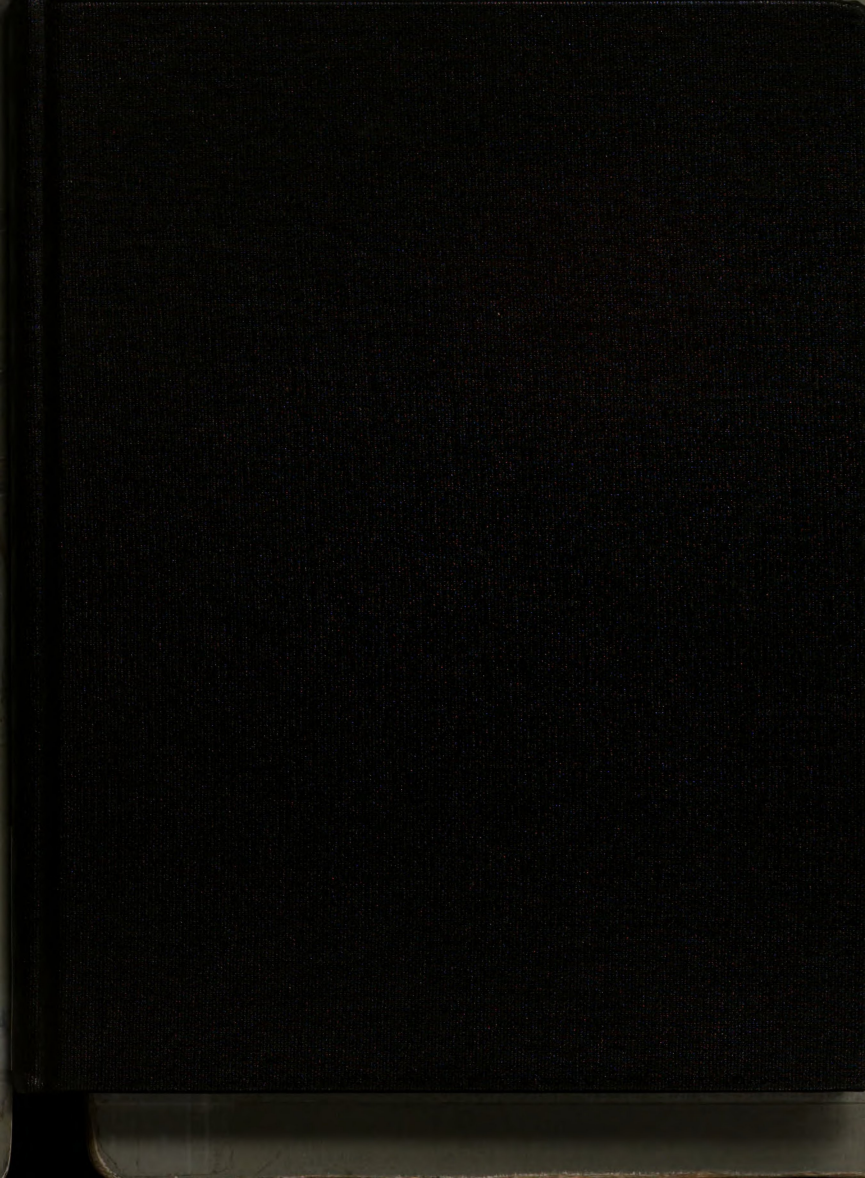




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THE IMPACT OF RELATIONAL LEVEL, DISTRESS TYPE,
AND GOAL STRUCTURES ON THE PROVISION OF
VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMFORTING

presented by

Kristen E. Salomonson

has been accepted towards fulfillment
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THE IMPACT OF RELATIONAL LEVEL, DISTRESS TYPE, AND GOAL
STRUCTURES ON THE PROVISION OF VERBAL AND NONVERBAL
COMFORTING

By

Kristen E. Salomonson

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF RELATIONAL LEVEL, DISTRESS TYPE, AND GOAL STRUCTURES ON THE PROVISION OF VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMFORTING

By

Kristen E. Salomonson

The investigation focused on identifying salient factors involved in the production of comforting messages provided to friends and strangers in high and low distress situations. In addition, the study also examined differences in secondary goals among comforter providers. Last, the investigation included four different measures of comfort. Results indicated that under the high distress conditions friends were more comforting than strangers. Under the low distress conditions, however, strangers were more comforting than friends. Using confirmatory factor analysis, all four measures of comforting were combined into a single scale for the ANOVA analyses. A significant interaction between relational level and distress type was found. No significant results from the secondary analysis were observed. The findings replicate earlier evidence that strangers can actually be more comforting than friends, but suggest that this behavior occurs only under special conditions.

For my Grandmother, Eve Tomey, who is the strongest person I have ever known.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Friendship is one of the most important elective relationships in the human experience. Not surprisingly, work concerning the nature of friendship abounds in many disciplines, including psychology, social psychology, sociobiology, and communication. In a similar vein, there is an impressive body of literature concerning the provision of helping behavior. Unfortunately, the type of relationship among the participants in helping situations has received comparatively little attention. As a result of this lack of empirical evidence, the association between relationship type and helping behavior is virtually unknown.

Ideally, a friend ought to be someone who provides emotional support when necessary. As such, friendship should have great importance in acquiring social support. The dearth of research here is surprising given the tendency among relational scholars to conduct research with the tacit assumption that relationship type impacts a number of related interpersonal rules of conduct associated with giving and receiving benefits in a relationship (e.g. Duck, 1993; Bark & Weir, 1975). The process of giving benefits differs depending on the relationship type. For example, good friends may not need to have a strict match of benefits because they understand the long-term nature of their relationship. But, for different types of relationships, the giving of benefits like social support may vary from strangers to friends to family to romantic partners.

A few studies provide clues to what might be expected with regard to friends and helping behavior. However, most studies that have been conducted offer no clear indication of how relational type impacts comfort. More recently, however, a group of studies focusing on the provision of verbal comfort provided to friends and strangers in distress has begun to examine the link between relational level and comfort (Salomonson & Tamborini, 1996; Tamborini & Salomonson, 1994). The results in this line of work merit further consideration.

In one experiment exploring the relationship of the support giver to the support receiver, Tamborini, Salomonson, and Bahk (1995) observed comfort provided to friends versus strangers. Contrary to expectations, data indicated that strangers provided more sensitive comforting messages to those in distress than did friends. This finding is puzzling from both a common sense and a conceptual perspective. As a society we believe that those with whom we have a close relationship value us more than do strangers. Indeed, scholarly work detailing the nature of interpersonal relationships illustrates that people believe friends ought to have greater concern for one's feelings and well being (Clark & Mills, 1987). If friends should care more, what may account for this counterintuitive finding?

The present investigation focuses on identifying salient factors involved in the production of comforting messages provided to distressed friends and strangers. The study attempts to replicate the findings of Tamborini et al. (1995), and it offers an expansion on the understanding of comforting by considering the type of distress experienced, the goal structures of the comforters, and different modes of measuring

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comfort. Underscoring the investigation are four important propositions about the comforting process.

1. The comforting patterns of friends and strangers differ.
2. The goal structures of friends and strangers are distinct from one another.
3. The goal structure differences are associated with the level of distress experienced by the comfort receiver.
4. A multi-method approach to assessing comfort including non-verbal and verbal intimacy will provide consistent findings.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Comfort and Friendship Expectations

Being a competent comforter has relational significance. Burleson (1988) explains that since relief from negative emotions is important to people, they view the skill of comforting as a significant activity and value friends who possess these aptitudes. Beyond this, other investigators' works illustrate the importance of comforting in the friendship realm – both for adults and children. Teach (1983) found that one of the expectations both adults and adolescents have of a friend is that they serve as primary support givers during a time of need. Adelman, Parks, and Albrecht (1987) found that people expect their friends to provide comfort, encouragement, understanding, sympathy, and verbal support. In assessing the importance of communication skills for judging the quality of friends, Burleson (1988) found that ego support and comforting ability ranked as the most important skills for friends to possess. Results like these establish an intrinsic connection between friendship and comforting in people.

