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The anticipated social cost of disclosing a rejection experience

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Abstract

Social rejection is a negative experience. Disclosing this experience to others may be beneficial for the target but may also entail costs if the audience reacts negatively. Across five pre-registered studies ($N = 1120$), we investigated how people may feel an urge to disclose a certain hypothetical rejection experience, but, depending on anticipated costs and benefits, may be reluctant to do so. The results reveal that when considering disclosing this rejection experience (a) targets anticipate social costs rather than benefits, and audiences indeed devalue such targets who disclose that they were rejected; (b) targets feel the urge to talk about this experience yet feel reluctant to do so; and (c) targets see disclosing to a close other as less risky, hence mitigating the conflicting urge and reluctance to talk. These findings suggest that people view disclosing a rejection experience as risky and perhaps not as the best coping strategy.

KEYWORDS
benefit, cost, disclosure, rejection, reluctance, social-sharing, urge

1 | THE ANTICIPATED SOCIAL COST OF SHARING A REJECTION EXPERIENCE

Social rejection is an aversive and painful experience that threatens the fundamental need to belong (Williams, 2009). While previous research documented the aversiveness of this experience (Chen et al., 2014; Wesselmann et al., 2013; Williams, 2009), the question of how people cope with this negative event has received less empirical attention (see Eck et al., 2016 for a review of coping strategies). Potential ways of coping include engaging in positive reappraisal of the situation (Poon & Chen, 2016; Sethi et al., 2013), enjoying comfort foods (Troisi & Gabriel, 2011), watching favoured television programmes (Derrick et al., 2009), or turning to religion (Aydin et al., 2010; Laurin et al., 2014). No studies to date have addressed an important social tool that could potentially help in dealing with the negative consequences of rejection: social sharing of this negative emotional experience.

Social sharing of emotions is a fairly common social tool (see Rimé, 2009 for a review). Even though motivations might differ, people often talk about negative emotion eliciting events with others (Duprez et al., 2015; Rime et al., 1991). On one hand, when talking about certain emotional events, people anticipate benefits such as emotional relief (Nils & Rimé, 2012) or experience benefits such as emotional recovery (Brans et al., 2014). On the other hand, people can anticipate costs when sharing emotional events with others such as being socially rejected (Cantisano et al., 2013). Thus, when considering talking about past rejection experiences, targets similarly might anticipate both costs and benefits, and this may impact their decision to share their hurt with others or not. This potential social tool in relation to social rejection has not yet received any empirical attention. We aim to fill this gap and investigate how targets of rejection think about socially sharing a rejection experience with others.

If targets of rejection would share their experiences with others, we believe they would initially do that during the reflective stage in which the targets deal with the negativity of the experience. According to the Temporal Need-Threat Model of Ostracism (Williams, 2009), the effects of being rejected unfold in three stages; reflexive, reflective and resignation stages. Targets of rejection feel the initial hurt in the reflexive stage. They start coping and dealing with the hurt in the reflec-

tive stage and progress to the resignation stage if rejection becomes prolonged and cannot be overcome. This last stage is characterized by feelings of depression, helplessness, unworthiness and alienation (Riva et al., 2017).

Imagine a workplace setting in which an individual was rejected by their team members due to sub-optimal task performance. After the initial pain (i.e., the reflexive stage), the target may start thinking about sharing their hurt with others in the reflective stage. They might want to share their hurt and may receive emotional and social support. However, they may be hesitant to share if they think that their audience will negatively evaluate them. This presents a crucial disclosure decision for the target, the outcome of which might help with or impede their recovery from the rejection experience. This means that targets may have to evaluate costs and benefits and choose their audience strategically to receive emotional and social support.

2 | SOCIAL SHARING OF SOCIAL REJECTION

2.1 | The potential benefits of sharing rejection

Social support (Teng & Chen, 2012) and social connections (Aureli et al., 2020; Marinucci & Riva, 2020) are potential remedies for the negative impact of social exclusion. One-way targets can tap into these benefits is by sharing their hurt with others. Previous work on social sharing of emotions (Nils & Rimé, 2012; Rimé, 2009; Rimé et al., 2020) and on self-disclosure (Afifi et al., 2017; Collins & Miller, 1994; Tremmel & Sonnentag, 2018) suggests that people anticipate and experience emotional and social benefits when talking about emotion-eliciting events and disclosing personally sensitive information. We set out to test whether these findings also translate to social rejection, a negative experience that has not been studied in this context. Targets of rejection might anticipate talking about the experience to be generally beneficial and useful, and that it might help them cope with the event (Zech & Rimé, 2005). More specifically, they could perceive emotional benefits such as emotional relief (Brans et al., 2014; Zech & Rimé, 2005) and emotional recovery from the experience (Nils & Rimé, 2012). Furthermore, there could also be social benefits such that people could reconnect and strengthen social bonds with the audience (Collins & Miller, 1994; Manne et al., 2004), or experience increased relationship quality in the form of feeling more accepted and secure (Gable et al., 2012), fulfilling the thwarted need to belong. This line of work suggests that targets may anticipate benefits when socially sharing a rejection experience. We refer to this as *the talking is good hypothesis*.

Previous work on reactions to social exclusion offers support for the idea that targets may benefit from disclosing their rejection to others. Observers can feel the target's pain after exclusion (Giesen & Echterhoff, 2018; Wesselmann et al., 2013; Wesselmann et al., 2009), suggesting that an audience can empathize with the target's suffering. Moreover, observers rely on available cues to make attributions as to why exclusion occurs (e.g., Petsnik & Vorauer, 2020; Rudert et al., 2020) and can be sympathetic towards the target if they think, for example, exclusion is unwarranted or unfair (Rudert et al., 2018). This work provides further support for the talking is good hypothesis by showing how observers can sympathize with and help the targets.

2.2 | The potential costs of sharing rejection

Social rejection experiences are instances in which people are socially devalued by others (Eidelman et al., 2006; Heerdink et al., 2015; Rudert et al., 2018; Sznycer et al., 2016; Wesselmann et al., 2013). Therefore, we think that targets can incur costs by socially sharing their rejection experience. We turn to previous work on social sharing of emotions and self-disclosure for the various ways in which the anticipation of costs can manifest itself. Targets might feel ashamed about being rejected (Sznycer et al., 2016) and not want to share it with others (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998; Rimé, 2009); they might anticipate being negatively evaluated upon sharing (Caughlin et al., 2005) or they might fear future rejection (Cantisano et al., 2013; Derlega et al., 2004). This line of work supports the idea that targets may anticipate sharing their rejection experience with others to be costly. We refer to this as *the talking is bad hypothesis*.

Work on observer and target reactions to social exclusion provides support for how targets may incur costs upon disclosure. Work on observer reaction shows that observers may devalue the target and side with the sources if, for example, they think that the target violated a norm (Rudert et al., 2020), was excluded fairly (e.g., because of being a burden to the group, Wesselmann et al., 2013), or was excluded with a punitive motive (Rudert et al., 2018; Rudert & Greifeneder, 2019). Targets seem to be aware of this possibility as well because one study showed that targets experience ostracism more negatively if there are observers present at the time of exclusion (as opposed to them learning about it later, Hales et al., 2020). The authors suggest that this might be due to targets not being able to engage in any sort of reputation control if audience is there to directly witness the incident. Taken together these set of studies offer support for the talking is bad hypothesis by showing how audiences may further devalue a target.

2.3 | Urge and reluctance to share

Above we argued that sharing a rejection experience may be associated with costs and benefits. Another issue to consider is how the act of sharing may manifest itself. We argue that it is useful to distinguish between having the need to talk about it (Rimé, 2009; Rimé et al., 1998) and acting on this need (Afifi & Steuber, 2009, 2010; Cantisano et al., 2013; Derlega et al., 2004). That is, it may be fruitful to consider the possibility that people may on the one hand feel an urge to disclose this negative experience and on the other hand be reluctant to actually share it (Lev-Wiesel et al., 2019; Mueller et al., 2009).

