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Emotional Disclosure and Closeness Toward Offenders

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Two studies tested whether emotional disclosure increases feelings of closeness toward offenders. In Study 1, participants recalled either someone who had offended them or a neutral acquaintance. "Disclosure" participants then expressed their thoughts and feelings regarding their targets, and "suppression" participants described their targets nonemotionally. As predicted, disclosure increased closeness toward offenders but not toward acquaintances. Study 2 extended these results by including a good friend to test whether disclosure selectively increases closeness toward offenders, and not simply toward any person who evokes strong feelings. This prediction was confirmed. Furthermore, the disclosure effect remained reliable even after controlling for mood. Studies 1 and 2 also showed that closeness toward offenders, but not toward friends or acquaintances, was positively related to the proportion of emotion-related words disclosed. Collectively, these findings suggest that confronting the emotions associated with an offense may be an important first step toward forgiveness.

People often benefit by overcoming feelings of hostility toward those who have wronged them. This aspect of forgiveness is associated with reduced depression and anxiety (Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hebl & Enright, 1993), heightened self-esteem (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003), and improved life satisfaction (Karremans et al., 2003). Some researchers speculate that by alleviating hostile emotions, forgiveness may even promote physical health (Baumeister, Exline, & Sommer, 1998; Thoresen, Harris, & Luskin, 2000). In addition, forgiveness may offer important self-perception advantages, releasing people from the demoralizing role of victim and its attendant passivity and depressed morale (Baumeister et al., 1998).

However, formidable interpersonal and intrapersonal obstacles can impede forgiveness. Many victims do not receive apologies from their offenders (Baumeister et al., 1998) and are therefore deprived of

an especially potent reason to forgive (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Smuidina, 1991). Even if apologies are offered, victims may disagree with offenders about the nature and severity of conflicts (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002), or they may seek more extensive discussion of offenses than offenders are willing to supply (Baumeister et al., 1998). In addition, victims may retain grudges because of the secondary gain of being a victim or because of principled refusals to excuse behavior they regard as fundamentally unacceptable (Baumeister et al., 1998).

Can the process of forgiveness begin without addressing these interpersonal barriers? We believe that it can. Specifically, we predict that people can increase feelings of closeness toward offenders by disclosing thoughts and feelings surrounding an offense. To explain why this is so, it is necessary to first consider the nature of forgiveness, the role of interpersonal closeness as an index of initial movement toward forgiveness, and the role of emotions in starting the forgiveness process. We turn to these issues next.

Forgiveness as a Process

Forgiveness is a relatively new area of scientific investigation and consensus has not yet emerged around a formal, operational definition of it (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000; Worthington, 1998b).¹

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However, most researchers agree that forgiveness exists both as an end state and also as a multistage process through which this state is achieved (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Worthington, 1998c). Indeed, forgiveness in some prominent approaches appears to follow classic change models (Prochaska et al., 1994) in that a willingness to consider embarking on this path is a prerequisite for the entire process to advance (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Worthington 1998c). This process perspective is central to the present research because it suggests that initiating forgiveness is a valuable goal in itself.

Closeness as an Index of the Forgiveness Process

An important index that the forgiveness process has begun may be victims' feelings of closeness to offenders. According to McCullough et al. (1998), closeness is a key indicator of forgiveness because it represents a reduction in avoidance and revenge, two motives that are inimical to forgiveness. In fact, McCullough et al. define forgiveness as the relative reduction of these motives. McCullough et al. have shown that closeness is positively related to those variables that promote forgiveness, including offender apology, victim empathy, and preoffense closeness. Closeness is also negatively related to avoidance motivations and revenge, two states that deter forgiveness (McCullough et al., 1998).

Closeness may advance forgiveness by promoting greater attributional generosity. In a series of studies, Arthur Aron and his colleagues (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Aron & Fraley, 1999) have shown that increased closeness reduces the "fundamental attribution error" (Ross, 1977). That is, people are less likely to fixate on personal shortcomings and are more likely to consider extenuating circumstances when interpreting the negative behavior of someone to whom they feel close. This is the kind of perspective shift (from censure of an offender's character to an appreciation of the offender's situation) that marks progress toward forgiveness (Enright & Coyle, 1998).

Because closeness is associated with these various constituents of forgiveness, because it is so integral to an affectively based model of forgiveness (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998), and because it has been used as a marker of forgiveness in other research (McCullough et al., 1998), it appears to be an apt index of initial lenience toward offenders.

The Emotional Basis of Forgiveness

A common theme in current forgiveness theory is that forgiveness is fundamentally an emotional phenomenon in which feelings of anger and hurt, and the thoughts and behaviors these emotions arouse, figure centrally (Thoresen, Luskin, & Harris, 1998). Moreover, the full process of forgiveness, whether it be the "silent

forgiving" of letting go of hostile emotions without seeking to improve relations with the offender (Baumeister et al., 1998) or the more interpersonally oriented attempt to achieve increased liking of and empathy toward the offender (Enright & Coyle, 1998), can occur only *after* the emotions aroused by an offense have been addressed.

Programs designed to promote forgiveness emphasize the need to confront offense-related emotions as a precondition for further progress. For example, Enright and his colleagues (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Hebl & Enright, 1993) have developed a "Process Model of Forgiveness" that is based largely on cognitive-behavioral theory. Although this intensive intervention emphasizes cognitive shifts such as reframing the offense, attaining insight, and finding meaning, it begins with the "confrontation of anger" (Enright & Coyle, 1998). Enright and associates emphasize the importance of achieving a "sense of real release" upon sharing the feelings associated with an offense (Hebl & Enright, 1993) and the "need to confront true emotions" (Freedman & Enright, 1996). According to Freedman and Enright (1996), confronting hostile emotions necessarily precedes subsequent cognitive shifts that solidify forgiveness: "Before forgiving, one needs to express (his or) her justified anger" (p. 985) and "the point is to release, not harbor, the anger" (p. 986). Indeed, Enright and Coyle regard confronting and expressing offense-related emotions as one of the most important elements of their Process Model of Forgiveness.

