maintain that the offended and upset individual’s response is the misfit. The dissonance felt by the outlaw is another cost of keeping their feelings to themselves, a product of emotion work or deep acting.

¹⁰ In this case, I mean free as in unconstrained and uncensored.

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The social consensus that the joke was humorous means that the anger is an outlaw emotion and can be potentially detrimental to a person’s well-being if either socially shared or suppressed.

Social Context and Expressing Feelings

Outlaw emotions are determined by social conditions. However, the codes that guide the appropriateness of emotional communication often vary across social environments. For example, a racist joke can be welcomed as acceptable and humorous by one group but, with another, rejected or outlawed. Outlaw emotions, display rules, and feeling rules identify that interpersonal dynamics such as trustworthiness, reciprocity, and intimacy are factors in the composition of healthy relationships but the context in which interpersonal communication occurs is also significant for creating the opportunities to experience such effects. Ackerson and Viswanath (2009) even postulated that, “addressing the social context may be an important tool for eliminating inequalities” (p. 5). Personal relationships, the workplace, and gender identity offer three examples of how social elements can influence the rules for expressing feelings.

Personal relationships. In personal relationships, communication is more intimate (Manne et al., 2004). Social penetration theory posits intimacy develops in accordance to certain social rules (Goffman, 1959). In the home, where close familial or romantic relationships tend to exist, communicating inner feelings is safer and reciprocation is high. Given how central personal relationships are to the day-to-day lives of people, it is little wonder how emotional well-being is so linked to this form of individual social capital.

As touted, self-disclosure plays an important role in relationship development (Derlega, Winsted, & Greene, 2008). Qualities such as trust (Welch, Rivera, Conway, Yonkoski, Lupton, & Giancola, 2005) and intimacy (Merz & Huxhold, 2010) have been shown to be two of the most important outcomes in thriving relationships and both have been linked to the practice of

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self-disclosure. Intimacy, when self-relevant feelings are shared in order to *feel* cared for by another (Reis & Patrick; 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988) has particular value (Prager, 1995; Prager and Buhrmester, 1998).

The workplace. Workplace communication is, “a complex interactive achievement of building consensus about what is appropriate action and what is not, what is true, and what is real” (Iedema, 2003, p. 44). In particular, emotional expression in the workplace is subject to certain context-lead rules (Coupland, Brown, Daniels, & Humphreys, 2008). Context rules are “codes that fit a time and a place” (p. 330). Feeling rules or display rules can also be context rules when emotions are the object in focus. To self-disclose, like many speech acts, is “to deploy an available discourse resource... that performs a particular function” (Coupland et al., 2008, p. 330). Like any social rules which guide certain behavior, they may be accepted or resisted in any context.

The hierarchical structures found in a workplace are sources of emotions (Goffman, 1956; Shils, 1970; Tiedens, 2001). However, individuals still draw upon their discretion for what and how much they emotionally reveal (Ekman, 1993; Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Hochschild, 1983). Shields (2005) identified that successful workplace interaction can be defined by how an employee negotiates workplace politics, including the codes that dictate who can self-disclose and what a person can self-disclose. The workplace demands a skillful balance of expression and suppression that still allows the maintenance of one's professional identity (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005; Lively, 2000; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989).

The workplace is often represented as a place with many distinguishable rules. For example, Kramer and Hess (2002) examined the communication rules for emotions in organizational settings and found that people managed their emotions actively in accommodation

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of this context. In fact, they established six rules for displaying emotions. They are listed below with their reported frequency in their survey results:

- 1) Emotions are to be expressed professionally (32%)
- 2) Emotions are expressed to improve situations (21%)
- 3) Emotions should be expressed only to the right people (11%)
- 4) Emotions are allowed to help individuals (11%)
- 5) Emotions are not to be managed to the detriment of others (8%)
- 6) Emotions are always inappropriate in the workplace (3%)

Although Kramer and Hess focused on describing emotional display rules in the workplace, they did not offer much analysis of why each reported rule existed. In addition, their focus did not include how people managed self-disclosing language.

While workplace discourse revolves heavily around behaving “professionally”, Fineman (1993) determined that there were places in the environment where employees could act unprofessionally while at work, including expressing emotions they could not elsewhere. Others have referred to such spaces or opportunities as “unmanaged spaces” (Gabriel, 1995) or “back regions” (Goffman, 1959). These spaces were accompanied by clear codes of conduct about what is appropriate in certain environments, including which emotions are acceptable and which are not (Bolton, 2003). The desire for safe places to behave outside of these rules illustrates the underlying need to be emotionally expressive (Rimé et al., 2002), particularly when opportunities are stifled. These spaces present opportunities for the release of tension created between uninhibited and acceptable expression.

Gender. Relationship type and context are not the only factors which can influence the expression of emotions (Weatherall, 2002). Social rules also differ between genders. Lackoff

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(1990) stated that, “gender related differences have a strong psychological component: they are intimately related to the judgments of members of a culture about how to be and think like a good woman or man” (p. 202). Lakoff (1990) also asserted that women are socialized into using linguistic features which represent tentativeness, deference and a lack of authority, explainable through observing historical patterns of women occupying powerless social positions.

Not only do gender differences exist in how men and women emotionally express themselves but differences in what is deemed appropriate emotional expression have also been noted (Ragins & Winkel, 2011). Women are expected to display positive emotions including compassion, warmth, cheerfulness and nurturance while men are expected to show emotions such as confidence, pride, and anger (Conroy, Elliot, & Pincus, 2009; Hess, Adams, & Kleck, 2005; LaFrance, 1998; Ragins & Winkel, 2011). One of the more prominent stereotypes pertaining to emotions and gender is that men *have* emotions but women *are* emotional (Shields, 2005). As a result, women have been shown to be disempowered in environments that historically reward male-stereotyped emotional display such as the workplace (Gibson & Shroeder, 2002).

Even when women display “male” emotions like anger, they are likely to be evaluated unfavourably in male-dominated contexts (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). Shields (2005) argued that these judgements create states of powerlessness for women because being emotional tends to be viewed as being “out of control” (p.10). These rules for expressivity indicate that women are often expected to display more “male” emotions and fewer “female” emotions though, in some settings, these displays still offer a no-win¹¹ scenario, perpetually keeping them disempowered

¹¹ A paradox can emerge for women who act emotionally in the workplace. Showing male emotions as a female can be viewed unfavourably while expressing oneself “like a woman” is unwelcomed, not taken seriously, or a misfit in environments historically influenced by male-dominated emotion rules.

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(Ragins & Winkel, 2011). Interestingly, emotions are still described as being *experienced* similarly across gender although they are expressed much differently (Geer & Shields, 1996). Ragins and Winkel (2011) discussed how the gendering of emotion can influence perceptions, expectations, and attributions about emotion. They described rules that govern emotional expression. Past research depicts that anger is the one emotion that women are less likely to display than men (Brody, 1996; Brody & Hall, 2000). However, as Brody (1996) purports, men may also emotionally express less often. They explain this tendency as a product of socialization where feelings other than anger are typically permitted for men but less so for women.

Language, Emotional Expression, and the Word “Feel”

Emotional self-disclosure cannot be examined without exploring the role of language. In the end, verbal emotional expression, like any behavior, is susceptible to a variety of social rules. Similar principles shared by Eckman (1972) and Hochschild (1979) can be applied to the language that symbolically represents it. More specifically, Cameron (1995) posited that women have been conditioned to seek approval by conforming to certain linguistic rules. Such gender management is likened to how women have been instructed in the ways of dressing or other feminine types of behaviour. The adoption of a ‘proper’ speech style is what Cameron referred to as verbal hygiene. Verbal hygiene is the normative meta-linguistic practice of choosing certain language forms over others “in an attempt to ‘clean up’ language in accordance with particular value judgements on what is aesthetically, socially or morally desirable (Cameron, 2006a, p. 149).

Cameron’s stance is that the act of cleaning up language is a symbolic effort to impose order on the social world. In particular, she described how women’s verbal conduct has different expectations than men, and focused the principles of verbal hygiene specifically on gender and

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equality. However, the concept of verbal hygiene is also intriguing as it pertains to self-presentation through emotional self-disclosure. At any given moment, there are a host of linguistic options available during interpersonal communication. In social support, Burleson (2008) wrote that “sensitive support thus requires more than good intentions; those who provide truly helpful support must know what to say (as well as what not to say)” (p. 208). Moreover, the chosen words do not only manifest themselves to the listener as information but they share something about one’s identity (e.g., as caring, as aloof) and, depending on the selection, private, inner experiences as well. Words bring inner information to light. The cleaning up or selective use of some words over others presents an intriguing focal point to study relationships.

Affect is a common focus in health communication research but how emotions are navigated through language is much less so (Watson & Gallois, 2007). Correspondingly, Coupland et al. (2008) called for methodological and theoretical ingenuity in how people “assemble and deploy emotions” (p. 328). A person’s attitude toward the words available to them in emotional self-disclosure is presumably influenced by certain relationship qualities and other situational factors. The word *feel*, for example, is emotionally symbolic because it represents inner felt experiences. Social research on emotion has historically focused on areas such as facial expression, physiological activation, and other physical displays. Emotionally disclosing language, by contrast, has received little attention (Clore, Ortony, & Foss, 1987; Ortony, Clore, & Foss, 1987; Wierzbicka, 2010). Emotion in language use has mostly been studied with regards to the emotional meaning of the message rather than the choice of verbiage to share such messages. Yet language may be considered the primary tool in self-disclosure and can be used in several ways. But when and why might a person choose one word over another to perform a disclosing speech act?

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The use of the word *feel* resembles a unique form of verbal disclosure, like a symbolic window into private experience that other words cannot offer (Fiehler, 2002). Although communicating personally relevant information can come in other forms such as “I am” or “I believe”, *feel* unto itself, offers a direct social cord to what is inherently affective and private. Fiehler qualified the word *feel* as experientially declarative whether the additional information attached is an experience-designating term (e.g., *I feel angry*), a short comparison (e.g., *I felt empty*), or an image (e.g., *I felt as hot as the sun*). It has distinct flexibility in its representative utility but when compared to other declarative verbs like *think* or *believe*, the word *feel* clearly represents the inner emotional experience more than the cognitive. In effect, the word *feel* represents “conceptual glue” for a category of private experience often described as affect, feelings, emotions, and the like (Barrett, 2006). Since there are many social rules surrounding emotional expression, how do people perceive their use of the word *feel*?

Davies and Harré (1990) wrote that, “the orderliness of many human productions, for instance conversations, is a consequence in some way, of rules and conventions which exist independently of these productions” (p. 44). In self-presentation, people manage how they express themselves according to social norms up to and including acting upon themselves to actually change what they feel, how they show their feelings non-verbally, and their verbal expressions. The social and cultural forces which quell authentic¹² expression are manifest in the relationships, environments, and even gender to which people are attached. The result is that access to emotionally healthy expressive opportunities for some is more limited than for others.

¹² The reference to authentic expression is less of a reference to research on the self (i.e., authentic self) than it is to differentiate between exerting self-control or management over allowing for feelings or emotions to emerge and be expressed uninhibited. Freedom to express and freedom from self-management is at the heart of such difference in which power plays a fundamental role.

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Discourse and Subjectivity

The application of discourse analysis to health research is not new. Discourse analysis has been used in health disciplines including the sociology and psychology of health (Willig, 2000). In fact, Morgan (1999) supported that discourse analysis is a very useful tool for understanding the social processes relevant to health. Meanwhile, Lupton (1992) believed that discourse analysis offers value for its ability to examine assumptions that traditional health-related measurements of perceptions or attitudes usually fail to capture.

By concentrating on subjectivity in this way, references to the work of Foucault in psychology have become more frequent (see Hook, 2010). This is particularly the case in areas such as critical health psychology which seeks to examine and challenge the social rules which privilege some groups with access to certain health processes over others and how certain discourses yield particular vulnerabilities for some populations. This focus on inequities of health has been supported by qualitative methods and, in several cases, the use of discourse analysis (Willig, 2004). Turner (1997), for example, outlined how the nature of subjectivity, discussed further below, produces certain identities within a discourse of health and it does so at a certain point in time (e.g., like the once accepted notion of Freud's hysterical woman). These identities, "become the object and focus of medicalization and normalisation" (Turner, 1997, p. xii). Understanding the subject positions made available in discourse is a significant stride in understanding the social processes which pertain to health and well-being.

This inquiry seeks to uncover the rules people perceive to follow and resist in regards to the social process of emotional disclosure (i.e., the use of the word *feel*), an event inherently associated with health. To do so, understanding how people makes sense of the word *feel* and its rules for use is important. Discourse analysis can help excavate these rules for language use.

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How emotions are linguistically expressed and how people talk about emotional disclosure can be examined through this approach. One purpose of discourse analysis is to see how people construct themselves through their talk about a particular topic (Potter & Weatherall, 1987). This includes what people believe or feel about certain uses of language. From this, the researcher may find some of the discursive rules which dictate how a person presents themselves in certain contexts or relationships, how they follow or resist such rules, and ultimately how an individual's subjectivity is generated through the use of the discursive practice of using *feel*.

Self-disclosure is inextricably linked to language use. Language is a means for constructing meaning and is fraught with rules (Fairclough, 1995). An analysis of the disclosure of emotions encourages the identification of discursive rules which inform disclosing speech acts (Coupland, 2001). Bolton (2003) explained that, "language is a type of social performance led by rules which match what someone feels with the situation they are in. Language is a vehicle for criss-crossing the often invisible boundaries between the public and private worlds" (p. 160-161). In turn, the rules that inform disclosure are likely to differ across different contexts, subject positions, and relations of power.

Discourse

Discourse is described as the way we talk about what we choose to talk about and is based on social norms. Lupton summarized discourse as, "a group of ideas or patterned way of thinking which can be identified in textual and verbal communications, and can also be located in wider social structures" (p. 145, Lupton, 1992). To adopt discourse analysis takes the assumption that meaning is socially bound (Talja, 1999). That is, a statement can only have meaning as part of discursive formation, bound to context and the social forces of the past that have shaped its current meaning. Weedon (1987) included power in her definition of discourse

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describing it as, “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning” (p. 108). As Harré and Gillett (1994) also noted, discourse can be public or private. Public discourse manifests itself as behavior, the private as thoughts. Private thoughts can be accessed through conversation.

Fairclough (2001) ascertained that an analysis of language elucidates the social assumptions that are operating below conscious awareness. According to Potter and Weatherall (1987), the researcher assumes the following positions when taking such an approach:

- 1) Language is used for a variety of functions and its use has a variety of consequences
- 2) Language is both constructed and constructive
- 3) The same phenomenon can be described in a number of different ways
- 4) There will, therefore, be considerable variation in accounts
- 5) There is, as of yet, no foolproof way to deal with this variation and to sift accounts which are ‘literal’ or ‘accurate’ from those which are rhetorical or merely misguided
- 6) The constructive and flexible ways in which language is used should themselves become a central topic of study (p. 35)

Discourse analysis, in turn, relies on explanations of attitudes, beliefs, or behavior because, “there is no way people’s interpretation of their actions and understanding of social conventions can be bypassed through mere description of what goes on” (p. 58). Instead, discourse analysis requires a more interpretive form of engagement on behalf of the analyst.

Overall, the various forms of discourse analysis (e.g., conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis) will focus on different features of discourse. For instance, some linguistic approaches will concentrate on the organization of conversation while others may be mostly

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interested in the use of particular words (Hammersley, 2002). Hammersley also noted that discourse analysis strives to reach conclusions about the production and effect of texts in their relation to the social contexts to which they are attached. Discourse analysis, he described, “may be used to develop theoretical understanding of various general types of discursive mechanisms” (p. 2).

The Subject

The concept of the subject has principal significance in discourse analysis. Foucault (1982) itemized two meanings of the word subject. First, a person can be subject to someone's control and dependence. Secondly, people can be tied to their own identity by their conscience and self-knowledge. Elsewhere, Nettleton (1992) explained that subjectivity is to know oneself and is a product of discourse. Moreover, according to positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), language use generates and helps negotiates subject positions. That is, language is a means to describe others and to represent oneself. Available subject positions, “are not only deployed strategically in order to achieve particular social objectives (e.g., to excuse aggressive sexual behavior) but they actually structure the individual's private experience itself” (Willig, 2000, p. 557). Furthermore, subject positions shape what a person can and cannot do. At any one time, a person might be exposed to multiple discourses with multiple subject position to their avail.

A person takes up subject positions of identity in relation to discourse. This positioning has been described as, “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). In talk, a person will assume a position through the language they choose and how this language is exercised. In essence, subjectivity is how one identifies themselves in their lives like as a youth leader, a caring father, or benevolent neighbor.

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A person can become a subject *to* and *of* discourse. Foucault (1982b) believed that identity is a form of subjugation and a person’s identity is what prevents them from moving outside boundaries of appropriateness associated with that identity. This is accomplished by staying disciplined on their own. For instance, a “caring” father resists yelling at their children because it is incongruent with this subject position.

Subjects are situated within a regime of truth at a particular point in history (Foucault, 1982a). That is, the subject is produced within discourse that is ultimately unfixed. In this sense, discourse is productive as it makes positions such as “the caring father” or “hard worker” available by which a person can become disciplined to and adopt it. The subject, by definition, must give way to discursive rules. These rules facilitate and enable while also limited and prevent certain behavior. The social rules reviewed in the previous chapter (e.g., feeling rules, display rules) are, by Foucault’s account, only truthful at a certain period of time.

To illustrate, men have historically had the option to show anger in the workplace. With the ascension of women into more leadership roles in this context, women are now more able to express themselves in this way since anger is typically permitted in these roles and less in subordinate ones (Ragins & Winkel, 2010). The social rule that women should not show anger because anger is a male emotion has eroded with certain social changes. These types of truths (i.e., rules) are not fixed but manifests in “regimes” whereby they are formed by nothing more than a social agreement that is constantly being influenced by both culture and history (Foucault, 1982a).

Regimes of truth come and go. The rules that guide so much of our behavior are called discursive practices. Discursive practices are sets of rules for producing forms of knowledge (e.g., when and how to express certain emotions) that are bound to both culture and history.

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These rules allow certain statements to be made giving them direct involvement in what is or is not truthful about the world.

Importantly, the process of subjectification means that people still have the ability to consciously choose how or what they want to be (i.e., a subject position) and can practice freedom by making these choices. Hall (1997) explains:

Individuals may differ as to their social class, gendered, 'racial' and ethnic characteristics (among other factors), but they will not be able to take meaning until they have identified with those positions which the discourse constructs, subjected themselves to its rules, and hence become the subjects of its power/knowledge. (p. 80)

This means that there will always be opportunities to resist the discursive rules, maintaining subject positions as unfixed. A person may emotionally disclose in a context with rules against it like the workplace while, at the same time, suppress emotions in situations or in relationships typically welcoming of such behavior like with family at home. In sum, Willig (2000) summarizes subjectivity as follows:

all approaches to subjectivity attempt to make a connection between language and experience, between how subjects and objects are constructed through discourse and what it feels like to be constructed and positioned in particular ways." (p. 558)

The effect of discursive rules can be observed through how people work on themselves to maintain social norms. Suppression, verbal hygiene, and emotion work can be interpreted as ways to stay aligned with a particular discourse about emotional disclosure. In Foucault's (1982a) pursuit of understanding how we develop knowledge about ourselves, he posed knowledge as a medium for "games of truth" whereby self-understanding results from applying a set of techniques. For Foucault (1982b), *techne*, the root of "technology" meant a conscious aim

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or intention. Like a manner of choice, technologies in some circumstances represent actions toward an intended outcome. These outcomes present themselves clearly in stating that technologies of the self:

permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (p. 145)

Knowledge, therefore, becomes a means for people to align themselves as truthful by their own account through a series of technologies, including technologies of the self.

Verbal hygiene (Cameron, 1995, 2006b), for example, reflects how people construct themselves as a particular type of subject by how they modify the language they use for certain relationships or contexts. For example, if the social rule exists that a person should not laugh or show happiness at a funeral, a person who does *not* but is in a good mood instead will likely employ strategies to stay disciplined to that rule for that context (e.g., like forcing a frown or a solemn countenance).

In all, people perform many social acts with words (Austin, 1962) like blaming, accusing, or disclosing and are constructed as subjects that are governed by discursive rules and that act according to these rules. Potter, Edwards, and Weatherall (1993) suggested that language constructs and is constructed by social practices like the act of self-disclosure. Subjects develop versions of reality when they converse with others in such a way. Discursive resources, like the word *feel*, aid subjects in achieving certain interpersonal objectives in social interaction and help access some ways of being over others.

Research Questions

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If trust, reciprocity, and intimacy are key conditions for social support, then looking closer at interpersonal communication that facilitates these elements is paramount. One facet of interpersonal communication appears to contribute to these factors more than others. Emotional expression and self-disclosure have been shown to play a role in these intermediating contributors to social capital. However, certain rules exist which can limit how people express and disclose inner experiences authentically. These rules are subject to social norms.

Since language is at the heart of self-disclosure, understanding how and when people feel free to use certain disclosing language could prove important to understanding the social forces which limit this key contributor to individual social capital. While studies have evaluated self-disclosure and emotional expression alongside many social conditions or through several social perspectives, there is virtually no research that has focused on the significance of language use to understand the conditions of possibility of emotional disclosure.

In particular, there are few words as unique as *feel* in this regard. The reasons for this are two-fold. First, this word can represent a wide array of feelings and not be bound by definitional debates related to separating concepts such as affect, feelings, or emotions from one another. In essence, *feel* encapsulates the gamut of inner experiences. Secondly, *feel* is clearly linked to the disclosure of emotions compared to other disclosing choices such as *think* or *believe*.

Consequently, discourse analysis can shed light on dynamics that are unconsidered or in the collective unconscious of those exposed to it on a regular basis. The purpose of this research is to explore how people make sense of the word *feel* in their communication across different social relationships and contexts. A secondary purpose is to examine how the perceived management of the word *feel* may be linked to well-being. Through in-depth interviews, this study attempted to identify the subject position made available through participant attitudes and

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beliefs about the word *feel*. In establishing “truths” about the use of the word *feel* this study examined how participants reproduced these “truths”. In particular, this study had six research questions:

- 1) How do people make sense of the word *feel*?
- 2) How do people make sense of the word *feel* across their various relationships?
- 3) What are the discursive rules for the use of the word *feel*?
- 4) How do people perceive their management of the word *feel* across their different social relationships?
- 5) How do people construct themselves as subjects through their perceived use of the word *feel*?
- 6) How might the use of the word *feel* be associated with well-being?

Exploratory qualitative methods and discourse analysis seek to provide answers to each of these questions.

Chapter 3: Methodological Approach

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Methodological Approach

Exploratory research is non-committal to a guiding theoretical framework. Instead, the function of exploratory research is to take a broad perspective and, “travel over or through a particular space for the purposes of discovery and adventure” (Stebbins, 2001, p. 2). Researchers explore when they have little knowledge about the group, process, activity, or situation they want to examine. However, research is undertaken because they believe it is worth discovering (Stebbins, 2001). In turn, the current research questions have been influenced by relevant literature on individual social capital, self-disclosure, and social norms rather than guided by one singular theory. However, there are several theoretical considerations to be made in the delivery of the selected method. This section outlines the methodology taken to address the research questions and includes a description of the qualitative methodology used, its participants, and the analytical approach. In addition, reflections on the methodological process will be made throughout.

Exploratory Research

Exploratory research is conducted when a research question or hypothesis has little to no theoretical reference in the literature (Stebbins, 2001). The problems that exploratory research aims to address are not clearly defined, hence the “explorative” moniker. It is the beginning of a process of research that, in the future, can define the best research practices, including methodologies, to address a problem that is defined more specifically by the initial exploratory endeavour. In this case, the value of examining the word *feel* in such a specific manner is rather unprecedented, particularly in the context of social support and individual social capital in which it is embedded. Therefore, the approach must be broad, open, and inductive, meaning that the findings of this investigation, as is the case with most qualitative research strategies, are subject

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to interpretation and not easily generalized. Although quantitative approaches can be used in exploratory research, qualitative methodologies are often cited as the most suitable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This is primarily because interviews involve interpretation on behalf of the participant (Talja, 1999). Exploration is empirically focused and it ultimately intends to derive theory from data (Stebbins, 2001). Stebbins finally emphasized that the objective of exploratory research is, "... the production of inductively derived generalizations about the group, process, activity, or situation under study" (p. 4).