Of course, one could argue that these two constructs are the opposing ends of the same construct. That is, one could argue that people who have a high urge are not reluctant, and those who have a low urge are very reluctant. This is, however, not what we anticipate. Building on insights from the social belongingness literature, we anticipate that the experience of being excluded may induce an urge in people

to (re)connect to others and thus share their experience. However, when considering whether to actually engage in social sharing (i.e., to act on their urge) people may let their decision depend on the anticipated costs or benefits of the actual sharing. If so, this could mean that while the urge itself might not depend on the expected costs or benefits of sharing, the reluctance to actually share one's experience might be moderated by these anticipated cost and benefits. In terms of more traditional theories of motivation that distinguish between drives and incentives (e.g., Hull and Spence's theories on behavior: Black, 1965), one could see the urge to socially connect to others as a drive that is evoked by being excluded, while the felt reluctance to actually act on this urge would be determined by the expected incentive of the actual sharing.

2.4 | Audience closeness as a moderator

Possible reactions of one's audience might account for the reluctance to talk. It seems plausible, however, that this process would also be dependent on one's relationship with the audience. Therefore, we also tested our reasoning in settings where we manipulated the closeness of the audience.

Individuals usually engage in social sharing of emotions with persons who are significantly close to them, such as partners, family members, or close friends (Duprez et al., 2015; Rime et al., 1991). Relationship closeness acts as a safety signal (Beike et al., 2016) and may affect to what extent targets perceive talking about rejection as costly or beneficial. Generally, individuals anticipate more supportive and less negative reactions when talking to a close other (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Greene et al., 2012). Extrapolating from these findings, we argue that the closeness of the relationship between the rejected target and the audience could moderate the target's perception of whether talking about rejection will be good or bad. More specifically, we propose that targets of social rejection will anticipate higher benefits and lower costs when sharing their experience with close others, as compared to distant others, and that this in turn would impact their urge and reluctance to talk.

3 | OVERVIEW OF THE STUDIES

Drawing on work on belonging (Williams, 2009), social sharing of emotions (Rimé, 2009), and self-disclosure (Omarzu, 2000), we propose that targets can consider disclosing their rejection experiences either as good (i.e., talking is good hypothesis) or bad (i.e., talking is bad hypothesis). In five studies, we contrast these hypotheses in relation to anticipated costs/benefits and urge and reluctance to talk. Our aim is to show whether targets consider socially sharing their hurt as good or bad.

In all studies participants evaluated an individual who was transferred from one work group to another. In the rejection conditions, participants were informed that the reason for the transfer was that the team members did not want to work with the target anymore. In the control conditions, participants learned that the transfer was based on a random draw. The reason to use this rejection manipulation is that it ensured that both conditions are similar on all possible levels of comparison except the reason for the transfer. This ensures that we only manipulated social rejection, while keeping constant that the target is changing groups.

We would like to highlight that in the social rejection condition, the reason for why the rejection occurred is unclear. That is, we rely on a rejection experience with an unclear reason (i.e., no clear reason as to why the colleagues did not want to work with the target) in a performance context (i.e., the workplace) and compare this to a situation where the target is again removed from the group, but not rejected. This means that the questions posed, and the evidence presented should always be viewed from the perspective of this comparison: unclear social rejection in a work context resulting in removal from a group versus random draw resulting in removal from a group.

We investigated three main questions: (1) Do people anticipate benefits (Studies 1 and 4) and costs (Studies 2–4) of talking about rejection? (2) Do people feel the urge and the reluctance to talk about rejection (Studies 1–4)? Lastly: (3) How does audience closeness impact these anticipations (Study 5)? For all the studies, we first report the pre-registered confirmatory analyses, followed by exploratory analyses. We report all measures, manipulations and exclusions in these studies. Furthermore, for all the reported studies, we pre-registered our a priori sample size calculations (conducted by using G*Power: Erdfelder et al., 2009) to detect medium to large sized effects based on the main dependent variables for an overall 80% power, and the alpha level corrected for the number of dependent variables by Bonferonni correction (see Supplementary Material for more information on all the sample size calculations and full set of measures used in all studies). We used the corrected alpha levels in each study to judge the significance of statistical tests (e.g., in Study 4, a p value smaller than .01 was considered significant given that there were 5 dependent variables). We only analysed the data after the data collection was finalized. We recruited participants online via Prolific Academic (an academic crowd sourcing website with comparable participant characteristics to the more popular alternative Amazon's MTurk: Peer et al., 2017). Each study had an independent sample (screening criteria: UK citizens, English as first language, aged 18–65 years, with approval rates > 80%, did not participate in any other study reported in this project). All data, preregistration files and analysis scripts are available on an online repository (i.e., Open Science Framework: https://osf.io/gntmj/

4 | STUDY 1

Study 1 provided a first test of our theoretical framework, by specifically focusing on the anticipated positive outcomes of talking about being rejected and how this relates to the urge to talk about it. We contrasted two competing hypotheses: According to the *talking is good hypothesis*, people would anticipate higher benefits if they would talk about what happened in the rejection condition than in the control condition. According to the *talking is bad hypothesis*, people would anticipate lower benefits if they would talk about what happened in the rejection condition than in the control condition.

Our predictions were less clear for the possible effects of the rejection manipulation on the urge to talk about what happened. The *talking is good hypothesis* would imply that the urge could be higher in the rejection condition than in the control condition, while the *talking is bad* hypothesis would suggest that the urge would be higher in the control condition than in the rejection condition. However, we also anticipated that people might always—regardless of the cause—have an urge to disclose the fact that they have transferred from their original group to a new group. If so, the urge would not be moderated by the reason (they did not want me vs. random decision). Following this argument, it may thus also be expected that people would anticipate similar levels of urge across the rejection and control condition.

4.1 | Methods

4.1.1 | Participants and design

We recruited participants online via Prolific Academic who were randomly assigned to either rejection or the control condition. After excluding participants who failed both of the attention checks[1] ($n = 2$) and who did not complete the survey ($n = 7$), the final sample consisted of 220 participants (153 female, 67 male, $M_{age} = 35.59$, range 18–65). We conducted a sensitivity power analysis using G*Power (Erdfelder et al., 2009) with 80% power, for a two-tailed independent t-test with an alpha level of 0.05. Results indicated that the minimum effect size that we can detect with 220 participants would be $d = .38$.

4.1.2 | Procedure

Participants were asked to imagine being the person in the scenario. Participants in the rejection condition ($n = 110$) read:

> I was working in a group of five for a project in my firm. We had to work as a group and, in the end, give a presentation to the stakeholders. Halfway through the project we had our project evaluation meeting and we also learned that there was an opening in a new project. During the meeting, we were also asked to rate how willing we were to continue working with our team members as part of the 360 feedback. We were told that if somebody gets a low rating they could be transferred to the new project. However, they also told us that if everybody gets similar ratings, the manager could transfer someone to the new project randomly. After this meeting, I learned that the other people in the project did not want to work with me anymore. Therefore, the manager told me that I was assigned to the new project and the rest of the group continued working without me.

The scenario presented in the control condition ($n = 110$) was almost identical. The only difference was whether the colleagues wanted to work with the target and how they were transferred to another group:

> After this meeting, I learned that the other people in the project wanted to continue working with me. However, since everybody got similar ratings the manager randomly picked one of us, and it was me. I got assigned to the new project, and the rest of the group continued working without me.

4.1.3 | Measures

Anticipated benefits

Following previous work on emotion sharing (Zech & Rimé, 2005), we distinguished between two types of benefits: general benefits and relief. General benefits was assessed with four items (e.g., "*Talking about the event would be meaningful*"; $\alpha = 0.92$). Emotional relief was measured by four items (e.g., "*Talking about the event would allow me to feel better*"; $\alpha = 0.81$; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Urge to talk

Urge was measured with three statements (e.g., "*I would have the urge to talk about what happened*"; $\alpha = 0.95$; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). For full set of items see Supplementary Material.

Manipulation check

We checked our rejection manipulation with two items ("*I would feel rejected*", "*I would feel excluded*"; $r = 0.83$; 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*)[2].

4.2 | Results

4.2.1 | Confirmatory analyses

Results indicated that the minimum effect size that we can detect with 220 participants would be $d = 0.38$. For all results see Table 1. Participants in the rejection condition anticipated that they would experience less relief when talking about their rejection experience than those in the control condition. We did not observe significant differences between conditions regarding perceived general benefits and the urge to talk.

4.3 | Discussion

The results did not support the *talking is good hypothesis*. We did not observe on any of our dependent variables that targets anticipated

[1] Information on attention checks can be found in the supplementary material.

[2] In Study 1 we asked the manipulation check questions before the other dependent variables, whereas in Study 4 we asked them at the end of the questionnaire.