According to Worthington (1998c), "forgiveness is an emotional event" (p. 125). Worthington's (1998c) REACH forgiveness intervention program, similar to Enright's Process Model, stipulates that "recall of the hurt" is the vital first step toward forgiveness ("*recall*" is the "R" in REACH). Worthington draws on classic conditioning to explain how negative emotions evoked by an offense can lead people to avoid contact with offenders and to suppress offense-related thoughts. This avoidance creates a self-perpetuating loop in which unresolved painful emotions resurface due to unexpected encounters with the offender (or the offense), are again suppressed, and then reemerge when reminders of the offense are encountered. Cessation of these offense-related emotions, says Worthington, requires that they be confronted. Similar to Enright, Worthington and associates contend that important cognitive changes, such as adopting an empathic attitude toward the offender, require that offended people first confront their own offense-related emotions.

Baumeister et al. (1998) explicitly define forgiveness in terms of emotional states. They write that "to forgive someone means to cease feeling angry or resentful over

the transgression" (p. 85). According to Baumeister et al., true forgiveness cannot be achieved without addressing underlying emotions. Attempts at forgiveness that involve only the public displays of forgiveness without addressing offense-related emotions represent what Baumeister et al. refer to as a "hollow forgiveness," which may complicate rather than relieve the victim's situation.

Forgiveness, Disclosure, and Emotions

If forgiveness is rooted in emotions, as these researchers and other psychologists (e.g., Fitzgibbons, 1986; Kaplan, 1992) assert, then forgiveness should be constrained by the laws that govern emotions. One principle of emotions is that they are involuntary, in the sense that once aroused, emotions cannot be defused at will (Zajonc, 1980). Thus, although a person may want to cease feeling angry, hostile, or resentful, merely wishing to expunge these feelings may not be sufficient to terminate them. In fact, efforts to consciously suppress or deny these emotions are more likely to increase rather than reduce their potency (as per Wegner & Wenzlaff, 1996).

In addition, although emotions are often generated by appraisals (Lazarus, 1991), once they are aroused, emotions can direct the course of thinking (Schwarz & Clore, 1996; Simon, 1967) even in the face of countervailing facts. For example, when offended people are in an aroused state, their hostility toward offenders is maintained even when informed of circumstances that mitigate the offense (Zillman, Bryant, Cantor, & Day, 1975; Zillman & Cantor, 1976). Thus, although people may deliberately decide to pursue a path toward forgiveness (Enright & Coyle, 1998), it is unlikely that they can forgive solely through deliberation.

Writing and Emotional Assimilation

How, then, can people overcome the emotions that impede the forgiveness process, especially when these emotions are not allayed by apologies or other external events? Research on emotional disclosure suggests that they can do so by putting their offense-related thoughts and feelings into writing (Kennedy-Moore & Watson, 1999; Pennebaker, 1989, 1997). According to Harber and Pennebaker (1992), disclosure through writing helps people overcome difficult emotions in several ways. First, it allows them to confront these emotions in a subjectively safe setting, where they need not worry about others' opinions or reactions. Confronting negative emotions and associated thoughts and images, in turn, promotes assimilation of emotions by transforming the emotional gestalt into more easily parsed verbal propositions. As a result, cognitive structures change to accommodate the disturbing event from which the emotions arise, and through this cognitive accommodation

emotions are resolved. By resolving troubling emotions, writing provides a potent source of coping. Pennebaker's research shows that people who write about past negative events realize important health and psychosocial benefits, including fewer doctor visits, improved immunocompetence, academic and employment gains, and reduced distress and depression (Pennebaker, 1997).²

A crucial condition of Pennebaker's writing studies is that participants must "let go and explore their thoughts and feelings" related to the troubling past event, to in a sense take dictation from their own emotions. Pennebaker reports that by writing in this emotionally guided way people obtain a sense of perspective and self-insight regarding troubling events and the ability to find meaning in misfortune (Pennebaker, 1989; Pennebaker, Mayne, & Francis, 1997). According to Pennebaker, 76% of his participants described the long-term effects of emotional writing in terms of achieving insight and perspective (Pennebaker, 1989). The enriched perspective and deepened insight that Pennebaker and others (e.g., Vitz, 1990) ascribe to writing are very much like the cognitive shifts that Enright and Coyle (1998), McCullough et al. (1998), and others have identified as central to forgiveness.

Overview and Predictions

If forgiveness is impeded by unresolved emotions, and if emotions are resolved through writing, then writing about past offenses should help people approach the forgiveness process. This is not to say that disclosure alone will secure complete forgiveness, but it may reduce complete alienation from offenders and thereby allow further forgiveness to advance. In other words, disclosure should promote closeness toward offenders. The present research involves two experiments that test this reasoning. In Study 1, participants first recalled either someone who had dramatically violated their trust (i.e., an "offender") or a neutral acquaintance and then either disclosed or suppressed their feelings toward these targets using methods modeled after Pennebaker (1994). Disclosure was predicted to lead to greater closeness, but only when the target was an offender. Study 2 broadened the scope of targets to include good friends as well as offenders and acquaintances. Including good friends made it possible to test whether closeness is selectively increased by disclosing emotions related to an offender, as is predicted, or if closeness is increased when disclosing emotions about anyone who evokes strong feelings.

Studies 1 and 2 also explored the linguistic processes underlying the effects of disclosure on forgiveness. If disclosing emotions about an offender is key to improved closeness, then the production of emotion-related words

should be positively related to closeness, but only if an offender is the subject of disclosure.