Research Paradigm

This study assumed an interpretist position. The interpretist paradigm ascribes to three significant assumptions. Ontologically, the nature of reality is subjective and findings or truths are socially created. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained interpretist ontology as follows:

Realities are apprehendable in the form of multiple, intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature, and dependent for their form and content on the individual persons or groups holding the constructions.

Constructions are not more or less "true", in any absolute sense, but simply more or less informed or sophisticated. Constructions are alterable as are their associated "realities".

(p. 111)

Epistemologically, the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known is locally and specifically constructed. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explained that, "the investigator and the object of investigation are assumed to be interactively linked so that "findings" are literally created as the investigation proceeds" (p. 111). Finally, the interpretist paradigm deploys methods which are typically qualitative in nature. This is a result of a belief in meaning being

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socially formulated and that interpretation is an important activity in its construction. Guba and Lincoln continued:

The variable and personal (instrumental) nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction between and among investigator and respondents. These varying constructions are interpreted using conventional hermeneutical techniques, and are compared and contrasted through a dialectical interchange. The final aim is to distill a consensus construction that is more informed and sophisticated than any of the predecessor constructions. (p. 111)

Participants and Recruitment

Fifteen participants were interviewed for this study. After acquiring ethical approval for this research (Appendix A), participants were recruited through a poster advertisement describing a study on *feel* and wellness at a campus health services centre. After information sharing via telephone or email, those interested in participating were invited to a non-obligatory one-on-one meeting where they could review additional information about the study and, if consent was obtained via a signed consent form (Appendix B), participate in an interview. Interviews were audio-recorded and ranged from 60 to 120 minutes each. There were 9 females and 6 men with ages ranging from 19-76 and an average age of 36.0 years old (see Table 1). All were Caucasian. The relationship status of participants included seven participants as unmarried, 6 married, 1 divorced, and 1 widowed. All participants were employed except one who was a full-time student.

Recruitment ceased at 15 participants when emergent themes linked to the research questions became prominent as responses to interview questions tended to share many similarities. Additional research questions that emerged in later interviews are included in the

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discussion section. After completing a more thorough data analysis once interviews were completed, additional themes emerged which could have been further explored through follow up interviews or including more participants. However, due to the delay between the original interviews, the fine-tuning of the analysis, and other time constraints to finish the dissertation, no new interviews were sought.

Table 1. Participant characteristics

Participant	Age/Gender	Profession	Relationship Status
<i>Juliette</i>	25/F	Nursing Student	Unmarried, dating
<i>Theresa</i>	32/F	Civil Servant	Unmarried, dating
<i>Jerry</i>	31/M	Civil Servant	Married with children
<i>Paul</i>	46/M	Ecologist	Divorced with children
<i>Ben</i>	47/M	Call Center Operator	Married with children
<i>Cindy</i>	29/F	Pharmacist	Married with children
<i>Nancy</i>	33/F	Mental Health Worker	Unmarried
<i>Jennifer</i>	26/F	Civil Servant	Unmarried
<i>Jake</i>	29/M	Military Officer	Unmarried, dating
<i>Olivia</i>	33/F	Engineer	Married
<i>Brenda</i>	40/F	Office Manager	Married with children
<i>Nadia</i>	31/F	Office Administration	Unmarried
<i>Charles</i>	43/M	Program Manager	Married with children
<i>Christine</i>	19/F	Education Student	Unmarried
<i>Alexander</i>	76/M	Retired - Military	Widow with children and grandchildren

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Data Collection

Interviews were semi-structured and led by an interview guide (Table 2) complete with several available probing questions (Appendix C) for use throughout. Probing questions are important pieces to an interview guide because they act to clarify and complete answers and enhance interviewer understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Overall, the interview was segmented into four parts. To begin, a projective technique, common in exploratory qualitative research, was deployed (Soley & Smith, 2008). Projective techniques, “involve the collection of responses from subjects to ambiguous instruments that evoke fantasy responses” (p. 5) and elicit an understanding of a phenomena based on one’s experience, motivations, and attitudes. These perspectives are important because they allow the analyst to identify dominant patterns within the discourse. In this case, participants were asked to share their mental images associated with the word *feel* in order to capture its meaning to them and how they make sense of the word.

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Table 2. Interview guide.

Part One	Part Two	Part Three	Part Four
Q1. What images, if any, come to mind when you think of the word <i>feel</i> ?	Q2. How, if at all, do you use the word <i>feel</i> in your daily life?	Q3. How, if at all, do you use the word <i>feel</i> with: - Superiors - Subordinates - Colleagues - Strangers - Friends - Siblings - Parents - As a parent - Romantic partner - In dating - Members of the opposite sex - Members of the same sex¹³	Q4. What other thoughts would you like to add about your use of the word <i>feel</i> ?

¹³ For Part Three, the final two questions were not originally included in the interview guide but were included in response to a dominant theme that was emerging in the data. In fact, gender became such a prominent factor in how participants believed they managed the word *feel* that it was given fuller attention as a full article.

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Next, the interview examined how each participant perceived to use the word *feel* in general. From here, the interview narrowed in focus by presenting questions pertaining to a series of relationships and contexts. These relationships included those with strangers, friends, siblings, parents, as a parent, romantic partners, and in dating. As interviews continued, added attention was given to the role of context and the perceived management of the word *feel* in workplace communication. Similarly, the role of gender identity was explored more vigorously through asking participants on their use of the word *feel* with members of the same or opposite genders. In exploring each participant's attitudes and perceptions in these ways, several social rules for the use of the word *feel* were uncovered.

Overall, the construction of the interview guide was a straightforward process lead first by identifying the most common relationships a person would typically experience in their life at any one time. Of course, this did not mean that all participants were engaged in these relationships at the time of their interview but this was not necessary for them to provide genuine beliefs about the word *feel* across them. The guide was also augmented by several probing questions. These included questions such as, for Part One of the guide, *What do you mean when you use the word "emotions"?* and *Why do you think this image comes to mind?*. Probing questions were used most often when the language chosen by the interviewee could have several possible interpretations. Therefore, clarification was necessary in order to establish their intended meaning and to remove assumption.

Although expansion-seeking probing questions like *Tell me more about how you use the word feel with this person?* were used throughout, other questions, called follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005), were also added to interviews as themes emerged. For example, as personal and professional discourses were found to be in completion with one another based on

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the responses provided to workplace-based questions, the follow-up question of, *Can you explain what makes the word feel seem unprofessional in the workplace?* Other follow-up questions that were added to explore the emergent themes can be viewed in Appendix D.

The value of staying open to adding new questions cannot be understated. However, in certain cases, possible probing questions were realized rather late in the data analysis stage. For example, it would have been fruitful to ask more about how people fall in or out of their free use of the word *feel* with a person (e.g., like with a friend or a family member). However, this idea materialized long after the interviews were completed. In fact, the question, *What times, if at all, have you stopped using the word feel in a relationship where you had used it regularly and why?* could be valuable as a core question.

Finally, while part of the inspiration to explore the word *feel* came in reference to personal experiences with gender differences in an applied field of work, the priority of this research was not on gender per se but on relationships. However, as interviews unfolded, the influence of gender was prominent and it was explicitly included in Part Three of the interview guide which explored different relationship types. Including the relationship feature entitled, *Members of the Opposite Sex*, was an addendum to the original guide and reflects a response to a prevailing direction many participants were taking. Similarly, allocating an article to discuss the workplace context followed a similar path since some of the clearest tendencies shown by participants occurred when they described their perceived use of the word *feel* with superiors, colleagues, and subordinates. At the outset, neither the workplace nor gender was preordained as areas of concentration. In fact, these recognitions required entering areas outside of my expertise, specifically gender identity, in order to honour their importance.

Data Organization

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Data analysis of each transcript began with a thorough reading of the interview text and identifying statements pertaining to the eight targeted relationships, the workplace context, and gender. The analytical steps included preparing an analysis chart as separated by each main interview question, finding meaning units in the transcripts (i.e., answers to questions), identifying data themes from the meaning units (e.g., trust, suppression, gender), and then tagging each meaning unit by its appropriate theme (Côté, Salmela, Baria, Russell, & Storm, 1993). For example, answers alluding to how gender played a role in the perceived management of the word *feel* in personal relationships would be tagged with the label “gender”. As a result, themes were easily identifiable within and across participant accounts of the use of the word *feel*. Meaning unit exemplars for the emerged themes are presented in Appendix D.

Data Analysis

People act upon themselves to stay disciplined to a discourse or to resist it through the language they use. Discourse, the composition of written and spoken texts, is the focal point of several academic disciplines. In discourse analysis, the researcher does not assume that their presentation of results is the only complete version of participants’ beliefs or perceptions. Therefore, interpretation is core to its work and is reflexive, theoretical, contextual, and textual in nature because the topic of discussion cannot be understood the same way by each person (Talja, 1999). However, depending on the adopted theoretical perspective of the examiner, discourse can be examined in several ways. It can be analyzed for its structure, functionality, its social role, or its communicative features as part of context or culture (Schiffrin, 1994).

Discourse analysis was selected as the analytic approach for this study. Willig (2000) wrote that, “the variability and fluidity of discourse can draw attention to the ways in which speakers use discursive resources in order to achieve interpersonal objectives in social

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interaction” (Willig, 2000, p. 548). Subsequently, discourse analysis is used to analyze patterns in language as clusters of themes, ideas, and images that are then used together to construct objects (Lupton, 1992). Ultimately, discourse analysis attempts to unveil the rules that govern certain social practices and identifies their reproduction and resistance (Fairclough, 2001).

Due to the assortment of approaches to discourse analysis, it was challenging to arrive at one. Similarities in both topic and research objective were found in Coupland, Brown, Daniels, & Humphreys’ (2008) article entitled *Saying it with feeling: Analyzing speakable emotions* whereby they qualitatively investigated the relationship between emotional expression and power among teachers, managers, and administrators in a UK school setting. In turn, their analytical framework, drawn from discursive psychology, was adaptable to the objectives of this study. As a result, analyses concentrated on (a) the social and discursive functions of the word *feel*, (b) the rules systems regarding the “appropriate” use of the word *feel* and, (c) how the emergent rules are resisted (Harré, 1986). In the end, this approach explored how people position themselves within a discourse of *feel*-based social sharing and the rule system that guides them. It did so by searching for patterns in the reports about the use of the word *feel* including differences across accounts and consistencies shared by accounts (Potter & Weatherall, 1987). After examining accounts for these patterns, responses to each research question were then sought.

The original intention of interviews was to explore the discursive formations of the word *feel* across common interpersonal relationships in daily life. However, the subject positions yielded by discourse are often influenced by other factors (Weatherall, 1998). As data collection and analysis progressed, two additional features required consideration. While communication using the word *feel* across common relationships was central to this study, context (i.e., the workplace) and gender identity emerged as imperative areas to explore more closely. Therefore,

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the three articles comprising the results of this document became about the perceptions of the word *feel* as they pertained to, (a) relationships, (b) context and, (c) gender identity.

Reflections on the Methodological Process

Overall, the methodology for this research was relatively seamless with few disruptive challenges. Obtaining 15 participants during recruitment was fairly effortless. Scheduling interviews presented no unusual issues and the actual administrative process (e.g., obtaining consent, fielding queries by participants) went smoothly. Common to interview-based research, there was a range in interview length where, on one extreme, outlying participants would provide relatively short and often ambiguous responses to questions. In these cases, probing questions were a useful tool but even they are limited in their ability to prompt rich responses from reserved participants. By contrast, there were participants who provided lengthy responses to each question they received. At times, these participants would veer off-topic and even forget the original question. This posed a unique challenge as refocusing the direction of the interview required tact. Transcriptions and the data organization of these interviews were lengthy processes and, as such, necessitated more effort to find and extract meaning units from, at times, responses which spanned several minutes. However, due to a diligently organized approach to analysis, extracting these units and allocating themes to them, while a highly invested process, was completed efficiently without the use of formal qualitative analysis software. Overall, the reflective process of analysis and meaning-making was rather uncluttered.

While it is fair to state that this process was ongoing and without a distinct ending¹⁴, the emergent observations are representative reflections of the major themes associated with the original research questions for this study. Although honouring the themes that surfaced in this

¹⁴ For example, analysis was active up to and including the implementation of reviewer comments produced by the academic review of each article.

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way meant expanding analytical horizons, such efforts were merited. Ultimately, it was pleasing to have three obvious paths (i.e., relationships, context, gender identity) for reporting and discussing the findings.

Overall, each article in the sections which follow presents a different consideration for analyzing the word *feel*. Article 1 entitled, *The word feel as an indicator of enacted social support in personal relationships*, investigates participant perceptions of the word *feel* across a series of 7 different interpersonal relationships. Article 2, called *Perceptions of the use of the word "feel" in the workplace* examines the influence of social context on beliefs about the word *feel*. Finally, article 3 named *The construction of gender though attitudes toward the word "feel"* explores the word *feel* for its role in the construction of gender identity. A general discussion section follows the third article.

Chapter 4: The word *feel* as an indicator of enacted social support in personal relationships

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The word *feel* as an indicator of enacted social support in personal relationships

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning attributed to the word *feel* and how people make sense of its use in their communication across their social network. The findings showed that the function of the word *feel*, in its basic form, was to emotionally self-disclose or to inquire about the private inner experiences of others. However, discursive rules dictated that it was not appropriate for all relationships. Most participants reported an open use in interdependent and supportive personal relationships. These relationships are portrayed as the most trustworthy and, through using the word *feel*, a source of well-being via the opportunities they provide to be cathartic and socially intimate. By contrast, the use of *feel* in relationships defined by dependence and vulnerability was perceived as being social risky. The word *feel* is portrayed as a potential indicator of enacted social support and a possible leverage point for interventions in social support.

Keywords: feel, emotion, social support, self-disclosure, reciprocation, trust, intimacy

Introduction

Self-disclosure has an important role in the process of developing and maintaining intimacy (Manne et al., 2004; Sparrevohn & Rapee, 2009) and well-being (Prager, 1995; Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006) in relationships. In fact, negative health outcomes have been associated with people who do not or cannot engage in emotional self-disclosure (Gross, 2002; Gross & Levenson, 1997; Zapf, 2002). However, acts of self-disclosure are not unanimously positive for a person's health and can result in such negative effects as feelings of shame, increased vulnerability, regret, and elicit specific concerns about rejection, burdening the listener, and of making an undesirable impression (Farber, 2006). As a result, acts of self-

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disclosure require skillful management in order to experience its positive benefits (Holtgraves, 1990).

Consequently, acts of emotional disclosure are guided by rules which dictate its appropriateness in certain contexts or relationships making it a political activity (Warner & Shields, 2009; Shields, 2005). Hochschild (1979; 1983) originally posited that social forces not only influence what or how people feel but also how this is shared with others. In this way, the management of emotions has been well researched. For example, burnout, stress, and anxiety have been identified as just a few of the negative consequences of inhibiting emotions (Gross & Levenson, 1997; Pennebaker, Zech, & Rimé, 2001; Pisaniello, Winefield, & Delfabbro, 2012). Inhibition, in either suppressed or repressed forms, has physiological (Richards & Gross, 1999) cognitive (Richards & Gross, 2000) and even social costs (Butler et al., 2003; Srivastava et al., 2009). It seems that disclosing feelings, while potentially good for health, requires the careful consideration of its inherent risks.

Emotional expression can be verbal or non-verbal. However, it does not occur freely for most people even when the result of disclosing emotions can be feelings of authenticity (Farber, 2006). The considerations for appropriate or timely self-disclosure can include choices in language use to enact such an event. The function of emotionally revealing language in disclosure is unique (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Mayer & Tormala, 2010) because it can expose social norms and influence the process social support (Goldsmith, 2004). In particular, enacted social support relies on language as the means to share social resources that have direct ties to improved health (Berkman & Glass, 2000; Kikuchi & Coleman, 2012) like informational support (e.g., advice) or emotional support (e.g., comfort during stressful times).

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Although emotion-based language has been examined in a variety of in-depth ways (Coupland, Brown, Daniels, & Humphreys, 2008; Gallois, 1993; Wierzbicka, 2009), the language chosen to self-disclose has received little to no specific attention in the literature. One word that is intriguing for its potential use in emotional disclosure is *feel*. As a result, this study explored how people make sense of the word *feel* across several common relationships and to examine what role it has, if any, in the process of social support.

Self-disclosure plays an important role in relationship development (Derlega, Winstead, & Greene, 2008). On one extreme, the extended absence of meaningful social connectivity where emotional self-disclosure is infrequent yields many hardships (Pennebaker et al., 2001; Segrin & Passalacqua, 2010). However, it is widely accepted that the number of relationships a person has in their social network is not as vital as the qualities within them (Ackerson & Viswanath, 2009; Baum & Ziersch, 2003; Ferlander, 2007). Qualities such as trust (Welch, Rivera, Conway, Yonkoski, Lupton & Giancola, 2005), reciprocity (Abbot & Freeth, 2008; Putnam, 1993) and intimacy (Merz & Huxhold, 2010) have been shown to be three important outcomes in thriving relationships.

Welch et al. (2005) defined trust as, “the mutually shared expectation, often expressed as confidence, that people will manifest sensible and, when needed, reciprocally beneficial behavior in their interaction with others.” (p.457). Intimacy, when self-relevant feelings are shared in order to feel cared for by another, (Reis & Patrick; 1996; Reis & Shaver, 1988) has particular value (Prager, 1995; Prager and Buhrmester, 1998). In general, trust, intimacy, and self-disclosure have an interconnected relationship in socially supportive relationships (Greene et al., 2006; Welch et al., 2005). If emotional self-disclosure has this role in accruing some of the benefits of relationships, then understanding more about the specific verbal mechanisms

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involved in it could shed new light on unexplored leverage points for facilitating positive health outcomes.

Historically, social research on emotion has focused on areas such as facial expression (Campellone & Kring, 2013), physiological activation (Kreibig, 2010), and other non-verbal displays (Knapp, 2012). Emotionally disclosing language, by contrast, has received less attention. Emotion in language use has been studied with regards to the emotional meaning of the message rather than the choice of verbiage to share such messages. Nonetheless, language is the primary tool for self-disclosure and there are several linguistic devices (e.g., *I believe*, *I think*, *I hope*, *I feel*) and methods (i.e., declarations, questions, or responses) at a person’s disposal.

Of the options available, the use of the word *feel* is an intriguing selection for disclosure. It symbolizes a window into private experience that other words do not (Fiehler, 2002). On its surface, the word *feel* offers a direct link to what is inherently private and emotional. Fiehler (2002) qualified the word *feel* as experientially declarative whether the additional information attached is an experience-designating term (e.g., *I feel angry*), a comparison (e.g., *I felt empty*), or an image (e.g., *I feel as hot as the sun*). It has distinct flexibility in its representative utility but, on its surface, the word *feel* represents inner emotional experiences much less ambiguously when compared to other disclosing verbs such as *think* or *believe*. As a result, the word *feel* is assumed to represent a type of conceptual glue for a category of private experience often described as affect, feelings, and emotions (Barrett, 2006). In light of this, how do people perceive the word *feel* and how might they manage it? Why might a person choose one word over another to perform a disclosing speech act?

Studying language that constructs identities or performs a specific action (e.g., to disclose) merits the use of discourse analysis (Searle, 1979). Discourse analysis excavates truths

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that are typically taken for granted (Fairclough, 1995; Parker, 1992; Potter & Weatherell, 1987; Weatherall, Watson, & Gallois, 2007) and that are important for understanding social and psychological realities (Willig, 2004). These truths are often experienced as sets of rules which guide actions such as who can say what to whom and when it can be said. In addition, through discourse, people assume a variety of subject positions (e.g., the caring parent, the risk taker, the unprofessional employee) which represents their agreements with the truths of the discourse including how it defines the social rules for certain behaviors (Langenhove & Harré, 1999). This positioning has been described as “the discursive process whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines.” (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). The rules for the different uses of certain words in a particular context or relationship facilitate the mining of the possible subject positions available through a word’s different uses. These subject positions reveal the assumptions within the discourse in which the person is taking part (Butler, 2006) and are made visible through both symbols (e.g., clothing) and practices (e.g., language use) (Weedon, 2004). Importantly, circumstances like social context and relationship type can dictate the conditions of possibility that make certain subject positions available over others.

Research Aims

The body of research on emotional expression, self-disclosure, and social support is vacant of rich analysis into the meaning ascribed to the word *feel* and its discursive rules which govern its use. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to explore the meaning attributed to the word *feel* and how people make sense of its use in a variety of social relationships. It did so by identifying and exploring the truths (i.e., the social rules) about the use of the word *feel* and

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how they were produced, perceived, and enacted across different types of relationships. In particular, four specific questions guided this research:

- 1.) How do people make sense of the word *feel*?
- 2.) How do people make sense of their use of the word *feel* across their social relationships?
- 3.) How do people perceive their management of the word *feel* across their social relationships?
- 4.) How do people construct themselves as subjects through their perceptions of the word *feel*?

Method

Participants

Fifteen participants were interviewed for this study. All participants were Caucasian, ranging in age from 19-76 with an average age of 36.0 years, 9 were female.

Sampling, Procedure, and Materials

Participants responded to a poster advertisement describing a study on *feel* at a campus health services centre. Those who showed interest were invited to contact the researcher via telephone or email. Upon doing so, an interview was scheduled to take place on the university campus where each participant was given the opportunity to review the information about the study. Audio-recorded interviews commenced after participants signed an informed consent form. Materials for data collection included an interview guide (Table 1), information form, and informed consent sheet. These materials were approved in advance by the University Ethics Review Board.

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Interviews

Interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes each and explored the perceived use of the word *feel* with friends, siblings, parents, committed romantic partners, co-workers, strangers, as parents, and in dating¹⁵. Each interview began with a projective exercise (Soley & Smith, 2008) whereby participants were asked to associate the word *feel* with a mental image and to explain their answers (see Question 1 of Table 1). Next, participants were asked to share how they perceived themselves to use the word *feel* in daily life. The interview subsequently narrowed focus upon participant perceptions of the use of *feel* across the eight common personal relationships listed above. Interviews concluded by providing participants the opportunity to share any additional beliefs about the word *feel*. Questions from the interview guide were supplemented by probing questions that were used to clarify responses, request further information, or invoke elaboration (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). After transcription, interviews were sent to participants via email for authentication. No changes were requested.

¹⁵ Many participants could not comment on the use of the word *feel* across all of the relationship scenarios since not all had experience in each role (e.g., parenthood).

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Table 1. Interview Guide

Part One	Part Two	Part Three	Part Four
Q1. What images, if any, come to mind when you think of the word <i>feel</i> ?	Q2. How, if at all, do you use the word <i>feel</i> in your daily life?	Q3. How, if at all, do you use the word <i>feel</i> with: - Friends - Siblings - Parents - As a parent - Romantic partner - In dating - Co-workers¹⁶ - Strangers	Q4. What other thoughts would you like to add about your use of the word <i>feel</i> ?

Data Analysis

This study focused on how individuals make sense of their use of the word *feel*.

Discourse analysis was selected as the analytical approach. Discourse analysis is used to analyze

¹⁶ The use of the word *feel* in the workplace is presented in a separate article (see Doell (2013)).

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patterns in language as clusters of themes, ideas, and images that are then used together to construct objects (Lupton, 1992). The subject positions yielded by discourse are often influenced by context, occasion, or relationship (Weatherall, 1998). In addition, Fairclough (2001) ascertained that an analysis of language elucidates the assumptions that are operating below conscious awareness. As a result, transcript analyses concentrated on (a) the discursive functions of the word *feel* and, (b) the rules for the suitable use of the word *feel* (Harré, 1986). In essence, participants were asked to connect context to their relationships in which they used or did not use the word *feel*.