If comforting ability is a desired characteristic in a friend, then relational consequences must exist for not being a good comforter. In several tests of this idea, Burleson found that individuals displaying more sensitive comforting strategies were rated as being nicer and more likable people than those who employed less sensitive comforting strategies (Samter, 1989; Burleson, 1985). These results identify comforting

as a central skill in a developed relationship, a skill that can be best understood as a part of the broader category of social support.

Social Support

The term “social support” is ubiquitous, yet difficult to define. Perhaps the challenge results because social support is an umbrella term for many related concepts. Early research began in the field of biology on how social support impacted susceptibility to disease. Results revealed a clear advantage to increasing social contact as a disease prevention measure (Cassel, 1976). Psychological researchers began their own investigations concerning social support. Two key areas of inquiry included community and personality psychology. A number of studies examined the beneficial effects of a variety of community-based programs that provide support to people who were otherwise support deficient. For example, researchers have found evidence that emotional support offered by health care professionals was beneficial to the recovery of cancer patients (Auerbach & Killman, 1977).

Aside from social support’s impact on physical well being, psychologists began to examine it as a personality variable. Attachment theory views social support as an important characteristic of personality. In this theory, early attachment experiences are thought to have long-term effects on how people view both themselves and their relationships. Positive early experiences lead a person to have fulfilling adult relationships. Thus, the degree of social support that each individual is capable of providing in a given relationship is contingent on the attachment style and behavior of those to which they were exposed (Sarason, Peirce, & Sarason, 1990). Studies investigating attachment theory have examined differences in interpersonal situations.

Bowlby (1990) concludes, “social support should be linked to differences in skills and behavior, especially in interpersonal situations, and even more to expectations about relationships and the perception or interpretation of what actually transpires in these relationships” (p. 47). This line of research indicates the presence of long-term impacts on the proclivity to provide socially supportive behaviors.

The richness of social support research resulted in the need for distinguishing among several social support types to fully capture their differences. For example, two studies by Cohen (1983 & 1985) indicated that there are differences in reactions to various support behaviors. Whether or not a strategy was thought to be supportive depended on the situation and its features. Taken together, these results lead to a useful discussion of social support typologies.

Typologies of social support. Researchers began to build typologies to expand the different types of social support that people are likely to produce (e.g. Cohen & McKay, 1984; Gottleib, 1978). House (1981) and Suhr (1990) developed two of the most widely used typologies. There are many points of commonality present in these two schemes.

House divided social support into four major groupings. **Emotional:** Support that indicates caring and concern for the other person and her/his situation. **Instrumental:** Support that is a tangible act of helping, including picking up a dropped object or looking for lost keys. **Informational:** Support that provides advice and counsel about a distressing topic. **Appraisal:** Support that entails evaluative feedback about the distressful event. Although this general typology provides an organizational

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framework, the lack of specificity makes it difficult to utilize it for coding social support behaviors.

Suhr's typology is more precise than House's and, therefore, better suited for coding interactions. The distinct categories allow us to identify social support as being one type or another. Suhr categorizes 23 individual supportive behaviors and groups them under five categories of aid. **Informational:** Aid that provides facts about the stress itself and how to deal with it. **Tangible:** Aid that provides or offers goods and services needed by an individual to assist with her/his problems. **Emotional:** Aid that communicates love or caring to those distressed. **Network:** Aid that communicates belonging to a group with similar concerns. **Esteem:** Aid that communicates respect and confidence in abilities.

Despite these typologies highlighting different ways that support can be conveyed, the empirical research on social support is not often divided into any categories. Instead, most research considers a construct broadly labeled "support," a practice that robs much social support inquiry of its potential richness. The reason for the failure to apply these coding schemes is unclear. Perhaps the lengthy process of coding may be a contributing factor. Fortunately, recent efforts in communication inquiry have begun to apply social support coding schemes in a useful manner.

The communication field has examined social support extensively (e.g. Burleson, 1989; Albrecht, 1984). In this line of inquiry, social support has been treated primarily in terms of how verbal messages convey support to others. Evidence has led researchers to conclude, "Communicative behaviors that range from quiet listening to active problem solving can be helpful to people who are striving to cope with stressful events" (Cutrona

& Suhr, 1992, p. 154). One rich area of inquiry is Burleson's research on communicative comforting behavior.

Comfort as social support. Burleson and his associates studied social support as the provision of comfort in a wide variety of interpersonal contexts. In this setting, a socially supportive behavior is thought of as an action taken for the benefit of another person for reasons not involving the receipt of an extrinsic reward. The focus of this research has been almost entirely on verbal comforting behavior.

Burleson began with an interest in how individual differences in social-cognitive abilities contributed to the skill of producing messages in a variety of taxing communicative tasks. Comforting was simply used as one such taxing task. The context was limited because of the researcher's interest in examining the communication skills people use most frequently. Thus, this research was confined to distress resulting from problems with everyday life, nothing catastrophic in nature such a death, divorce, or serious illness. It was believed that virtually all people had some experience such as someone telling them they had flunked a test, had a fight with a relational partner, or were not invited to a party.

Burleson and his colleagues began by assessing how comforting skills developed in individuals and what characteristics may influence their development. Studies (e.g. Burleson, 1985; Burleson, 1982) suggest that skills developed in a progressive manner over the course of childhood development – and this was influenced by the development of the people with whom the children had the most contact.

Several investigations focus on sex differences in comforting provision and the type of comforting offered (Wood & Dindia, 1998; Cutrona, 1996; Wood, 1995;

Burleson & Samter, 1984). While the overall level of comforting offered does not differ, results indicate women are better able to produce “person-centered” comforting strategies than men. Person-centered strategies are those that “explicitly acknowledge, elaborate, or legitimize the feelings and perspective of a distressed other” (Burleson, 2002, p. 1). Men are slightly more likely than women to employ “instrumental” comforting strategies, where they present action steps to resolve the problem (Barbee, Cunningham, Winstead, Derlaga, Gulley, Yankeelov, & Druen, 1993). Early inquiries documented these sex differences, but did little to explain their origins apart from referencing the role of gender-socialization. Work now focuses on explaining sex differences through psychological processes involved in message production including the level of cognitive complexity, differing interaction goals, and feelings of self-efficacy (Samter, 2002; McGeorge, 2002; Burleson & Gilstrap, 2002).

Comfort and relational type. While it appears clear that gender has an impact on social support behavior, only a few studies aside from the work of Tamborini and his colleagues have examined the role of relational status. Of these few studies, two groups of researchers conducted investigations that add specifically to our knowledge about the impact of relational status on the provision of comfort. One pertains to romantic relationships and the other to friendships. Taken together, these studies may help to explain some of the confusing results with regard to comfort provision by strangers and friends.

Barker and Lemle (1987) instructed individuals who were romantically involved to complete a helping task with both their relational partner and an opposite sex stranger. The task involved having an interpersonal discussion with the other and sharing problems

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currently troubling each individual. Participants were then asked to provide information about the types of support/comforting strategies offered to them by the other. Their results indicated there were important differences between the romantic partner and the stranger groupings. Based on the coding scheme employed to array comforting strategies, the helping behaviors exhibited by the romantic partners contained more behavioral advisement, interpretation of behaviors, and self-disclosure of similar problems. The authors assert these differences resulted from partners being less concerned with forming a good impression. In addition, they believed the romantic partners were more likely to be motivated by the goal of influencing the other's behavior. Finally, romantic partners were also more critical and less empathic toward one another than were the strangers.

Mills and Clark (1982) research considered friendship-type relationships. The study was based on the difference between communal and exchange relationships. They describe communal orientation as being mirrored in family, friend, and romantic relationships. Here, people feel responsible for others and show concern for them and their wellness. There is an expectation that those involved in such a relationship will be obligated to come to the other's aid when necessary. In exchange relationships, there is no such feeling of closeness or responsibility for other's well being. Here, benefits are doled out only through reciprocating for a past favor, or for the promise of a return benefit in the future. Such relationships are characterized by more formality as in a business relationship. The results of the study indicated that those individuals who were led to expect a communal-type relationship were more helpful than those participants who were led to expect an exchange-type relationship. These results suggest that perhaps

one who is involved in a more developed relationship (more communal) may be more likely to help a distressed other than would a stranger.