STUDY 1

This study provides an initial test of whether disclosure promotes closeness toward offenders. Participants first recalled either an offender or a neutral acquaintance and then either disclosed or suppressed their deepest thoughts and feelings about this person. Participants then rated how close they felt toward their assigned social targets. Disclosure was predicted to promote increased closeness, but only if the social target was an offender.

Study 1 also explored the processes underlying this predicted effect of disclosure on closeness. Enright and Coyle (1998), McCullough et al. (1998), Worthington (1998c), and others emphasize the importance of addressing emotions associated with an offender as a precondition to achieving genuine forgiveness. Pennebaker's research on disclosure and health supports this perspective in that writing that is more emotional is associated with better physical and psychological outcomes (Pennebaker, 1989). For these reasons, we predicted that the degree of disclosed emotions (as measured by the proportion of emotion-related words) would be positively associated with subsequent closeness, but only for those writing about an offender. If disclosure promotes forgiveness by helping people confront unresolved emotions, then the amount of emotion-related words produced during disclosure should be positively related to subsequent feelings of closeness toward offenders.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Sixty-three female undergraduates participated in this study for psychology course credit. Participants were run individually in 45-min sessions.

PROCEDURE

Participants were taken to an experiment room and were informed that the study concerned the relation between imagery and memory. Participants were told that they would be randomly assigned one of several topics related to their own life and would be asked to generate mental images surrounding this topic. The experimenter then drew a three-ring binder labeled "social experiences" from a shelf that also held binders labeled "recreational experiences" and "employment experiences." These other binders were only props used to disguise the interpersonal focus of the study. The experimenter informed the participants that the binder contained all the materials needed to complete the study. The experimenter then presented the partici-

pants with a small Walkman-style cassette tape player, instructed them how to operate the player, and told them that nearly all the information needed to complete the study would be presented on the tape player. The tape player contained either the offender or the neutral acquaintance imaging instructions (see below). The participants were instructed to locate the experimenter (who was in an adjoining room) after completing the experiment tasks and were then left alone in the room to proceed with the study.

The participants completed the study mostly on their own, with no experimenter contact other than the initial instructions and the debriefing. There are two distinct advantages to this format. Supplying most instructions via tape player greatly increased the consistency with which these instructions were presented (Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990). In addition, the taped instructions helped ensure that the thoughts and feelings participants generated toward their assigned social target were not affected by interactions with the experimenter.

Imagery task. Two audiotapes were prepared to guide participants through the imaging task, in which participants evoked mental images, memories, thoughts, and feelings about a neutral acquaintance or about someone who had offended them. Participants in the offender condition were instructed by their tape to retrieve images of someone who had once been important to them but who had profoundly disappointed them during a time of need and about whom they now feel negatively.³ The history of past friendship with the offender was specified in order for there to be a potential reservoir of affection that might be accessed after disclosing offense-related emotions. In addition, this instruction helped standardize the kind of offense participants considered. Participants in the acquaintance condition were instructed by their tape to recall a person whom they encountered in an official capacity on campus but did not know personally, such as a store clerk. This acquaintance, participants were told, should be someone they neither liked nor disliked but about whom they felt neutrally.

The 5-min guided imagery tasks presented on the tapes all followed the same general format, consisting first of a 60-s relaxation phase (designed to reduce the influence of participants' transitory concerns and preoccupations) followed by a series of four 30-s imaging phases designed to produce rich, differentiated, and (in the case of the offender condition) emotionally charged recollections about the assigned social target. These phases involved (a) selecting a specific acquaintance or offender as an imaging target (depending on condition) and evoking general recollections and images about this person; (b) recalling an experience with the assigned

target, which for participants in the offender condition involved a specific incidence of betrayal and for participants in the acquaintance condition involved a routine interaction; (c) focusing on how the target looked and sounded during the recalled encounter; and (d) focusing on the images associated with the most salient thoughts and feelings regarding the target. The tapes ended by directing participants to the three-ring binder, which contained the writing and rating tasks that concluded the study.

Writing task. Disclosure and suppression were instituted by having participants complete a 20-min writing task modeled after Pennebaker (1994). This task consisted of a single page of lined paper, with instructions at the top directing participants to write about their assigned social target. Disclosure participants were instructed to express their deepest thoughts and feelings about their social targets. "Suppression" participants were told to write only about their target person's physical attributes (i.e., height, weight, hair color, etc.), manner of dress, and related qualities. Suppression participants were explicitly told to withhold revealing their personal thoughts and feelings.

Outcome measures. Participants completed a packet of outcome measures immediately after they finished their assigned writing tasks. The first item in this packet was the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), which is a single-item measure of interpersonal closeness. The IOS consists of a set of seven pairs of circles labeled "self" and "other." The circle pairs differ in the degree to which they overlap, such that the first set shows no overlap between the "self" and "other" circles (indicating no closeness) and the seventh set shows nearly complete overlap between them (indicating intense closeness). Participants completed the IOS with their assigned target (acquaintance or offender) designated as the "other" and thereby indicated how close they felt toward this person.

The IOS has several properties that make it particularly advantageous for testing the present hypothesis. Because of its largely visual rather than verbal format, the IOS may reduce social desirability pressures likely to emerge in studies, such as the present one, where some participants disclose difficult personal experiences and the emotions these experiences evoke. The IOS is a widely used, highly reliable measure with psychometric properties that match or exceed those of more elaborate closeness measures (Agnew, Loving, Le, & Goodfriend, 2004). Also, the IOS is a robust indicator of relationship status, correlating highly with satisfaction, commitment, and investment in relationships (Agnew et al., 2004), and with the maintenance of relationships for more than 3 months (Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997).