Data Organization

Data analysis of each transcript began with the preparation of the transcripts (e.g., eliminating typos) and a thorough reading and re-reading of the interview text. The analytical steps that followed included creating meaning units from the data (i.e., answers to questions), identifying data themes from the meaning units (e.g., trust), and then tagging and placing the meaning units under the appropriate data theme(s) (Côté, Salmela, Baria, Russell, & Storm, 1993). Categorized meaning units were subsequently aligned under the eight relationships in focus. Alternative cases were also recognized and evaluated for their relevance to the research questions of this study.

Findings and Discussion

In the interviews, participants reflected on the role that the word *feel* had in their daily lexicon. Poignantly, one participant, Ben, wondered why he concluded that the word *feel* required judicial management in certain situations. In doing so, he presented the most definitive rule for the use of the word *feel*:

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In society, you are not supposed to use the word *feel* in conversations when you are with a certain type of person. I really don’t know why off-hand. All I know is that it is different and it is probably innate for a lot of people. I really don’t have an explanation for it. (Ben)

Common to discourse analysis, the focus of the interview was on making the “innate” explicit in order to bring the norms for the use of the word *feel* to light. Subsequently, *feel* was explored with greater specificity. In particular, in the sections that follow, associations of the word *feel* will be outlined. Next, the social functions of using the word *feel* will be examined. Finally, the perceptions of the use of the word will be segmented into the emergent theme of reciprocation. Specifically, this includes accounts of the word *feel* in unreciprocated, reciprocated, and inhibited communication. These accounts then give way to a discussion of the word *feel* as it pertained to themes of vulnerability, intimacy, and trust in the context of social support.

Associations of the word feel

While not all participants considered *feel* as broadly as Ben above, all provided a precise mental association of the word *feel* at the beginning of their interview. In turn, many were able to identify a link between the word *feel* and its specific rules of use. Foremost, participants’ collective imagery depicted the word *feel* as associated with emotions. In addition, several accounts were supported by images pertaining to interpersonal relationships. These social-emotional associations could be negatively or positively valenced.

Emotions; positive. Participant depictions were primarily positive and focused on desirable feelings such as happiness or love. Juliette identified an image of her grandfather in her association:

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Love. Two people. My grandpa and myself I guess. What pops into mind is the feelings between two people... the feeling of love between two people. (Juliette)

Similarly, Theresa pictured positive images of close relationships that were important to her:

It's going to sound ziggy but it's something very positive. A sun hugging something! (Laughs). I don't know (pauses). I would see my family or my boyfriend or something. That's how I would envision the word feel, in an emotional family lovey-dovey way. (Theresa)

Emotions; negative. Although positive emotions were most frequently connected to the word *feel*, two participants associated the word feel with negative emotions. Olivia, for instance, associated the word with anger as she recalled specific details of her relationship with her mother:

The first thing that comes to my mind is someone angry. A feeling of fear and a picture of someone's face who is frustrated with you or angry and stuff. It's my mother. Poor woman. She and my dad had problems from before I was 5. (Olivia)

Olivia's account, while in the minority, foreshadowed a series of distinctive perspectives she would offer on the word *feel*. Of all participants, she appeared the most forthcoming, disclosing several details of the unpleasantness she had experienced in relationships past which had influenced how she managed the word *feel* afterward.

In all, *feel* was related to emotions with several images integrating social relations in the process. This exercise revealed unanimity across what participants associated with this word. After making these attributions, each participant was then asked how they believed they used the word in their day-to-day lives.

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Functions of the Word "Feel"

Table 2 shows the social functions that the word *feel* performed (Harré, 1986). The data revealed *feel* as used in two ways, self-disclosure and inquiry. In the context of personal relationships, its use revealed several themes.

Table 2. Social functions of the word feel

Type of Use	Themes	Intended outcomes
<i>Self-disclosure</i>		
	To confess	Relief
	Be intimate	Closeness
	Seek Support	Emotional resolution
<i>Inquiry</i>		
	Emotional support	To unburden, to comfort, to create intimacy

First, self-disclosure came in the form of confession where the intention of such disclosures was to feel unburdened or relieved from angst or tension. Secondly, *feel* acted as an invitation for intimacy or closeness from another party. Finally, disclosure was described as a request for support to help resolve unwanted feelings they were experiencing. That is, *feel* was described as useful in evoking help to resolve an issue. This differed from acts of confession because confessionals were a cathartic means to an end with no expectation for active assistance.

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Its second use as inquiry represented *feel* as a form of questioning to evoke emotional disclosure in personal relationships. More specifically, emotional support, its most significant theme, corresponded to *feel* as a general act of social support through outcomes such as unburdening, comforting, or creating intimacy. These emergent themes, confession, intimacy, support seeking, and emotional support provision and their accompanying goal-orientation are supported by the literature on self-disclosure in personal relationships (Farber, 2006; Greene et al., 2006; Manne et al., 2007).

Disclosure; seek support. This form of disclosure reveals personal information used to facilitate a fix for an emotional concern. Jake, for instance, viewed the word *feel* as a means to resolve troubling feelings.

If someone makes me feel something that isn't in my normal sense of what I want to feel then I might use the word *feel* to tell someone I'm close with how I'm feeling. Yeah. I'd use it to describe how I feel and may be they can help me get past it and move on.

While Jake's social network appeared to provide him with options to resolve unwanted feelings in this manner, Olivia's did not. Her accounts of the word *feel* tended to contradict the “friends and family only” discourse revealed by others. For instance, she sought emotional intimacy with her counselor in response to her discomfort with self-disclosing to her family. Below, she described how her attitude toward self-disclosing developed:

As a kid, where do you put your feelings? I tended to be the kind of kid who internalized everything and so even from age... grade 7... I was in grade 7 when my mom first sent me to counselling just so I could talk to someone because I wasn't talking period. So I think it is not something I tend to use with my family.

When asked why the word *feel* seemed more available in relationship with her counsellor

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compared to with others, Olivia continued with the following:

Probably because that’s their job. They are getting paid to sit there and listen to you.

You’re not expected to share your emotional load in life with just anybody. Not in North America. Where I’ve lived, you’re expected to deal with it yourself the best you can. You don’t burden other people with it if you don’t have to. Even with really close friends I think you withhold significant information as far as the emotional stuff.

Worrying about burdening others through self-disclosure is common (Derlega & Winstead, 2001; Farber, 2006; Farber, Berano, & Capobianco, 2004). However, Olivia’s perspective highlighted the value of using *feel* with a professional care provider. Interestingly, Foucault (1983) noted that confessional relationships have been traditionally salvation-oriented. In particular, he referenced the institution of the church and how it provides resources to help an individual into the next spiritual world. Salvation, he extended, is observed in more modern ways like in the pursuit of health, well-being, and security. This form of confession draws out emotional, informational, or instrumental support with outcomes such as relief (e.g., “unburdening”), a plan for physical healing, or emotional well-being.

This emotionally supportive resource embraces self-disclosure from the emotionally vulnerable. In part, using professional care providers for support is attractive for self-disclosure because they are bound by certain codes of ethics which protect privacy and, in turn, creates trustworthiness. In this form of duty or professional care, Foucault (2000) noted, “the good ruler is precisely the one who exercises his power as it ought to be exercised, that is, simultaneously exercising his power over himself” (p. 288). Therefore, social status imbalances (e.g., expert support provider versus support seeker) observed in relationships with health-care providers generate perceptions of lower risk for those taking vulnerable positions through their use of the

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word *feel*.

Participants also shared many observations on the role of *feel* in soliciting support. In counselling settings like the one Olivia’s participated in, *feel* may be a part of a confession to simply seek relief or a disclosure where her counsellor’s advice is sought. While the focus of this study was on personal relationships, the word *feel* may also have a role in relationships with care providers in non-emotional ways. In addition to Olivia, Theresa and Ben also shared how they would use *feel* with an expert care provider. With their physicians, they used *feel* to disclose how they felt in order to obtain informational support (i.e., advice, diagnoses) or instrumental support (i.e., fixing a condition) (Berkman & Glass, 2000). Theresa, for instance said, “If you have a doctor examining you or somebody at a medical station doing it they’re going to ask you how things feel. *I feel pain there. I feel pain here.* Direct locations, right?” Health-care providers like doctors and nurses are in a unique position to be able to offer both forms of social support.

In general, participants showed an assortment of scenarios for using *feel* to acquire emotional support including these formal relationships with professional-care providers. However, examples were mostly derived from informal yet trustworthy relationships with friends, parents, and intimate partners. These personal relationships construe the core of a person’s social network. This support is important to strengthening bonds because disclosing emotions, particularly when such disclosures are reciprocated, helps develop trust and intimacy (Derlega et al., 2008; Manne et al., 2007). Trust and intimacy were recurring themes associated with the use of the word *feel*.

Disclosure; be intimate. *Feel* was richly described as connected to creating or maintaining closeness with others. This use epitomized the original associations of *feel* being emotional, even intimate, in nature (Prager, 1995). Cindy and Theresa, respectively, represented

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intimacy in these responses:

The closer the person is to me the more likely I am to use the word *feel*. I've used it with my family, my husband, my parents, and my sister but less likely with acquaintances.

(Cindy)

I guess everybody gets first impressions or last impressions and you can read somebody when you first meet them. So I guess a lot of it is a matter of trust, too. For me, personally, if it is someone you can trust then maybe you'd feel more comfortable. Say you're sitting in a group and there's the acquaintance there and there's good friends also there. Would you share an intimate story of what went on in your life? I think that's a judgment call. When you first meet them or you've known them for a couple of days and if that person is good friends with the others and you're good friends with the other people, I guess you would let them into your world right? (Theresa)

The content of the use of the word *feel* was portrayed less as a way to resolve a personal challenge (as in support-seeking) but chiefly in reference to relationship development. Theresa, for example, noted how the addition of someone new into a network of friends changes how she self-discloses using the word *feel*. Social penetration theory fundamentally identifies that a personal relationship develops as people self-disclose which, in turn, builds intimacy (Sprecher, Treger, & Wondra, 2013). In turn, *feel* appeared to have a place in relationship-building for her and others.

Disclosure; to confess. The word *feel* was also used as a way of resolving a psychological tension. The use of *feel* in a confessional was characterized by a lack of expectation for assistance. On its own, this act provided the relief they were seeking without further problem solving. Olivia, for instance, reflected on this role as follows:

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The word can release a bunch of things; either the emotional burdens a person carries or things that are more personal and possibly that evoke more emotions. I find it more personal and I would only use it with someone I knew and trusted very well. (Olivia)

Olivia’s portrayal of the word *feel* in confession frames it as a significant, if not unique, expression. Conceivably, this is a function of carrying pent-up feelings over a period of time, released without any need for someone explicitly inquire about these feelings for her to share them.

Inquiry; emotional support. Another representation of the word *feel* in personal relationships was as an act of care or comforting. In this sense, the word *feel* was depicted as a way to gauge and support the well-being of others.

I use the word as a check to see if someone’s okay. (...) It is very important to me how other people feel, the people I care about. When you want to know what’s going on in their lives, the main thing that you’re asking is how they’re feeling. “How do you feel about that?” or “What are you doing about it?” Although it may not be important to me, you put yourself in their shoes and try and help them out. (Juliette)

Acts of emotional support are viewed as a fundamental provision of close relationships (Burleson, 2008; Cunningham & Barbee, 2000). Albrecht, Burleson, & Goldsmith (1994) defined supportive communication as communication that influences how people view themselves, their situation, and their relationship. Juliette’s account of using *feel* in inquiry represents how it can act as a device to maintain a relationship in this way. This, again, revealed another purpose for the word *feel* as a significant tool to nurture bonds and deploy emotional support within one’s social network.

Interpretations of the word *feel* framed it as a chief element of the process of emotional

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support with its inherent intention to emotionally unburden or comfort. Those who used the word *feel* typically restricted its use to personal and intimate relationships. However, Olivia's outlying accounts of her use of the word *feel* revealed that its management was more complex. She reserved her use of the word *feel* for her relationship with her counsellor who is supposed to keep, as a professional, an emotional distance from clientele. Since she showed resistance to the dominant rules, Olivia may be taking up different subject positions within the discourse that dictates that the word *feel* should not be used in any personal relationship. Her circumstances dictated that *feel* should be avoided in places where others may normally use it because her personal relationships had not been stable enough for her liking.

Perceptions of the use of the word feel across relationships

Feel was examined with parents, siblings, children, friends, strangers, romantic partners, co-workers and in dating relationships in the next stage of the interview. Paul's insight, below, sheds light on why this word required management and also represents several relevant patterns pertaining to trust, vulnerability, and dependency in the process of social support.

When I am talking about my feelings, I am giving someone information about me. I am letting them know how they can have an impact on me. If they are aware of it, they have a certain amount of influence over my emotional state. So I have made myself vulnerable there. But life would be dull if we didn't. (Paul)

The most poignant pattern within the data was that the perceived reciprocation of the word *feel* indicated interdependence within the relationship. Moreover, dependency was observed when one person required social support from the other. This dynamic meant that one person took on a vulnerable position among the rules for emotional disclosure. This will be

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exposed by looking at the perceived uses of the word *feel* across relationships where it was used in reciprocated, unreciprocated, and inhibited ways.

Reciprocated use. Interdependent relationships yielded the most balanced use of *feel*. As a result, these relationships allowed for the free use of the word. Participants shared opportunities to inquire and disclose as well as a willingness to confess, be intimate, and seek emotional assistance. The relationship that most epitomized this freedom was friendship. Participants described using the word *feel* openly with friends.

With friends? Without any hesitation. It will just be very spontaneous. I won't censor my thoughts. It just comes out and this is how I'm feeling and I know that it'll be accepted.
(Brenda)

This portrayal showed a lack of any conscious management or suppression. In the literature, friendship has been described as one of the most important social relationships for achieving well-being (Niven, Holman, & Tottendell, 2012). However, even amidst friends, some discretion was still reported. A cluster of friends can still exhibit variations in closeness, explaining the need to manage the word. For instance, while friendship in general was a secure relationship for the word *feel*, several participants cited their least inhibited use with their “best” friend. Christine represented this difference as follows:

There's a best friend and you have other friends. Your best friend is more the person you tell everything to – stuff you wouldn't tell your family, things you wouldn't tell your other friends. That one person is a special relationship. You'll talk about everything; who you like, your relationships, your family and how it all makes you feel. You can actually talk to each other without worrying what they think. They won't judge you and stuff. It's definitely much easier to use the word *feel* with them.

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Christine shared that self-disclosure, and the use of the word *feel*, can make a person vulnerable to undesired judgement, a concern held by several participants. Friendship can be enjoyed for its equality but social intimacy is also present in close friendships, particularly in “best” friendship. As a result, friendships are less vulnerable to the risks taken by the use of the word *feel* compared to other relationships.

In general, reciprocating relationships were largely depicted as non-judgemental, more intimate, and trustworthy. “I sense that I probably haven't or don't use it with someone I'm not close to or don't trust”, Nadia said. “Someone I trust wouldn't judge me”, she concluded. In relation, Warner and Shields (2009) described that the emotions of others are often judged by people for their appropriateness. Participant attitudes showed that they were wary of such judgement and managed their use of the word *feel* accordingly.

Unreciprocated use. Outside of friendship, attitudes toward the use of the word *feel* were more heterogeneous. There were instances of use in all other situations but it appeared that other factors mediated its perceived management. Most accounts were associated with the vulnerable subject position that participants took on whereby they used *feel* for the acquisition of social support.

For example, the use of the word *feel* with parents was presented most often as an act of disclosure as a way to obtain emotional support. Nonetheless, instances of its use in inquiry were shared by two participants. In Juliette's case, she described her mother as being friend-like, a person with which she used the word freely:

My mom doesn't care that my boss is thinking about his goals and outcomes or how much money I made for somebody else. She just wants to make sure I'm happy and healthy and all those things. There's no way to quantify that other than using your

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feelings. In (my second language), "How are you?" is translated pretty much as "How are you feeling?"

However, Olivia shared otherwise. Her tenuous relationship with her parents, particularly as a youth, meant that the word *feel* should not be used with her parents. For her, this relationship had been historically unsupportive and emotionally uneasy:

O: I'd probably use other words but I don't think we'd use the word *feel*. "How are you feeling?" is a bit of a dangerous topic so... yeah.

K: What do you mean by dangerous?

O: Like I briefly described to you, home life was not exactly stable. So... I think it is not something I tend to bring up with my family. Generally, if you share, then that gives the other person permission to share. So the word is something I tended to avoid.

Her account showed how important social support is for using the word *feel*. A lack of it for Olivia meant that avoiding *feel* was a sensible strategy, partly because she wanted to avoid a reciprocal response where she would be expected to listen to her family's emotional disclosures or assume an emotionally vulnerable position in her relationship with them. Research on reciprocation indicates that it is a common aspect of social exchanges and can be described as an element of healthy social relationships but suppression, in certain circumstances, can also be a healthy coping strategy (see Greene et al., 2006). In Olivia's case, she participated in professional counselling presumably to receive the positive effects that sharing feelings in a stable and safe emotionally environment can elicit. Alternatively, healthy social networks, like a collection of good friends, would offer other options for self-disclosure. Olivia's suppressive approach was necessary for her to avoid potentially tense or hurtful conversations with her family.

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Mixed reciprocation. There was variation across the attitudes towards the word *feel*. This category identifies the relationships that may include reciprocation for some but not others. For example, mixed beliefs about *feel* were identified across participants when discussing sibling relationships. This heterogeneity is partly explainable by variations in closeness. Nadia, in particular, cited closeness as a factor in her discretion with her siblings:

I feel closer to my sibling so I would probably use it more often and in a more spontaneous and honest way. With my parents, I would be more careful using the actual word.

This provided some support for the effect of dependence on the word *feel*. Nadia shared that her use of the word was freer with her sibling, an interdependent relationship, noting that she, too, showed a lack of interest in disclosing with her parents. Previously, Olivia's unstable relationship with her parents seemed to create emotional distance, making her believe that her *feel* usage was emotionally risky. As a whole, even in stable, supportive parental relationships, reciprocation of inquiry was rarely described. This dependent relationship creates two different set of rules for the word *feel*. Interestingly, Fairclough (1995) recognized that how people use language is strongly determined by their family relationships implying that how *feel* is managed during upbringing may be perpetuated in adulthood. However, in Olivia's case, a lack of trust is likely the most significant contributing factor to her avoidance with her parents. Given her acknowledgement that self-disclosure is often reciprocated with them, her disinterest or even lack of care towards the feelings of her parents may also be a motive.

Inhibited use. Many instances of *feel* avoidance were presented by participants and these accounts constituted a theme of inhibited use. For example, the greatest hesitation occurred in its use with strangers. Theresa explicated one reason for this:

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I think *feel* is more intimate. So I don't think I would feel the need to use the word *feel* in a context with a stranger (...) I don't think you get into those in depth situations or conversations with them. (Theresa)

Furthermore, in Nadia's accounts of her use of *feel* with her family, she noted how she internalized a lot of angst towards some of her family and, like Olivia, cited that the word *feel* was "dangerous". This discontent, when combined with emotional strain, emerged in her memory of a significant rupture of her suppression:

My father and I would never use it. I've never used it. I honestly think the first time I used it a couple of months ago when there was a huge blow out and I had an adult reaction to it where I didn't go crying off. I said, "You really made me feel like shit, you know?" That was probably the first time I said "This is how you made me feel".

In this confrontation, the feelings that Nadia was suppressing appeared to have reached a critical mass. As a result, her inhibited emotions eventually overflowed to a point that she could not help but use the word *feel* to relieve this strain and assume the vulnerable position she sought to avoid. In order to feel better she had to confess these feelings even if it was within a relationship with a history of poor emotional support. This release appeared to be an honest and authentic display and shows similarities with Stiles' fever model of disclosure (1987; 1995). This model postulates that the likeliness of emotional disclosure increases as psychological distress increases. For Nadia, the accumulation of tension led to a rupture in the rule that the word *feel* is reserved for someone you trust.

Meanwhile, those participants who described the greatest amount of freedom in using the word *feel* in certain relationships established more self-sufficient positions. Parents, for example, controlled how and when the word *feel* was used and were themselves uninhibited in using *feel*

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as an act of inquiry. Nadia and Olivia aside, participants willingly accepted the vulnerable position that *feel* presented in these supportive relationships because it was safe and trustworthy to do so.

However, one noteworthy instance materialized which showed how relationships are dynamic and can change over time. This, in turn, can also impact levels of dependence. For example, in his relationship with his father, Jerry, noted that he did not use the word *feel* growing up but as time passed things changed:

Growing up when I was younger, there's wasn't as much in common between us (...)

Now my dad is retired, I've grown up and we have more things in common. I think it's a common thing. A coming of age thing. Yeah, we're really good friends now. I consider him a really good friend of mine. Yeah, it is definitely used more now. (Jerry)

Jerry described an emergent willingness to express himself using the word *feel*, perhaps due to a change in dependence. His relationship with his father appear to have developed into a friendship and signified a move toward independence and something more socially equal. In turn, this account may also showing how emotional support can develop over time.

While Jerry's inhibition eased as he grew older, an interesting outlying account of the use of the word *feel* was shared by another participant. As mentioned, most participants demonstrated strong hesitation with strangers. The obvious analysis of the use of *feel* with strangers is that, given its emotional and personal connotation, a person should not divulge this information to someone they do not know well or trust. That is, *feel* belongs in closer personal relationships. Intimacy, as Theresa identified earlier, was associated with the word *feel* by several participants. Her account showed that sharing using the word *feel* can be construed as an

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act of intimacy and trust. However, a relationship with a stranger is less defined. It is more difficult to identify with someone unknown.

These unknowns appeared to cause participants to exercise caution with the word *feel*, mitigating any risk from the vulnerability it can elicit. Greene et al. (2006) explained that people will typically choose non-disclosure due to fear of rejection or loss of privacy. For example, people may choose not to disclose if they feel the other party will not be helpful. Others have noted that disclosure can begin a process of establishing closeness and intimacy (Derlega et al., 2008). In seeking intimacy, the risk of non-responsiveness or, in places, social rejection was noted by participants. This makes Nancy's outlying account, below, quite intriguing.

Sometimes I find it easier to use with strangers. I've noticed a pattern in my relationships where I can get closed. It is the opposite of some people who take their time to get to know someone and then you feel more comfortable. I am kind of the opposite and I am aware of it. The closer I get, the more guarded I get. I think it stems from some family relationships that have been difficult. (Nancy)

Intimacy has been shown to be an important component of healthy social relationships (Manne et al., 2004; Reis, 2001). Given Nancy's descriptions of her relationships with the close people in her life (i.e., family, friends, partners), her account was understandable. She reported that she suffered pain in her past intimate relationships. This may be what prompted her to act outside of the rules, introducing *feel* in relationships where it was not normally used. Perhaps this was an effort to find intimacy in a manner that she could easily abort without much emotional risk. The social cost of emotionally self-disclosing with a stranger is minimal if it is not reciprocated or it is more forcefully rejected (Shaffer & Tomarelli, 1989). Using *feel* in this way may give feelings of greater control over the word in addition to the opportunity to experience intimacy with less

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risk. Nancy's opportunities to disclose were reported as so few that she sought emotional self-disclosure in this way to feel socially supported.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning attributed to the word *feel* and how people make sense of its use across common social relationships. Overall, participants framed their accounts of the word *feel* within a discourse of emotional disclosure. The social function of the word *feel* was, in its basic form, to declare inner experiences, inquire about these experiences in others, or respond to these inquiries. In analyzing its role in a variety of social relationships, the word *feel* emerged as transactional, portraying a device that could be wielded to achieve certain outcomes such as to achieve intimacy, cathartic relief, and emotional comfort or to obtain solutions to problems.

This study also found that participants followed the general rule that the use of the word *feel* is for intimate and personal relationships. However, participant's accounts of their use of the word *feel* were not homogenous as evidenced by Nancy and Olivia as they resisted this rule by reproducing counter discourses with alternative truths. This heterogeneity was a welcomed product of a methodology that explored a variety of relationships rather than focusing on just one.