TABLE 1 Means, standard deviations and test statistics for all dependent variables in Studies 1–4

		Condition					
		Control *M (SD)*	Rejection *M (SD)*	*df*	*T*	*d*	95% CI
Study 1	General benefits	4.36 (1.36)	4.19 (1.50)	215.83	0.86	0.12	[−0.22, 0.55]
	Relief	4.29 (1.22)	3.50 (1.26)	215.10	4.90***	0.66	[0.47, 1.11]
	Urge	4.72 (1.65)	4.86 (1.74)	217.40	−0.60	0.08	[−0.59, 0.31]
	Manipulation check	4.08 (1.64)	6.08 (1.14)	194.55	−10.51***	1.42	[−2.38, −1.63]
Study 2	Negative evaluation	2.71 (1.59)	5.31 (1.35)	207.66	−12.91***	1.76	[−3.00, −2.20]
	Willingness to work	5.23 (1.31)	2.84 (1.30)	211.98	13.44***	1.84	[2.04, 2.74]
	Reluctance	2.94 (1.73)	5.10 (1.72)	211.97	−9.13***	1.25	[−2.61, −1.69]
	Shame	2.43 (1.51)	5.29 (1.44)	211.82	−14.20***	1.94	[−3.26, −2.47]
Study 3	Negative evaluation	1.93 (1.24)	3.69 (1.52)	205.76	−9.34***	1.27	[−2.13, −1.39]
	Willingness to work	5.64 (1.07)	4.08 (1.31)	205.69	9.56***	1.30	[1.24, 1.88]
	Reluctance	3.26 (1.59)	5.50 (1.22)	202.33	−11.67***	1.58	[−2.26, −1.86]
	Shame	2.83 (1.72)	5.55 (1.42)	208.45	−12.66***	1.72	[−3.13, −2.29]
Study 4	Social benefits	4.41 (1.25)	2.85 (1.27)	213.00	9.08***	1.24	[1.22, 1.90]
	Relief	4.51 (1.16)	3.26 (1.37)	207.73	7.26***	0.99	[0.91, 1.60]
	Costs	2.86 (1.24)	5.03 (1.12)	210.37	−13.55***	1.85	[−2.50, −1.86]
	Urge	4.76 (1.42)	4.67 (1.39)	212.75	0.42	0.06	[−0.30, 0.46]
	Reluctance	2.94 (1.12)	4.40 (1.50)	205.27	−7.88***	1.07	[−1.83, −1.10]
	Manipulation check	4.05 (1.71)	6.26 (1.05)	176.16	−11.39***	1.56	[−2.59, −1.83]

Note. $^{*}p < .05$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{***}p < .001$.

more benefits in the rejection condition than in the control condition. The results partially supported the *talking is bad hypothesis*. Participants anticipated less relief about disclosing what happened to them in the rejection condition than in the control condition; we did not find statistically significant differences between the two conditions on the general benefits measurements.

In addition, we explored whether people felt the urge to talk about their experiences. The pattern of results across benefits, relief and urge to talk did not provide support for the idea that anticipated benefits are related with the urge to talk. Indeed, we observed that participants in both the rejection and the control condition anticipated similar levels of urge to talk. That is, people anticipated wanting to talk about being removed from a group at similar levels, regardless of whether this was because they were not wanted by their original group members or because of a random draw.

5 | STUDIES 2 AND 3

Study 1 suggested that the talking is bad hypothesis is predictive of how targets of rejection perceive the consequences of sharing their experience with others. In Studies 2 and 3, we took a closer look at the underlying concepts of this hypothesis by assessing the anticipated costs associated with talking about a rejection experience. We examined this from the perspectives of both the target (Study 2) and the audience (Study 3). Study 2 investigated whether targets anticipate this communication to be costly, and Study 3 investigated whether the audience's reaction would be in line with what targets anticipated. Participants were asked about the reluctance to share the experience, feelings of shame and devaluation in response to disclosure. Given that the only difference in the method of these two studies was the perspective that the participants were asked to take, we report them together.

For both Study 2 and 3, we predicted that participants would indicate more (anticipated) reluctance to talk and more (anticipated) shame in the rejection than in the control condition. Furthermore, we predicted that the participants would report more (anticipated) negative evaluations and less (anticipated) willingness to work with the target in the rejection condition than in the control condition. In short, we expected that targets (Study 2) and audiences (Study 3) would have a similar assessment regarding the disclosure.

In addition to the pre-registered hypotheses, we also conducted exploratory analyses. We conducted mediation analyses in both studies. In Study 2, we investigated whether the relationship between the rejection manipulation and the increased reluctance to talk would be mediated by the anticipated overall negative evaluation. In Study 3, we explored whether the relationship between the rejection manipulation and the reduced willingness to work with the target would be mediated by the audience's overall negative evaluation of the target.

5.1 | Methods

5.1.1 | Participants and design

We recruited participants online via Prolific Academic (with the same recruitment criteria as in Study 1). For Study 2 we collected data from

219 participants. After excluding the participants who failed both of the attention checks ($n = 1$) or with partial responses ($n = 1$), the final sample consisted of 217 participants (154 female, 62 male, one other [unspecified], $M_{age} = 35.98$, range 19–62). For Study 3, after excluding participants who failed both of the attention checks (one participant) or had partial responses (four participants), the final sample consisted of 214 participants (131 female, 81 male, two other [one nonbinary, one questioning], $M_{age} = 36.71$, range 18–65). In both studies participants were randomly assigned to either the rejection ($n_{study2} = 108$, $n_{study3} = 106$) or the control condition ($n_{study2} = 109$, $n_{study3} = 108$). Sensitivity power analyses revealed that for a given dependent variable we could detect an effect size of $d = .38$ and $d = .39$ for Studies 2 and 3, respectively.

5.1.2 | Materials and procedure

We used the same scenarios as in Study 1. In both Study 2 and Study 3, participants first read the statements about reluctance to talk, shame, negative evaluation and willingness to work on the first page and then read the statements about person perception dimensions on the second page. The order of the questions on both pages were randomized.

How Do Participants Feel About Sharing? In Study 2, participants reported how reluctant (*How reluctant would you feel to talk about this story?*) and ashamed (*How much shame would you feel if you were to talk about this?*) they would feel to talk about the experience. In Study 3, participants read the statements phrased from the perspective of a person who was hearing about the experience from the target. They were asked to anticipate how the target would feel about sharing this experience. The full set of items and questions can be found in the Supplementary Materials.

How Do Others Evaluate Sharing? In Study 2, participants reported on the negative evaluations they would expect from the audience after sharing the experience (*I think people would negatively evaluate me if I were to talk about this story*) and how much the audience would be willing to work with them (*Upon hearing this, how willing people would be to work with you in a similar situation?*). All questions in this study were answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Items from the audience perspective (Study 3) asked if the audience would negatively evaluate the target and if they would be willing to work with the target in the future. Full set of items can be found in the Supplementary Materials.

5.2 | Results

5.2.1 | Confirmatory analyses

The descriptive statistics and test results of the confirmatory analyses of Studies 2 and 3 are reported in Table 1. Targets (Study 2) anticipated that they would be evaluated more negatively, expected the audience to be less willing to work with them, felt more reluctant to talk about the episode, and indicated they would feel more ashamed in the rejection than in the control condition.

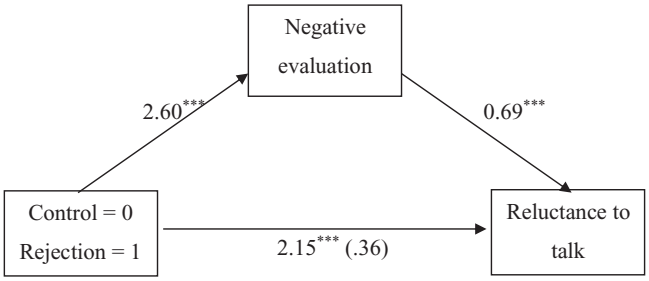

FIGURE 1 Exploratory mediation analysis, Study 2. *Notes.* Exploratory mediation analysis investigating the effect of rejection manipulation on target's reluctance to talk via perceived negative evaluation. The regression coefficients are unstandardized (the measurement scale is the same for all variables across studies).
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The results were similar for the audience (Study 3). Compared to the control condition, participants in the rejection condition evaluated the targets more negatively and were less willing to work with them. Moreover, participants in the rejection condition anticipated that the targets would be more reluctant to talk and feel more shame associated with talking about the episode.