Participants also completed a brief mood questionnaire and rated task pleasantness. The mood questionnaire asked participants to rate the degree to which they currently felt anxious, alone, sad, angry, happy, and calm. Participants responded by selecting options on 5-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*a great degree*). Pleasantness consisted of a single item, "To what degree was the imaging task pleasant?" followed by the same 5-point Likert scale used to assess mood. The purpose of these measures, which followed the rating tasks, was to check whether outcomes could be explained mainly by transitory mood changes and to serve as manipulation checks.

Design summary. The study took the form of a 2 (acquaintance or offender) \times 2 (disclose or suppress) factorial experiment. For participants in the offender condition, those given an opportunity to disclose their thoughts and feelings were predicted to report greater closeness to the offender, compared to their counterparts who were not given this opportunity. Closeness ratings were predicted to be unaffected by the disclosure condition for participants in the neutral acquaintance condition.

Results

MANIPULATION CHECKS

Task pleasantness and the mood. The effect of the imaging task was assessed using measures of task pleasantness and mood. Mood was indexed by combining the six items that comprised the mood inventory into a single scale score (with "happy" and "calm" reverse-coded), $\alpha = .82$. Higher scores indicated more negative mood. Participants in the offender condition rated the imaging task as less pleasant ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 0.86$) than did those in the acquaintance condition ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.07$), $F(1, 61) = 20.18$, $p < .001$. Participants in the offender condition also rated their moods more negatively ($M = 3.04$, $SD = 0.77$) than did participants in the acquaintance condition ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.69$), $F(1, 61) = 26.24$, $p < .001$. Negative moods and task pleasantness were negatively related to each other, $r(63) = -.47$, $p < .001$. These results indicate that participants were fully engaged in the imaging task and that those in the offender condition selected betrayers and betrayals of sufficient importance as to depress their moods and make the task relatively unpleasant.

Suspicion. Debriefing questions indicated that no participant correctly identified the true purpose of the study.

MAIN ANALYSES

The central hypothesis in this study was that feelings of closeness would be selectively stronger among partici-

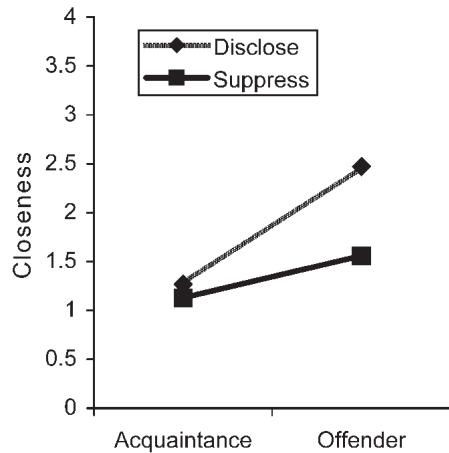


Figure 1. Closeness as a function of social target (acquaintance or offender) and writing condition (disclose or suppress).

participants in the offender/suppress condition relative to participants in offender/disclose, acquaintance/disclose, or acquaintance/suppress conditions. A planned contrast (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1985) was used to test for this specific interactive pattern. Results confirmed our prediction, $t(17.70) = 2.84, p < .02^4$ (see Figure 1). Post hoc tests show that the participants in the offender/disclose condition rated themselves as feeling closer to their imaged target ($M = 2.47, SD = 1.62$) than did participants in the offender/suppress condition ($M = 1.56, SD = 0.81$), the acquaintance/disclose condition ($M = 1.27, SD = 0.59$), or the offender/suppress condition ($M = 1.13, SD = 0.35$).⁵ There were no other between-group differences.

Mood effects. We explored the role that mood had on the interaction between disclosure and closeness. As reported earlier, participants who thought about an offender reported more negative moods than did those who thought about a neutral acquaintance. However, mood scores were unrelated to closeness ratings for the entire sample, $r(63) = .14, p = .15$, and they were unrelated to closeness ratings for participants in the offender condition, $r(33) = .01, p = .98$. It therefore appears that mood does not contribute to the effects of disclosure on closeness.

Linguistic Inquiry Word Count text analysis. To more closely examine the relationship between disclosure and closeness, we analyzed the emotional content of participants' writing samples.⁶ We first submitted transcribed protocols to the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) program (Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001), a text analysis program that computes the proportions of various word and phrase categories within writing samples. LIWC is especially sensitive to language related to emotions, cognitions, and other verbal markers of

TABLE 1: Correlations Between Closeness Ratings and the Proportions of Affect-Related Words, by Condition, Study 1

	n	All Emotion Words	Positive Emotion Words	Anger-Related Words	Sadness-Related Words	Anxiety-Related Words
Offender/disclose	13	.51*	.63*	.33	-.02	-.49†
Offender/suppress	12	-.08	-.08	-.20	.04	-.30
Acquaintance/disclose	11	-.07	.09	-.17	.12	-.23
Acquaintance/suppress	12	-.44	-.46	-.20	-.16	-.13

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$.

psychological activity. Next, we correlated IOS closeness ratings to the proportions of emotion-related words overall, to positive emotion words (LIWC does not discriminate among types of positive emotions), and to the three types of negative emotion words LIWC captures: anger, sadness, and anxiety. If disclosure selectively abets closeness toward offenders by helping people address the emotions related to an offense, then the correlation between emotion words and subsequent closeness should be selectively positive among participants in the offender/disclose condition but not among any others.

This prediction was confirmed. As Table 1 shows, closeness was positively related to the proportion of emotion-related words for offender/disclose participants but was either negatively related or unrelated to closeness for participants in the other three conditions. Both positive and negative emotions appear to play a role in this relationship. The more positive emotions evoked through writing led to increased closeness toward offenders. This suggests that disclosure may revive residual positive feelings toward offenders, leading to increased closeness. The relation between anger-related words and closeness within the offender/disclose condition, although not significant, is intriguing. In contrast to the other three conditions, where the relation between anger words and closeness is negative, it is clearly in the positive direction for the negative/disclose participants. This suggests that disclosing anger may have a tonic affect on the early stages of forgiveness.