Interestingly, these alternative discourses produced subject positions related to emotional disclosure that were non-intimate or impersonal in nature (e.g., with a stranger, with a counsellor). Nancy and Olivia's perspectives represented ruptures in the discourse of emotional disclosure that presumes the pre-existence of intimacy or a personal connection. It is possible that ruptures could result from inadequate opportunities to obtain emotional support in close relationships elsewhere in their social network. These cases lead them to use *feel* outside of its

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normal rules for use and to seek support in more formal relationships such as with a counsellor since they were not close with some of their family.

The literature on emotional self-disclosure pays little attention to the choices individuals make in the type of verbal mechanisms used to reveal feelings. This study shows that how people manage *how* they verbally self-disclose personal feelings can reveal certain qualities of the dyadic relationship in which it takes place. That is, inferences can be made about positions of interdependence, vulnerability, and the presence of trust and intimacy between two people. In addition, the word *feel* also shows that people may be taking on inherent risks in its use compared to other words such as *think*. They assume these risks ostensibly to obtain support, or a stronger depth of it, that these other mechanisms may not bring.

Goldsmith (2004) defined enacted social support as “what individuals say and do to help one another” (p. 13). These characteristics are reflected in the above portrayals of the word *feel*. Furthermore, recent research has suggested that enacted support be examined more for its functional components than as a general construct (Chen & Feeley, 2012). While this study focused on personal relationships, participants referred to their relationships with professional care-providers as another context for its use. While personal relationships showed that *feel* was an important part of the process of emotional support, it could also be affiliated with processes of effective informational support where advice is deployed through the use of *feel* with patients or clients. Consequently, the word *feel* appears to have special qualities that conveys valuable information which may, 1) induce relief that coincides with disclosing emotions, 2) enhance the intimate connection in a relationship and, 3) assist the supporter in providing more prudent and precise support. These features all have implications for health for the discloser.

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The need to socially share emotions is ubiquitous (Rimé, Corsini, & Herbette, 2002) and this study supported that there can be many opportunities to do so across a social network. When these opportunities are unavailable, they can be sought out in more institutionalized forms. Regardless, the mechanisms for the accrual of social support are valuable for their potential to invoke positive health outcomes. Therefore, the word *feel* merits further investigation in interpersonal communication research and, in particular, its value in high-leverage relationships that offer direct ties to health and well-being such as those with physicians, nurses, or counselors. In this regard, there are several research questions worth exploring further. For example, what types of *feel*-based questions are received as the most or least supportive? What are the effects of an intervention that teaches the deployment of the word *feel* to health-care providers as a support skill? To do so could shed light on this word’s most effective and ineffective uses. These questions would add to the foundation expounded here.

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Chapter 5: Perceptions of the use of the word *feel* in the workplace

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Perceptions of the use of the word *feel* in the workplace

Abstract

This study explored attitudes toward the deployment of the word *feel* in workplace communication. A discourse analysis of this emotionally declarative word across three types of workplace relationships revealed a set of social rules guiding how emotional self-disclosure is managed in this context. Participants outlined how resistance to these rules put social or professional resources at risk but it was deemed necessary in order to maintain or restore equilibrium between well-being and job performance. Although status stratification in the workplace functions to maintain productivity, participants revealed an ongoing tension between performance and authentic emotional expression. The effects of this tension, examined through beliefs about the word *feel*, are discussed for its role in workplace well-being.

Keywords: well-being, workplace, self-disclosure, feel, emotion

Introduction

Professionalism has been described as a value system within which new employees learn the social order of things in the workplace, preserve this order, and stabilize it (Evetts, 2003). Once exposed to this order, an employee's behaviour mostly becomes self-governed, keeping him or her disciplined to a set of social rules (Foucault, Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988). Moreover, professionalism and emotional behavior have a particularly unique relationship whereby "professionalism refers to a blend of expressed and suppressed emotions that still allow a person to be considered "professional" in their workplace role" (Lively, 2000, p. 38) and although the prevailing ideology has been that emotions are irrational and unproductive in workplace environments (Putnam & Mumby, 1993), the workplace is still saturated with emotional experiences. This presents a tension between maintaining a rational-professional role

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and acting emotionally authentic (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Basch & Fisher, 2000; Boudens, 2005).

Recently, emotional discourses, such as the emergence of the concept of emotional intelligence, have gained legitimacy as a positive component of leadership and workplace performance (Hughes, 2005; Kramer & Hess, 2002; Gibson, 2006; Tracy, 2000). However, organizational settings rarely elicit complete authentic expression, but require, instead, different forms of emotional management (Fournier, 1999). Emotional management is not just directed at emotional display but penetrates verbal communication through adjustments in language choices (Cameron, 1995; Coupland, Brown, Daniels, & Humphreys, 2008). A vast amount of research on emotional management in the workplace has concentrated on emotional display with less of the focus set on verbal processes of emotional self-disclosure (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Kramer & Hess, 2002; Trethewey, 1997; Waldron & Krone, 1991). Furthermore, few studies have examined the management of the verbal mechanisms of emotional self-disclosure in these settings. None have analyzed mechanisms of emotional disclosure governing the use of the word *feel*.

As such, the purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of the use of the word *feel* in workplace communication. Since the need to share emotions has been considered ubiquitous and pervasive (Rimé, Corsini, & Herbette, 2002), understanding how these mechanisms of verbal emotional disclosure are perceived may introduce new prospective leverage points for nurturing workplace well-being.

Background

This section reviews emotional disclosure from three perspectives. First, the link between emotional expression and well-being will be considered. Next, the relationship between power,

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context, and the verbal disclosure of emotions will be reviewed. Finally, the role of language in emotional self-disclosure will be established, introducing this study's particular interest in the word *feel* as a focal point for examining emotional communication.

Emotional Expression and the Workplace

In general, the freedom to express private feelings has been shown to have positive effects on health and well-being (Ferrara, 2002; Pennebaker, Zech, & Rime 2001; Sriram, Chaturvedi, Gopinath, & Shanmugam, 1987; Taylor, Bagby & Parker, 1997). However, the workplace has historically supported cognitive over emotional expression even though emotions are still felt in this context (Collins, 1990). As a result, employees may display emotions that are incongruent with how they actually feel. As useful as this emotional labor may be for organizations, the resultant dissonance it creates for employees can have harmful consequences to employee well-being and performance (Dilorio & Nusbaumer, 1993; Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Shields, 2005; Wharton & Erikson, 1993). Burnout, exhaustion, and low job satisfaction have been identified as just a few of the negative outcomes (Côté & Morgan, 2002; Cropanzano, Weiss & Elias, 2003; Grandey, 2008; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989; Zapf, 2002).

Similarly, research on emotional behavior has revealed that emotional suppression, the conscious withholding of inner feelings, can cause a series of harmful effects including decreased enjoyment, decreased stamina, increased anxiety, and even increases in depression (Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Gross, 2002; Gross & Levenson, 1997; Muraven, Tice, & Baumeister, 1998). In certain instances, these negative effects may be experienced in sacrifice for the maintenance of the rational-professional discourse.

The workplace has been of interest for communication researchers partly because its hierarchical social structures set a foundation for emotional experiences by creating subordinated

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roles (Shils, 1970; Tiedens, 2001). However, individuals still draw upon their own discretion for what and how much they emotionally reveal (Ekman, 1993; Erickson & Wharton, 1997; Hochschild, 1983). Foucault (1979) noted that professional discourses mean that people are required to be self-controlled and self-motivated to perform in ways the organization defines as appropriate. As a result, individuals who achieve these targets “will be rewarded with career promotion and progress.” (p. 408). Shields (2005) elaborated that successful workplace interaction can be defined by how an employee navigates these workplace politics, including the codes that dictate who has the freedom to emotionally self-disclose, what a person can be emotional about, and under what circumstances.

In general, professionalism demands a balance of expression and suppression that still allows the maintenance of a person's professional identity amidst their colleagues (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005; Lively, 2000; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989) and even with customers (Hood & Forey, 2008). The workplace requires a form of emotionally communicative competency including the skillful use of self-disclosing language (Cameron, 1995; Coupland et al., 2008). Martin and White (2005) noted how this aptitude is what helps people align themselves with the shared beliefs and values of communities.

Status hierarchies (i.e., lines of authority or supervision) in workplace communities mean that the freedom to be emotionally authentic in the workplace is not experienced by all (Allendar, Colquhoun, & Kelly, 2006; Lee & Jablin, 1995; Sandelands & Boudens, 2000). The tendency for unequal emotional communication is common and is one effect of power in interpersonal communication (Foucault, 1988). There are different rules for emotional acceptability based on status. Subordinates, for example, are expected to suppress anger in the workplace as this emotion is typically reserved for those in higher level status positions (Pearson, Anderson, &

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Porath, 2000). Kramer and Hess's (2002) survey research revealed several discursive rules for sharing emotions in workplace including that, 1) emotions are to be expressed professionally, 2) emotions are expressed to improve situations, 3) emotions are expressed only to the right people, 4) emotions are allowed to help individuals, and, 5) emotions are not to be managed to the detriment of others. Rules such as these catalyze a host of self-management techniques (Eckman, 1972).

Since employees are subjects of multiple discourses in their lives (i.e. father, friend, or professional) following the rules of one discourse may consciously or unconsciously produce resistance to the rules of another. In all accounts, individuals can, potentially but not necessarily, be produced as self-aware, emotional subjects in competing discourses that carry contradicting rules which ultimately generate psychological tension. Language is at the heart of this tension.

The Language of Emotional Disclosure

According to Pennebaker, Mehl, and Niederhoffer (2003), emotionally expressive cues begin with words. Moreover, Lupton (1994) described that, "language does not exist in a social vacuum but is embedded in social and political settings and used for certain purposes" (pp. 17-18). Bolton (2000) also proclaimed that "language is a type of social performance led by rules which match what someone feels with the situation they are in. Language is a vehicle for criss-crossing the often invisible boundaries between the public and private worlds" (p.160-161).

Since language is the symbolic representation of thoughts, beliefs, and feelings, it has a vital role in emotional self-disclosure and the production of discourse. Yet, past research has tended to focus on the general act of emotional disclosure or its attached emotional content (i.e., sadness, happiness, or anger) and less on its linguistic mechanics.

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The choice of language use in self-disclosure can reveal a lot about the nature of subjectivity and the effects of power in the workplace. For instance, in an examination of written communication in the workplace (e.g., memos, reports), Forey (2009) outlined that verbal projections act to define the speaker in certain ways, including their workplace position relative to their intended audience and, in places, the degree to which they assume responsibility over what they are writing. For example, the grammatical choice of *it is believed that* softens responsibility over the message that follows more than *I believe that*. The former creates a distance between what is said and the writer while the latter is more personally disclosing. Forey (2009) suggested that these choices are not made randomly in the workplace but consciously to a certain degree.

These types of linguistic components of self-disclosure are valuable for understanding the connection between certain social practices and health processes or outcomes (Viswanath, 2008) and how people align themselves within discourse to achieve a sense of belongingness or social acceptance through their language choices (Martin, 2004; Martin & White, 2005). While several studies or reviews have discussed the relationship between emotion and language (Barrett, Linquist, & Gendron, 2007; Coupland et al., 2008; Majid, 2012) no studies have made *feel* its primary focus of analysis as a mechanism for self-disclosure. The word *feel*, according to Fiehler (2002), is a thematic expression, described as a word that designates events or experiences. More specifically, experiential declarative expressions, “define what occurs in their scope as experience or emotion” (p. 88). An authentic declarative expression, therefore, casts light into private, inner experiences. In certain forms (e.g., *I feel*) the word *feel* represents a disclosing speech act with closer association to inner emotional experiences than other more cognitively symbolic representatives like the words *think* or *believe* (Fiehler, 2002; Mayer & Tormala,

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2010). In fact, Mayer and Tormala (2010) determined that *feel* and *think* leave distinctly different impressions on the listener. Due to its emotional connotation, it is presumed that *feel* does not align itself with the rational-professional discourse.

Research Aims

Foucault (1972) emphasized that verbal statements have a role beyond linguistic analysis including the ability to expose effects of power by enabling, “rules or forms to become manifest” (p. 99). This study aimed to explore the discursive rules for the word *feel* by examining employee perceptions of its management in workplace relationships of differing status. This analysis sought to answer three specific questions. First, how do participants make sense of the word *feel*? Secondly, how do people perceive to use the word *feel* in their workplace relationships? Finally, what does their perceived management of the word *feel* reveal about relationship between productivity, well-being, and professionalism? By examining these questions, an analysis of the effects of power on emotional self-disclosure in this common setting is made possible (Willig, 2004).

Method

Design

Qualitative methods are typically well-suited for exploratory social research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Stebbins, 2001). Meanwhile, discourse analysis attends to language in order to identify effects of power on social life (Fairclough, 2001; Willig, 2004).

Participant Characteristics

Fifteen participants were interviewed for this study (see Table 1). All participants were Caucasian, 9 of the 15 were female, ranging in age from 19-76 with an average age of 36.0 years.

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Table 1. Participant characteristics

Participant	Age/Gender	Profession	Relationship Status
<i>Juliette</i>	25/F	Nursing Student	Unmarried, dating
<i>Theresa</i>	32/F	Civil Servant	Unmarried, dating
<i>Jerry</i>	31/M	Civil Servant	Married with children
<i>Paul</i>	46/M	Ecologist	Divorced with children
<i>Ben</i>	47/M	Call Center Operator	Married with children
<i>Cindy</i>	29/F	Pharmacist	Married with children
<i>Nancy</i>	33/F	Mental Health Worker	Unmarried
<i>Jennifer</i>	26/F	Civil Servant	Unmarried
<i>Jake</i>	29/M	Military Officer	Unmarried, dating
<i>Olivia</i>	33/F	Engineer	Married
<i>Brenda</i>	40/F	Office Manager	Married with children
<i>Nadia</i>	31/F	Office Administration	Unmarried
<i>Charles</i>	43/M	Program Manager	Married with children
<i>Christine</i>	19/F	Education Student	Unmarried
<i>Alexander</i>	76/M	Retired - Military	Widow with children and grandchildren

Sampling, Procedure, and Materials

Participants responded to an advertisement describing a study on *feel* at a campus health services centre. Those who showed interest were invited to contact the researcher via telephone or email. Upon doing so, an interview was scheduled to take place on the university campus

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where an opportunity was given to review the information about the study. Audio-recorded interviews commenced after participants signed an informed consent form. Materials for data collection included an interview guide (Table 2), information sheet, and informed consent form. These materials were approved in advance by the University Ethics Review Board.

The Interview

Interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes each and, in part, focused on the meanings participants associated with the word *feel* and how they used this word across three common hierarchal relationships in the workplace including with superiors, subordinates, and with colleagues. Each interview began with a projective exercise whereby participants were asked to share the first mental image they associated with the word *feel* and, afterward, to explain their responses. Projective questions such as these are designed to evoke constructions of meaning and eliminate researcher assumption (Soley & Smith, 2008). Questions from the interview guide were supplemented by probing questions that were used to clarify responses, request further information, or invoke elaboration (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Table 2. Interview guide

Part One	Part Two	Part Three	Part Four
Q1. What images, if any, come to mind when you think of the word <i>feel</i> ?	Q2. How, if at all, do you use the word <i>feel</i> in your daily life?	Q3. How, if at all, do you use the word <i>feel</i> with: - Superiors - Subordinates - Colleagues	Q4. What other thoughts would you like to add about your use of the word <i>feel</i> ?

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Post-Interview

Study debriefs were sent via email to each participant along with a transcription of their interview. An invitation was made to make changes to the transcripts prior to analysis. No changes were requested.

Analysis

Overview of Discourse Analysis

Since an analysis of language allows for the interpretation of social life (van Dijk, 2001), discourse analysis was selected for this study. Discourse analysis was used to identify clusters of themes, ideas, and images shared by participants that acted to unveil the rules that governed their perceived use of the word *feel* operating below their conscious awareness (Fairclough, 2001; Lupton, 1992; Potter & Weatherell, 1987). Discourse analysis also considers power in its explanation of discursive practices of subjects (Fairclough, 2001). As a result, analyses concentrated on (a) the social and discursive functions of the word *feel* in the workplace, (b) the rules systems regarding the “appropriate” use of the word *feel* in the workplace and, (c) how these rules were resisted (Harré, 1986).

Data Organization

Analysis of each transcript started with a thorough reading of the interview text and identifying statements pertaining to the eight targeted relationships. The analytical steps included preparing the transcripts, creating meaning units from the data and tagging them, creating data categories, and categorizing the meaning units under relationships (Côté, Salmela, Baria, Russell, & Storm, 1993). Themes were subsequently identified within and across participant beliefs about the use of the word *feel* in their relationships. Like themes were then grouped together while alternative cases were also recognized and evaluated for their relevance including their role in

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framing resistance to the discursive rules for the word *feel* (Willig, 2004; Wood & Kroger, 2000).

Findings

This section presents the findings from the interviews on the topic of the word *feel*. It includes how participants constructed the meaning of the word *feel*, their perceived use of the word *feel* across common workplace relationships, and how participants linked the use of the word *feel* to well-being in the workplace. In preparation, one participant, Brenda, summarized the broadest rule for the use of *feel* in the workplace setting:

I wouldn't use it (at work). Maybe it is just my level of understanding of the system and how it works. At this point I feel I have to be ultimately professional and not use it. Let's just think about action items that are going to get us where we have to go. You try to depersonalize the process. Brenda's description introduced several themes present in many other accounts by other participants. This included how others constructed its meaning in this context.

Constructions of the Word Feel

Several constructions of the word *feel* emerged from the data set. These constructions contributed to the identification of the social rules for its use in the workplace.

The word feel does not belong in the workplace. Unanimously, each participant's initial responses about using the word *feel* in the workplace reflected hesitation and caution. In subsequent consideration, specific conditions for its use emerged. For example, Theresa, a civil servant, said *feel* belonged only in her private life, identifying the difference in rules between these two contexts:

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At home, you're going to have intimacy right? There are certain rules at work. At home you don't have them. You can voice things differently at home where you couldn't at work in terms of how you feel. You're not going to go down that road at work.

Although Theresa alluded to an absence of rules at home, the rules governing the use of 'feel' in this personal milieu are simply different. Consistent with the work of Foucault (1979), her perspective was prevalent among other participants as they spoke about self-managing their emotional behavior at work. For example, Charles introduced the relationship between context and professional risk:

For people to freely express how they feel about something, be it personal or professional, it has to be a little like how we find ourselves right now. This (setting) is more personal.

There aren't any other people around that might pose a threat. There aren't any competitors anywhere. In a work environment, at the end of the day, you're looking to progress within the organization (...) the people around the table, colleagues and friends, are also potential competitors.

Foucault et al. (1988) stressed that people who behave appropriately and according to certain codes get rewarded with progress in professional settings. Charles expressed the idea that his feel-based language influences his success at work. These two excerpts described two chief perceptions. First, the word *feel* is unprofessional and, second, the use of the word *feel* is intimate and personal. Interestingly, as reflection continued, hesitation emerged as participants recalled exceptions to these perspectives.

The word feel is unprofessional because feel is seen as personal. Kramer and Hess (2002) found that professionalism, beyond job competence, was defined as keeping one's private life separated from the workplace and leaving emotions out of interactions with colleagues. In the

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opening quote to this section, Brenda, an office manager, captured this sentiment as she attempted to keep the workplace impersonal and unemotional even in the way she manages the word *feel*. She referred to a standard of behavior that kept the use of the word out of the workplace. Most participants cited the use of the word *feel* as being an intimate form of interpersonal communication. "Personal", in these cases, referred to inner feelings typically reserved for close relationships and private times or places. The word *feel* appeared to put the professional discourse in competition with the private where feelings are more openly communicated.

As a result, Nadia, an office administrator, rejected the word *feel* in the workplace. She referred to the word *feel* as being too "emotional", a quality that does not fit professional settings:

The word *feel* doesn't jive with the professional context. It brings in an emotional factor and it makes me feel like I'm not being professional. So somebody that I don't feel open enough to share how I'm feeling I probably wouldn't use the word *feel*. I would say... I don't know what I'd say. I sense that I probably haven't or don't use it with someone I'm not close to or don't trust.

Similarly, Nancy, a mental health worker, also felt that discretion in the use of the word *feel* was imperative in her job. However, citing the demands of the professional discourse, she illustrated a desire for having freer use of the word *feel* in the workplace.

I have been brought up that you don't show things like that in the work environment. You have to be professional and capable. You don't give people anything else. For me it is a balance. Part of me wants to go the other way though. It is a conflict.

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Nancy referred to a struggle between her upbringing, the demands of the workplace, and the need to authentically express herself. Her thoughts revealed that the use of the word *feel* could threaten perceptions of her ability to perform at her job but, at the same time, its use demands that she make concessions. Several participants shared the sentiment that they felt they could be judged poorly for using *feel* at work. Nancy felt required to manage her *feel*-based language in a way that may compromise her true self in order to avoid judgments. This account represents the type of dissonance that can have implications for health and wellness (Erikson & Wharton, 1997; Shields, 2005; Wharton & Erikson, 1993).

The word feel is emotional. The hesitation with which each participant shared in using the word *feel* in the workplace was tied to the emotional connotation of the word. Nadia, along with eleven others, identified a link between emotions and *feel*:

I guess the images I would have of the word *feel* would be of extreme feelings of either extreme sadness or extreme joy in a certain moment, of me feeling those things. That probably would be the image that comes to mind for that word.

The prevalence of this connection suggests that the rational discourse is dominant. Participants typically revealed a need to be cautious in their use of *feel*. Some identified that using the word could pose a social or professional risk to their reputation in the workplace. Nadia, in response, represented this sentiment as follows:

I don't want to be viewed as someone who is overly emotional but someone who has a grasp on things. I am not inclined to use the word *feel* at work (...) It would probably be viewed as a weakness like I'm not tough skinned or can't handle stress or conflicts.

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Nadia's concern about her professional image was shared by four others. To address this concern, Jerry, for example managed *feel* by strategically replacing it with *think*. He believed that this helped him escape judgement:

When it is something I'm not too confident in, when it is something I feel I need to project more intelligently or more respectfully, I will use *think*. Where I work now, they don't care what you feel. They want to know what you think and the thought behind it. "*I feel*" is a tentative, less confident way.

The replacement of the word *feel* with *think* represented a more conscious or strategic attempt to align themselves with the professional discourse. Although it may be difficult to conclude that those who did not behave reflexively in this way are docile (i.e., unconsciously disciplined) (Foucault, 1988), it is fair to say that some participants never considered their use of the word *feel* in the workplace prior to these interviews. The reasoning behind Jerry's adjustment suggests that *think* is an effect of power. In all, replacing *feel* with *think* seemed to be a way to skirt negative judgement, like being too personal or weak, which could threaten their professional advancement. This type of language choice might be an attempt to cloak an actual feeling as opposed to reveal a thought as a way to impersonalize the disclosure.

Feel as a point of emphasis. As reflection continued, contradictory examples of the word *feel* actually being used accumulated. Despite describing its stigmas, participants shared instances where they would consciously use the word *feel* to emphasize certain messages in certain situations. In these occasions, *feel* served as a sincere declaration. Jennifer and Theresa represented these perspectives respectively:

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I may use it when I’m in a meeting and I have a point of view. When it’s your turn to talk at the table and you want to express something important you normally start off by saying “*I feel*” this way. That’s how I’d use it at work. (Theresa)

I would use it in terms of something I meant sincerely like “I feel that we should take this course of action” under a certain scenario. If I felt very strongly about it or it was part of something I thought was really important, I would use it. (Jennifer)

For some participants, the word *feel* commanded special attention, conveying an increase in the importance of their message as if it was symbolic of honesty. As a result, the expectation was to be taken seriously. Provided how several participants alluded to the word *feel* being risky, it was not surprising that *feel* was given an emotional meaning.

The above shows that the general rule for the workplace was that the word *feel* was inappropriate. The tendency to honour this rule was exemplified, on one side, through replacing *feel* with *think*. However, further reflection revealed that the majority of participants contradicted themselves by reporting its use for making important points. Foucault (1982) identified that discourses are in regular competition with one another so it could be expected that participants would identify moments where they remembered using it even though they believed it was unwelcome. As additional analyses explain, competing discourses make managing the word *feel* more complex than participants initially considered.