5.2.2 | Exploratory analyses

We ran exploratory mediation analyses to gain more insight into how devaluation based on talking about being rejected impacts targets' reluctance to talk about the issue and the audience's anticipated behaviour towards the target. In Study 2, we investigated if the anticipation of negative evaluations mediated the relationship between the rejection manipulation and reluctance to talk. This mediation analysis (lavaan R package; 1000 bootstrap estimates), in which we dummy coded condition (0 = control, 1 = rejection) and centred the *negative evaluation* variable, revealed a significant indirect effect of condition on reluctance to talk ($B = 1.79$, $SE = 0.22$, 95% CI [1.38, 2.23], $p < .001$, see Figure 1).

For the audience, we explored if the effect of rejection on the audience's willingness to work with the target was mediated by how negatively they evaluated the target. We reasoned that one potential reason for the audience being less willing to work with the target might be the negative evaluation caused by hearing the episode. The mediation analysis, in which we dummy coded the condition and centred negative evaluation, revealed a significant indirect effect of condition on willingness to work with the target through negative evaluation ($B = -.62$, $SE = .14$, 95% CI [-0.92, -0.36], $p < .001$, see Figure 2).

5.3 | Discussion

The results revealed that targets of rejection (Study 2) anticipated that they would be more negatively evaluated upon sharing the episode, and

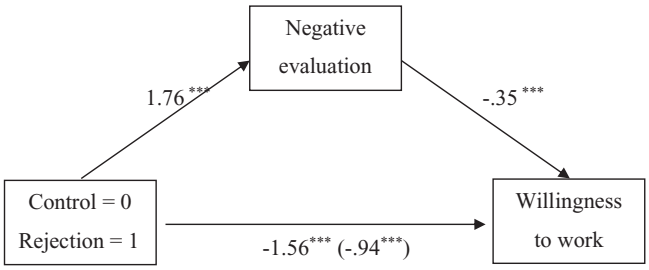

FIGURE 2 Exploratory mediation analysis, Study 3. *Notes.* Exploratory mediation analysis investigating the effect of rejection manipulation on audience's willingness to work with the target via negative evaluation. The regression coefficients are unstandardized (the measurement scale is the same for all variables across studies). * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

their audience (Study 3) indeed evaluated them more negatively compared to a person who was not rejected. This (anticipated and actual) devaluation supports *the talking is bad hypothesis* and suggests that sharing an experience of being rejected might be a risky act for the target. Upon sharing, they might be devalued by their audience and get rejected again.

Supporting our predictions, targets reported that they would feel more reluctant to talk about the episode in the rejection condition. Targets' reluctance to talk parallels their anticipation of the costs. This provides additional evidence for the relationship between anticipated costs and the decision to disclose. While people might have similar levels of urge to talk about both episodes (Study 1), they feel more reluctant to talk about the rejection episode– that is, the riskier endeavour.

The exploratory mediation analysis of Study 2 suggests that people's anticipation of the outcome of the disclosure affects how they feel about sharing the rejection experience with others. This corroborates prior findings in research on disclosure (e.g., Greene et al., 2012). The exploratory mediation analysis of Study 3 suggests that the negative evaluation of the audience partially mediates the relationship between rejection and the audience's willingness to work with the target. Taken together, these results suggest that devaluation plays a role in both targets' and audiences' appreciation of talking about an episode of rejection. Targets feel reluctant to share because they anticipate devaluation and the audience is less willing to work with the targets because they indeed devalue them.

6 | STUDY 4

Study 4 aimed to replicate and extend Studies 1 and 2 by simultaneously testing the *talking is good* and the *talking is bad* hypothesis. We assessed both the anticipated costs and benefits, and replaced a measurement of general benefits with a more specific measurement of social benefits (e.g., feeling accepted; feeling closer to the audience). Regarding the costs, support for our reasoning and replication of Study 2's findings would mean that rejection information would result in higher anticipated costs, and more reluctance to talk. Regarding benefits we still had two competing hypotheses. The *talking is bad hypothesis* would predict that participants report lower anticipated social benefits and relief associated with talking about the rejection experience, whereas the *talking is good hypothesis* would predict higher anticipated social benefits and relief associated with talking about the rejection experience.

Similar to the reasoning we outlined in Study 1, for urge we reasoned that people could report either less or more urge to talk in the rejection condition than the control condition.[3] Using a different approach from that in Study 1, we now also measured reluctance to talk. Simultaneously both the urge and reluctance to talk enable us to explore whether the constructs represent two ends of the same spectrum or indeed two independent constructs that tap into different conceptualizations of talking about rejection. While the former would mean that whenever urge to talk is high, reluctance to talk should be low, the latter would mean that these constructs could be high or low at the same time, independently from each other.

6.1 | Method

6.1.1 | Participants and design

We collected data online via Prolific Academic (same recruitment criteria as in Study 1) and had 216 completed responses to the study. After we had excluded one person who failed both of the attention checks,[4] the final sample consisted of 215 participants (148 female, 65 male, two non-binary, $M_{age} = 34.14$, range = 18–65). Participants were randomly assigned to either rejection ($n = 108$) or control ($n = 107$) condition. A sensitivity power analysis with an alpha of .01 revealed that for a given dependent variable we could detect an effect size of $d = .46$.

6.1.2 | Materials and procedure

We used the same rejection and control scenarios as in Study 1. After reading one of the scenarios, participants were presented with benefits and cost questions in one page and urge and reluctance to talk questions in another page. We randomized the order of the pages, and the order of the questions within each page. Lastly, they answered the manipulation check questions and some basic demographics. All items reported below were answered on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*).

Anticipated benefits

To assess the potential social benefits one could reap from disclosing an emotion-eliciting event (Gable & Reis, 2010; Greene et al., 2012; Sprecher et al., 2013) we measured anticipated social benefits with

[3] We did not update our hypothesis based on the results of Study 1 because another difference between the two studies is the order of the manipulation check questions. In Study 1, we asked participants to report whether they felt excluded and rejected before all the other dependent variables. Whereas in this study we asked the MC questions at the very end.

[4] We used the same exclusion criteria and attention checks as in Study 3.

four items (e.g., *"If I were to talk about this story, I think it would make me feel accepted."*, $\alpha = 0.88$). For relief, we used the same items as in Study 1 ($\alpha = 0.83$).

Anticipated costs

We used questions from Study 2 about anticipated negative evaluation and willingness to work with the target as measures of anticipated costs. After reverse coding the willingness item, we averaged these two items into a single *costs* variable ($r_{\text{spearman-brown}} = 0.76$).

Urge to talk

We used the same items as in Study 1 and averaged the ratings of the three items to obtain one *urge to talk* score ($\alpha = 0.84$).

Reluctance to talk

Instead of using a single-item measure as in Study 2, we measured reluctance with three items (e.g., "I would be hesitant to share this story with other people;" $\alpha = 0.82$).

Manipulation check

We used the same manipulation check items as in Study 1 ($r = 0.82$).

6.2 | Results

6.2.1 | Confirmatory analyses

Full results can be seen in Table 1. Participants anticipated more costs and felt more reluctant to talk, and also reported lower levels of relief and social benefits, in the rejection than in the control condition. As with the results of Study 3, we did not observe a significant effect of condition on participants' urge to talk.

6.2.2 | Exploratory analyses

Above we showed that reluctance to talk is moderated by audience clsoeness and urge to talk is not. To further investigate the discrepancy in urge and reluctance to talk ratings, we conducted a mixed ANOVA with the condition as the between factor and the urge and reluctance scores (i.e., sharing preference) as the within factor (see Figure 3). We observed significant main effects of the rejection manipulation, $F(1, 426) = 60.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$, and the sharing preference, $F(1, 426) = 92.42$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.18$, which were qualified by a significant interaction, $F(1, 426) = 33.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.073$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that people anticipated similar levels of urge and reluctance to talk in the rejection condition, $t(107) = -1.12$, $p = .27$, $d = 0.11$. However, in the control condition, the reluctance to talk about the event was less intense than the urge to talk, $t(106) = -9.07$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.88$.

As a further test of the relationship between urge and reluctance to talk, we also explored the correlation between these two variables. The results revealed significant negative correlation between urge and reluctance to talk, $r = -.38$, $p < .001$.