STUDY 2

Study 1 confirmed that emotional disclosure leads to increased closeness toward offenders but not toward a neutral acquaintance. Study 2 extends the range of social targets so as to include a close and trusted friend. This was done to establish that disclosing emotions evoked by an offender, rather than those evoked by any significant other, increases closeness. For example, it may be that reminiscing in an elaborate way about any-

one important in one's life, whether positive or negative, produces a sense of shared history that leads to closeness. If so, then thinking about either a good friend or a failed friend, and disclosing thoughts and feelings about these people, should lead to increased closeness toward them. On the other hand, if the emotions surrounding an offense represent a selective barrier to closeness (perhaps because these are often suppressed), then disclosure should improve closeness to offenders but not to close friends.

Study 2 also explored the relation between disclosed emotion words and increased closeness for offenders compared to others, as was done in Study 1. The manner in which suppression was operationalized in Study 2 permitted a more complete text analysis of disclosure and closeness than could be done in Study 1. This is because all participants revealed their emotions toward their assigned targets, but disclosers did so before rating closeness, whereas suppressors did so after rating closeness. This is a more passive kind of suppression, where participants are not explicitly instructed to actively avoid the expression of thoughts and feeling. As such, it will help clarify whether freely disclosing increases closeness beyond preexisting levels or if instead brief episodes of active suppression lead to depressed closeness.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Eighty-five female undergraduates participated in this study for psychology course credit. Participants were run individually in 45-min sessions.

PROCEDURE

Study 2 largely followed the same procedures employed in Study 1. The cover story, imaging task, and outcome measures were in most ways identical to those used in the first study. There were two main differences. One involved the inclusion of a good friend in addition to the neutral acquaintance and offender targets used in Study 1. Participants assigned to the "friend" condition were instructed to evoke images of someone they regarded as very important, whom they liked very much, who made them feel warm and content, and who represented a reliable source of support.

The other main difference involved the way in which suppression was operationalized. One purpose of this study was to better locate evidence, within participants' writing samples, that the expression of emotions promotes increased closeness. Doing so required giving all participants an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings toward their assigned targets while preserving the disclosure/suppression dimension that is central to this research. This was done by alternating the order in which the writing task and the closeness rating mea-

sure were administered. Disclosure participants expressed their thoughts and feelings regarding their assigned target (i.e., friend, acquaintance, or offender) and then rated closeness toward this person. This follows the same sequence as employed in Study 1. Suppression participants also wrote their thoughts and feelings regarding their assigned targets (and thereby provided comparable writing samples for subsequent analyses). However, they did so *after* completing the IOS closeness rating of their assigned targets. Thus, suppression participants did not have an opportunity to disclose the emotions evoked by the imaging task before they rated closeness. As a result, their closeness ratings were expected to be lower than those of discloser participants, who disclosed before rating closeness.

Results and Discussion

MANIPULATION CHECK

Task pleasantness. The intent of the imaging task was to make salient the positive, neutral, or negative thoughts and feelings participants held regarding, respectively, a close friend, a neutral acquaintance, or a person who had betrayed their trust. As in Study 1, a measure of task pleasantness assessed the effect of the imaging task. A one-way ANOVA confirmed that participants differed in their ratings of task pleasantness, $F(2, 82) = 90.81, p < .001$. Post hoc tests showed that participants in the offender condition rated the imaging task as less pleasant ($M = 1.69, SD = 0.76$) than did participants in the acquaintance condition ($M = 2.82, SD = 1.09$), $p < .001$, who in turn rated the task as less pleasant than those in the friend condition ($M = 4.68, SD = 0.61$), $p < .001$.

Mood effects. The imaging groups differed in mood and in a manner consistent with the intended effect, $F(2, 82) = 18.26, p < .001$. Post hoc tests show that participants in the offender condition reported more negative moods ($M = 2.53, SD = 0.69$) than did participants in either the acquaintance condition ($M = 1.77, SD = 0.56$) or in the friend condition ($M = 1.70, SD = 0.49$). The acquaintance and friend conditions did not differ from each other in terms of negative moods. As in Study 1, task pleasantness and negative mood were negatively related, $r(85) = -.40, p < .01$. Overall, manipulation checks indicate that the imaging task had the intended effect.

Suspicion. During debriefing, all participants were asked what they believed was the true purpose of the experiment. None identified the actual research objective.

MAIN ANALYSES

The central hypothesis of this study was that ratings of interpersonal closeness would be jointly affected by the nature of the imaging target (offender, acquaintance, or

friend) and whether an opportunity to freely express thoughts and feelings regarding this target preceded the closeness rating (disclose condition) or followed closeness ratings (suppress condition). Specifically, we predicted that disclosures that preceded rating would selectively lead to greater closeness, but only when the target was an offender. We again tested this prediction in a planned contrast. The positive disclose and positive express conditions were weighted at zero because these conditions were expected to report high levels of closeness toward their targets, which were close friends, but to not differ between themselves. Offender suppress, acquaintance express, and acquaintance suppress were all weighted -1 and contrasted with positive express (weighted $+3$), following the same formula used in Study 1. Results again confirmed the predicted pattern, $t(15.34) = 2.36, p < .05$.⁷ As Figure 2 shows, only among participants in the offender condition did disclosure lead to increased closeness. Post hoc analysis shows that participants in the offender/disclose condition reported more closeness toward their imaged target than did participants in the offender/suppress condition, $p = .05$.