Using the Word Feel Across Workplace Relationships

Each participant was asked to describe how they perceived the role that the word *feel* had in their communication with their colleagues, subordinates, and superiors. Their accounts illustrated that the workplace setting was not a monolithic site, but a more complex environment

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that contained both professional relationships and more personal ones that influenced perceived self-disclosing language choices.

Feel with superiors. Each participant had at least one person at work to whom they were professionally accountable. Their bosses were people who had the ability to terminate their employment, to delegate work, and offer judgements pertaining to job performance. The strongest hesitation toward the use of the word *feel* came in these relationships. Nancy suggested the word *feel* had no place in communication with her supervisor:

My boss is a pretty busy person so I am not going to use it with her. Sometimes I have wondered if that was harming me or I wonder if I should just take the chance and see what happens and have enough trust.

Interestingly, Nancy perceived that there could be benefits to successfully introducing it into her relationship with her supervisor. Trust had been a key factor in her hesitation. As the norm, self-disclosing using the word *feel* with superiors was perceived as best avoided.

Meanwhile, Juliette, a civil servant, noted that she had used the word previously with her boss in her performance review. Even when breaking the *feel* rules, she reinforced that it is reserved for exceptional circumstances:

The word would have to refer to what I've accomplished or how I feel my progress is going. It would be in reference to goals and my relationship with people. You don't say to your boss I feel frustrated with you because you don't pay attention or you don't care.

Juliette was not alone. Nadia also shared her resistance, revealing that it came as a result of competing discourses:

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Well, with my boss, I feel like I have a friendship with her. So it is kind of different. I would use it... I trust that because I am telling her how I'm feeling that it won't skew her professional perception of me.

Competing discourses place people in positions to make choices on how to manage their behavior (Foucault, 1982, 1988). The above examples support how the more personal role of being a friend and the role of being professional can oppose one another. Several others portrayed a freer use of the word *feel* with colleagues whom they consider friends. Trust and friendship may negate the professional imperative.

Although *feel* was considered unwelcomed, it lost its stigma if it was used in reference to job performance or productivity with a superior. Ben highlighted how the word would be used during his performance reviews with his superior:

With your boss, I think the word *feel* could be used in a professional context. If you are going through your yearly evaluation you could use the word *feel* or "*I felt like*". But I am not sure I would feel okay to use it in everyday exchanges with a superior.

Disclosing feelings with the boss was frowned upon yet almost expected when it pertained to discussion of one's work performance. While participants reported that they would not voluntarily use the word, they showed instances where it emerged because a supervisor wanted more information. In the workplace, there is an expectation that private, emotional information is available to those in higher status positions.

Feel with subordinates. In total, five participants held supervisory roles. When workplace roles were reversed, participants shared differing attitudes towards the use of the word *feel*. As Jake described, the word *feel* was approached much differently by those with decision-making authority over others:

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Actually, I ask my subordinates a lot about how they feel. Generally, if they're feeling good, they're going to produce a lot more. So I generally want them feeling good. I want to send them in a direction where they're feeling good. So I often ask them how they're feeling.

Those in supervisory status positions appeared to convey an attitude of entitlement in accessing the feelings of subordinates because of the connectivity of emotions and performance. While subordinates felt unable to inquire using the word feel, supervisors conveyed less constraint over its use in this way. However, supervisors noted that they would not disclose to someone of lower status unless the relationship was more personal in nature. Nancy outlined that she will introduce it with a co-worker if they choose a harmless context outside of the workplace:

If it is a side time from work and talking to someone on a more personal level, I would. I probably would do it with someone I am comfortable with or who I trust or who trusts me and it is reciprocated. It would only come up with someone with whom I had a rapport like with a friend or if a staff member comes to me with problems. Sometimes, people feel comfortable coming to talk to me so that word might come up in those circumstances but not in a professional setting.

Nancy's comments were indicative of Foucault's panoptic effect (1979). As if being monitored, Nancy feels the need to assess or change the environment to circumvent the rules. Foucault (1979) elaborated that when power is internalized, subjects can behave in ways to avoid this gaze. He wrote that subjects, "inscribe in (themselves) the power relation in which they simultaneously play both roles, they becomes the principle of their own subjection" (p. 203). Nancy's behavior reinforced what other research has stated about the role of special workplace zones or places in the workplace that allow for emotional authenticity (Fineman, 1993).

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Furthermore, the use of the word *feel* as an act of support or care, like Nancy, or an act of productivity management, like Jake¹⁷, shows how discourses can compete against one another in this context. In Nancy’s case, she took up a caring subject position through her use of the word *feel*. In this way, she alluded to using *feel* for emotionally supporting a colleague at work. Meanwhile, Jake’s use of the word *feel* showed his discipline to the professional workplace discourse by using it for managing the capacities of his staff. This shows that the word *feel* may be a part of an alternative social support discourse to the dominant professional discourse which forbids its use in this setting.

Overall, those with higher status (i.e. superiors) appeared as the freest to use the word *feel* and prompt it from their subordinates. They had the most control over when, how, and with whom it was used. Foucault (1982) asserted that power is productive. It could be argued that in private or personal settings the word *feel* is construed as an act of care for a friend, for example, but, in the workplace, the dynamics of power supported the use of word *feel* as a way to monitor and enhance productivity. This supports how employers have incorporated workplace wellness initiatives into workplace culture. If how an employee feels contributes to their performance, it is understandable that corporate wellness programs invest in protecting or strengthening this link. However, these participants were more interested in using *feel* as a technique of productivity rather than a device for assessing or supporting well-being. Employers appear willing to use many methods to this end (DeVries III, 2010).

In general, this word appeared as a type of tool or communication competency that allowed those supervising participants to monitor an employee’s process of performance.

¹⁷ Brenda, another manager, also noted a similar use of the word *feel* as a strategy to improve performance of her employees.

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Interestingly, the five supervisors interviewed explained that they must self-manage their declarations in the face of their *own* supervisors.

Feel with colleagues. Conversations with colleagues yielded a mixture of sentiments about the use of the word *feel*. Participants described their relationships with some workplace colleagues as merely professional while others relationships were more personal. For example, Jennifer expressed her desire to maintain a professional appearance at work:

I don't have a lot of personal attachment to my job. I suppose that if I felt like something was really against what I wanted to do I would say that I felt very strongly about it. But I think I would probably exercise a different word to communicate what I was trying to say because the nature of my work isn't particularly personal.

Jennifer's description also identified that she may use the word under the appropriate circumstance but, like Jerry and Paul presented earlier, she preferred to strategically avoid it, even consciously choosing to use different words. By contrast, Ben valued his personal connections with colleagues in the workplace:

I would use it differently with someone who I have a personal working relationship and who is at the same level with me at work. I am more inclined to share the details of my personal life with someone who I work closely with. That is my style of working with people. I probably tell them more than they want to know!

In interviews with paralegals and legal assistants, Lively (2000) found that those who share similar roles at work tend to participate in similar emotional management with each other. However, social stratification is often maintained by lower status individuals who serve the emotional needs of their superiors (Hochschild, 1983; Pierce, 1995). For Ben, status equality meant less risk in sharing how he felt. Although these relationships are still at risk for negative

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social or professional judgement by others, the discretion applied appeared lessened. A colleague was deemed less threatening to the professional capital of an individual than a superior. That is, acting unprofessionally through the word *feel* has fewer consequences with those who do not hold the ability to affect employment. This reinforces the observation made by Forey (2009) that the linguistic devices used in the workplace can be impacted by the relative positions of the individuals in communication.

The Word Feel and Well-Being at Work

Resistance is not unusual in the workplace since discourses and identities are often in competition with one another (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006; Trethewey, 1997). Well-being played a catalyzing role in the resistance of the *feel* rules. Suppressing emotions had a limit. Eleven of the fifteen participants referenced an example of using *feel* with a co-worker with a superior when they had reached a form of psychological distress. Being at this “wits-end” yielded a disregard of any workplace rules related to the word *feel*. This rupture was characterized by using the word *feel* openly and honestly to describe challenges or obstacles that have been, by their observation, causing problems. Most importantly, factors such as status, productivity, trust, or context became irrelevant, indicative of a break from the professional discourse they had described.

Nadia, in one example, disclosed how she used *feel* as a point of emphasis to help resolve a negative issue with colleagues in a group meeting:

I probably would use it to express some sort of anxiety. It’s probably more likely in a negative way. Like if co-workers are venting and I’ll say, “I feel as though the team is not supporting each other.”

Ben shared a similar perspective:

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I've used it by saying to my superior "I feel you aren't giving me a fair shake" with getting extra duties I received.

Ben and Nadia's descriptions were representative of openness to the word *feel* when employees were not feeling how they wanted to be feeling. It was reported as being used in groups, one-on-one, with colleagues, and superiors. *Feel* crossed the boundaries of competing discourses.

Christine expressed that the only instance she could ever recall using the word *feel* at work was in an emotionally poignant moment:

I worked at a diner, the owners were foreign. The way they treat their workers there is different from here. The way they were, everything had to be quick and done. One time they made me cry because they were harsh about it. I was really under stress. I never talked to them that much because they weren't that pleasant. That's the only time I've used the word *feel*.

If a worker felt their well-being was compromised or they had approached their wits end, the word *feel* became a communication option that transcended status. Participants perceived that when they became too frustrated, stressed, or anxious, a resolution to the tension could be voluntarily sought by self-disclosing through the word *feel*. The risks inherent to the use of the word *feel* were ignored. This observation resembled the Fever Model of self-disclosure which purports that disclosure tends to increase as does psychological distress (Balmforth & Elliott, 2012). Disclosure, in this way, serves to relieve tension or stress. In addition, this pattern offers support to Kramer and Hess' (2002) finding that emotional expression is more acceptable when its purpose is to remedy a situation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore how people make sense of the word *feel* in workplace communication. The perceived deployment of the word *feel* by this study's participants appeared contingent on their organizational position in relation to the listener. The cautious attitude toward the use of the word *feel* was symbolic of a desire to maintain a professional identity through suppressing verbal self-disclosure in this context.

In reference to the research questions of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn from the findings. First, participants constructed the word *feel* as a personal and unprofessional emotionally disclosing act. Secondly, participants perceived their use of the word *feel* as potentially risky, influenced by their relative status with co-workers and by trust. In attempts to fulfill occupational status, participants perceived that they managed the word *feel* carefully in their face-to-face communication, reproducing hierarchies in the process. Finally, the management of the word *feel* was depicted as a product of the tension between productivity and well-being whereby the professional risks of its use were weighed against the suppression of feelings that the word would help communicate. A rupture in the professional discourse emerged as participants shared that they had used the word *feel* under psychological duress. In addition, the presence of trust also allowed for the multi-directional use of the word *feel* (i.e., upward with superiors and downward with subordinates), primarily as a result of the competition between professional and personal discourses. Participants described that trust and friendship strongly buffered the risk assumed in communicating using the word *feel*.

Overall, the workplace is a complex setting that possesses both professional and personal relationships. A specific analysis of the use of word *feel* in this context revealed the tension behind emotional communication that, as a result, can influence productivity and employee well-

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being. A workplace that recognizes the need for safe, equitable opportunities to use *feel*-based disclosure, free from social or professional risk, may symbolize an emotionally healthy workplace. Therefore, further research should consider exploring the actual effects of using the word *feel* in the workplace including a focus on the development, repair, or maintenance of trust and well-being.

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Chapter 6: The construction of gender through attitudes toward the word *feel*

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The construction of gender through attitudes toward the word *feel*

Abstract

Research suggests that gender differences exist in how men and women emotionally express themselves. Some of this research evaluates emotionally expressive language but none have looked specifically at attitudes towards specific emotionally declarative words. Using discourse analysis, this study focused on how participants constructed themselves as emotional subjects through their perceptions of their use of the word *feel* in same-sex and opposite-sex communication. Findings suggest that the word *feel* was used to construct gender identity. In particular, both male and female participants referred to the word *feel* as feminine, weak, and emotional, requiring different management approaches based on the gender of the communication partner. In addition, the management of the word *feel* revealed an attitude of caution on behalf of female participants when using this word with men. This was contrasted by attitudes of free expression with other women. Findings are considered for their role in processes of social support.

Key words: gender, *feel*, relationships, emotion, social support

Introduction

Lackoff (1990) stated that, “gender related differences have a strong psychological component: they are intimately related to the judgments of members of a culture about how to be and think like a good woman or man” (p. 202). These differences can be explainable through variances in cultural values or differences in social power between men and women (Weatherall, 2002).

Gender stereotyping of emotion has been shown to be a factor in the equal treatment of women because male rules for this form of expression have been dominant (Matsumoto, 2009;

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Ridgeway, 2001; Shields, 2002). Ragins and Winkel (2011) presented that the gendering of emotion can influence perceptions, expectations, and attributions about emotion. For example, women are expected to display positive emotions like compassion, warmth, cheerfulness and nurturance while men are expected to show emotions such as confidence, pride, and anger (Conroy, Elliot, & Pincus, 2009; Hess, Adams, & Kleck, 2005; LaFrance, 1998; Ragins & Winkel, 2011). Not only do gender differences exist in how men and women emotionally express themselves but discrepancies in gender-appropriate self-disclosure have also been outlined (Ragins & Winkel, 2011).

These social rules for expressivity are not limited to specific contexts but can be accounted for in many domains. In many instances, women have been shown to be disempowered in environments that typically reward male-stereotyped emotional display (Gibson & Schroeder, 2002). Even when women display “male emotions” like anger, they are likely to be evaluated unfavorably in historically male-dominated contexts (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2008). The gender rules of expressivity indicate that women should display fewer male emotions and more gender appropriate emotions. However, these rules offer a “no win” scenario because expressing stereotypical male emotions as a female or expressing stereotypically female emotions in male dominated settings can both be judged negatively (Ragins & Winkel, 2011).

Although emotions are still experienced similarly across gender they are displayed much differently (Geer & Shields, 1996). For example, anger is the one emotion that women are less likely to display than men (Brody & Hall, 2000). Men may emotionally express less often because they have been socialized to not show feelings other than anger. As a result, there are gender rules which govern emotional expression. Hochschild (1983) and Shields (2005)

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described them as governing which emotions can be displayed by whom, how much they can be displayed, and when.

Lakoff (1990) asserted that women are also socialized into using linguistic features which represent tentativeness, deference and a lack of authority, explainable through observing historical patterns of women occupying powerless social positions. In all, the effect of the gendering of emotion is that men *have* emotions but women *are* emotional (Shields, 2005). This notion has created conditions for women which can cause their emotional behavior to be judged as “out of control” (Shields, 2005, p. 10). Furthermore, Hochschild (1983) purported that the social rules have been constructed and perpetuate mostly by men, reflective of a “state of power and influence” (Ragins & Winkel, 2011, p. 381).

Gender and Emotional Language

One theoretical perspective on gender identity is that gender is something that people do and not a stable trait or quality that people possess (West & Zimmerman, 1987). That is, gender is socially constructed and reproduced. A person can adapt their behavior to align themselves with many social situations and the gender rules therein (Janssen & Murachver, 2004). In this way, Weatherall (2002) outlined that language reflects and perpetuates gender and acts as an important instrument in these productions. She also described that power was once believed to be separate from language but, since, has been understood as inextricably linked. There are rules that govern the use of language and certain word choices in communication that propagate gender identity more than others (Sheridan, 2007).

Tannen (1993, 1996), for instance, framed that women communicate more to establish intimacy while men communicate to display or maintain social status. There is plenty of research which claims that emotionality (i.e., sharing one’s emotions) is a female characteristic. For

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instance, Newman, Groom, Handelman, and Pennebaker (2008) quantitatively analyzed a broad range of text samples and found small but consistent gender effects. Of their most significant findings, they learned that women use a more “rapport” style of language than men, focusing on social topics and internal feelings. They concluded that women use more of a social-emotional focus in their language use, communicating in order to develop and maintain rapport and disclose feelings. Meanwhile, men communicate to help solve problems, debate, express opinions, and share facts (Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1973; Tannen, 1990) and even interrupt more than women, a potential assertion of power and authority (Weatherall, 2002). Evidence also suggests that the listener’s gender influences how feelings are shared through language. Mixed-sex conversations showed different use of language than same-sex language (Thomson, Murachver, & Green, 2001)). Same-sex conversations reveal less stereotypical representations because gender-preferential language is more pronounced in same-sex relationships (Mulac & Bradac, 1995).

These differences are further reflected in research on social support. Gender differences have been observed in supportive style. In particular, there are contrasting preferences between emotional support, caring related to encouragement and other acts targeted at self-esteem or positive self-appraisal (Stansfeld, 1999), and instrumental support, the provision of financial assistance, material goods, or services (Heaney & Israel, 2008). For instance, research has shown that women seek out, prefer, and are more receptive to emotional support while men are more this way with instrumental support (Ashton & Fuehrer, 1993; Burleson, Holmstrom, & Gilstrap, 2005; Wilson et al., 1999). Furthermore, women have been found to perceive emotional support as more important than men and have larger emotionally supportive networks (Cahill & Sias,

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1997). Interestingly, when focusing on masculine and feminine gender characteristics as separate from the sex of subjects, these same differences occurred (Reevy & Maslach, 2001).

These patterns fit the gender stereotype that casts women as more nurturing and relationship-focused and men as more emotionally detached (e.g., Carli, 2001; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992; Lakoff, 1990; Zimmerman, Holm, & Haddock, 2001). Hochschild (1983) had also viewed women's affect-laden communicative style as being linked to their limited access to power since the meaning of words has been typically determined or controlled by men. Therefore, the language of emotional disclosure can be analyzed for its role in perpetuating positions of vulnerability and dependence in social relationships. Are there gender-preferential characteristics in how men and women manage language that discloses their inner feelings?

The Word Feel

The word *feel* was selected as the object of study for its emotional and personal connotation (Doell, 2013). Ortony, Clore, and Foss (1987) described the word *feel* as “an elliptical way of expressing a more complex idea”. Fiehler (2002) established the role of *feel* in verbal emotional expression as “experientially declarative” (p. 88), illustrating its conceptually encompassing breadth. “Experience”, he described, is a more accurate way of discussing the inner private lives we live. The word *feel* was chosen because it has a clearer emotional meaning than other self-disclosing speech acts that use words such as *think*, *hope*, or *believe*. To self-disclose is, “to deploy an available discourse resource... that performs a particular function” (Coupland et al., 2008, p. 330). In essence, the use of the word *feel* performs the act of emotional self-disclosure less ambiguously than these alternatives. Like any social rules which guide

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certain behavior, the rules pertaining to the word *feel* can be accepted or resisted in any context or relationship.

Overall, research pertaining to the word *feel* and gender is sparse. However, Mayer and Tormala (2010) examined messages containing *think* or *feel* for their respective persuasiveness. They learned that women were more affectively oriented, impressed more by *feel* messaging while men were more influenced by the use of the word *think*. Mayer and Tormala noted that while people may use these words interchangeably their impact is not the same. They concluded that beyond the possible lay assumptions which posit that *think* is a replacement for *feel*, the affective or cognitive orientation of the listener are the most important features. That is, using the word *think*, according to their data, has a persuasive effect on men due to their tendency toward a less emotional identity.

However, it is noteworthy that, in cases, the word *think* could be interpreted as idiomatic whereby its actual use may not reflect cognitive activity but may be representative of other private inner experiences such as emotions. This makes studying perceptions and attitudes towards the use of the word *feel* an even more intriguing proposition, particularly how or when its avoidance is exhibited. Gender identity is also a factor shown to produce different sets of rules that affect the linguistic choices people make in different contexts. Specifically, gender identity may contribute to the conscious modification of language to maintain a gender-appropriate alignment within certain social situations (Cameron, 1995; 2006; Eckert, 1999). Past research on emotions, language, and gender provides an opportunity to explore attitudes towards *feel* for its role in the construction of gender identity. Hence, the purpose of this article is to portray how people may construct themselves as male or female through their beliefs about their use of word *feel* with people of the same or opposite gender.

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Methodology

Four questions guided this inquiry, 1) How do participants construct their gender identity through their beliefs about the word *feel*? 2) How do people perceive their management of the word *feel* across their different social relationships? 3) What are the gender differences in attitude, if any, towards the word *feel*? 4) What can the use of the word *feel* reveal about the process of social support between genders?

Participants

Fifteen participants ranging in age from 19 to 76, (6 male, 9 female; average age = 36 years) were interviewed. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission. Participants responded to a poster advertisement describing a study on *feel* at a campus student services facility. Those who showed interest were in contact via telephone or email. After additional information sharing, an interview was scheduled where another opportunity was given to review the information about the study. At this point, a consent form was completed outlining their rights as a participant. If consent was obtained, the interview commenced.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews ranged from 60 to 120 minutes and focused on attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about the use of the word *feel* in daily life. After general perceptions were collected, participants were asked questions about their specific use of the word in their same and opposite gender communication.

Data analysis focused on the construction of subject positions derived from the attitudes toward the use of the word *feel* across the gender of participants (Lupton, 1992). Specifically, transcript analyses concentrated on (a) the social and discursive functions of the word *feel* and,

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(b) the rules systems for the suitable use of the word *feel* by gender of the listener (Harré, 1986).

Overall, this approach identified how study participants made sense of their gender through their beliefs about the word *feel* and the rule system that guides its use in same and opposite gender communication. This approach to discourse treats perceived use of this word as “context bound or occasioned” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 97) and allowed for the examination of the word *feel* as an effect of gender.

Specific analysis of each transcript started with a thorough reading and re-reading of the interview text and identifying statements pertaining to the seven targeted relationships including those with parents, siblings, friends, subordinates at work, superiors (bosses) at work, colleagues at work, and intimate partners. The steps included preparing the transcripts, creating meaning units from the data and tagging them, creating data categories, and categorizing the meaning units under each relationship type (i.e., male-female, male-male, female-female). Patterns in the attitudes towards the word *feel* were identified in reference to the gender of participants and linked to the available discourses pertaining to gender and emotion described in the literature.

Findings

The findings will be presented according to three themes. First, participant accounts about what the word *feel* represented will be shared. These interpretations are analyzed for their role in the construction of gender. Secondly, the perceived use of the word will be reviewed for its role in same-gender (i.e., women with women, men with men) and mixed-gender communication. Finally, examples of how participants managed their use of the word *feel* according to perceived gender rules will be presented and discussed.

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Construction of Gender

Interviews revealed many examples of how participants constructed their gender identity through their use of language to express emotions, observed through the attribution of feminine qualities to the use of the word *feel*. In addition, the management of the word *feel* was described as being influenced by the gender of the person with which they were communicating. For example, when asked whether she perceived the word *feel* as influenced by gender in any way, Christine explained:

Well there's that whole thing that people say that women are more sensitive, feeling, and more open. I don't know what guys are like with each other, but when they are with girls they don't really use it. They don't say "I feel this or that". When girls are together, and we know each other, we are more comfortable with it. Guys have to feel more macho I guess. For guys, to be too feeling is to say that you're weak. I don't know why that it is. I guess it is because when you are sharing feelings it represents sensitivity.

The word *feel*, described by participants as representative of emotions, was consistently referred to as feminine. When asked about the role the word *feel* has in her relationships, Theresa relates the word to a motherly image:

I'm just a big mushy feeler. There's no thinking involved! (laughs).

K: What do you mean by that?

I want to make sure everybody is happy and, from my mother, the disease to please is about worrying about yourself last. If it is something that I am really not concerned with or don't feel strongly about one way or the other like where we're going for dinner let's say, I'll be less assertive... hmmm... I have to get back on track here... yeah, *feel* is more submissive I guess.

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Theresa showed how the function of the word *feel* was for emotional support. However, she depicted *feel* as a feminine word but she noted that its use also subjected its users to a submissive position. Her use of “mushy” to describe this position connotes a lack of strength or perhaps a compromised integrity. Meanwhile, Juliette noted, below, that her gender validated her beliefs about her use of the word *feel*:

I use (the word *feel*) to share my personal feelings of my day and about myself. I guess because I'm a girl I use it often... probably many times a day.