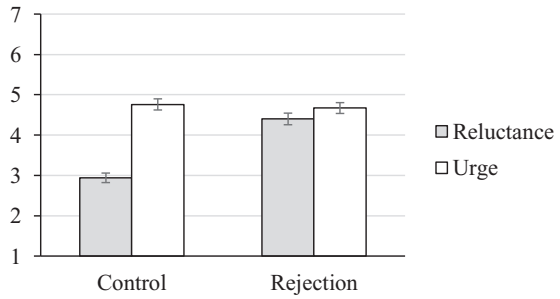

FIGURE 3 Reluctance and urge to talk as a function of the rejection in Study 4. *Notes*. Mean values of reluctance and urge to talk (with standard errors) in Study 4 as a function of the rejection manipulation. Higher values reflect more reluctance and urge to talk about the given experience

6.3 | Discussion

Results suggest that targets of rejection anticipate more social devaluation and fewer benefits than the people who were not rejected by their teammates. Taken together, Study 4 replicates the results of previous studies in that it offers further support for *the talking is bad hypothesis* but not for *the talking is good hypothesis*. We also investigated the relationship between urge and reluctance to talk. While the constructs were negatively correlated, they reacted differently to our manipulation of rejection. More specifically, while people reported similar urge to talk for both episodes, they reported more reluctance to talk about the rejection episode. This provides further evidence that, although related, these two constructs are independent from each other to a certain degree. That is, people might always have the urge to talk about a negative event such as being transferred to a new group but their reluctance to talk will depend on their assessment of costs and benefits. This particular relationship between urge and reluctance to talk and the anticipated outcomes resonates well with the understanding in traditional behavioural theories (Black, 1965) in that people have the urge (i.e., the drive) but their reluctance will depend on the costs and benefits (i.e., incentive motivation). Moreover, the similar urge and reluctance to talk ratings in the rejection condition points to a conflict between the individual's desire to share this experience with others and their simultaneous hesitation to do so.

7 | STUDY 5

Studies 1–4 did not specify the relationship between the target and their audience. In Study 5, we included relationship with the audience as a factor and manipulated the closeness of the audience by asking people to think of either a close or a distant other to talk about the experience in the vignettes. By doing so, we investigate how audience closeness impacts people's anticipation of costs and benefits regarding sharing a rejection experience.

We studied the impact of rejection and audience closeness on (a) anticipated costs and benefits, (b) reluctance to talk and (c) urge to talk.

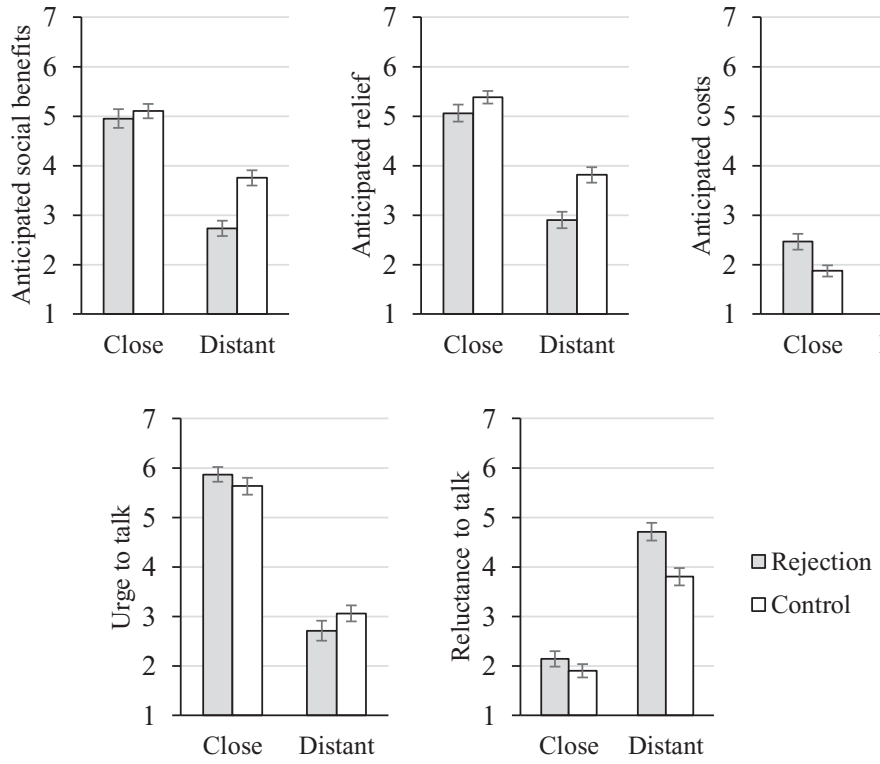

FIGURE 4 All outcome variables in Study 5 as a function of rejection and audience closeness. *Notes*. Mean values of outcome variables (with standard errors) in Study 5 as a function of the rejection and audience closeness manipulations. Higher values indicate higher anticipated social benefits, relief and costs, and higher urge and reluctance to talk, respectively

As we argued before, the predictions for the anticipated costs and benefits and reluctance to talk should mimic each other. Audience closeness can function as a safety signal (Beike et al., 2016). This safety signal may affect the benefits and costs targets associate with sharing their experience. In particular, we expected participants to report higher anticipated social benefits and relief, and lower costs and reluctance to talk with a close rather than with a distant other. Aside from the predicted main effect of audience closeness, we also expected an interaction effect between audience closeness and our rejection manipulation. More specifically, we expected the effect of audience closeness to be more pronounced for targets who had been socially rejected than for targets in the control condition. Relatedly, we expected participants to anticipate lower social benefit and relief in rejection than in the control condition, but especially so when the audience is a distant other. The rationale for these predictions is that high cost and low benefits are more pronounced and relevant for those sharing being socially rejected. Especially under these conditions, the safety signal of talking to a close other may be impactful.

Note, however, that we expected only a main effect of audience closeness on urge to talk but not a main effect of the rejection manipulation, nor an interaction effect. We did not expect a main effect of the rejection manipulation given that people reported similar levels of urge to talk across conditions in Studies 1, 3 and 4. We reasoned that the safety signal (Beike et al., 2016) may increase the urge to talk about being transferred to another group regardless of the reason. Therefore, we predicted only a main effect of audience closeness on urge to talk.

7.1 | Methods

7.1.1 | Participants and design

We employed a 2 (Audience closeness: close vs. distant) × 2 (Rejection: rejection vs. control) between-subjects design. We recruited participants via Prolific Academic (with the same recruitment criteria as in Study 1). After excluding the participants who did not complete the survey ($n = 9$) and who failed one of the attention checks[5] ($n = 16$), the final sample consisted of 254 participants (189 female, 64 male, one other, $M_{age} = 33.77$, range = 18–65). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. A sensitivity power analysis with an alpha of .01 revealed that for a given dependent variable we could detect an effect size of $\eta_p^2 = 0.045$.

7.1.2 | Materials and procedure

Participants read the scenario that was also used in Studies 1–4, to induce the rejection manipulation. The difference was that now participants considered talking about experience to someone who was not involved in the event and either really close to them (close other condition), or not so close to them (distant other condition). Subsequently,

[5] We used the same attention checks as in Study 3 but this time excluded people who failed one of the attention checks based on our pre-registered exclusion criteria.

they answered questions about anticipated social benefits, relief, costs, and the urge and reluctance to talk about the experiences. We presented the anticipated social benefits, anticipated relief and anticipated costs items in one page, and urge and reluctance to talk ratings in another page. The page order and the question order within each page were randomized. Lastly, participants answered the manipulation check questions and demographics before being debriefed.

Measures

We used the same anticipated social benefit ($\alpha = 0.91$), relief ($\alpha = 0.90$), costs ($\alpha = 0.77$), urge to talk ($\alpha = 0.94$), and reluctance to talk ($\alpha = 0.87$) measures as in Study 4. However, this time the questions and the instructions were tailored to a specific audience (e.g., instead of "*I would like to talk about this*" for urge, we asked "*I would like to talk about this with this person*" and instructed participants to answer all the questions with the person they thought of as the audience in mind).

Manipulation checks

Right after the audience closeness manipulation we asked the participants to report the category that would best represent their chosen audience with a forced-choice question (*spouse/partner*, *friend*, *family member*, *colleague*, *acquaintance*, *professional [e.g., a psychologist]*, *stranger*). After responding to all dependent variables, participants answered the same rejection manipulation check as in Study 4 ($r_{sb} = 0.85$). We then also asked them to report the closeness level of the imagined audience ("*How close was the person you imagined talking to?*"; 1 = *not close at all*, 7 = *very close*).