Mood discounting. One explanation for this interaction is that participants in the offender condition recognized that writing about a betrayal lowered their moods and then discounted their resulting antipathy toward offenders accordingly. Thus, the disclosure participants who focused on offenders may not have actually felt closer to their targets but may have instead simply adjusted their closeness ratings to correct for their own hostile moods. To test for this mood-related confound we conducted an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with mood entered as the covariate. As expected, mood had no overall effect on closeness ratings, $F(1, 78) = 0.13, p = .722$, and the interaction between imaged target and disclosure remained significant even after accounting for the contribution of mood, $F(2, 78) = 5.69, p = .005$. Thus, it does not appear that the effect of disclosure on feelings of closeness toward offenders is an artifact of mood-related discounting.

LIWC text analysis. Participants' protocols were transcribed and then analyzed through the LIWC program, as was done in Study 1. Table 2 shows that the proportion of affect-related words was again *positively* related to closeness for offender/disclose participants (although as a nonsignificant trend, $p < .15$). The proportion of affect-related words was unrelated to closeness for participants in all other conditions. Of importance, anger-related words were marginally and positively related to closeness among offender/disclose participants but among no others. However, positive emotion words were not related to closeness among offender/disclose

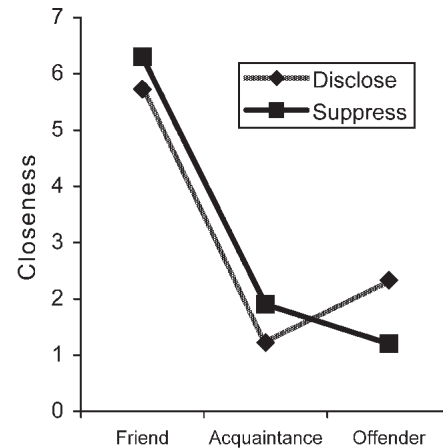


Figure 2. Closeness as a function of social target (friend, acquaintance, or offender) and writing condition (disclose or suppress).

participants (or any other participants), in contrast to Study 1 findings.

LIWC effects across studies. LIWC data from the offender/disclose participants in Studies 1 and 2 were each based on small *ns* and therefore the correlations derived based on these data may be subject to instability. To obtain a more reliable representation of the relation between emotional disclosure and closeness toward offenders, the offender/disclose data from the two studies were combined. Correlations from this combined sample show significant and positive relations between closeness and the proportion of affect-related words generally, $r = .52, p < .05$, and the proportion of anger-related words, $r = .45, p < .05$. There was also a nonsignificant trend regarding the relation between closeness and the proportion of positive emotion words, $r = .33, p < .15$. Closeness was unrelated to either the proportion of sadness-related words, $r = .01$, or to anxiety-related words, $r = -.13$. These results generally confirm that the emotional content of disclosure, and anger in particular, is integral to increased closeness toward offenders.

Discussion

The two studies comprising the present research demonstrate that disclosing emotions related to an offense promotes closeness toward offenders. Study 1 showed that participants who disclosed their thoughts and feelings about an offender, compared to those who did not, reported a greater degree of closeness toward the offender. Disclosure did not affect closeness ratings toward a neutral acquaintance. Thus, in the one condition in which emotions surrounding an offense were evoked, emotional disclosure led to increased closeness relative to emotional suppression.

Study 2 replicated and extended the findings of Study 1. This experiment included a “close friend” as a social target along with the casual acquaintance and offender targets used in Study 1. Including a “close friend” condition made it possible to test whether disclosing feelings toward offenders selectively increases closeness (as the present research predicts) or if disclosing intense emotions toward any significant social contact leads to increased closeness. As predicted, disclosure promoted closeness only toward offenders, not toward good friends or acquaintances. This indicates that the effect of disclosure on closeness is not due to the elaborate recall of any significant person in one’s life because a close and trusted friend would be no less personally significant than would a previously close friend who had betrayed one’s trust. Thus, disclosure does not abet closeness by conferring a “warm glow” of reminiscence or by creating a general state of emotional arousal.

It should be noted that all participants in the close friend condition—disclosers as well as suppressors—gave closeness ratings near the positive extreme of the IOS measure. Thus, a ceiling effect may have occurred among participants in the friend condition. However, Figure 2 shows that disclosure slightly reduced rather than increased closeness toward friends (as well as for neutral acquaintances), which is opposite from the pattern that emerges for disclosure toward offenders. It is therefore unlikely that increased closeness toward offenders following disclosure reflects a general tendency for disclosure to promote closeness, regardless of social target.

Study 2 also showed that disclosure led to increased closeness toward offenders, even when suppression of emotions was operationalized in a manner different from that employed in Study 1. This confirmation of the predicted effect of disclosure on closeness toward offenders, using two different suppression inductions, adds to the reliability of the disclosure/forgiveness relationship.

EVALUATING THE MAGNITUDE OF EFFECTS

Although participants who disclosed their thoughts and feelings regarding an offender rated themselves as feeling closer toward this person than did suppressors, the absolute level of closeness they reported was not high (on average, at about 2.5 of the 7 levels of closeness measured by the IOS). This is not surprising; a transformation from hostility and distrust to affection and intimacy is unlikely to be produced by a single 20-min writing exercise. Recall, however, that suppressors reported virtually no feelings of closeness toward offenders ($M = 1.63$ in Study 1, $M = 1.2$ in Study 2, where 1 = *no closeness*). Compared to this near absence of close feelings, the improved closeness to offenders reported by the

TABLE 2: Correlations Between Closeness Ratings and the Proportions of Affect-Related Words, by Condition, Study 2

	n	All Emotion Words	Positive Emotion Words	Anger- Related Words	Sadness- Related Words	Anxiety- Related Words
Offender/disclose	15	.42	.10	.51†	.06	.18
Offender/suppress	14	.25	.39	-.47†	.23	.20
Acquaintance/ disclose	13	-.38	-.17	-.14	-.28	-.39
Acquaintance/ suppress	12	-.01	.04	-.08	-.11	.01
Friend/disclose	14	.14	.14	-.22	-.01	-.19
Friend/suppress	14	.05	.19	.01	.02	.06

† $p < .10$.

disclosers represents not only a quantitative gain on suppressors but also a qualitative shift from near total alienation to appreciable, if slight, feelings of connection. This shift may indicate that initial steps toward forgiveness may have been taken.