The findings of these two studies lead to divergent expectations. As a result, no lucid picture emerges concerning how relational type impacts the level of support offered in a distressful situation. On the one hand, partners in long-standing relationships should understand one another better and know what is likely to be more helpful (Cutrona, 1995). On the other hand, they may become less tolerant of the other's faults and more likely to introduce their own personal agendas into the helping process (Barker & Lemle, 1987). Perhaps relational level alone does not provide an adequate explanatory mechanism in this particular instance.

Undoubtedly, providing comforting between friends and strangers is more than a matter of relational features. Surely, there are other factors involved in the experience. One potential factor is the type of stressor eliciting the need for comfort. Perhaps by considering the level of distress, a better understanding of comforting between strangers and friends can be forged.

Significance of the Stressors

While it is typical for scholars examining emotional stress to separate it into major and minor categories, investigations of comforting behavior largely have been confined to minor stress. While this limitation may be explained by the practical difficulties hindering the study of communication under conditions of great distress, issues concerning various levels of stress likely play an important role in the provision of comforting behavior.

Major and minor stressors. Lazarus and Cohen (1977) developed one of the most widely used typologies of stressor types. There are three types of stressors identified. Each is specific in nature and readily seen as identifiable exemplars. The first is described as **Major Events**. These are acute and intense occasions that are relatively rare. Examples of this type of stress include the death of a spouse or a loss of a job. These events have the potential to cause a great deal of emotional upheaval. The second type of stress is characterized as **Chronic Events**. These represent more permanent features of a particular living situation. These events do not have a sudden onset period, but refer to things of long duration such as having poor familial ties, being born into poverty, or having few friends. The third type is **Daily Hassles and Disappointments**. These demonstrate a quick onset, but are minor events that cause temporary emotional upset and problems. These events may include having a fight with a relational partner, being yelled at by your boss, and the like.

In an attempt to array stressful events from most to least stressful, Holmes and Rule (1967) developed the *Social Readjustment Scale*. Participants are asked to assess forty-three events by assigning a score of one for the least stressful to one hundred for the most stressful. The results align closely with the Lazarus and Cohen typology, with stressors that are characterized as **Daily Stressors** rated as the least stressful, **Chronic Stressors** rated as moderately stressful, and **Major Stressors** rated as most stressful (Rule, 1972; Holmes & Rule, 1967).

Like most research on comforting, Burleson and his associates focus on the import of comforting in response to daily stressors. Burleson points to studies indicating that stress resulting from minor stressors is a better predictor of physical health and

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depression levels than major stressors (e.g. Eckenrode, 1984; Delongis, 1982) to validate his focus on such daily stressors. Despite these results, studies exist which link major stressors to physical and emotional wellness. Findings suggest the ability of social support provision to alleviate the distressful and depressing impact of these major stressors. Studies concerning the role of social support in reducing stress and depression include situations such as facing retirement (Lowenthal & Haven, 1968), losing a spouse (Pennebaker & O'Heeron, 1984), losing a parent (Lehman, Ellard, & Wortman, 1986), or being a patient in a hospital (Peterson & Albrecht, 1996) or in a hospice (Zimmermann & Applegate, 1992). Evidence in these two lines of research reveals both major and minor stressors are important in terms of how they can impact physical, mental, and emotional states of individuals. Clearly, it is useful to investigate both types of stressors.

Distress Level and Relational Type

Though little is known about comfort as a function of distress level and relational type in combination, two studies shed light on this situation. Hale, Tighe, Vaughn, and Mongeau (1994) began by investigating the self-reported differences between the type of verbal support people say they would offer in a major versus minor stressor situation. Results suggest that the messages were of a different character. The messages provided in response to a major stress event (operationally defined as a death or a divorce) were more sensitive than those offered in response to a minor stress event (operationally defined as an exam failure or the break-up of a relationship).

Motivation's role. Hale et al. (1994) explained the results of their investigation by advancing the argument that the motivation to provide comfort was higher in the major stressor situation than it was in the minor stressor situation. They interpreted

Salomonson and Tamborini's (1994) study demonstrating the impact of empathy on comforting provision as evidence of one potential source of motivation. Concern for the other person and her/his emotional distress produced a motivation for the individual to provide comfort.

While acknowledging the importance of empathy, Hale et al. argue that although motivation can be a function of empathy, it is by no means the only mechanism by which motivation can be produced. For example, a social skills perspective indicates that motivation to behave in an appropriate manner may also explain differences in comforting responses. The appropriate response in the situation where one is faced with someone who is distressed is to help that person. This higher motivation was thought to have led to more sensitive, and therefore, more competent comforting messages.

In a related study, Tighe, Hale, and Lemieux (1994) further examined the relationship among distress type and comforting behavior. They hypothesized that there would be significant differences in the quality of the comforting messages offered – with more sensitive messages being offered in the high stressor situation and less sensitive messages being offered for the minor stressor situation. They also hypothesized that the quality of comfort and motivation to comfort well would be significantly and positively related.

Participants in the study were asked to write a response to a close friend who expressed either a minor stress (relational break-up/failure of an exam) or a major stressor (divorce of parents/death of parents), and to indicate their motivation to comfort. Results indicated that the messages in response to a friend in a major stressor situation were significantly more sensitive than responses to a friend in a minor stressor situation.

In addition, the motivation to comfort was significantly higher for the major stressor situation. These results provide a possible explanation for the apparent discrepancy of results from the Tamborini et al. (1995) study where friends were less comforting than strangers in low distress situations. The results concerning distress levels elicit some interesting questions about the role of motivation in situations calling for social support. Perhaps under conditions of low distress, strangers are more comforting than friends. This could be motivated by the politeness and impression management concerns offered by Barker and Lemle. However, since the Hale et al. results indicate that friends become more sensitive in comforting when the stressor is more serious, it is possible that under high distress conditions, friends are motivated to be more comforting than strangers. In this scenario, friends are more compelled by the serious nature of the situation and a stronger desire to help someone about whom they care. On the other hand, a stranger motivated by politeness and impression management concerns may not feel the same compulsion that is experienced by a friend in response to a serious stressor.

Taken as a whole, the work of Hale and his colleagues provides a promising indication of wherein lies the answer to the main question of this investigation. Unfortunately, the paper-and-pencil nature of their measurement protocol has serious implications for their results. Tamborini et al. (1995) demonstrated that the comfort responses people say they would provide to a distressed other are quite different from ones produced in face-to-face interactions. As such, there is a need to replicate the Hale et al. work demonstrating that friends are more comforting in high distress situations as opposed to low distress ones employing an interactional technique. In addition, there is a



need to explain the unanticipated results of Tamborini et al. indicating that friends are less comforting than strangers in low distress situations.

While this previous research leaves questions unanswered, the following differences are expected with regard to comfort, distress level, and relational type. First, there will be a significant interaction effect of distress type and relational level on comforting messages. It is this interaction that explains the apparent contradiction in results in friends and strangers. It is not the relational level or distress type alone that produces the pattern of results, but the combined impact of the two variables.

H1: Strangers will provide more sensitive comforting messages than friends under conditions of low distress.

H2: Friends will provide more sensitive comforting messages than strangers under conditions of high distress.

H3: Friends will provide more sensitive comforting messages under conditions of high distress than under conditions of low distress.

Unspecified in the interaction is the pattern of comforting behavior offered by strangers in a high versus low distress situation. Will a stranger's comforting be more sensitive, less sensitive, or unchanged under conditions of high distress? There are no solid indications to guide prediction; so one possibility may lie in the politeness explanation offered earlier as a motivation for strangers to provide comfort. Perhaps the introduction of a high distress topic may be perceived as socially incorrect and reduce the motivation of the stranger to provide comfort.