7.2 | Results

7.2.1 | Manipulation checks

For the feelings of rejection, we observed a significant main effect of our rejection manipulation, $F(1, 250) = 37.93$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$. Compared to the control condition ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 1.72$), participants in the rejection condition ($M = 6.22$, $SD = 1.11$) reported feeling more rejected, $t(220.17) = -10.54$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.32$. Neither the main effect of audience closenessa.[6]

For the closeness ratings, we observed a significant main effect of the closeness manipulation, $F(1, 250) = 454.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.65$. In the distant other condition, participants rated the audience as less close ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.16$) than in the close other condition ($M = 6.57$, $SD = 0.85$), $t(236.53) = -32.12$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.02$. Unexpectedly, we observed a significant main effect of the rejection manipulation on closeness ratings, $F(1, 250) = 6.38$, $p = .012$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.025$. Participants in the rejection condition reported that their imagined contact was more distant ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 2.39$) than the participants in the control condition ($M = 4.67$, $SD = 2.16$). The interaction term was not significant, $F(1, 250) = 5.05$, $p = .025$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.020$.

Finally, in the close other condition, participants mostly reported imagining close others (most selected three categories: 64% spouse/partner; 19% close friend; 17% family member) and in the distant other condition, participants reported imagining more distant categories (most selected three categories: 64% acquaintance; 21% colleague; 5% stranger).

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics for Study 4: Means and (standard deviations)

	Condition			
	Rejection		Control	
	Close ($n = 58$) *M* (*SD*)	Distant ($n = 67$) *M* (*SD*)	Close ($n = 66$) *M* (*SD*)	Distant ($n = 63$) *M* (*SD*)
Social benefits	$4.95\ (1.44)_a$	$2.73\ (1.44)_b$	$5.01\ (1.18)_a$	$3.75\ (1.23)_c$
Relief	$5.06\ (1.31)_a$	$2.90\ (1.36)_b$	$5.38\ (1.03)_a$	$3.81\ (1.24)_c$
Costs	$2.46\ (1.22)_a$	$4.84\ (1.14)_b$	$1.87\ (.92)_c$	$3.00\ (1.10)_d$
Urge	$5.87\ (1.14)_a$	$2.71\ (1.66)_b$	$5.63\ (1.39)_a$	$3.06\ (1.29)_b$
Reluctance	$2.14\ (1.19)_a$	$4.71\ (1.46)_b$	$1.89\ (1.10)_a$	$3.80\ (1.39)_c$

Note. Within each row, the means that significantly differ from each other are indicated by different subscripts ($p < .0025$).

Confirmatory analyses

We conducted planned 2 × 2 ANOVAs for all dependent variables. We followed up each of the significant interaction effects with simple effect analyses. For the full set of descriptive statistics, see Table 2. For a visual depiction of all outcome variables in Study 5 as a function of rejection and audience closeness, see Figure 4. The pre-registered *p* value for main effects and interactions was 0.01, and for simple effects analyses we used 0.0025.

For *anticipated social benefits* we observed significant main effects of rejection, $F(1, 250) = 21.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.078$, and closeness, $F(1, 250) = 35.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$, qualified by an interaction effect, $F(1, 250) = 7.53$, $p = .006$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.029$. As predicted, for participants who imagined talking to a close other, we observed no significant difference between rejection and control conditions, $t(110.30) = 0.62$, $p = .54$, $d = 0.11$, 95% CI [-0.33, 0.62]. When considering talking to a distant other, participants in the control condition anticipated significantly more social benefits than participants in the rejection condition did, $t(127.90) = 4.69$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.82$, 95% CI [0.59, 0.1.46]. Additionally, the effect of audience closeness was larger in the rejection condition, $t(114.66) = -9.11$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.64$, 95% CI [−2.71, −1.74] than in the control condition, $t(126.04) = -6.35$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.12$, 95% CI [−1.76, −.93].

For *anticipated relief* we observed a main effect of rejection in the predicted direction: participants anticipated more relief in the control

[6] One might wonder whether the effect of closeness on feelings of rejection could explain our findings in other dependent variables. We think this is unlikely for several reasons. First, we think this pattern of results was inflated given that we asked the participants to rate manipulation check ratings at the very end of the survey. Second, the interaction on the manipulation check of rejection if anything was driven by the difference in the control condition ($M_{close} = 4.05$, $SD_{close} = 1.81$; $M_{distant} = 4.60$, $SD_{distant} = 1.55$, $t(125.02) = 1.84$, $p = .068$, $d = 0.32$) rather than a difference in the rejection condition ($M_{close} = 6.30$, $SD_{close} = 1.05$; $M_{distant} = 6.16$, $SD_{distant} = 1.17$, $t(122.87) = -0.73$, $p = .46$, $d = 0.13$). Therefore, we do not think that it can explain an effect that is mainly driven by the differences in the rejection condition. Lastly, the manipulation check for rejection and closeness did not seem to be associated, $r = -0.1$, $p = .10$.

than in the rejection condition, $F(1, 250) = 17.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.055$. We also observed a main effect of closeness in the predicted direction, $F(1, 250) = 51.41$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.17$: participants anticipated more relief in the close other condition compared to the distant other condition. While the interaction was not significant, $F(1, 250) = 3.66$, $p = .057$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.014$, the simple effects analyses seemed in line with our predictions. The rejection manipulation did not have a significant effect on relief for participants considering talking to a close other, $t(107.77) = 1.49$, $p = .14$, $d = 0.27$, 95% CI [−0.11, 0.74]. But participants who imagined talking to a distant other anticipated more relief when talking about the control experience than the rejection experience, $t(127.89) = 4.01$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.70$, 95% CI [0.46, 1.37].

For *anticipated costs* we observed main effects of rejection, $F(1, 250) = 91.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.27$, and closeness $F(1, 250) = 34.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.12$, qualified by an interaction effect, $F(1, 250) = 20.57$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.076$. When considering talking to a close other about the event, participants in the control condition perceived this as less costly than participants in the rejection condition, $t(104.84) = -2.99$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.54$, 95% CI = [−0.98, − 0.20]. The effect was in the same direction for the participants who imagined talking to a distant other, but much larger, $t(127.91) = -9.35$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.64$, 95% CI [−2.22, −1.45]. Furthermore, as expected, the effect of audience closeness was larger in the rejection, $t(117.57) = 11.20$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.01$, 95% CI [1.96, 2.80], than in the control condition, $t(120.83) = 6.32$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.12$, 95% CI [0.78, 1.48].

For *urge to talk* we observed a main effect of closeness, $F(1, 250) = 109.54$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.31$. In line with our predictions, participants in the close other condition reported higher levels of urge to talk ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 1.28$) than the participants in the distant other condition ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.49$). However, we did not observe an effect of rejection, $F(1, 250) = 2.08$, $p = .15$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.008$, nor an interaction effect, $F(1, 250) = 2.89$ $p = .091$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.011$.

Lastly, for *reluctance to talk* we observed main effects of rejection, $F(1, 250) = 15.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.059$, and closeness, $F(1, 250) = 69.49$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.22$, but these were not qualified by a significant interaction effect at the 0.01 level, $F(1, 250) = 4.06$, $p = .045$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.016$. Simple effects analyses did reveal patterns consistent with our reasoning. When considering talking to a close other, no significant difference was observed between rejection and control conditions, $t(116.87) = -1.18$, $p = .24$, $d = 0.21$, 95% CI [−0.65, 0.17]. When considering talking to a distant other, participants in the control condition were less reluctant to talk than participants in the rejection condition, $t(127.98) = -3.60$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.63$, 95% CI [−1.39, −0.41]. Moreover, as predicted, the effect of audience closeness was larger in the rejection condition, $t(122.57) = 10.79$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.92$, 95% CI [2.09, 3.03] than in the control condition, $t(117.97) = 8.60$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.52$, 95% CI [1.47, 2.34].

7.3 | Discussion

The results suggest that audience closeness affects how people view talking about rejection experiences. More specifically, when being socially rejected (as compared to just being transferred to a new group), participants associated talking to a distant other with lower social benefits and higher costs. This negative effect was not found for those considering talking to a close other. While people might anticipate talking about rejection to be a costly endeavour in general, it thus seems that such concerns may be mitigated if the audience consists of close others. In those cases, the audience may serve as a safety signal (Beike et al., 2016) and make the communication appear less risky for the targets of rejection.