Her parsimonious account of the feminine nature of the word *feel* also revealed her openness and freedom to use it. This belief may also mean that she believes that her gender allows her to use *feel* as if being a woman makes her usage appropriate.

The emergence of the word *feel* as a woman's word, was confirmed by Theresa. Using metaphor, Theresa identified her comfort level with the use of the word while depicted *feel* as a motherly form of communicating:

I use it a lot with my brother and my mom, not often with my dad. We're a very tight family and always talking. Nobody is afraid to say “I love you” or show emotion or anything like that. But I'd say we're all very momish with each other.

Theresa's implicit acceptance of the word *feel* in conversing with her mother and her avoidance of it with her father, the dominant male in her family, exemplified the word *feel* as something feminine and submissive. Her choice of the word “momish” depicts a nurturing quality as well. In addition, her account reveals an association with nurturance and intimacy with its use, a quality described as common in gender difference research (Tannen, 1993).

Christine also reflected upon the notion that the word *feel* is a feminine word. She referred to “society” for the origin of the rules guiding her use of the word, explaining how, for

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her, the feminine associations of its use are propagated:

K: You referred to “today’s society” to explain how you use *feel*. What do you mean?

C: You have the media and the movies and stuff like that. Guys, when they are crying too much, people will be like, “Why are they being a cry baby?” You have your friends and your associates and people at work. It is the community and how everyone interacts with each other. That’s what society is. It is the general environment that you’re in.

Since *feel* had been strongly associated with emotions, participants like Christine referred to instances of gender construction through acts of emotional expression. Attitudes were different for men, however. Men also identified *feel* as associated with emotions but showed much more hesitation in their attitudes towards its use. In explaining his reservation, Ben revealed how he hedged his use of the word *feel* with his parents. He explains how this kept him aligned within the discursive rules:

When you are a kid, you learn to be right down the middle. So you don’t want to offend dad and you don’t want to hurt mom so you try to walk down the middle where it is acceptable to both.

Similar to Theresa, Ben shared how he believed he needed to manage the word *feel* between his mother and father, a sentiment noted by three other participants.

The word *feel* was portrayed as acceptable in communication with mothers because they were the emotional supporter in the family. On the other hand, relationships with fathers revolved around non-emotional forms of assistance. These accounts, in general, revealed how gender can be constructed through specific language use. Both male and female participants noted that the word *feel* meant something feminine to them. These constructions were associated with the concepts of emotional self-disclosure, social support, and vulnerability.

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Next, participant reflections concentrated on their perceived same and opposite gender use of word *feel*. The following section segments participant perceptions of their use of the word *feel* across these relationships from both the male and female perspective.

Between Women

The freest accounts of using the word *feel* were described by women with other women. The word *feel* was portrayed as less constrained, revealing that woman felt more comfortable. Nadia, for example, commented that, “as for with women, I just use it and I don't care when or what about”, showing no reference to vulnerability. Nadia's uninhibited use was supported by Brenda in her workplace communication:

I manage a team of professionals and they're all women and I think we all lean very much on emotional scales and stress scales. "How are you feeling?", "How is your work load?", "Do you feel you can handle it?"

Even in the workplace, where appropriate emotional expression is typically reserved for anger (Ragins & Winkel, 2011), Brenda shared that she felt comfortable using it with other women as a form of emotional support. This transcendence of context is reinforcement for the typical gender rules for the use of the word *feel*. Female participants' constructed their gender as emotionally communicative particularly among women.

Between Men

By contrast, male participants showed hesitation in describing their perceived use of the word *feel* with other men, indicating that the word *feel* was perceived as unwelcome. Alexander, a retired member of the armed forces described its absence in a traditionally very male-dominant environment:

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When I joined the army, there were no women other than nurses. There was a lot of machismo. Men didn't use the word *feel*. It wouldn't come up.

His use of the word "machismo" depicts *feel* as being feminine, weak, and something to be avoided, particularly in military contexts. Paul also noted an avoidance of the word with other men. He traced his beliefs to his relationship with his parents as a younger man.

Generally speaking, if we're going to talk about the differences between mother and father, I'd definitely use the word *feel* with my mother rather than my father. That's just the background growing up. My mother would be more comfortable expressing her feelings than my father was. My father was a quiet guy. I didn't always know what he was thinking about. Generally, he didn't express his feelings that much so at home I'd use it in communication more with my mother than my father.

Paul was not alone in his reflections. Several others explained that emotions were only discussed with mothers. They cited how they had learned these gender rules from their parents. For example, Jake detailed qualities of his father which defined the appropriateness of the word *feel*:

My dad was kind of a tougher guy you know. He made sure that you didn't show too much feeling because we could get hurt doing that. You had to be really careful. You didn't want to show too much happiness or too much sadness.

His account highlights his belief that the word *feel* is not tough, something men should represent. To accommodate, male participants offered examples of how they would adjust their language use to stay disciplined to the gender rules of emotional self-disclosure. Ben, for example, shared that he has used a variation of the word *feel* with his male friend.

I'd use the word mostly in a third person situation where I'd say this happened or that happened. Then I would say, "Boy I felt like clocking that guy or I felt like giving them a

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big hug”. In that sense, you would use the word *feel* but it is in a story-telling guise. It is not necessarily what I feel like right then. (...) It is removed, like in the third person. It is in the context of the story, with friends, you would use the word *feel* or felt.

Ben’s use in this manner bends the gender rules in that he uses *feel* in past-tense which means he is not feeling the emotions he describes at the present moment. This metaphorical temporal distance (i.e., how he felt back *then*) is a more masculine method for its use. Ben’s disclosure of his emotions from the past does not put him in a potentially vulnerable position. Interestingly, Paul, a single parent of an eight year old boy, revealed how *feel* was used in emotionally supportive ways. It was one of the rare instances of its use by male participants. He said:

With Charlie, my son, it is more a focus on positive feelings. I guess it is more explicit with Charlie. It needs to be. I think he’s developing his own emotional life and I recognize that. Talking about feelings is a big part of that. I talk with him in more simple terms about more basic emotions. Keeping the focus on more positive emotions. Like why I enjoy having him with me when we are fishing; why it is important to me. There is more of a purpose than with a parent where it is a normal part of a conversation. I might say, “We are spending this time together because I love you, because you are important, and because we feel strongly about each other.”

It was difficult to discern that Paul’s use of the word *feel* with his son was related to the absence of Charlie’s mother or whether its use with a child simply represented a parenting discourse with different rules for the word *feel* (e.g., the word *feel* is allowed with your children). Regardless, the use of the word *feel* was associated with emotional comforting, a typically female gender role.

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Same-gender communication revealed contrasting attitudes and beliefs about the word *feel* depending on gender. While women believe it to be an acceptable part of conversation with other women, male participants felt it was not appropriate to use with other men. Reflections regarding its use with parents provided the strongest evidence for the origins of these beliefs, attitudes they maintain as adults. These differing attitudes show how participants construct part of their gender identity through the use of their emotionally symbolic words.

Between Gender Opposites

Attitudes shifted in mixed-gender communication. The perceived management of the word changed when gender of the communicating partner changed. The lack of perceived use with other men did not mean that men avoided the word entirely. Several participants revealed that they believed it can be appropriate to use the word *feel* with women. Several of the male participants referred to their relationships with their mothers as pertinent to the construction of their attitudes towards the use of the word *feel*. Jake, for example, shared how he felt free to emotionally disclose in his relationship with his mother:

Using the word is different with both parents. With my mother, it is always open and accepted to share your feelings. Good or bad, it is good to share your feelings.

In general, Charles showed that although the word *feel* required caution in certain contexts, it played an important role in his private relationships with his family. His depiction, below, pertained to his communication with his wife:

I use the word *feel* differently with my wife than with every other person. If I'm at work, the word *feel* would be used the same way with a female colleague or female subordinate or a male colleague or male subordinate. I think I would make a differentiation between friends and family and the work environment. *Feel* with family would be used more often

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than it would be in a working environment. Would there be a differentiation between male and female in the workplace? No. Certainly in my personal life there would be. Fitzpatrick, Mulac, and Dindia (1995) learned that same-sex conversations display more stereotypical gender-preferential language use and that mixed-gender use was represented by an adaptation in language, most often by men. In this study, men with spouses shared that although it was a word they would typically avoid, it had a place in private moments with their partners.

Contextual factors, like Charles described above, were apparent in Ben's perceived use. In a rare instance of use among family members, he described that his father indeed used *feel* but he had to create privacy and a more intimate situation to do so:

My father was open to sharing feelings but in a very personal context when you are alone. Others shouldn't know how you feel because it would make you open to preying. In my mother's case, it was okay to feel and okay to share it and be open about it. It appeared that the creation of private space could be a way of minimizing the vulnerability that *feel* creates. Overall, Ben's statement represented a common theme among men that they were socialized not to use the word *feel*.

Meanwhile, female participants also shared hesitation toward using the word *feel* with men. Nadia described this interplay, confirming several typical associations of the word shared by others:

I think with men, or the men in my life, I would use it more cautiously because, to me, there is a connotation of weakness to it. With the men in my life I know that I am more cautious with using it. If it is in the context of some kind of emotional relationship I would be a lot more cautious. (Nadia)

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Nadia's thoughts confirm the feelings of vulnerability *feel* elicits with men, particularly if the information disclosed was personal in nature. Theresa, in a similar account, depicted when she believes to use the word *feel* with her boyfriend:

Let's say I'm feeling anxious or feeling like there's something we need to discuss. When it is more in my gut, what I call or used to call nervous belly but that's something that I'm actually feeling, there's a physical aspect that comes out. I'm learning *feel* is a bad word for men in this lousy article I read. *Feel* is the "f" word. You should never say *feel*. It's risky. You should say "think" (laughs).

Lakoff (1975) described women's language usage as weaker than men's and notes that this weakness is due to societal powerlessness not a sex based inferiority. Weatherall (2002) identified that differences in language use could be a representation of a difference in power or a perpetuation of it. Theresa exemplified hesitation and stayed disciplined to the rule that the word *feel* is not appropriate with men. In fact, the conscious exchange of the word *feel* with *think* represents a clear example of how she managed her language to stay aligned with the dominant discourse. That is, women are expected to acquiesce to the gender rules for males when two *feel* discourses compete (i.e., women may use it but men should not). In this example, the female discourse becomes secondary to the male discourse.

Conclusion

Participants described their use of the word *feel* as a way of fulfilling social norms through following its gender rules. The most significant rule was that the word *feel* is inappropriate in the male lexicon. Gender stereotypes of emotional expression were observed in that the word *feel* was depicted as something emotional, weak, and vulnerable and a word that appeared to breach the male identity. However, this does not mean that men had not or would not

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use it but rather explains how the use of the word *feel* is influenced by one's gender identity.

This study portrayed the emergence of this gender rule through self-management strategies that were employed by both male and female participants to stay disciplined to the rules for the use of the word. In addition, in accounts of its use with members of the opposite sex, there was evidence of atypical use by male participants but attitudes were strongly opposite when it was considered in same-gender conversation. In addition, these attitudes appear to be influenced by the parental modeling of the use of the word *feel*.

In all, this analysis showed how gender identity can be constructed through the perceived use of the word *feel* in same and opposite-gender communication. This identity was further forged through its deployment in social support as female participants fulfilled an emotionally supportive subject position.

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Chapter 7 Discussion and Conclusion:

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore how people made sense of the word *feel* in their communication across different social relationships and contexts. Assuming the use of the word *feel* was linked to processes of emotional disclosure, a secondary purpose was to examine how the perceived management of the word *feel* could be linked to well-being. In particular, discourse analysis was deployed to examine how participant attitudes were influenced by context, relationship type, and gender. This section will focus on summarizing this study's findings, providing responses to its research questions, and situating the results amongst relevant concepts found in the social support, self-disclosure, and individual social capital literature¹⁸. Potential applications to practice and study limitations will also be presented.

The meaning of the word feel

Several questions led this analysis. Question 1 pertained to how participants made sense of the word *feel*. The projective exercise which began each interview for each participant was to associate the word *feel* with a mental image. The consensus shown across participant interpretations of the word *feel* indicated that it was firmly situated in a discourse of emotions.

Furthermore, this finding positioned *feel* as a sensitive or "personal" word, fitting of intimate forms of communicating. These depictions provided a clear reference point for understanding the word *feel* in processes of social support which emerged upon further analysis. At times, participants juxtaposed the emotional nature of the word *feel* with *think*, framing its

¹⁸ It should be noted outright that these findings should be considered within the confines of the qualitative data.

Conclusions are not intended to generalize but to evoke curiosity into how and why people manage specific language related to emotional disclosure and how this process might influence well-being.

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emotional qualities with a word representative of cognitive disclosure. In this way, *think* was sometimes portrayed as a way to avoid the personal nature of this word. This further reinforced that *feel* was part of a discourse of emotional disclosure (Greene et al., 2003; Greene et al., 2006) and had a more specific role in emotional support (Goldsmith, 2004).

Functions of the Word Feel

After exploring the associations of the word *feel*, the focus of this study turned to how participants managed this word across a variety of relationships (Question 2). In particular, participants were asked to make sense of how they have used the word *feel* across a variety of relationships in their social network. This question addressed the function of its use in daily communication. Again, similar to Fiehler’s (2002) overview of the word *feel* as a declarative expression, accounts primarily showed that *feel* was used for disclosing emotions and the provision of emotional support.

As outlined in Article 1 entitled, *The word “feel” as an indicator of enacted social support in personal relationships*, disclosing acts appeared across three themes, each aligned with different goals (see Table 1, Article 1, p. 93). First, emotional self-disclosure using *feel* was used as an act of catharsis, focusing on achieving relief from undesired feelings usually in the form of voluntary self-disclosure (i.e., confession). Secondly, *feel* was used as a way to be intimate whereby its goal was to facilitate or maintain closeness with another person. The last act of disclosure was indicative of social support whereby disclosing inner feelings was connected with an intention of eliciting information that could induce solutions from the listener, at times showing the coalescence of enacted emotional and instrumental support. This was particularly showcased in the reports of its use with relationships with professional care providers (e.g., counselors).

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These findings reflect elements of research pertaining to the effects of emotional disclosure. Moreover, cathartic relief (Pennebaker, 1993) and intimacy (Manne et al., 2004; Prager, 1995; Putnam, 2000) are linked to processes of support with positive health effects. This differs from instrumental support in that they pertain to the feelings of the disclosing subject. Instrumental support produces positive health effects in different ways, usually unrelated to emotions, and focuses on the exchange of information which may facilitate health. For instance, this could include getting treatment advice from a physician. However, this study strongly suggests that the primary function of the word *feel* was in the provision or reception of emotional support. It is plausible that this pattern was related to the more frequent opportunities to use it in this fashion across one's social network because the relationships investigated were mostly personal (e.g., parents, friends, partners, siblings).

Interestingly, when the context changed as depicted in Article 2 entitled, *Perceptions of the use of the word "feel" in the workplace*, the word *feel* was wielded in another way. Indeed, *feel* was portrayed by a few participants as an indicator of enacted social support through their support of colleagues but it was also described by some as a means to gage productive capacity. In particular, three participants holding superior positions at work (i.e., bosses, managers, supervisors) explained that they had used the word *feel* to assess the emotional states of staff members with the belief that how their staff performed was directly influenced by how they felt. In some instances, superiors were forthcoming in outlining the use of the word *feel* to monitor production rather than as a means of emotional support reinforcing the strength of the professional discourse over the personal.

In discourse analysis, it is possible to observe conflicts between discourses circulating in a specific context. This change in context yielded a fascinating interplay between these

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competing discourses. This has been studied in a variety of environments including the classroom (Baxter, 2002) and the workplace (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). A competing discourse is a set of interrelated texts that offer “alternative constructions of social reality” (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 646). This means that the word *feel*, while representing a personal-emotional reality for the subordinate was confronted by the professional-productive reality of the superior. The workplace, highlighted as emotionally political by many scholars (Dougherty & Drumheller, 2006; Kramer & Hess, 2002; Trethewey, 1997; Waldron & Krone, 1991), revealed a complex communicative dynamic for the use of *feel*. The presence of personal and professional discourses presented a tension and could lead to challenges to the intention for its use, the interpretation of the intention for its use, and whether it was meant to reflect the socially supportive utility of the word *feel* portrayed in the personal discourse of close relationships in Article 1.

This shows how influential context can be on emotional disclosure. Importantly, a key factor which transcended the typical constraints of the environment was trust. Because trust is commonly found in personal relationships, it changes the conditions of possibility for the participant. In essence, feelings pertaining to trust signified a change in discourse. A lack of trust in the workplace could cause people to discipline themselves within the constraints of the subject position of the “professional employee” and thusly avoid emotional disclosure. This position would prevent them from participating in acts of self-disclosure and, in turn, minimizing the risks associated with this behavior (Farber, 2006).

The professional discourse portrays how the stratification of authority produces different conditions of possibility for different people. Power is productive (Foucault, 1982a), producing subjects like “professional employees” that keep certain unacceptable emotions out of their

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jobs¹⁹. In turn, these employees yield judgements about being more efficient and create the model for adequate workplace behavior. However, when discourses compete it minimizes the productive capacity of each of the discourses (Phillips et al., 2004). The word *feel* emerged as an indicator of the tension between professional and personal discourses in the workplace as participants navigated its appropriateness in the relationships found in this setting. Participants explained that although the rule was that *feel* was not welcome in the workplace, they believed they broke this rule regularly, ultimately choosing personal-emotional subjectivity over the 'professional' subject position. At first strongly against using *feel* in this setting, upon further reflection, participants noted that there were conditions that made it acceptable, even in the most resisted relationship such as interactions with superiors. Interrelated factors such as trust and friendship were cited as contributing to the assessment of appropriateness. For instance, if a colleague was a friend, the word *feel* was available for use, even if that friend was a supervisor and had professional authority over the speaker. This is reflective of the ubiquitous human drive for self-disclosure and communicating emotionally with others (Rimé et al., 2002) and that this need can transcend contexts and competing discourses.

The duplicity that manifested itself in the workplace is noteworthy. If social support competes with processes of workplace productivity, it places people in awkward, even stressful, positions in this environment. Since social support is linked to trust, workplace relationships offer a very precarious option for its reception or provision. It is difficult to know for certain whether the word *feel* is used out of care or out of productive interest at work. Two bosses in this study appeared to use *feel* as a Trojan horse, acquiring information towards the execution of their

¹⁹ Emotions such as anger and pride, for example, are appropriate for some employees at some time and have been directly associated with gender in several studies on emotions in the workplace (Conroy, Elliot, & Pincus, 2009; Hess, Adams, & Kleck, 2005; LaFrance, 1998; Ragins & Winkel, 2011).

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workplace responsibilities. Using *feel* as a way of monitoring the productive capacity of subordinates illustrates how an environment can cause people to behave differently from one context or relationship to another due to their subject position within in a different discourse (Fournier, 1999). Although there was a small sample of examples to analyze, these participants appeared to approach this behavior as acceptable and did not cite any dissonance with this act.

It is easy to judge the Trojan horse use of *feel* as disingenuous. However, evoking disclosure in this way might simply be an implicit acknowledgement of the relationship between how people feel and how they perform. While largely unexplored in this study, it is possible that bosses use this information to improve employee performance by masking the word *feel* as an act of social support. It could be argued that this makes the productive inquiry using *feel* as a form of professional care instead. As a result, this behavior could be part of a process of instrumental support whereby advice or direction to staff members is provided.

Due to how authenticity has been described as one of the desired effects of emotional self-disclosure (Farber, 2006), this productive use of the word *feel* could be fraught with negative effects. Any misinterpretation of inquiries by subordinates or deceptive uses of *feel* by bosses might cause feelings of regret, embarrassment, and distrust for subordinates. According to these findings, subordinates in the workplace are already in a position where they may feel that they have to disclose feelings when called upon. Therefore, using *feel* in a deceptive way would hinder any accrual of individual social capital and, instead, place them at risk for psychological or emotional harm. Overall, the relationship between boss and subordinate emerged as one of the most complex of all relationships due to these competing discourses.

Workplace relationships are important since this context has been identified as an environment that is critical to well-being as it is often associated with high levels of

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psychological stress (Beehr, 1995). The use of *feel* in these ways requires managerial efforts resembling emotional labour whereby emotional expression may be falsified in order to present oneself in a way that is deemed to be productive to an employer (Cropanzano, Weiss, & Elias, 2003). In circumstances where actual feelings do not match the demanded emotional expression (e.g., feel sad but must act happy), harmful feelings of dissonance can result (Erikson & Wharton, 1997; Shields, 2005; Tracy, 2005; Wharton & Erikson, 1993).

Although this environment caused a more cautious use of the word *feel*, it is a place where its use in emotional support could also have the biggest impact. In a meta-analysis of research on social support and workplace stress, Viswesvaran, Sanches, and Fisher (1999) determined that social support plays a big part in mitigating perceived stressors. Data such as this has led to more formalized attempts at supporting the psycho-emotional health of employees (DeVries III, 2010). The introduction and advancement of the workplace wellness movement has increased the availability of more formal social support resources (Allendar et al., 2006; DeVries III, 2010) which appear to allow employees a way to cope with stress. However, it is also likely that this tension will always be an issue and that emotional support will never be fully accepted as part of this culture. As a result, the professional environment may produce many untrustworthy relationships. Study participants who identified friends in the workplace appeared willing to trust them in using the word *feel* (i.e., felt safer). In this sense, their workplace social capital was stronger than others.

Outside the workplace, *feel* was depicted as less restricted in voluntary personal relationships (e.g., relationships one chooses) such as with friends and intimate partners. Familial dynamics, where relationships are not voluntary, showed a mixture of perceived uses. Some participants described a freer use of the word with parents and siblings while others cited its use

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as “dangerous” and “risky”. This shows how the heterogeneity in the experiences of the participants is influenced by trust. Those with little trust of family members had little interest in building or maintaining any level of intimacy in these relationships. As a means for building closeness, the word *feel* was subsequently avoided, revealed as a way to determine whom people trusted. In the end, its use shows where people are likely accruing individual social capital within their social network.

Another interesting emergence in personal relationships pertained to participant accounts of the reciprocation of the word *feel*. Reciprocation is a key component to supportive relationships (Prager & Bauhrmester, 1998) and the accrual of individual social capital (Abbott & Freeth, 2006; Putnam, 2004). Whether the relationship was in a personal or professional context, reciprocation, as represented in the bi-directional use of the word *feel* in emotional support, was tied to social status. For instance, findings indicated that a boss at work could inquire using the word *feel* with a subordinate but a subordinate could not use it in inquiry with their boss. Under the “professional employee” subject position, participants showed that they were well disciplined within the workplace discourse which does not allow for the discussion of emotions. That is, the workplace is not a place to get personal with the boss and so reciprocation of their use of *feel* is not allowed.

However, this behavior would change if subordinate and boss had an established friendship. Then, individuals could be simultaneously in the position of friend and as co-worker. In the case of Juliette in Article 2, the personal discourse overtook the professional discourse in her relationship with her boss and so she felt comfortable inquiring using *feel* in this relationship in this context. Of course, friendship is discussed heavily in the literature for its reciprocating tendencies (Hallinan, 1978; Olk & Gibbons, 2010). By observing where *feel* was reciprocated,

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strong ties can also be inferred with some degree of accuracy. Even though there are exceptions to the rules (like Nancy's use with strangers but not with family), *feel* can indicate the strength of social ties.

Similarly, participants also shared that being in a subordinated or submissive personal relationship outside of work (e.g., as a son or daughter) revealed a similar tendency. They showed a dependency on others for emotional support and an expectation that subordinate positions are free to disclose emotions but not that this would not likely be returned in kind. This observation was supported in Article 1 by Jerry's account of how self-disclosure using *feel* appeared to equalize with his father as he reached adulthood. With the outgrowing of some vulnerability indicative of youth, the use of the word became reformed. In this way, relationships between people could change over time, influencing emotional communication and their accrual or maintenance of social support. In this instance, a re-balancing appeared to be related to change in social status from vulnerable child to more equal peer. Since reciprocation of disclosure has been associated with the experience of trust (Prager & Bauhrmester, 1998) and trust inextricably linked with processes of social support (Goldsmith, 2004) and social capital (Putnam et al., 1993, Putnam, 1995, 2000) its presence in relationships cannot be undervalued.