Closeness achieved despite countervailing negative moods. Not surprisingly, participants who recalled being betrayed by an erstwhile friend experienced lowered moods compared to participants who recalled a neutral acquaintance. Furthermore, these negative moods were related to reduced closeness—the worse a person felt after thinking about a failed friend, the less close they felt toward this person. However, disclosing the negative thoughts and feelings associated with offenders still induced increased closeness toward such people, despite the negative moods that recalling these offenders evoked and the generally depressing effect these moods had on closeness toward them. This indicates that the impact of disclosure on social attitudes supercedes the negative feelings aroused by the disclosure process.

Study 2 also indicates that mood-related discounting does not confound increased closeness toward offenders following disclosure. Such discounting might have occurred if the offender/disclose participants observed that recalling an offender worsened their moods and then “corrected” for this self-perceived negativity by increasing their closeness ratings. However, the positive effect of disclosure on closeness toward offenders was confirmed even after controlling for negative mood.

EVIDENCE THAT WRITING PROMOTES CLOSENESS

Forgiveness researchers contend that the emotions related to an offender must be addressed before genuine forgiveness can be achieved (Enright & Coyle, 1998; McCullough et al., 1998; Worthington, 1998c). According to Pennebaker, emotions can be resolved by writing about them. If closeness is selectively promoted by dis-

closing the emotions related to an offense, then the rate of emotion-related words disclosed in writing should be positively related to closeness. Both studies confirmed that this is so; for participants in the offender/disclose condition only, the higher proportion of emotion-related words they produced during the writing exercise, the closer they subsequently rated themselves as feeling toward the person who had offended them. Anger-related words appear to play an especially important role, as evidenced largely by Study 2 and the analysis of the combined Study 1 and Study 2 samples.

The role of positive emotions is less clear. Although disclosing positive emotions was associated with increased closeness in Study 1, it was unrelated to closeness in Study 2. The role of positive emotions may be especially contingent on the nature of the offender and the quality of the preoffense relationship. Perhaps Study 1 participants recalled offenders who aroused more positive feelings than did Study 2 participants.

*EMOTIONAL DISCLOSURE, INCREASED
CLOSENESS, AND EMOTION THEORY*

Although results from Studies 1 and 2 are consistent with our predictions and with current forgiveness theory, they may still appear paradoxical. Participants in the disclosure/offender condition had elaborated, in writing, on the negative thoughts and feelings related to a person who had betrayed them. Principles of availability (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973) and mood-congruence (e.g., Bower, 1981) might predict that this more focused attention on the negative thoughts and feelings associated with an offender would have depressed rather than increased closeness toward him or her. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) might make a similar prediction in that recalling an offense and disclosing associated thoughts and feelings is inconsistent with subsequently reporting increased closeness toward an offender. Yet, disclosure led to increased closeness toward offenders in two separate studies. Moreover, increased closeness toward offenders was positively related to the expression of emotion-related words. Collapsing across both studies, participants felt closer to offenders when they wrote more emotion words generally; more anger-related words; and less consistently, more positive-emotion words.

What is it about emotions that their disclosure would advance closeness toward offenders? Central to this question is the nature of how emotions are generated and sustained. These aspects of emotion are addressed by "discrepancy theories" of emotion, which postulate that emotions arise when events contradict expectations or schemas (Leventhal, 1980; Mandler, 1975; Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987).⁸ In betrayal-related offenses, feelings of anger would arise when the expectations of loy-

alty, caring, and trust placed in a close friend were contradicted by the friend's betrayal. Emotional arousal, under discrepancy theories, is therefore very much like dissonance arousal (Aronson, 1969)—both occur when beliefs and events are at odds, and both abate when consonance between beliefs and events is restored.

One way to resolve the dissonance of being betrayed by a friend, at least in the short term, is to recast this person as an adversary. Doing so might alleviate the discomfiting ambivalence that is aroused by seeing someone as both the recipient of one's affection and the source of one's hurt. However, a radical recasting of a close friend into a distained adversary may not fully address the entire complexity of the offending situation. Some disappointing friends may still possess redeeming qualities or still have legitimate claims on one's affection. Some failures in friendship may be due to situations offenders faced and not simply or solely to their character flaws. Recognizing and assimilating these kinds of extenuations is key to the forgiveness process (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Worthington, 1998c). However, doing so appears to require a return to the emotions associated with an offense, particularly anger (rather than sadness or anxiety), as evidenced in the present research and as postulated by forgiveness theorists (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1998; Enright & Coyle, 1998; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Worthington, 1998c). Why would this be so?

One of the elegant aspects of discrepancy theory is that because emotions arise due to disjunctions between beliefs and events, they also serve as markers for locating these disjunctions (Mandler, 1975; Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987; Simon, 1967). By reviving emotions—negative as well as positive—offended people can identify the extenuations detailed above. These extenuations might be considered second-order discrepancies in that they arise when erstwhile friends are vilified in excess of their misdeeds or when a self-protective attitude of disdain conflicts with residual affection. By reviving emotions around an offense, these second-order disparities might be located and, as result, a more refined and thus more equitable reexamination of the offense and the offender can occur. Moreover, to the degree that second-order disparities themselves are negatively arousing (perhaps as conscience pangs about a belatedly recognized overreaction or as regret about a precipitously severed tie), the discloser may be motivated to adopt a more rounded perspective on the offense and/or on the offender—in effect, to move toward forgiveness.