Study 5 also offers further support to the idea that urge and reluctance to talk are two distinct constructs. Participants reported a higher urge and lower level of reluctance to talk to close others compared to distant others. This suggests that they would feel a need to share these experiences with people who are close to them, and they would not feel hesitant in doing so. However, when considering talking to a distant other, the relationship between urge reluctance to talk was different. While the urge to talk was as similar for those who were socially rejected as for those who were transferred to another group, the reluctance to talk was especially higher in the case of social rejection.

We would like to draw the reader's attention to the effect of the rejection manipulation on the manipulation check for closeness. Participants in the rejection condition reported that their imaged contact was more distant compared to participants in the control condition. One possible explanation for this effect is dependency regulation: people who are low (vs. high) in self-esteem tend to distance themselves from others (e.g., partners or friends) in response to threats of rejection (e.g., DeHart et al., 2004; Murray et al., 2002). That is, for some of the participants in the rejection condition thinking about how their partners would negatively evaluate them may have resulted in this slight decrease in perceived closeness. Future work might consider including measures of self-esteem to test this possibility.

8 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The goal of the present set of studies was to investigate whether people consider talking about social rejection experiences as good or bad. We investigated this question by comparing two instances of a person being removed from a work group: they were either rejected by their colleagues with an unclear reason or removed by a random draw. Our results more strongly support the idea that talking about rejection is considered bad: Targets of rejection anticipated devaluation from the audience upon disclosing their experience, which is in fact corroborated by our finding suggesting that audiences socially devalue targets who talk about a rejection experience. Relatedly, targets anticipated talking about a rejection experience to be less relieving and socially beneficial than talking about an experience where they are transferred to a new group but not rejected. Moreover, we present evidence suggesting that while people feel the urge to talk about rejection episodes, the anticipated costs probably make them feel reluctant to do so. This suggests a potential conflict with regard to disclosure preferences and highlights the usefulness to distinguish between a need to talk about rejection (urge) and actually talking about it (reluctance). Lastly, our

results indicate that audience closeness can help people to resolve this conflict between urge and reluctance to talk. More specifically, talking to a close other makes this communication appear less costly.

Our findings contribute to knowledge on belonging and rejection in multiple ways. First, we contribute to research on rejection by investigating an interpersonal coping strategy: sharing one's hurt with others. Previous work on dealing and coping with rejection mainly focuses on intrapersonal coping strategies such as enjoying comfort foods (Troisi & Gabriel, 2011) and watching favoured television programmes (Derrick et al., 2009), or psychological factors that can protect one against the negative impact of social rejection such as psychological flexibility (Waldeck et al., 2017). Some recent work points to the potential of interpersonal coping by showing that interpersonal connections can buffer against the resignation stage (e.g., Aureli et al., 2020; Marinucci & Riva, 2020). The current work contributes to this growing body of work on coping with rejection by suggesting that talking to others about a social rejection experience is akin to sharing certain negative emotions such as shame (Finkenauer & Rimé, 1998) or disclosing personally sensitive information such as information about a stigmatizing condition (e.g., Cantisano et al., 2013, 2015). That is, when one thinks about sharing a social rejection experience a cost-benefit analysis is made which indicates that sharing one's hurt can be costly unless shared with a close other.

Second, we contribute to research on rejection by showing that sharing one's rejection experience with others can indeed be costly. Previous work on reactions to social exclusion show that audiences can devalue the target or the source of exclusion based on their attributions about why the episode took place (Rudert et al., 2018; Rudert & Greifeneder, 2019). We contribute to this work by investigating a certain incident of ostracism (i.e., rejection with an unclear reason in a performance context) and focusing on anticipated devaluation and support. This line of work suggests that under certain conditions the individuals can devalue and further reject the target when, for example, they think the target is burdensome (e.g., Wesselmann et al., 2013) or have certain unattractive dispositions (e.g., Ren & Evans, 2020; Rudert et al., 2020; Stavrova et al., 2021) or when they think the sources had a punitive motive (e.g., Rudert et al., 2018). We extend this line of work by showing that in the context of rejection in a work context—targets see disclosing a rejection experience as more costly than disclosing an instance where they were removed from the group randomly. Additionally, audiences evaluated the targets more negatively in the rejection condition. This suggests that, in the case of rejection in a working context such as the one that we used in this project, the audience may conclude that the rejection was warranted and devalue the target. We think this could exacerbate the negative effect that rejection has on targets in two potential ways. First, upon disclosure, targets might be further devalued and rejected. In this case, the rejection experience would only be intensified by disclosure and prolong the hurt of rejection. Second, targets might refrain from sharing their rejection experience due to the anticipated devaluation. This could especially be detrimental in cases where the target might need help in dealing with the rejection experience. If targets cannot or are afraid to disclose their experience, they might miss out on the help that they need. We believe that in both cases, being rejected again and not receiving the necessary help may pave the way for chronic rejection (Riva et al., 2017).

Our third main contribution is twofold, and it concerns the conflicting urge and reluctance to talk about rejection experiences and the potential way out of this conflict. Our results revealed an interesting aspect of talking about rejection with regard to urge and reluctance to talk. While participants had similar levels of urge to talk about the situations in both the social rejection and the control condition, they reported more reluctance to talk about social rejection condition. The relationship between urge and reluctance to talk about rejection episodes is in line with some of the traditional theories of behaviour and motivation (e.g., Black, 1965) that focused on drives and incentives. People might have an urge to talk about their experiences following social rejection (high drive) and based on anticipated costs and benefits they might feel reluctant to do so (low incentive motivation). This particular relationship poses an interesting disclosure decision as the individual has to somehow resolve the conflict between their urge and their reluctance to talk about being rejected.

Our findings highlight a potential way out of the conflict between urge and reluctance to talk: the results show that targets anticipate more benefits and fewer costs when talking to a close rather than to a distant other. This is in line with previous work on social sharing of emotions suggesting that people usually share their emotional experiences with close others (Rime et al., 1991) and they perceive fewer risks associated with the conversation if the audience is a close other (Afifi & Steuber, 2009; Greene et al., 2012). This suggests that targets of rejection could reap the benefits of talking about rejection by selecting their audience strategically. This further supports the role and importance of social connections and interpersonal coping strategies in people's well-being (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010, 2015), especially in dealing with social rejection (e.g., Teng & Chen, 2012).

Functional accounts of exclusion suggest that exclusion serves as punishment for people who deviate from group norms (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Hales et al., 2016; Kurzban & Leary, 2001). If rejection signals past punishment for non-normative behaviour, then the target would have a clear motive to not disclose this information to others and protect their reputation. This motive to protect their reputation, in turn, may get in the way of receiving social support from others. In line with what we would expect from the functional account, our results suggest that targets (and audiences) tended to interpret the rejection experience as evidence of devaluation.

8.1 | Limitations and future directions

We would like to acknowledge certain limitations of the current work. First of all, in the current study we investigated how people anticipate talking about a rejection experience. In fields such as self-disclosure both real and hypothetical disclosure decisions are widely studied and considered informative (e.g., Greene, 2009; Greene et al., 2012). Indeed, both in scenario settings and in real-life disclosure decisions, one can focus on disclosure intentions. In the current paper we conceptualized these intentions as urge and reluctance to share, and the

anticipated outcome of the disclosure. Given the strong relationship between behavioural intentions and actual behaviours (Ajzen, 1991), we think that the current work is a crucial first step in understanding disclosure decisions regarding social rejection experiences. At the same time, we think that future research would benefit from investigating the extent of disclosure of actual rejection experiences with paradigms such as recall tasks (e.g., Knowles & Gardner, 2008; Pickett et al., 2004). This could help us gain insight into the frequency with which people talk about rejection experiences in real life and if they see it as a potential way to deal with rejection.

In addition, there are some aspects of the current design that merit attention, most notably the control condition. In all studies, we pitted our rejection condition against a control condition in which targets were assigned to a new project, but not socially rejected. In the scenario we used, the target in the control condition was socially accepted, but randomly picked to be removed from the group. We refer to this as a control condition because the outcome (being removed from the project) was identical to the outcome in the rejection condition; the only difference was in whether the project members wanted to work with the target. This does not necessarily imply that the control condition was neutral. One could, for example, argue that the control condition was positive because the project members indicated that they wanted to work with the target. Alternatively, one could make the argument that it depicted a negative setting that describes a form of rejection albeit a more ambiguous one, and removal was more a case of a misfortune. While our intention was not necessarily to create a neutral control condition, these possible interpretations suggest that for future research it may also be worthwhile to also consider more neutral controls.