In friendship, participants described their use of the word *feel* as primarily unhindered, a product of the equal social status of friendship. Reciprocation was most frequently reported in these relationships. Unsurprisingly, this has been determined elsewhere as a highly emotionally supportive relationship (Sias & Bartoo, 2007). Once again, this result draws back to trust, and even more specifically, social intimacy. Of course, it is not possible to discern whether the word *feel* helped establish trust or intimacy or if it emerged afterward but these supportive relationships were repeatedly portrayed as *feel* appropriate. In general, an analysis of the use of

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the word *feel* reinforces the role friendship has in well-being (King & Terrance, 2008) and individual social capital (Verhaeghe et al., 2012) for its displays of trust, intimacy, and reciprocation.

After analyzing the perceived management of the word *feel* by relationship type and context, the data also lent itself to an examination of the role of gender, spawning a third article called *The construction of gender through attitudes toward the word feel*. Gender emerged as a relevant factor in how or when participants chose to use the word *feel*. First, several participants described the word *feel* with vulnerable qualities such as it being “soft”, “motherly”, and “intimate”, referencing it according to the gender stereotypes for emotional behavior. Furthermore, female participants illustrated stronger comfort levels in using *feel* with other women. This pattern was supported by the hesitation that some female participants shared in their use of the word *feel* with other men, even in their intimate romantic partnerships. Meanwhile, some male participants shared that the only time they would use the word *feel* was with a woman, particularly with their romantic partner, and not with other men.

The word *feel* was not only an indicator of emotional self-disclosure or emotional support but it upheld gender identity. Since *feel* was associated with emotions and the sharing of emotions, it was subsequently associated with femininity. This is supported by the open attitude toward it by women contrasted by a more closed one by men. Its use by men would be a rupture to the masculine discourse. However, where intimacy was acceptable for men (i.e., in their romantic partnerships or, in cases, best friendship) the word *feel* was acceptable. The word *feel*, in this sense, may be kept for more private use by men. This would also uphold the research that states that men tend not to disclose nurturing emotions as often as women (Carli, 2001; Zimmerman, Holm, & Haddock, 2001). It was difficult to identify whether its use in this way

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meant that men were losing opportunities to receive the health effects of emotional self-disclosure or their management in this way was sufficient.

Discursive Rules for the Word Feel

The next focus of this study was on the discursive rules for the use of the word *feel* in interpersonal communication. The clearest rules that emerged for the use of the word *feel* included the following:

- 1) *Feel* is not welcome in the workplace
- 2) *Feel* requires trust
- 3) *Feel* is for women to be used with other women
- 4) *Feel* is for intimate relationships
- 5) *Feel* as an act of inquiry is only available to those of equal social status or to those of higher status for inquiry of someone of lower status

There are some similarities between the rules dictating the use of the word *feel* and those reported by Kramer and Hess' (2002) study about the workplace and the general expression of emotions. Altogether, emotional expression was identified as being reserved for certain types of people, showing that discretion for communicating in this way was part of workplace life. Furthermore, emotions, according to Kramer and Hess, require professional expression in the workplace implying that some are allowed while others are not. *Feel*, too, was subject to the influence of the professional discourse of the workplace, one where there is an appropriate time, place, and relationship for its use.

In addition, *feel*'s use as part of an inquiring act was portrayed in this study as an act of care. However, an alternative intention was displayed by the bosses who exercised it as a method to monitor productive capacity and not just as a means of social support. Kramer and Hess

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reported that emotions are okay to use when they are directed at helping others. While their survey results showed that some people believed that emotions are wholly inappropriate in this setting, this was contrasted by participants in the current study who originally shared similar impressions but provided several instances where *feel* could be used (e.g., when a co-worker is a friend) as their interview progressed. So this study does not necessarily support all of Kramer and Hess' findings.

At times, some participants also portrayed the word *feel* as risky. Yet, the motives behind using *feel* appeared to be in line with those common in self-disclosure and include an interest in feeling closer to someone and to relieve an emotional burden (Farber, 2006). However, as alluded to earlier, these rules were not always followed as participants shared many accounts of using *feel* outside of these parameters. For example, one participant, Nancy, broke several rules when she noted how she felt the most comfortable using *feel* with strangers, particularly in contrast to her past intimate relationships and relationships with her family. She mentioned that the safest use for the word was with someone she did not know, a result of experiencing emotional hardship in these personal relationships. Strangers, for her, appeared to offer a clean social slate where she could express herself with fewer consequences. That is, in an encounter with a stranger, disclosing emotions using the word *feel* was safe because the relationship, likely temporary, could be terminated easily. However, if reciprocation was experienced, an outcome typically linked to well-being (Helgeson, Shaver, & Dyer, 1987), benefits might be accrued and a potentially intimate, trusting moment could occur. According to the tenets of social penetration theory (Sprecher, Treger, & Wondra, 2013), this reciprocation could lead to a deeper more meaningful relationship. This finding shows how people may seek intimacy and trust through the

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word *feel* (i.e., emotional self-disclosure) when they do not find it in other relationships such as with friends or parents.

In addition, one other participant, Olivia, who described her personal relationships as poor, believed her most prevalent use of the word *feel* was with her counsellor. This is noteworthy because it supports research that states how important the effects of emotional expression are, including trust and intimacy (Reis, 2001), to the point that people may seek opportunities to self-disclose when they do not have it in their personal relationships (Greene, 2009). It was intriguing to see how attitudes toward the use of the word *feel* led some to value these outlets as a means to maintaining emotional well-being, a mandate the field of counselling attempts to achieve, in part, through establishing trust (Farber, Berano, Capobianco, 2004; Ferrara, 2002; Rimé, Corsini, & Herbette, 2002).

Subjectivity

Discourses offer different subject positions for a person to take up or resist (Davies & Harre, 1999). Participants constructed themselves as several types of subject through their attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of the word *feel*. Through a discourse of emotional disclosure, the word *feel* allowed for participants to produce, reproduce, and resist certain truths (Fairclough, 1995; Foucault, 1982a). Some of these subject positions were dictated by gender, context, or relationship type.

In the workplace, the attitudes towards the word *feel* revealed several subject positions. For instance, superior status roles like supervisors or bosses could take on positions such as the supportive or productive boss. In the former, superiors inquired using the word *feel* (e.g., How have you been feeling lately?) as an act of care towards their staff. In the latter, a supervisor could use the word *feel* to gauge employee productivity as several participants. Using *feel* as a

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productive subject could access emotional information that would help them manage their subordinates more effectively.

Other positions included the workplace friend whereby, regardless of status position within the workplace organization, the word *feel* was believed to be wielded willingly with those co-workers participants considered friends. Since the word *feel*, in one of its uses, could be construed as an act of care, workplace friendships allowed for its use over and above the rule that the word is not allowed in professional environments. As such, a professional subject position was also constructed through the avoidance of the word *feel* in this setting.

The caring subject was present across relationships beyond the workplace. Its use in inquiry between friends constitutes an act of care. Those who deployed it in this fashion assume the position of the caring friend. Perceptions of the use of the word *feel* acted as an indicator of vulnerability based on who used it, how it was used, and with whom. To expose emotions in this way is to expose part of the essence of living. In particular, exposure through self-disclosure makes a person vulnerable to the negative judgment of others and a host of other effects such as shame, regret, and even fear (Farber, 2006).

However, the construction of friendship could be observed through how participants reciprocated its use in both inquiry and disclosure, sharing the vulnerable and caring subject position as a part of the nature of this relationship. In fact, acts of confession, the unprompted act of emotional self-disclosure, was depicted as a safe act among friends. This voluntary assumption of a vulnerable subject position in using *feel* is a powerful use provided the resistance that participants shared in using it in several other relationships.

Similarly, parents could undertake the position of the caring parent in their use of the word *feel*. Most participants described how they would use the word *feel* in disclosure with their

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mother or father but rarely would use it in inquiry. In fact, those participants with children shared that inquiring using *feel* was important to them because of how it represented the interest and care for the emotional state or health of their children. Given the tension that Olivia and Nancy felt towards some family members, it was not surprising how both suppressed their use of this word with them. While some participants portrayed a comfort level with using the word *feel* at home which resembled that they may take it for granted, the tension revealed by others shows that not all parent-child relationships are successful in establishing trust and support for a child's emotional disclosure even though it is generally regarded as healthy (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Gross & Levenson, 1997).

Another subject position constructed through the management of the word *feel* relates to trust. The trustworthy subject was a person with which someone was able to use the word *feel* in voluntary self-disclosure. Several participants discussed how they would not use the word with someone they did not trust. Interestingly, Nadia cited how she only used the word *feel* in a negative emotional outburst with her father, someone with which she had a strained relationship. This represented a rupture to the *feel* rules as she certainly did not trust her father in emotionally focused conversation. However, in her outburst, she felt it was necessary to express herself due to the overwhelming emotional strain she was feeling in that relationship. As such, overly-emotional subjects helped define the rules for the word *feel* more clearly because they crossed social boundaries in contexts like the home or workplace. They also disclosed in relationships where, according to these rules, they should not be.

In analysing gender, participants showed how they constructed their masculinity or femininity through their attitudes towards its use. For example, male participants portrayed their perceived use as restricted and mostly reserved in conversation with their intimate partners. Of

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note, of the workplace supervisors who shared that they used the word *feel* with their subordinates, no males shared that they used it as an act of care. Conversely, women shared a liberal attitude towards the use of the word *feel* with other women but, when discussing their usage with men, its use was more heavily managed and more cautious. This supports the gender stereotypes about expressing emotions. While men seemed to be more judicial in their attitudes towards their use of the word *feel*, women appeared restricted by the masculine emotional discourse of maintaining stoicism (Hilton et al., 2009; Mayer & Tormala, 2010). Yet, the male participants showed that, in comparison to other relationships, they felt the most open using the word *feel* with their romantic partners and their friends. While their perceived use might not have been as prolific as that of the female participants, it does show that healthy relationships (i.e., those with reciprocity, trust, and intimacy) are represented by a more regular use of the word *feel* and that people seek out safe, trustworthy places to use it.

Other subject positions emerged as well. A dominant subject position was observable in the discourse through how women in this study tended to give way to the disclosure patterns of men. Unsurprisingly, subjects identified as having the most control over the word *feel*, including its use in either disclosure or inquiry, were generally bosses, parents, and men. Other positions, such as a woman, child, or subordinate in the workplace were represented as vulnerable positions whereby they were expected to disclose when asked although many did so willingly and voluntarily. Presumably, the willingness to do so is linked to the trustworthiness of the inquirer. Unwanted emotional tension seemed to drive the more unwilling accounts, such as Olivia's and Nadia's, whereby using *feel* was the end result of being at one's wits end.

In these wits-end cases, participants also assumed a resistant subject position as they used the word *feel* outside of the rules with a person they did not necessarily trust. For instance,

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Nancy’s account of the word with complete strangers supports this. How participants used the word *feel* within the variety of subject positions at their disposal shows the variety of options they have to reproduce the truths about how and when a person ought to use this word *feel* and, ultimately, disclose emotions.

Feel and Well-Being

Social capital is a determinant of health and social support plays an important role in it (Ferlander, 2007). As identified, social support comes in three forms; instrumental, informational, and emotional. The use of the word *feel*, based on the observations of the data across all three articles, could be a good indicator of social support, specifically emotional support, in action. That is, its use is a mechanism to obtain, maintain, or deploy emotional support.

It is interesting to consider how the use of one word can represent a healthy communication process. Participant references to trust, intimacy, and their patterns of reciprocity reinforce its place as a mechanism of support and individual social capital. According to Burleson (2003, 2008), providing support which addresses the feelings of the supported is the best received by those in need. This was labelled as “high person-centered” messaging. Low and moderate person-centered messages are characterized as inadequately addressing the feelings of the receiver. Burleson (2008) provided examples showcasing the difference between levels which supported the word *feel* as a tool for lending emotional support.

Furthermore, Viswanath and Emmons (2006) described the role that messages have in affecting health outcomes. Message effect research investigates “how features, formats, and content of mediated messages produce effects on cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes” (Viswanath & Emmons, p. s239). While the context of their line of research is

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focused on messages produced by the media for large audiences, it is worth considering the specific effect of *feel* on the quality of the provision of emotional support between individuals, something Burleson (2008) implies through his examples of person-centered messaging.

In addition, the reciprocated use of the word *feel* reflected in the data was found in the most supportive relationships by participants. Does this mean that its lack of use means that a person is missing opportunities to give or receive social support? Are these relationships less emotionally supportive as a result? Social support exists in many forms and includes emotional support (i.e., experiencing love, care, sympathy) (Ackerson & Viswanath, 2009). However, *feel* appears well connected to emotional support since it was clearly related to emotions.

Perhaps the most pertinent connection between the use of the word *feel*, social support, and individual social capital comes from its persistent relationship with trust. One emergent pattern was that when there was no trust, it was a word to be avoided. It is difficult to disclose feelings without trust. Meanwhile, intimate relationships, typically the product of self-disclosure, vulnerability, and reciprocation (Green et al., 2003, 2006; Petronio, 2002), were a common setting for the word *feel*. Trust has a formidable role in the accumulation and dispersal of individual social capital and reasoning suggests that the word *feel* can have a role in it at the micro-social levels.

Another important consideration generated by these findings pertains to equal access to health. The concept of self-presentation identifies that people manage their behavior to present themselves in a certain light in order to obtain information about what stands as acceptable behavior for the situation they are in. The word *feel* did not occur freely but required skilled management²⁰. Why should it be managed at all? In short, people do not want to get hurt, a

²⁰ An exception to this would be moments of rupture where one's filter was not used and the rules for *feel* ignored. Skill implies a sense of control while ruptures are characterized by a reduction in control.

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possibility in the vulnerable position that self-disclosure elicits, especially doing so in front of a person who is in a position to cause harm. It was clear from participant reflections that the self-disclosure of emotions is also a vulnerable process. In Article 3, allusions were made that one's gender identity influenced how people used this word. It appeared as though some of the females felt the need to acquiesce to the communication preferences of men. However, since the rules for feel may preclude its use with men, this could also be an example of staying disciplined to these parameters.

If the use of the word *feel* can be a healthy form of communication, this observation might be indicative of potential unequal outcomes based on gender. A woman may be assuming a vulnerable position in her attitude toward the disclosure of emotions in relationships with men. If the need to disclose emotionally is ubiquitous (Rimé et al., 2002) and there are people who have more influence over this process than there are also people with more control over it than others. The word *feel* appears to support this narrative. However, the findings also suggest that people will seek out alternative opportunities to self-disclose. This might also be why women identified their open use of the word *feel* with other women.

Application to Theory

The literature focusing on the verbiage of emotional self-disclosure is sparse. More so, research on the word *feel* specifically is nearly non-existent. This is unsurprising given how specific of a research endeavour an examination of this word represents and, secondly, how occupied the literature is with the content of what is disclosed and less about the verbal mechanisms for such disclosures. However, some of the lessons of these findings can be connected to existing theory.

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Use of “Feel” as a skill. Theorists have proposed that self-disclosure is a type of skill (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Holtgraves, 1990). Ackerson and Viswanath (2009) summarized that, “expressing need and negotiating assistance constitute key aspects of social support that draw on interpersonal techniques” (p. 12). Moreover, those who self-disclose and are competent²¹ at it are likely to access important health processes as a result.

The concept of emotional intelligence has been widely discussed since the mid 1990’s. Emotional Intelligence Theory proposes that how people manage their emotions and understand the emotions of others may exhibit a form of higher social functioning. The findings of this study show that people are likely to make conscious choices about how and when they disclose *and* what language they choose to use to do so. In accordance, *feel* may not fit certain social circumstances well but, in others, it opens the doors to accumulating individual social capital.

The “*feel-as-a-skill*” perspective could be a valid consideration in the emotional intelligence discourse. Goldsmith (2004), for instance, stated that social support demands an adaptation to factors within the environment and relationship in order for it to be successfully provided. Since enacted social support, particularly through its ties to self-disclosure, can have positive and negative effects, how it is delivered deserves careful consideration. For example, Goldsmith identified a variety of emotional support strategies and categorized them based on their helpfulness. Among them, the phrase, *I know how you feel*, has been deemed unhelpful in supportive circumstances. Therefore, its use likely requires some deft manoeuvring in certain times and places.

Transformational leadership. Another concept that appears to have relevance to the applicability of the discursive rules resides in the leadership literature. Transformational

²¹ There are several clear allusions to emotional competence and well-being in the literature. See Ciarrochi and Scott (2006) for a more in-depth examination of this link.

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leadership can be seen when "leaders and followers make each other advance to a higher level of morale and motivation" (Burns, 1978, p. 20). It has been associated with employee empowerment in the workplace as well (Pieterse, van Knippenberg, Schippers, & Stam, 2010).

A more traditional approach to social support and health focuses on the relationships where health information is exchanged like in hospitals and clinics. However, stress in the workplace is commonplace and considering how much time people spend at work, the relationships here represent another leverage point for deploying social support that can impact well-being. Transformational leadership proposes that an effective management style includes empathy for subordinates and an interest in influencing their motivations and perceptions to work in concert towards common goals (Vera & Crossan, 2004). In contrast to the transactional leadership style, which values compliance through using rewards and punishment, the transformational approach appears more likely to value what people feel for both their well-being and performance at work. As Jake, a manager from this study, noted, he would use the word *feel* to get a sense of the current inner state of his staff to gauge their productive potential. It did not appear that he was concerned with how they felt as an act of care or support. Taking this Trojan horse approach might offer a glimpse into the opposing styles of leadership whereby a transformational leader in this instance would inquire using *feel* as an act of care, even if doing so could also aid performance if he or she could offer support to the feelings of their staff as a result. In this sense, the word *feel* could be a good fit for more horizontal organizational structures which frame relationships as more reciprocal and equal.

“Feel” and self-disclosure. In general, the findings of this study elicit another question. Does the use of the word *feel* promote or protect health? It is cursory to provide a definitive response to this question. However, the processes and concepts tied to the results from this

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research suggest that it could be. However, short of this, the simple use of the word *feel* in a relationship cannot be *the* key to well-being. Reciprocation and trust play a strong interactive role. There appears that there is some skill involved in using *feel* and perhaps this skill is what facilitates the accrual of individual social capital.

However, acts of emotional self-disclosure are widely considered to be healthier than suppression (Pennebaker, 1995, 2003) except for a few unique circumstances²². Self-disclosure in its direct forms (Holtgraves, 1990) occurs when little interpretation is required on behalf of the listener. That is, when an emotionally communicative act occurs in direct fashion, it is obvious that the speaker is openly sharing what they feel. Indirect forms require interpretation as the meaning of what is said or shared is not as clear. "I feel" statements, for instance, are very direct and represent unfiltered self-disclosure whereby the speaker does not attempt to mask or hide that they are sharing feelings. Based on some participant accounts, suppression may enter the process of self-disclosure in the conscious choices people make in how they verbally disclose. While the organismic account of emotional expression approaches communication as reflexive and instinctual (Hochschild, 1979, 1983), clear of any active management on behalf of the communicator, using *feel* might be as open and free of an act of emotional self-disclosure as any other. In this sense, there might be some credence in stating that the more frequent use of word *feel* could be an indicator of a relationship's strength.

Consider how some participants shared their preference to use the word *think* instead of *feel* in some situations. Is this decision, if a conscious one at all, a mild form of suppression? By their accounts, this choice avoids a set of perceived risks that the environment in which it takes place presents. For example, the workplace exposes someone to being judged as unprofessional

²² Like when disclosure alienates or embarrasses the other party and creates social isolation or forms of conflict and additional stress.

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or weak. That is, if people never suppressed how they felt when they were inclined to self-disclose their emotions would we see the word *feel* used more often? The data suggest that this is a possibility. If suppression, in turn, is a deleterious act then using the word *feel* could be considered healthy as it is as highly emotionally symbolic verb compared to other options. Even though *think* was perceived as more appropriate at certain times, could it still be considered a suppressive act if it was a result of a choice not to use more emotionally descriptive language? Of course, a person's use of the word *think* cannot necessarily be deemed as a type of deflection from emotions as people disclose thoughts regularly, too.

Feel and emotional rupture. Upon describing the rules and reasons for managing the word *feel* across many social relationships in differing contexts, most participants shared instances where their discipline to these rules broke down. In particular, participants described that they would stay disciplined within the rules, avoiding the word *feel* with certain people and in certain contexts, unless they experienced some form of duress. If a participant were a part of a relationship that required the suppression of *feel* (and emotional self-disclosure in general) and they began to feel things that they did not want, a breaking point was described where such feelings could not be withheld. Being at this wits-end led to an eventual rupture in the rules in order to find relief from the tension they were feeling or to instigate a solution from another party to remedy the cause of such stress.

Participants were seemingly willing to follow the rules as long as their mental health was stable (e.g., they were coping well with stress). Their well-being took priority over the social acceptance that the rules served to promote. Interestingly, Pennebaker (2003) proposed that the words people choose to use in communication can betray their thoughts and feelings. Perhaps the

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experience of psycho-emotional tension corrects this betrayal through the breaking of emotional suppression.

This behavior is similar to what Stile accounted for in the Fever Model. The premise underpinning the Fever Model is that people tend to disclose feelings when they are distressed (Stiles, 1987, 1995). The ruptures to the *feel* rules were represented by participants who acted contrarily to a certain identity facilitated by their use of this word. These ruptures were consistently reported as a moment of discomfort, stress, or emotional overload.

Ruptures occur in any discourse and they signify that rules indeed break down. In this context, the breakdown of the rules for the word *feel* may indicate something larger than the simple need for someone to feel better. It shows how people cannot maintain the rules in the face of emotional overload. These reflections by participants provide further support for how formidable the desire to disclose is (Rimé, et al., 2002). This is evident in how those who hold the most control over how it is wielded (i.e., as disclosure or inquiry) surrender self-control during a rupture. In turn, they assume a vulnerability to the potential negative effects of disclosure.

It can be argued that surrendering control equalizes the effect of any difference in status. Interestingly, through exploring attitudes and perception about the use of the word *feel* we can see how penetrating inequalities in access to social support might be. These inequalities reveal themselves in how people manage the language tied to the behavior which accesses social support and its health effects. However, even the forces which perpetuate or support such inequalities can relent and break down. Ultimately, these attitudes towards the word *feel* show that there are imbalances in access to self-disclosure when discipline to the rules is upheld.

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In the end, this study shows how the discursive rules are not fully stable. A big component of this variation is when health is interpreted as being compromised then subjects feel they can no longer abide by the rules that define their position within the discourse (i.e., professional employee). They then change their subject position from professional to “unprofessional employee” and use *feel* to disclose emotionally. By contrast, they may refuse this discourse entirely and take up a position in a different discourse. This discourse could pertain to mental health where they express their feelings in order to cope with stress.

Social support: trust, intimacy, reciprocation. The literature does not make specific references to how certain words might facilitate social support over others. However, there is plenty of support for how such concepts as social support, trust, intimacy, and reciprocity as important contributors to individual and group health (Evans, Barer, & Marmor de Gruyter, 1994; Kawachi, 1999; Kawachi & Berkman, 2001) This study adds depth to this dialogue by examining the micro-social components of social interaction that may be facilitative (or, in cases, deleterious) to the accumulation, maintenance, or nurturance of social support.

The findings from this study showed how the word *feel* acts as an intersection for many of these outcomes or processes. For example, the literature on social support frames the importance of trust for health and well-being (Putnam, 2003; Welch et al., 2005). An analysis of the perceived use of *feel* revealed that trust was really important to when, where, and with whom it was used. If *feel*, as an emotionally self-disclosing speech act, is facilitative of certain health processes that counter emotionally suppressive behavior, then it is worth considering as a key component or indicator of enacted social support. The relationships that offered the freest use of the word *feel* are arguably the most important to the well-being of participants and the accrual, maintenance, and dispersal of individual social capital (i.e., friends, intimate partners, family).