RQ1: Will strangers provide less sensitive comforting messages under conditions of high distress than under conditions of low distress?

Primary and Secondary Goals

Primary and secondary goals are another factor that may be relevant in comforting provision. Goal structures appear uniquely suited to offer insight into the comforting quagmire because of their broad applicability to a number of communication tasks. It may be the case that the perplexing results with respect to the comforting of friends and strangers are a function of their concern for multiple goals. Analyzing different goal structures in comforting situations may provide information about what drives an individual to produce the messages that result.

Inquiries pertaining to goals have their derivation in the literature on planning which posits that much of communication is accomplished through the enactment of certain goals planning action sequences. The goal of altering another's behavior needs planning, and this necessity controls the behavior of the source to a degree (Hobbs & Evans, 1980). Hobbs and Evans define goals as "desired future states of affairs" (1980) where a primary goal is the desire that is most salient given a particular communicative task. It is the basic objective of the interaction. For example, when an individual wants a favor from someone, the primary goal is to get the person to perform the task. A secondary goal is tangential to the purpose of the primary goal. These secondary goals are concerned with generalized desires and motivations that are omnipresent in an individual's social interaction. In light of these two considerations, it is clear that one individual may be formulating her/his messages with a primary goal and one or more secondary goals. Communication scholars have highlighted four such secondary goals types (Dillard, Segrin, & Harden, 1991).

The classification of secondary goals. The first of the four main categories of secondary goal is **Identity Goals**. These are related to a person's self-concept and are described as internal standards of behavior that impact how one treats others.

Interaction Goals are concerned with socially appropriate behavior. These point to the sender's desires to manage her/his impression to maximize perceptions of her/his competence. Goffman (1967) and Grice (1975) suggest these goals are associated with a desire to appear competent in terms of ensuring smooth communication and adherence to the rules of conversation – such as the ideas that messages must be relevant and coherent.

The third group of goals, **Resource Goals**, focuses on maintaining or increasing valued assets. These resources fall into three categories. Relational assets are comprised of the personal rewards associated with change in another's behaviors. These assets may vary in strength and include positive stimulation, emotional support, social comparison, and basic relational gratifications and benefits. Second, there are material assets. These are physical objects like money and other valued resources to which the source has some attachment that is somehow connected to the relationship. Last, there are physical assets. These are the aspects of the sender's well being that may be compromised in the period of the communicative task. Of these three relational goals, only relational asset goals are pertinent to the present investigation. While the remaining two asset goals may both be influential in other communication situations, it is not the case with comforting.¹ Finally, **Arousal/Emotional State Management** goals focus on the state of the sender. Here, individuals attempt to maintain their most preferred level of arousal during the communicative task. Too much or too little arousal is unpleasant. Not surprisingly,

¹ Data from a pilot study conducted for this investigation concerning secondary goals relevant to the comfort situation indicated that there was no mention of issues relating to physical or material assets in the sixty participants completing the test.

people want to avoid negative emotional experiences as a result of an interaction. In general, people try to manage this goal to attain their personal optimal emotional level.

There are obviously salient differences among the primary and secondary goal types. The primary goal is termed such because it basically defines the communication situation. It is the essential purpose of the interaction. The primary goal is also the impetus behind which the secondary goals are most salient to the sender. These goals, however, serve to limit and later shape the behaviors that are performed in service of the primary goal.

Goals and communication situations. Researchers examining various communication situations have utilized multiple-goals explanations to describe differences in behavior. One example is Burleson's work on the influence of multiple goals in sexual harassment situations. Building on the recent interest in complex communication situations, he views the management of sexually harassing messages as one such instance. He stresses that cognitive complexity is an important determinant in whether an individual is capable of producing a message that addresses multiple goals at once. Results are consistent with the idea that multiple goals are addressed in sexual harassment situations. Bingham and Burleson (1989) found that messages produced by a female subordinate in response to a sexual statement made by a male superior addressed a variety of goals simultaneously. These more complex messages were judged by raters as likely having more impact on the harassment situation than those messages addressing a single goal.

Dillard and his colleagues examined interpersonal influence (compliance-gaining) situations as another multiple goal task (1991). Investigations yielded evidence

suggesting that for persuasive situations, people actually do think in terms of primary and secondary goals. Clearly, there are some differences in terms of the primary goals found in compliance-gaining and comforting situations. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a similar set of secondary goals seems appropriate for comforting as well as for persuasive communication. Dillard et al. found evidence to suggest that secondary goals associated with the relational appropriateness of certain messages inhibited the use of some strategies, while encouraging the use of others. In a similar vein, it is plausible that secondary goals could inhibit some forms of comforting behavior, while at the same time promoting others. In the same study, the researchers developed a set of statements describing why people would opt to select a given compliance-gaining strategy. These statements were created based on responses from a group of participants who were asked to describe their reasons for employing the influence strategies they selected. The evidence suggests that people mold their interpersonal influence behavior to effectively obtain what they want from the interaction. People consider other factors, such as the appropriateness of the tactics, in compliance-gaining situations.

An investigation exploring the conflicting goals inherent in a social support situation provides a more direct indication of the applicability of the multiple goals perspective to comforting. While not specifically citing a multiple goals explanation, Goldsmith (1992) posits that many of the goals in a supportive communicative situation make the act of trying to give support a difficult enterprise. She focuses on how *Politeness Theory* may explain some of the dilemmas with respect to supportive messages. She reasons that when providing any type of aid, whether it is conveying emotional, informational, appraisal, or tangible support, the giver perceives a potential

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for a threat to both herself and the receiver of the supporting communication. These issues are clearly akin to the interaction-goals subgroup of secondary goals.

In this instance, it is important for the one providing the support to appear to be a competent communicator, to induce the other to form a good impression, and not to do anything inappropriate which may compromise the other's face. She may worry that they are not doing an adequate job of supporting, that it could constrain upon her time, or she could feel used as if she were "Ann Landers" and not a person in her own right. In terms of the person receiving the support, there are many potential face threats including looking weak, having undesirable information come to light, fear of stigmatization, and feeling less competent for having to ask for help.

Although she does not include the other goals in her framework, Goldsmith provides an informative place to begin specifying the goals in the comforting provision situation. These results illustrate the applicability of multiple goals to different communication situations.

Application to the comforting situation. The multiple goals perspective has been applied to many divergent communication tasks. How do these goals relate specifically to the comforting situation? Is the relationship impacted by relational level and distress type in the comforting situation? In terms of the identification of the goal structure for this situation, the primary goal is to provide comfort to someone in distress. Secondary goals include items from the four major groupings of secondary goals introduced in the earlier section of this work. The first group is **Identity** goals. They include a person's concern for providing comfort according to her/his own morals and standards. It is a concern for handling the situation in a way that she/he feels comfortable. In terms of

Interaction goals, a person would want to make a good impression, be socially appropriate, not look ineffective, and be competent at providing comfort. With regard to **Relational** goals, one would be careful not to damage the relationship, and would have concern for not causing further distress through the comforting attempt. Finally, **Arousal** goals would be concerned with not wanting to be in an aversive state and the fearing being in a negative emotional state.

Clearly, there are many issues to consider when communicating with a distressed person. Comfort should remain the prominent goal, but there are different means available to a comfort provider in terms of how she/he elects to behave in the situation. Management of a number of goals is clearly indicated. As such, we ask the following research question:

RQ2: How will the level of comfort provision be related to secondary goals?

Beyond a simple understanding of secondary goals and comforting, the potential exists for relational type to moderate this association. Perhaps friends have to manage more of these goals than strangers. It is also conceivable that different goals may become important for friends as opposed to strangers. For example, **Identity** goals might be of greater importance for a friend. Perhaps she/he would feel less comfortable not adhering to internal standards of behavior concerning comfort provision than would a stranger. Conversely, **Interaction** goals might be more important in the stranger situation because this exchange may be the only contact she/he will have with the person, and as a result the other individual will judge competence solely on the basis of the one interaction. **Relational** goals might be more important in the friend situation because of the nature of an established, ongoing relationship between the two individuals. These goals may not

come into play in a stranger interaction with little possibility of further contact. Finally, **Arousal** goals may be important to both of the relationships, but for different reasons. In the friendship situation, one might be aroused because one is concerned for her/his friend and is upset because of the friend's distress. This may be true for the stranger situation as well, but the fact that a stranger is expressing distress to another might be awkward and induce aversive arousal. Various possibilities such as those highlighted here lead to the development of the following question.