At this point it may be useful to elaborate a bit more on the control setting that we used, depicting a setting of social acceptance. One could argue that if our control condition is positive, we would not be able to tease apart whether our results are due to the positivity in the control condition or the negativity in the rejection condition. We do not see this as a potential concern for the interpretation of our findings for two main reasons. First, in our control condition participants were told that their colleagues wanted to continue working with them, but they also were told that everybody received similar ratings. This suggests that the experience of the individual was in fact similar to the rest of the group and was not overly positive. We believe that the positive interpretation would be more likely if the participant was the "most popular" as in an overinclusion situation (e.g., Williams et al., 2000). Second, the current understanding of social exclusion has been influenced by paradigms that contrast exclusion/rejection and inclusion/acceptance (examples include but not limited to: Hartgerink et al., 2015; Pickett et al., 2004; Ruff et al., 2014; Twenge et al., 2001). The underlying assumption in such paradigms used in rejection literature is that acceptance or inclusion is the norm (e.g., Rudert & Greifeneder, 2016; Voelkel et al., 2021), and the observed effect is due to the negativity of rejection and not the positivity of acceptance. In fact, a recent study (Dvir et al., 2019) tested this question with Cyberball (an online ball tossing game widely used in research on social ostracism and acceptance: Williams & Jarvis, 2006; Williams et al., 2000) and found that the observed effect in belonging threat was attributable to the exclusion condition and not the inclusion condition—in which the participant receives the same amount of ball tosses with the rest. Thus, we think that the interpretation of our control condition as positive rather than neutral does not pose a major threat to our findings and conclusions in the current project. At the same time, we think that future work ruling out such alternative explanations (e.g., by incorporating a neutral condition) would be likely to contribute to the field.

One could also interpret the events in the control condition as a negative experience because the target is removed from the group regardless. This would imply that the target in the control condition can also benefit from disclosing their story to others to "clear the air". In doing so, they can let others know that they were removed from the group because of a random draw but not because they were incompetent or disliked. This suggests that the similar levels of urge to talk we observed across control and experimental conditions may have different underlying motives. In the control condition the target may be motivated by reputation control and in the rejection condition the target may be motivated by support seeking. We cannot differentiate these motives with the current data as we only focused on anticipated emotional and social benefits. However, future research can investigate numerous other motives for a target to talk to others about their experience. For example, such research can incorporate measures to investigate whether a target's disclosure is motivated by reputation control (Vonasch et al., 2017), wanting to warn others about the source (i.e., prosocial gossip: Feinberg et al., 2012), trying to figure out how to deal with the situation (i.e., instrumental support seeking: Carver et al., 1989) or seeking clarification to make sense of what happened (Duprez et al., 2015). By incorporating measures of such motivating factors, future research can shed more light on why targets would want to engage in the seemingly costly acts of disclosure.

We would also like to acknowledge some factors that may potentially limit the generalizability of our findings. First, we conducted our studies via a crowdsourcing platform based in the UK and limited our sample to people from the UK. In doing so, we relied on a WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich and Democratic) sample that may not be representative of the world population at large (Henrich et al., 2010, 2010b). This is relevant because previous work suggests that individuals' reaction to ostracism may be related to cultural factors such as whether one is living in independent or interdependent communities (Over & Uskul, 2016) or whether one is high or low on interdependent self-construal (Ren et al., 2013). Thus, we think future work would benefit from investigating disclosure of rejection experiences in non-WEIRD samples to see the effect of cultural factors on disclosure of rejection and increased generalizability.

The second generalizability issue concerns our choice of scenarios. Our five studies all used the same scenario of rejection in a work context (i.e., a team project). Using the same setting in all studies had some clear benefits in terms of replicability and comparison between studies. One could also reason, of course, that generalizability might be served by using different settings. For example, one might wonder whether our findings also extend to being rejected in more social settings (e.g., being ignored at a party). Indeed, we feel that this would be a

valuable path for future research. Such research could then also be used to address potential reasons for rejection.

In the project, we used scenarios where rejection happened at work settings, yet we did not specify the reason why targets were rejected. Due to the work setting, participants might have inferred that the reason for rejection was work related and thereby possibly related to the target's incompetence. Would, then, being rejected at a party impact one's disclosure preferences differently? This question is important given that previous work suggests that being rejected for a certain reason is associated with devaluation in relevant domains (e.g., Riva et al., 2016). Thus, we believe that future work can investigate various reasons for rejection (e.g., competence vs. sociability) and inspect how they impact the targets' disclosure preferences and decisions. That being said, we investigated if targets would be evaluated differently on these core dimensions when the reason for rejection was unclear (see Supplementary Materials for more details on materials and results of this exploratory analysis). We asked participants to indicate how they think they would be evaluated as targets in Study 2 (or how they would evaluate the target from the audience perspective in Study 3). Participants anticipated more negative evaluations in terms of competence, sociability, and morality in the rejection than in the control condition. Similarly, the audience evaluated someone who was rejected more negatively on all dimensions compared to someone who was not rejected. That is, the ambiguous reason for rejection resulted in the anticipation of negative evaluation (and negatively evaluating the target) in all three dimensions. Future research can incorporate specific reasons for rejection (e.g., negative evaluation on competence or sociability) and investigate their impact on disclosure decisions.

One could see the choice of using a general audience in Studies 1–4 (i.e., talking to others about rejection) as a potential limitation. However, we have purposefully made this choice to study a general effect. Moreover, with rejection (and other similar mistreatment constructs such as incivility or bullying) it is not difficult to imagine one having to talk to persons other than close others. For example, in case of being rejected in the workplace, if one needs instrumental support (support aimed at altering the situation at hand: Carver et al., 1989) from their colleagues they may need to talk to people who are not close to them (e.g., other colleagues with a similar experience, HR departments and so on). We think that the effect we observed in the current study with a general audience speaks to such situations and highlights the importance of current findings.

We designed the current set of studies to investigate if targets deem sharing a rejection experience as good or bad and we showed that they consider it as bad rather than good. We did not design the current set of studies to test why this is the case. Future studies should investigate why people feel reluctant to talk about rejection experiences. Our exploratory mediation analyses in Studies 2 and 3 shed light on a possible reason: negative evaluation. It is possible that targets are more reluctant to talk about their experience because they fear negative evaluation. Likewise, it is possible that audiences are less inclined to work with the targets because they negatively evaluate them. These conclusions are based on exploratory analyses and future research is needed to clarify the role of negative evaluation. Understanding why people are hesitant to share their hurt is an avenue for future research.

There are individual differences in sensitivity to rejection which can have an impact on the extent to which targets anticipate costs or benefits and are reluctant to share their hurt with others. For example, people who are high on rejection sensitivity (Downey et al., 2004), experiential avoidance (Tyndall et al., 2018; Waldeck et al., 2020) or social anxiety (Zadro et al., 2006) might be more likely to ruminate about the experience, anticipate more negative outcomes and be less likely to share their pain with others. In future studies this potential influence can be investigated and controlled for when exploring the social sharing of rejection experiences.

8.2 | Conclusion

Targets who consider sharing their rejection experiences with others might feel they are stuck between a rock and a hard place. If they do not share, they will not be able to receive benefits, and if they do share, they might be rejected again. People might see talking to close others as a way out. In the current research we investigated if people consider disclosing a rejection episode to others as good or bad. By relying on a set of vignettes manipulating rejection in a work context, we found that people anticipate talking about rejection to be a costly endeavour (compared to talking about being removed from a group based on a random draw). Even though people seem to have an urge to talk about rejection, they feel reluctant to do so. Selecting a close other as an audience may mitigate these concerns and thereby provide a remedy to the conflicting needs and concerns of those who are socially rejected.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors indicate no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

The line of studies received ethical approval from the Ethical Review Board of Tilburg University (reference number: EC-2018.2017.103a).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All data, analysis scripts and pre-registration files are available online in a publicly accessible online repository (https://osf.io/gntmj/).

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

All data, analysis scripts and pre-registration files are available online in a publicly accessible online repository (https://osf.io/gntmj/?view_only=bb875cf47a244d7fa5b4916f97332361).

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