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Intimacy has also been deemed as a healthy outcome of self-disclosure (Manne et al., 2004; Sparrevohn & Rapee, 2009). Social penetration theory suggests that intimacy results from a process of self-disclosure between two people (Sprecher, Treger, & Wondra, 2013). Interestingly, participants described the word *feel* as having intimate connotations. That is, its use was a sign of more intimate communication between two people. Intimacy, it seems, can be framed as a state of thriving. The word *feel* was indicative of this as people described it as a part of social support processes.

By contrast, using *feel* in self-disclosure was also shown in cathartic or therapeutic ways where participants noted its role in getting unwanted feelings out. This showed how participants took up a vulnerable subject position as being consumed by negative, unwanted feelings. This is a state by which people will seek assistance to rectify or resolve such feelings. *Feel* showed a great deal of versatility in this way.

It is not too presumptuous to posit that the word *feel* may be a discursive resource for seeking health by those in vulnerable positions. First, it allows the vulnerable subject to directly communicate information to others which would aid potential care givers in assisting them. Secondly, the act alone can be enhancing for the simple cathartic release of tension. This is what is intriguing about this word. Aside from instances of dishonesty, it is explicitly emotional. Given its stigmatic qualities, the word *feel* is not likely to be used as a replacement for other words but appears to be the word being displaced (e.g., like with the word *think*). This was reported as a way to protect oneself from the risks associated with self-disclosure (Farber, 2006) and taking up a vulnerable subject position. Therefore, *feel* has a unique function when it comes to self-disclosure, relationships, and well-being.

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The insights participants shared illustrated how the word *feel* could play a part in the fabric that theorists refer to when they describe the concept of individual social capital (Aguilar & Sen, 2009; Verhaeghe, et al., 2012). Even though it creates vulnerable positions that can make people feel exposed and weak, the word *feel* is a vehicle for bringing people closer together through creating trust and intimacy and making people feel better through catharsis. Participant accounts show that it has a role in how the accumulation or maintenance of social support operates at the micro level.

Application to Practice

Viswanath (2007) claimed that, “a clearer delineation of the relationship between health communication and social capital would not only be of academic interest but could be fruitful in the practice of social change in public health” (p. 259-260). In addition, Subramanian, Lochner, and Kawachi (2003) noted that intervention should be reflective of whether the aspect of social capital being researched is most beneficial at the individual or collective levels. Provided that language is most representative of micro-social processes, these findings are well-suited for research on social relationships.

The proposed implications for practice materialize from the identified discursive rules. Rules, as noted by Meadows (1998) are highly important leverage points for intervention. She noted, “If you want to understand the deepest malfunction of systems, pay attention to rules and who has power over them” (p. 7). By cultivating the rules, a applied practitioner will not just see when to or not to use the word *feel* but, in their potential association with health outcomes, can set out to proactively change or address them in their work to create more opportunities for these outcomes. While this study did not delve into the equality of these opportunities, it appears that

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the differences in the perceived use of *feel* across status and gender could reflect unequal access to emotional support.

This aside, the implications are most clear for subjective well-being. Fittingly, a field that is challenged by stigmas due to its association with emotions, the word *feel* may adopt similar properties due to it being associated with weakness and instability. For example, simply talking about the topic of emotional health, such as depression, is difficult (Mak, Poon, Pun, & Cheung, 2007). As a result, people can suppress a lot of feelings and, at the same time, valuable information that would be useful for others to be able to support them through social, informational, or instrumental ways within health-care professions is withheld. If the word *feel* is stigmatized yet it appears useful as a discursive resource in enacted social support then perceptions such as these are worth addressing.

The emergent rules from personal relationships and the professional context might be applicable to health communication strategies in the provision of health care between health care providers such as nurses, doctors, social workers, and counsellors and their patients or clients. Emotional disclosure is a regular occurrence in relationships with counsellors, nurses, and physicians. Interestingly, Watson and Gallois (2002) identified that medical professionals who emotionally express themselves with their patients are judged as more effective by patients. This is likely because they are seen more as individuals than professional. Furthermore, Arora et al. (2007) found that the emotional support skills of physicians are one of their weakest skill sets. Approaching the word *feel* as part of the emotional support skill set, defined by its discursive rules, could contribute to its successful deployment in some medical environments. Therefore, there is an impetus for further examination of *feel* in this context.

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Whether emotions are in response to a troubling diagnosis or a part of the regular dialogue in ongoing counselling, these findings suggest that use of the word *feel* could have an impact if consciously applied in certain ways. In consideration of this, the subject positions taken up through the word *feel* can offer some guidance toward capturing its value. The use of the word *feel* would be noteworthy to examine if they are wielded in certain ways, including:

- In voluntary disclosure
- By a man
- As inquiry
- In moments of rupture

More research should be conducted to further understand the nuances of its use in this context. This includes its role in the provision of instrumental and informational support alluded to in Article 1. It is sensible that a goal of any application of the skillful awareness and management of the word *feel* in this context should be to achieve a form of deliberate enacted support rather than unplanned or inadvertent support.

At this time, it is worth revisiting the impetus for this study which emerged out of received advice about the word *feel* as a health and high performance consultant in training. The word *feel* was described as a word that should be managed according to the gender of the client. That is, the word *feel* is okay for women but alternatives, like *think* or *believe*, should be used for men. Without much reflection, I heeded this advice. After conducting this research, a set of 5 discursive rules for the word *feel* materialized. As such, how accurate was this original advice and what might be the implications for using the word *feel* in formal supportive relationships?

First, and most generally, the word *feel* requires management in order to achieve certain objectives. For example, since gender figured prominently in how people perceived the word

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feel, its use with men needs to be judicious. In this sense, I do not propose that it should never be used with a man. However, because it was associated with weakness or femininity, it would be fair to assume its early introduction in consultation could be off-putting. Not to be overlooked, participants noted strongly that *feel* was linked to feelings of trust. In turn, it might be that trust and rapport are more important to establish before using the word *feel* so explicitly with men.²³ Trustworthiness, the sources of another rule for *feel*, is a fair ambition of any supportive relationship and this does not mean it is not required with women. However, the receptiveness of *feel* appears more robust with women than men.

In extension, the above refers to the consultant using the word in inquiry such as “How do you want to feel when you perform?” As a consultant, I have witnessed reservation to asking this question before enough trust and rapport had been established. However, when a client uses the word *feel* unprovoked as a self-disclosure (e.g., “I am feeling anxious about tomorrow”), the consultant should feel comfortable in using it going forward. This is why a Foucauldian perspective was valuable for responding to the possible research questions of this study. Identifying the transgressions to the discursive rules and the reasons for such ruptures allows for identifying the meaning they may carry when they occur in practice. When the word *feel* is used in self-disclosure, the trained consultant should be comfortable in returning it in kind. When it occurs outside of the rules, like a male hockey player that might say “I just don’t feel like myself on the ice these days”, this should be considered momentous.

It must be noted that using the word *feel* will most likely require the considering of several factors. This research showed that the process of self-disclosure and social support is complex. To show the nuance that might be required, consider a possible consulting scenario and

²³ While not reviewed in this study, it might be that *feel* is part of the trust or rapport building process rather than an outcome of it.

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how it could be managed. Susan and Craig are national-level figure skaters who contend for the podium every year. In ice dance, they need to be in harmony to be at their best but, lately, this hasn't been the case. Frustrated with their recent performances, Susan and Craig contact a performance psychology consultant a mere 2 weeks before their biggest event of the season. How should the word *feel* be navigated in this first meeting?

To begin, there will be little time to establish trust. Any trust that they do have in the consultant would result from the credibility they gave him/her prior to making contact either through a referral or perhaps information from a website. It is likely that they are wary but, based on their circumstances, realize something needs to be done to skate how they want to skate. Secondly, there is a gender dynamic worth noting. As an opposite gender team, the consultant will be encountering a clash of the *feel* rules. Should the gender rule be broken or upheld?

My response in this case would be extremely considerate of the timing of our contact in the reference to a peak event. My assumption, before an initial consultation, would be that they are not feeling the way they need to feel to perform at the level they want to perform whether they disclose how they feel or not, delving into this private inner experience is acceptable. Implicitly, they will have recognized that how they have been feeling recently has been harming them making rapport and trust less of a concern at the start of this consulting relationship and in light of the impending deadline. In essence, the risk of discomfort in using *feel* in inquiry before any previous self-disclosure is far outweighed by the potential positive effects of using it. Even if this circumstance were, instead, two men from a bobsleigh team, I would have no hesitation in using it.

A final consideration is that Craig and Susan are athletes. Athletes will have a firm understanding that how they feel affects how they perform. In fact, they spend a lot of time on

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shaping and managing how they feel in order to perform how they want to. It is inherent to what they do. Therefore, this characteristic should inform the decisions as well.

My first consultation assignment occurred in 1998, 15 years prior to the final completion of this study. Over this period of time, I have gathered enough experience to understand the nuance of consulting. I use the word *feel* in my work on a regular basis and, by all accounts, have developed an expertise in its deployment in support and its recognitions in unprovoked self-disclosure. Both my training and experience have provided me with other skills that allow me to confidently navigate its use. The rules elucidated here will be helpful for others in supporting rules, in performance psychology or beyond. It must be stressed that this nuance means that training and reflection is required. New consultants or consultants and training should follow these rules until they have a good “feel” for its use. As shown in these three articles, talking about feelings is inherently personal and trust and rapport building skills **MUST** be understood first before plunging into such matters. Although there might be less risky instances for the use of feel than others (e.g., talking about past problematic feelings versus future hopeful or desired feelings) it is recommended that neophyte consultants or support providers learn other fundamentals skills first.

To this end, self-disclosing ruptures should be the focus and inquiring using *feel* outside of the rules should be avoided. The ruptures shared by these participants showed that self-disclosure was reflexive as stress, tension, or emotion was so overwhelming that they needed to share how they felt. These instances transcended the rules and gender, trust, status, and context lost relevance. These moments represent high-leverage supporting moments where a positive impact can be made on the current state of the discloser.

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The word *feel* might also have practical value in reference to message effects in health communication. Message effects involve the consideration of how the content of mediated messages influence thoughts, attitudes, and behavior (Viswanath & Emmons, 2006). It was an interesting coincidence that, during the writing process of this thesis, a mental health campaign was launched called *Let's Talk*. Bell Communications, a Canadian telecom company, collected a high profile Olympic athlete named Clara Hughes to represent the campaign. Its focus was to facilitate the open communication of mental health through social media and in offline group meetings in the community. In following the campaign diligently over its first two years, much of its focus has been placed on addressing the stigma of mental health. They have attempted to do so by performing mass advertising campaigns for one targeted month each year.

In essence, the campaign is an invitation to the public to self-disclose feelings with someone who is presumably trustworthy. While *Let's Talk* is focused strongly on public education, its supporting tools consistently implore people to talk about how they feel or have felt in the past. The word *feel* is represented in their materials. While there is no blatant attempt to invite people to use the word in self-disclosure, it would appear that the word *feel* could be a tool for initiatives such as these as it is a large part of the mental health discourse.

Ultimately, it is useful to be strategic in how messaging is constructed. That is, using *feel* within the parameters of its discursive rules can eliminate some of the linguistic snags that limit access to the important support available or on offer. This includes considering alternatives to *feel* until trust or rapport is established.

Study Limitations

This study is faced with several limitations that warrant consideration for future investigations. One of the inherent constraints of qualitative research is in its restrictions in

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generalizability of its results. The findings cannot be depicted as definitive of the manifestation of the constructs used to frame this work. Patterns and themes are delineated from the interviews and they should not be taken as fact but, instead, used to inform new research questions and even new research methods to learn more about these findings in greater depth. Staying within the parameters of qualitative research in this way is a challenge. Observing reflections of concepts in the accounts of study participants is stimulating but making grand conclusions from these occurrences must be restrained.

Another limitation of this study included its lack of focus on the valance attached to the use of the word *feel*. Unsurprisingly, participants indicated that it could be used to describe a range of emotions, positive or negative. No questions were asked that pertained to whether valance played a more important role in how people used *feel*. Is it used more for coping with concerns, stresses, or anxieties (what Goldsmith (2004) described as “troubles talk”)? This could shed light on its potential role in much more specific processes involved in achieving positive health outcomes.

Furthermore, there was only a moderate amount of variation in context details. The majority had office jobs and most, likely due to mean age, had secured middle management positions. While this still allowed for an exploration of the word *feel* in a professional context, this study could have benefited from insights from a wider variety of professions (e.g., construction, sports coaching, teaching). In this way, the workplaces described by participants were also very gender neutral in that no participant except Alexander, a military retiree, described their workplace as gender-dominant in any significant way.

While gender emerged as prominent in other ways, another boundary of this interpretation was created by not considering sexual orientation. Information on orientation was

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not collected from the participants. However, it is possible that the use of the word *feel* can be influenced by this attribute. Do men or women use the word *feel* differently as sexual orientation varies? This limitation presents another intriguing question for further research.

An additional noteworthy limitation lies in the process of participant recruitment. Poster advertisements were located at a campus health clinic. In turn, considerations might be made for how self-selection through this means might influence the findings. For instance, it is plausible that self-selected participants from a clinic poster might a) care about well-being and how they feel more than most b) have a negative slant on health and well-being by virtue of their need to visit a clinic to begin c) be more open to discuss such matters. In these cases, interviews may be unusually rich and unrepresentative. However, this richness has its advantages as a reflective participant can produce detailed insight that helps minimize assumptions on behalf of the researcher. Such a recruitment approach may have missed certain perspectives which would have influenced these results. For example, would people who do not attend clinics respond differently? Would they have deemed the word *feel*, for instance, as more personal than attendees? Would they been as likely to associate *feel* with their feelings? Do people who avoid clinics do so because they make them feel vulnerable? On this note, are those who did respond already in a vulnerable position and, in turn, more likely to describe the word *feel* as denoting vulnerability? These questions require consideration in analysing the recruitment approach chosen.

Future Directions

In light of these limitations and the findings lies opportunity. These insights point to additional questions that merit exploration. One question to include as an extension to the current study would be with regard to the dynamic nature of relationships and how they can change over

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time. In particular, at no point in this study were questions asked pertaining to the conditions whereby a person may stop using the word *feel* in a relationship that previously included it. It would be intriguing to learn more about how people fall into and out of its use with parents, friends, colleagues or others.

In addition, this investigation explored the word *feel* across many relationships. While such a wide swath yielded enough heterogeneity in the data to make clearer assumptions during analysis, there would be plenty of benefit to digging deeper in one context or even into one relationship. As mentioned, health care provider relationships with patients would be a possible next step. Another possible relationship to explore more vigorously is the superior-subordinate one found in the workplace. Examining the influence of different types or styles of workplace might be a positive extension of the current findings.

Furthermore, at its foremost, this study focused on perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about the word *feel*. Consequently, this study does not offer the complete story on how the word is actually used in day-to-day practice. Therefore, it would also be logical to examine how participants use the word in their daily lives. This could be achieved using an ethnographic approach whereby real-time occurrences of the use of the word could be obtained. For example, recording actual speech in the workplace using a wireless microphone/recorder could allow for even closer examination of the instances of use. This would subsequently introduce the opportunity to probe into the reasons for its use or avoidance. This approach offers a lot of flexibility. For example, this method could examine the word *feel* in very specific types of relationships. Intriguing uses of this approach to observing the word *feel* in greater depth could include, for instance, doctor-patient relationships, counselor-client relationships, or relationships found at home.

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A final direction to follow based on these findings is to explore the word *feel* as part of intervention research in performance arenas or health promotion settings that rely on delivering social support. Exploring the effects of the skillful use of the word *feel* in communication with patients or clients on measures such as trust and helpfulness would demonstrate the capacity of the skillful use of the word *feel* for providing social support. This could help define the nuances of the use of the word *feel* and lead to its more effective use.

Closing

Few studies have been conducted with the purpose of exploring the choices people make in using self-disclosing language. No studies have examined the word *feel* as a specific object of focus. Yet, the findings of this study indicate that much can be learned about social support and well-being through such a narrow focus on language use.

This study began with a simple curiosity into the reasons behind how people manage the word *feel* in their daily lives. In general, exploratory research is a messy and uncertain process that is filled with stumbles and reconsiderations. In the end, its ultimate objective is to achieve coherency from an often jumbled process. This goal can only be achieved after analysis and not before, indicative of qualitative research but particularly representative of explorative approaches.

Health is a complex concept, influenced by a wide range of factors. This study has revealed a multitude of possible associations between language use and certain health pathways. In the vein, acts of self-disclosure are common in the daily lives of people. However, this study shows how self-disclosing speech acts may not all be created equally. Future exploration into the theoretical development of the speech acts performed through the word *feel* is worthwhile. In

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addition, the possible practical efficacy in intervention approaches that present the use of word *feel* as a skill appears to be a worthy initiative to push understanding forward.

Research on individual social capital and, more specifically, social support, strives for more mechanisms which might link concepts together in order to clarify the pathways which produce positive health effects. In sum, although the deployment of *feel* requires judicious management of the risks inherent in emotional self-disclosure, this word can be an indicator of enacted social support whereby valuable social resources are exchanged.

Appendices

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Appendix A - Participant Consent Form

Recruitment of participants for a study on feel and well-being

As part of my doctorate, I will be conducting in-depth interviews under the supervision of Dr. Christine Dallaire who is a professor in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. One purpose of my study is to explore how people interpret well-being in their life. The second purpose is to understand how people understand the word “feel”.

If you are interested, you will be asked to participate in one in-depth interview of approximately 30-45 minutes in length with a possibility of a second follow-up interview of 45-90 minutes in length where you will be asked to tell your life story. In the instance of the second interview, should you be asked to participate, you will not have to share any information you wish not to share.

The interviews will be audio taped and will be scheduled at a time convenient to both you and myself. These interviews will take place in the Centre for Consultation in Sport and Health. You will be assigned a number to your file so that your name will not appear on or identify you on any transcript. The information you will share throughout the study will be used strictly for research purposes and remain strictly confidential. All data will be kept for five years after it is collected and will be destroyed in August of 2012.

Furthermore, the audiotapes and transcripts of interviews will be stored in the Laboratory of Sport Psychology & Well-being at the University of Ottawa, and only the research team will have access to the codes and data. You will be able to receive, by providing a mailing address below, a summary of findings of this research.

Benefits of this study: The research topic and interviews were found to be interesting and useful in similar research in which the process of meaningful life engagement was explored. You will

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learn about yourself and might leave the study with a more concrete understanding of what it is like for you to be well.

Potential risks involved: The risks for this study are not higher than those lived in everyday life. All interviews will be conducted in English and no compensation will be offered for your compensation.

By agreeing to participate in this study, I, _____, understand that my involvement will consist of sharing some personal information about my life and that the research will not pose any serious risk. The purpose of this study is not to impose judgement on how I live my life but to gain information. I am also aware that the results of this study will be presented to research peers at the University of Ottawa, at conferences and/or published in health psychology journals but that my name will not be mentioned at any time. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, including before or during the interview without any consequence or prejudice.

Any information requests or complaints about the ethical conduct of my project may be addressed to the protocol officer for ethics in research, 550 Cumberland, room 159, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5, (613) 562-5387 or ethics@uottawa.ca. There are two copies of the consent form: one for the participant and one for the researcher.

I consent to the interview being audio taped: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Should you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact:

Dr. Christine Dallaire

OR

Kelly Doell

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School of Human Kinetics

Faculty of Health Sciences

University of Ottawa

Population Health

Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Ottawa

Please mail me a summary of the results to:

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Appendix B - Interview Guide with Probing Questions

Part One	Part Two	Part Three	Part Four
Q1. What images, if any, come to mind when you think of the word <i>feel</i>? • What else do you see? Is this all? • Why this image? • If any, what other images come to mind? • What exactly do you mean when you use the word "emotion"?	Q2. How, if at all, do you use the word <i>feel</i> in your daily life? • What other ways do you use it? • Why do you believe you use it in this way?	Q3. How, if at all, do you use the word <i>feel</i> across your relationships: • Tell me more about how you use the word <i>feel</i> with this person? • How does using it in this way compare to other relationships? Can you elaborate more on the factors which influence how you use it?	Q4. What other thoughts would you like to add about your use of the word <i>feel</i>? • What else would you like to add to what you've already shared?

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Appendix C – Interview Follow-Up Questions

The following questions were added to the interview guide as themes were identified. They served to accumulate additional depth:

- Can you explain what makes the word *feel* seem personal?
- Can you explain what makes the word *feel* seem unprofessional in the workplace?
- How, if at all, does the gender of the person with which you are speaking influence how you use the word *feel*?

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Appendix D – Sample Meaning Units

Theme	Sub-theme	Sample Meaning Units
Self-disclosure	To confess	- The word can release a bunch of things; either the emotional burdens a person carries or things that are more personal. (Olivia) - ... I absolutely need to have trust in the person with whom I'm dealing to reveal feelings. I don't need to ask how they feel though. (Charles)
	Seek intimacy	- I guess you would let them into your world right? (Theresa) - I don't share as much information and certainly not about more personal or intimate information about myself and my personality.(Jennifer)
	Seek support	- I'd use it to describe how I feel and may be they can help me get past it and move on. (Paul) - I was in grade 7 when my mom first sent me to counselling just so I could talk to someone because I wasn't talking period. So I think it is not something I tend to use with my family. (Olivia)
Inquiry		- I use it as a check to see if someone's okay.(Juliette) - I ask because I genuinely want to know how they are feeling. I am concerned about how they feel. I'm there for them. (Jake)
Trust		- So I guess a lot of it is a matter of trust, too. For me, personally, if it is someone you can trust then maybe you'd feel more comfortable. (Theresa) - I'll use it with people I am more comfortable with. (Nadia)
Reciprocation		- You'll talk about everything; who you like, your relationships, your family and how it all makes you feel. (Christine) - With my friends, we'll use it without any worry. (Brenda)
Inhibition		- I always try and keep a poker face (at work). You try not to share emotions. (Charles)

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- There are sometimes that I withhold how I feel and I will internalize it if I don't feel the other person is going to be open to what I am saying (Nancy)
 - Feelings are use continuously at work but not necessarily said. But they are felt. (Ben)
- Intimacy
- The closer the person is to me the more likely I am to use the word *feel*. (Cindy)
 - There is a certain amount of intimacy that people want to avoid at work... at work there are rules.
 - I think *feel* is more intimate. (Jerry)
 - There has to be a connection (Nadia)
- Professional
- I think work is less about how you feel and more about outcomes and what you produce. (Juliette)
 - I won't talk about me and how I feel I will talk about the environment and what needs to be done. (Brenda)
 - With my government job, I would never mention how I felt with the boss. But at the hospital, I would... Nurses have a more holistic way to view jobs and they want you to have a positive experience. (Juliette)
- Personal
- The word *feel* is personal to me. (Jennifer)
 - I think it is easier to use in more personal contexts. (Ben)
 - At work, it is more oriented to money and institution outcomes rather than your personal life. (Juliette)
- Gender
- I manage a team of professionals and they're all women and I think we all lean very much on emotional scales and stress scales. (Brenda)
 - Generally, (my father) didn't express his feelings that much so at home I'd use it more with my mother than my father (Theresa)
 - Men don't feel. (Alexander)
- Sincerity
- To be honest and sincere and talk to them exactly what I'm feeling inside. You wouldn't say "I feel sad" if you didn't mean it. (Brenda)
 - I would use it in terms of something I meant sincerely like "I feel that we should take this course of action". (Cindy)

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Vulnerability

- If they are aware of it, they have a certain amount of influence over my emotional state. So I have made myself vulnerable there. (Brenda)
- If you share, that gives the other person permission to share... but it is rather difficult. (Olivia)
- My father was open to sharing feelings but in a very personal context when you are alone and others shouldn't know how you feel because it would make you open to preying. (Ben)

At Wits End

- It doesn't have to be a close relationship but I'm very comfortable using *feel* when I'm overwhelmed or my stress level is high. (Brenda)
 - I probably use it to express some sort of anxiety. It's probably more likely in a negative way. (Nadia)
-

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