RQ3: How will relational level and secondary goals be related?

In addition to differences associated with the relational level of the comforter and the distressed individual, goal structures may change as a result of the type of stressor involved. Whether the distress is of a major or minor variety may impact the relative salience of the goals. For example, all the secondary goals may become less important when the distress level is high. The primary goal of providing comfort may move to the forefront and obscure concern for the secondary considerations. Here, nothing would be more important than salving the emotional distress that is serious in nature and no other energy would be expended in the service of other goals. By contrast, egoistic processes may dominate under high distress conditions and make comfort provision less important than secondary goals. Considering these possibilities, the question is put forth.

RQ4: How will distress type and secondary goals be related?

It is also possible that relational level and distress type may interact and have a meaningful impact on the importance of secondary goals. Will the goals salient to a highly distressed stranger be the same as those for a highly distressed friend? What about low distress conditions? It is conceivable that highly distressed strangers may perceive

arousal goals as salient, while for highly distressed friends it may be interaction goals.

These possibilities lead to the advancement of the following research question.

RQ5: How will the interaction of distress type and relational level be related to secondary goals?

Assessing Comfort: Methodological Issues

While the differential results with regard to friend and stranger comforting may be a function of the interaction between distress type and relational level, there remain additional possibilities to be explored. One avenue concerns the way comforting behavior has been assessed. This factor may provide further insight into the comforting process. While most research has used the verbal sensitivity scheme developed by Burleson and his associates, we consider additional methods of assessment in this investigation. We consider verbal immediacy and nonverbal modes of comforting to determine if either reveals unique facets about the comforting process.

Burleson and verbal sensitivity. Burleson's widely used coding instrument was developed from the work of Applegate (1978). This scheme was developed by combining aspects of Bernstein's person-centered versus position-centered speech, a classification based on work of Warner (1957) and Rogers (1961). Applegate developed a nine-category system to code comforting messages that identifies increases and decreases in the degree of acknowledgement, legitimization, and autonomy granted the distressed individual when someone is trying to help.

There are two basic types of communication relevant to this typology. The first is person-centered communication that demonstrates awareness of an attention to the affective, subjective, and relational consequences of communication contexts. This type

of communication is sensitive to the fact that what is said may be damaging to the other person's feelings, sense of self, and to the continued nature of the relationship. Its underlying core is recognizing and providing support for the unique qualities and characteristics of others. So in person-centered communication, people are seen as individuals and not just another person in distress, but as a specific person in distress.

Position-centered communication, conversely, is message behavior that relies on the rule requirements for the individual's role in society. People are not treated as individuals here, but instead are looked at as strangers, acquaintances, or friends. Communication is not tailored to the individual's needs, only what ought to be said to **that type of person** in a given situation.

Position-centered communication and person-centered communication are not dichotomous, but rather opposite poles on a continuum. Applegate describes this as "reflecting the general developmental progression from global, concrete, and fragmented social cognitive and communicative action to more differentiated, psychologically-focused, and integrated modes of thought and behavior" (Applegate, 1990, p. 233).

Operationally, then, the term "sophisticated comforting strategy" means a message that acknowledges, elaborates on, and explicitly legitimizes the feelings of others. Basically, these messages convey that a person's position is understood, that her/his experience is not uncommon, and that it is okay to feel the way she/he does.

There are nine levels of the coding scheme. The lower three tiers deny the individual perspective of the distressed person. These levels do not take into account how that particular person is feeling, and the message is not customized to individual needs and the parameters of the situation. The middle three levels describe messages that

provide some implicit support and legitimization of the other's feelings. Finally, the messages in the top three groups demonstrate full acknowledgement and elaboration of feelings outwardly. Burleson notes "sophisticated comforting strategies project a greater degree of involvement with the distressed other, are more neutral evaluatively, are more feeling-centered, are more accepting of others, and contain more cognitively-oriented explanations of feelings experienced by the other" (Burleson, 1990, p.70). Thus, individuals view these more sophisticated strategies as showing greater concern, caring, and interest in their situation.

The term "sophisticated" implies that those messages rated more highly on the coding scheme are better than those that are rated lower. Research into this question by Burleson and Samter (1985) reveals that they are in fact rated "better." Participants were given four hypothetical comforting situations with a corresponding list of nine corresponding response messages. Each message represented one of the nine categories from the scheme. The participants were instructed to rank the messages in terms of their preferences as to which message they would most like to receive in that situation. They were told to think about the sensitivity and effectiveness of the messages. The participants' rank ordering of the nine messages for each of the four situations matched the nine-category scheme exactly.

The crux of the scheme is to assess the quality of a message by determining the degree to which "the feelings and individual perspective of the distressed other are either denied, implicitly recognized, or explicitly acknowledged, elaborated, and granted legitimacy" (Burleson, 1982, p.1572). The results of studies employing this coding scheme have demonstrated consistent findings. Those people who provided messages

with more sophisticated strategies (scoring higher on the scheme) were perceived as doing a better job of both alleviating the negative affective state of the distressed individual, and also were viewed as better serving other subsidiary goals like relational maintenance (Burleson, 1991). This finding mirrors the earlier discussion of the comfort task as one with multiple goals. In addition, those individuals whose messages were scored more highly on the comforting scheme were evaluated more positively and seen as more competent communicators than those who scored lower on the coding scheme.

When Burleson and his associates initiated their program of research into comforting, they began by examining the types of stress that occur daily. Burleson commented, “This research was restricted to comforting activity addressing mild-to-moderate feelings of disappointment, hurt, or sadness arising from everyday events” (p. 68). He pointed to evidence (e.g. Wortman & Lehman, 1985; Lindemann, 1965) that suggested the types of strategies used to manage such extreme feelings might not be the same as those used to manage smaller scale discomforts. While the scale seems appropriate for use in describing comforting messages produced in response to daily stressors, it is less clear as to its use in rating messages in response to major stressors. Only a few studies employed the Burleson scheme to assess messages produced by major stressors (e.g. Hale, Tighe, & Lemieux, 1994; Tamborini, Salomonson, & Bahk, 1995), although these applications were successful. It could be the case that situations involving major stressors require additional modes of assessing comforting.

Immediacy and verbal comforting. Another important area of coding verbal messages is verbal immediacy. Verbal immediacy is defined as language that indicates a desire for intimacy and closeness on the part of the speaker (Borchgrevink, 1994). The

coding procedure originated in order to capture the level of affiliation and interdependence conveyed through words among people engaged in conversations (Merhabian, 1967). Clearly, demonstrating interdependence and affiliation is linked to appearing supportive to an individual. In terms of reducing emotional distress, expressions of interconnectivity may serve as comforting messages. The coding scheme provides insight on interconnectivity by examining the verbal content of conversations to assess the degree of distance between the communicators. The successful use of this scale has been demonstrated in its application to a variety of communication situations including hostage negotiations, divorce mediation sessions, and comforting situations (Donohue & Roberto, 1993; Tamborini & Borchgrevink, 1992; Donohue, 1991). In addition, the relationship of individual differences in empathy to verbal immediacy has also been studied (Borchgrevink, 1994).

The scheme used in communication studies provides measures of spatial approach, spatial avoidance, and general spatial immediacy (Borchgrevink & Donohue, 1993). Expressions of spatial immediacy are indicative of trust, intimacy, and a desire to be close to an individual. Positive affect for a relationship is conveyed by language choices expressing approach, while negative affect for a relationship is conveyed by language choices expressing avoidance. In order to apply the coding scheme, each conversation is broken down into a single utterance, the natural break point of speech between two interactants. Each utterance is assessed to determine whether it contains certain classes of words indicating more or less verbal immediacy.