What this suggests is that forgiveness will occur to the degree that there is room for it to occur. There must exist disparities between the way the offense and the offender have been initially appraised, and the resolution of these disparities must lead to a more positive assessment of the offender. In the current research, locating such dispari-

ties was possible because participants were asked to consider someone who they had once liked but who had at one time violated the participants' affection. The positive correlation between positive emotion words and closeness toward offenders that emerged in Study 1, and that is evident when collapsing across Studies 1 and 2, suggests that having positive attributes or sentiments to locate in offenders may be important to forgiveness.

However, in some cases, extreme and harsh judgments of offenders may be fully consistent with the offenders' actions. War crime victims may never have reason to forgive their abusers, and it may be psychologically inappropriate to direct them to do so. These victims may still benefit from disclosure (as per Shortt & Pennebaker, 1992) but the benefit may come from adopting a more charitable understanding of themselves or a more optimistic view of humanity in general (Harber & Pennebaker, 1992) rather than feeling more favorably about their offenders. The current findings suggest that efforts to persuade victims to forgive without allowing them to express their emotions (e.g., "turn the other cheek" or "let bygones be bygones") or efforts by victims to forgive by suppressing their own hurt feelings are likely to be counterproductive. As Baumeister et al. (1998) note, such displayed but unfelt forgiveness tends to be hollow.

Is forgiveness itself achievable through disclosure? The present research did not determine whether disclosure led to a conscious attitude of forgiveness toward offenders and did not show that forgiveness, as an end state, was itself achieved. A shift from entrenched resentment to conscious, genuine forgiveness may involve a more elaborate intervention than employed in this research. It may require the multiple writing sessions commonly used by Pennebaker in his studies (Pennebaker, 1989). It may also require a time delay between initial disclosure and subsequent consideration of the offender. For example, Mendolia and Kleck (1993) showed that people are less autonomically aroused by disturbing stimuli after disclosing their thoughts and feelings toward these stimuli and being given a 48-hour delay before encountering these stimuli a second time.

However, forgiveness is a process as well as a state and the shift from near total alienation among suppressors to slight but discernable increased closeness among disclosers suggests that disclosure is a valuable and perhaps necessary first step in that process. It is also important to consider that forgiveness need not involve the resumption of preoffense affection but simply the reduction of hostility (Baumeister et al., 1998) and that forgiveness is therefore distinguishable from reconciliation (Worthington, 1998b, 1998c). The reduced alienation displayed by disclosers suggests that the energetic hostility that denies any commonality with offenders was

relaxed and in that way some measure of forgiveness was achieved.

DISCLOSURE AS A FORGIVENESS INTERVENTION

When severely angered, Benjamin Franklin wrote heated letters to his critics and adversaries but then would shelve these correspondences having found that the very act of writing had defused his emotions (Morgan, 2002). Franklin's experience was not unique; many people have written angry letters and then found that their hostility had so cooled that the letter was never sent. Could writing serve as a forgiveness intervention, as these examples and the current research suggests? In cases where the offense is relatively minor and the relationship relatively strong (Karremans et al., 2003), writing alone may be sufficient to overcome hostility. When offenses are greater or relationships weaker, forgiveness may require more than writing (or other kinds of indirect disclosing). However, even in these more extreme situations writing might still be useful as a first step, perhaps by making the prospect of full forgiveness appear less remote and by supplying the perspective that encourages additional forgiveness efforts. In addition, writing to one's self may deter victims from retributive acts that could inflame conflicts.

Writing about offenses also may provide corollary psychosocial benefits. By feeling increased closeness to offenders, victims may redeem valued social bonds and thereby retain the advantages of a strengthened support network (Cohen, Underwood, & Gottlieb, 2000). Furthermore, victims who disclose their anger in writing may be less prone to see their social world as peopled with adversaries or failed friends and thereby relax the hostility and vigilance that represent important health risks (Helmets & Krantz, 1996). There are also likely to be direct health benefits to disclosing feelings related to offense, as indicated by Pennebaker's suppression and illness research (Pennebaker, 1989, 1997).

CONCLUSION

The present research confirms that disclosing the emotions caused by an offense promotes closeness, and in this way may initiate the process of forgiveness. It also shows that the more fully offense-related emotions are addressed, the greater is the resulting feeling of closeness to the offender. These results have important implications for forgiveness research, for theory on emotion management, and for understanding the relation between emotions and attitudes. Finally, this research indicates that writing may be a useful means to approach the forgiveness process; it requires only rudimentary skills, it can be done cheaply and with easily obtainable materials, it can be done without the participation of others, and it requires virtually no instruction other than the suggestion to try it.

NOTES

1. See McCullough, Pargament, and Thoresen (2000) and Worthington (1998a) for comprehensive overviews of forgiveness.
2. At least one third of the traumas that Pennebaker's participants disclose involve victimization or conflict (Pennebaker, 1989), suggesting that forgiveness may play an important role in the health benefits that disclosure provides.
3. See Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerker, and Kluwer (2003) for a similar use of imagery to evoke past interpersonal conflicts.
4. This contrast test does not assume equal variance, due to greater variance in the negative/disclose condition.
5. Tukey tests of multiple comparisons are used for all post hoc analyses reported in this article.
6. Due to a clerical error, 15 of the original writing samples were lost and are therefore unavailable for Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC) analyses. These lost samples were comprised equally of the four experimental conditions and therefore do not represent a systematic loss of data.
7. This contrast test does not assume equal variance between conditions.
8. Mandler does not characterize his approach to emotions as a theory but he nonetheless articulates a framework that explicitly relates emotional arousal and quality to event/expectation discrepancies.

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