Nonverbal behavior and comforting. While the pursuit of categorizing verbal comforting messages has been a productive one, nonverbal assessment of comforting

communication may provide a different, richer picture of the comforting situation. It may be that the surprising pattern of results found for friends and strangers could be partially due to a failure to observe heightened levels of comfort provided to friends via nonverbal means. In any event, exploration into the nonverbal realm of comforting will inform the process further.

Nonverbal scholars maintain that 60 to 90 percent of all meaning in interpersonal communication can be accounted for by nonverbal communication (Burgoon, 1988). Although empirical verification of this is a difficult task, few doubt the importance of nonverbal expression to the communication process. Despite this, little attention has been paid to this type of communication in many important and well-studied areas within the communication discipline. The prosocial/comforting behavior venue is no exception to this inattention.

Given the difficulty people have providing comfort to others, it may be the case that those offering support would prefer the less overt nonverbal communication. One of the functions of nonverbal communication is to assist people in saying things they are unwilling or unable to say with verbal communication (Burgoon, 1988). Many individuals have been in situation where there are really no words, but a touch or some other form of nonverbal communication gesture is indicated. Cutrona, Cohen, and Igram (1990) found that when bereaving individuals were asked, a majority of them found an embrace or a touch to be more helpful than a verbal message.

Despite this, no standard coding schemes exist for any of the nonverbal codes (including kinesics, vocalics, haptics, chronemics, and others) related to prosocial behavior or supportive comforting behaviors. Yet, while there has been no standard

scheme developed specifically for comforting behavior, several coding schemes have been developed that relate tangentially to the prosocial behavior area. In particular, research on nonverbal codes measuring immediacy and intimacy in a variety of contexts appears meaningfully linked to the provision of comfort.

Nonverbal immediacy, also termed “involvement” in some conceptions, has been investigated by many nonverbal researchers (e.g. Anderson & Anderson, 1990; Capella & Greene, 1982). An example of this type of scheme is present in the work of Burgoon and Hale (1985) who argue that Immediacy/Involvement is one of four main relational message nonverbal functions.

Immediacy and involvement refer to the degree to which a variety of nonverbal cues, including body orientation, lean, eye gaze, gestures, and proximal cues are performed to indicate an individual’s attention and focus on an interaction. Such behaviors are thought to be indicative of conveying closeness and connection, a form of nonverbal communication that appears closely akin to supportive behaviors.

Coding schemes for nonverbal immediacy/involvement adopt one of two main approaches. The first is coding specific nonverbal behaviors for their frequency. How long did they gaze at one another, how many gestures did she/he perform during the interaction? These types of coding results are useful in that they are easy for an observer to code and provide direct, quantifiable differences in nonverbal involvement. The main criticism of this coding methodology lies in the artificiality of the process (Gordon, 1994; Manusov, 1995). Participants in conversations are unlikely to keep a running tally of nonverbal movements during the course of a conversation. For measurement purposes, some researchers using this approach record interactions and have trained individuals

code the frequency of nonverbal behaviors. This method ignores the input of the conversational participants as to their perceptions of the nonverbal behavior occurring during an interaction.

The second type of coding is characterized by a more global, natural assessment of nonverbal behaviors. The focus is not the identification of specific behaviors, but rather the overall impression that is conveyed through observing constellations of nonverbal behaviors. Here, people are asked to assess the extent to which a person's nonverbal cues indicated pleasantness, involvement, interest, or detachment in response to the interaction. This type of scheme is useful because the type of information it provides is akin to the types of assessments that people perform on their own during conversational interactions. For example, it is unlikely that individuals count the number of times a person nods or marks the number of seconds someone gazed at them. Instead, they form an overall impression based on their combined assessment of a variety of cues.

One global nonverbal scheme was employed on studies examining behaviors during a game-playing task of married and romantically involved couples (Manusov, 1995). Although this scheme has not been used specifically with regard to prosocial/supportive behaviors, it is logical that at least a portion of it may be applicable to this scenario. Having someone express nonverbally that they are involved with you and your discussion of problems may be comforting in and of itself. This would be comforting in the sense that there is someone listening to you with interest, even if she/he is not saying anything to you in direct response to your problems. Presumably, this would be more comforting and supportive than witnessing someone looking away and appearing

bored with the interaction. By employing this scheme, important features of the interaction not captured via verbal mechanisms may be identified and considered.

In another study employing the idea of nonverbal involvement, stigmatization was coded nonverbally by using a scheme designed to assess nonverbal involvement (LaPoire, 1995). This study is relevant to the present purpose because of the fact that here the stigmatization that occurred (as assessed through low nonverbal involvement) could be seen as a lack of support. In this case, the study concerned people who were and were not frightened by homosexuals having to interact with them. So, in essence, the lack of support could be characterized as lack of support for one's entire lifestyle and being. The results of this study indicate the utility of coding interactions for nonverbal immediacy behaviors while pointing to the potential value in coding comfort as well.

Nonverbal intimacy may also serve to convey social support to others. Many researchers include conceptions of intimacy as a vital nonverbal function. For example, Burgoon and Hale (1985) describe an **Intimacy/Similarity** dimension that entails shared like, trust, and affiliation through nonverbal means. Additionally, Patterson (1983) highlights the importance of intimacy to nonverbal function. He describes intimacy as "the manifestation of an affectively based reaction toward another person. [This] affective reaction comprises liking, loving, interest in, or **concern for another person**" (p.96). This view of intimacy explicitly links supportive, caring behavior with the intimacy function of nonverbal communication and provides the necessary bridge between nonverbal behaviors employed to code intimacy and those that can be used to code socially supportive behavior. The intimacy function may be particularly important to people in more developed relationships, who have had the time to grow feelings of

care and concern for another individual. In initial interactions, there may be another more important function behind intimacy-like behaviors. Patterson points out that often in initial interactions where managing impressions is critical – people perform involvement and intimacy behaviors for the purpose of making a good impression or obtaining a desired response from someone, but not as an expression of their feelings. Thus, the intention behind the behavior may not always be the intimacy function in this context.

Many authors have advanced specific nonverbal behaviors that have been identified with intimacy. These include Argyle and Dean (1965) and Merhabian (1969). They identified interpersonal distance, gaze, touch, body orientation, and body lean as important indicators of intimacy. A general approach to coding nonverbal intimacy was developed by McAdams and Powers (1981). They identified five general components for an intimate exchange including openness, receptivity, harmony, concern for other, and surrender of control. Although not specifically formulated for nonverbal use, each component can be assessed to the extent that each is conveyed nonverbally. These appear to be important considerations with regard to the assessment of social support.

The two areas have developed separately from one another in the nonverbal literature with immediacy being thought to possess less personal closeness than intimacy. However, they do seem to share the same characteristics. Both convey closeness and affinity, and being accepting of any topic on which the other wants to converse. As such, for the purpose of the present investigation, the two can be considered related.

Incorporating verbal and nonverbal comforting messages offers the potential to increase our understanding of comforting in different contexts. Perhaps friends and

strangers comfort people in high and low distress situations in different ways. For example, a stranger may feel more comfortable with verbal means of support rather than nonverbal ones. Given the fact that in most investigations of comfort, only verbal sensitivity has been examined, it is possible that additional modes of measurement might tell a more complete story. At the same time, however, when considering the similarities among the concepts identified at the core of schemes designed to measure verbal sensitivity, verbal immediacy, and nonverbal intimacy/immediacy, perhaps these different schemes measure a single concept. Based on these considerations, the following research question is offered.

RQ#6: How will the nonverbal and verbal measures of comforting be related?

Potentially, these measures of verbal and nonverbal comfort may be indicative of differences in terms of the fact that support is not a singular concept, but a multifaceted one. As such, this separation may lead to various expectations regarding the type of comforting messages offered by different individuals in certain situations. There is some evidence that in situations where there is a high degree of distress, nonverbal support may be more effective than verbal support in alleviating the negative affect. Work on the intimacy function of nonverbal communication follows that such behavior may be used to convey support, with strangers and particularly among individuals in established relationships (Argyle & Dean, 1985).

Specifically with regard to stressor type, some work indicates that often times with more serious stressors, nonverbal gestures are better salvers than verbal ones. This observation suggests that people find nonverbal messages more comforting than verbal messages when distress is high. From a communicator competence perspective, it

appears reasonable that because nonverbal communication means are better able to reduce distress, those in a position of comfort-provider would elect to employ this nonverbal strategy that is most likely to be effective. However, it is unclear whether or not this would supplant or supplement verbal comfort.

Moreover, although there is preliminary evidence indicating a possible relationship among various types of support provision and distress type, there are few clues to the impact of such support types and their use by friends and strangers. Finally, the possibility exists that there may also be an interactive impact with regard to relational type, distress level, and verbal and nonverbal comforting. Based on these considerations, the following research question is advanced.

RQ#7: How will distress type and relational level impact the nonverbal and verbal measures of comforting?

METHOD

Participants

Ninety friends and 82 strangers served as participants in the experiment. First, 90 undergraduate students were recruited from an introductory communication research methods and statistics course at a large mid-western university to serve as confederates in the experiment. In exchange for their participation in the study, these students were granted course credit. Following selection, each confederate was instructed to ask one of his or her friends to participate in what was described as a film viewing evaluation study. Prior to the beginning of the experiment, both the confederate and the subject signed an informed consent form. Each of the 90 confederates played her/his role in two separate experimental sessions: once with a friend, and once with a stranger. All 90 confederates completed a session with a friend, and 82 completed a session with a stranger. Depending on the availability of friends, some confederates were scheduled to participate with the stranger first; while for others, the friend session was first. See Table 1 below for a complete breakdown of the sex of all the confederates and the participants.

Table 1

Sex of Confederates and Participants

Confederates (N=90)	Friends (N=90)	Strangers (N=82)
Males (N=39)	M=15 F=24	M=16 F=19
Females (N=51)	M=22 F=29	M=17 F=30

100

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Overview

The experimental procedure utilized in this investigation replicates and extends the work of Tamborini et al. (1995). In the earlier study, friends and strangers were placed in a low distress situation and their comforting verbal sensitivity was assessed. The design of the current experiment is essentially the same, but with two important extensions. First, there is a 2 x 2 factorial design that crosses relational level and distress type. Also, several modes of measuring comfort are employed including verbal sensitivity, nonverbal immediacy, nonverbal intimacy, and verbal immediacy.

Procedure

Both friend and stranger participants filled out a questionnaire approximately a month before the laboratory session. The series of questions contained empathy measures, additional personality trait measures, and assessments concerning the consumption of a variety of mass media. The latter two groups of items were included to obscure the importance of empathy measures. The participants were unaware that the experiment about to take place in the laboratory was related to the questionnaire completed a month earlier.

In both the friend and the stranger sessions, the participant believed that the confederate was taking part in the experiment along with her/him. Upon arrival, participants were ushered into a comfortable room containing a television monitor and two chairs. They were led into the room in such a way that the confederate sat in front of the video monitor, leaving only one seating option for the subject. The participants always sat in the chair farthest from the entry door. The experimenter had both the subject and the confederate sign an informed consent form. The experimenter then told

the pair that after viewing a film, they would be asked to complete a short questionnaire. They were also told that they were able to leave at anytime if they felt uncomfortable with the film. The thirty-minute film, either a comedy, tragedy, or horror film, began. Participants were randomly assigned to their film conditions.²

At the start of the film the experimenter began to tape the interaction between the subject and the confederate through a two-way mirror. Following the film credits, the confederate started to express distress over her/his current problem. Before the experiment, every confederate had been randomly assigned to express either a minor stressor or a major stressor. After the distress expression, the confederate waited for a response from the subject. If the subject said nothing, the confederate repeated the phrase, “What am I going to do?” If no response was given, the confederate was instructed to simply sit quietly until the experimenter returned. If the participants did respond, the confederate was instructed to downplay the effectiveness of the suggestions offered by repeating, “I don’t know what good that will do.” After a period of exactly five minutes, the experimenter ceased the taping and re-entered the session room. The experimenter then requested that the subject go to another room to complete the questionnaire. The confederate remained in the experimental room and was told to remain there to complete a questionnaire.

² The film manipulation was part of another study not detailed in this investigation. In the horror condition, participants viewed a portion of the film, Tales from the Darkside. In the film, an elderly man hires a hit man to kill a cat he believes murdered three people close to him. The cat’s motive involved the elderly man’s business in which he performed drug tests on cats. At the end of the film, the cat kills both the elderly man and the hit man in a grisly manner. Participants in the comedy condition viewed an episode of Fawlty Towers, a British comedy series, called “Basil the Rat.” The program involves a married couple running a hotel. One of the employees, Manuel, has a large pet rat that is running loose in the hotel on the day the health inspector is coming for a visit. Participants in the tragedy condition viewed a segment of the HBO Series Families in Crisis. In this episode, the abortion consent law forced a young girl to have an illegal abortion and then have to tell her parents about it after she falls ill. She later dies from an infection.

The participants filled out a bogus questionnaire about their perceptions about elapsed time in the film. In addition, participants were asked if they had seen the film previously. Finally, they were asked about their perceptions of both the present study and the one they completed about a month earlier. This was done to ensure that the participants were not aware of the true purpose of the study. After completion, the experimenter debriefed the participants and told them that the person with whom they completed the study was actually a confederate in the experiment. In addition, participants were told that the purpose of the study was to assess the influence of empathy on the provision of comforting behavior to a distressed other. Participants were also informed that distress type and relational level were also being considered as important variables in the investigation. The participants were then informed that their sessions had been taped. The participants were explicitly asked if they would like to have their tape destroyed. An assurance of confidentiality was given to the participants with regard to all experimental information.

Following this debriefing session, the participants were asked to complete a series of questions assessing the level of distress they perceived in the confederate's situation, their goals during the comforting interaction, and how these influenced their selection of strategies. Finally, the friend participants were asked to define the nature of their relationship with the person who had brought them into the laboratory. Please refer to Appendix A for complete information concerning the experimental script.

Confederates

Ninety undergraduate students served as confederates in the experiment for the friendship and stranger portion of the study. The confederates were recruited from two

introductory undergraduate research classes in the communication department at a large, Midwestern University. In order to guard against variation in expression during the comforting conversation, all confederates followed an identical script with rigid instructions. The confederates underwent extensive training to familiarize themselves with the procedure and script contents. Three training sessions were held to familiarize all the confederates with the procedures of the experiment.

Distress Type

In contrast to the previous investigations by Tamborini et al. (1995), both minor and major distress situations were included in the study. The creation of the minor stress situation was replicated following the procedures of Tamborini et al. (1995). Minor distress was operationally defined in one of three forms. The primary option was for students to express concern about doing poorly in a class and needing extra credit to improve their grade. However, additional scenarios were provided in the event that the friend knew the “grade situation” was not true. Additional options included trouble with unpaid parking tickets or difficulty with credits needed to graduate. Each of the scenarios was carefully scripted to guard against variability in presentation. All options were judged to be similarly distressing by independent raters. A pilot test with a separate sample of 60 participants assessed the level of distress contained in each scenario on a five-point scale (1 = not very distressing to 5 = very distressing). The three scenarios were not significantly different from one another with respect to distress level (Grade Situation $\bar{M} = 2.31$; Parking Ticket $\bar{M} = 2.04$; Graduation $\bar{M} = 2.27$) by the Student Newman-Keul’s Test.

In the major distress category, the primary topic for the stranger participants was marital difficulty and the possibility that their parents might get divorced. As was the case with the minor stressor situation, additional options were provided to ensure that the friend participants would be believed. All confederates in the high distress condition had additional options of the death of a family member or the discovery of a medical problem of their own. These situations were selected because of their previous identification as major stress events (Lazarus & Cohen, 1977). Hale et al. (1995) employed the divorce scenario successfully in their research examining the impact on comfort of distress type. In the pilot test reported earlier, the same 60 individuals who assessed the minor distress scenarios rated the major stress events as well. The three scenarios were not significantly different from one another (Divorce $\underline{M} = 4.03$; Family Death $\underline{M} = 4.17$; and Own Health $\underline{M} = 4.42$) at $p < .05$ levels by the Student Newman-Keul's Test. In addition, all the major stressor scenarios were rated significantly more stressful than each of the minor stressors (Divorce $\underline{M} = 4.03$; Family Death $\underline{M} = 4.17$; and Own Health $\underline{M} = 4.42$ were significantly more stressful than the Grade Situation $\underline{M} = 2.31$; Parking Ticket $\underline{M} = 2.04$; and Graduation $\underline{M} = 2.27$) at $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's Test. Full-text scripts are found in Appendix A.

Measures

There are two groups of measures included in the present investigation. The first group of measures is the four modes of assessing comfort. They include verbal sensitivity, verbal immediacy, nonverbal immediacy and nonverbal intimacy. The final measure is the goal importance scale given to participants following their experimental session.

Coding comfort. Three independent, highly trained senior-level communication students (two females, one male) conducted the coding for the Burleson sensitivity of comforting scheme and the nonverbal intimacy and immediacy scheme. Two coders (one male and one female) conducted the coding for the verbal immediacy scheme. Four one-hour training sessions were attended by all of the coders. The actual coding process took place over a period of approximately two months. In the case of a disagreement, the coders met and discussed their differences until a single selection emerged.

Sensitivity of comforting messages was measured using two schemes, Burleson's scheme and the Verbal Immediacy Coding Scheme. One of the richest aspects of these data is the fact that actual statements made to distressed individuals were coded and assessed. Too often, individuals studying communication have participants indicate what they think they would say in response to another if they were actually there.

Burleson's verbal sensitivity scale is a nine-category hierarchical system based on the work of Applegate (1980) and later employed in numerous other studies by Burleson and his associates. The scheme is grounded in Bernstein's distinction between personal and positional speech. Positional speech refers to communication that lacks sensitivity. People employing this type of speech adapt messages in solely role-centered ways. Personal speech, however, refers to communication targeted at considering the inner thoughts and feelings of the person being addressed.

The value of using this type of speech lies in its quality of legitimating the affective states of others. Specifically, a lower score on the scheme represents messages more characteristic of positional speech, whereas messages scored higher on the scheme represent the use of more personal speech. The coding scheme is divided into three

superordinate categories: Denial of individual perspectivity (1 to 3); implicit recognition of individual perspectivity (4 to 6); and explicit recognition of individual perspectivity (7 to 9).

Three categories showing denial of individual perspectivity represent the least sensitive message types of the coding scheme. There is little attention paid to the feelings of the individual. No understanding of a person's predicament is displayed. In response to the low distress scenario of someone who received a number of parking tickets, one friend subject responded to a confederate, "Well, you have a credit card don't you? Pay it off." In the high distress scenario with a family death one stranger responded, "That's rough. Lot of problems with that. You gonna go home?" These statements represent low sensitivity comforting messages produced during both high and low distress situations with friend and stranger participants.

Three mid-level category comforting strategies representing implicit recognition of perspectivity reveal a greater indication that a person understands a situation. In response to a friend who is in danger of failing a class, one subject responded, "That's too bad. I'm sure you'll do okay, though. Maybe you could talk to your professor. Does he have office hours this week?" In the high distress condition of having a potential medical problem one stranger subject responded, "Wow, really? That is a lot to deal with on top of school and everything. When will you find out? I hope it's soon."

Finally, at the explicit recognition of perspectivity level of the scheme, an individual conveys understanding of the person's situation and of their feelings openly. Examples of this level of comforting sensitivity include a subject's response to a friend having a medical problem, "Why didn't you tell me? That's terrible. But you know in

the end you'll be fine. You feel worried and upset now, but you'll come through. A similar thing happened to my Mom so I know how hard it is." In response to a stranger having academic problems, one subject said, "That is the worst. I'm sure you'll be able to do something, though. It's early enough to study hard for the final. You can pull it up. Just try not to be down. I know when I feel that way it's even harder to get things done."

This study examined the interactional messages produced during conversations. Consistent with previous use of the scheme, each subject was assigned a comforting score based on the highest-level statement produced during the interaction. The percentage agreement was 94%. Their reliability is Kappa = .89. Complete information on the coding scheme is contained in Appendix C.

Verbal immediacy is the second scheme measuring sensitivity of the comforting messages. This scheme assessed verbal immediacy of the language used in these comforting interactions. Each interaction was transcribed and divided into utterances and coded for spatial approach, spatial avoidance, and general spatial immediacy. The spatial approach measure is the sum of all verbal immediacy indicators that reflect approachability or closeness, while the spatial avoidance measure is the sum of all the verbal immediacy indicators that reflect avoidance or distancing behavior. For each utterance, a score of +1 is assigned to language that brings the conversational participants closer together and a score of -1 is assigned to language that brings conversational participants farther apart. General spatial immediacy is the spatial approach total minus the spatial avoidance total. For example, the following statement from a low distress stranger had a general spatial immediacy score of three. "This (+1) situation must be hard on you. I am sure you are close (+1) to passing this (+1) course." Another

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statement made by a high distress stranger participant was coded as a score of zero.

“That (-1) sucks. This (+1) is a real problem. Are you going to go home? Percent agreement for the coders was 96%, with a Kappa = .91. Complete information regarding these methods is found in Appendix D.

The nonverbal immediacy was developed as a new coding scheme to investigate the use of nonverbal comforting and support behaviors. The scale contains fourteen items. The items comprising the scales were taken from previous research on expressions of immediacy via nonverbal communication (Manusov, 1995; LaPoire, 1994; Andersen & Andersen, 1990; Burgoon, 1989; McAdams & Powers, 1981

The nonverbal intimacy scale was developed using items from previous research on nonverbal expressions of intimacy via nonverbal communication (Manusov, 1995 and LaPoire, 1994). There are four items measuring nonverbal intimacy. The nonverbal immediacy and intimacy scales are global nonverbal impression measures. Each scale employs opposite adjective pairs to measure overall nonverbal kinesic impressions (e.g. body lean, body position, eye gaze, and the like). The measures do not examine specific behaviors, but instead are concerned with the combined impact of myriad cues resulting in an overall impression. In the present case, coders were instructed to base the judgments upon an overall bodily impression from each area. Each bipolar adjective for both immediacy and intimacy are assessed on a scale of one to seven.

Consistent with previous uses of parts of this nonverbal coding scheme, measurements were taken at three points of time to assess changes in nonverbal behaviors during the course of an interaction. In this study, the three time-points included the moment immediately after the distressed confederate expressed the problem, one minute

after the disclosure, and two minutes after the disclosure. The highest of the three ratings for each of the adjectives was used as the score for the participant. Three coders assessed the videotaped interactions using the nonverbal coding scheme. Their percent agreement was 93%, with Kappa = .89. Complete information on content included in both the nonverbal immediacy and the nonverbal intimacy scales is in Appendix E.

Goal structure identification. In order to gather data about possible secondary goals people manage while in a comforting interaction, a procedure employed by Dillard et al. (1991) in their research on the goal structures of compliance-gaining message producers was followed. A group of 60 pilot-test participants were given scenarios describing distressed people in one high (parental divorce) and one low distress situation (grade situation). The distress situations were selected from previous research on comfort and distress type and were the same ones later used in the comfort experiment.

Participants were asked to imagine themselves in the distressful situations with a friend and again with a stranger. Then, they were asked to make a judgment in both situations about whether they would use any of thirty-two messages in each situation. Participants were asked to provide clear reasons why they would and would not use a particular strategy to comfort both the friend and the stranger. The messages on the list included an example from all nine of Burleson's verbal sensitivity categories, and twenty-three examples from Suhr's aid typology. Examples were included from both typologies to increase the breadth of comforting messages offered to the pilot-test participants. The messages were presented in random order for each of the distress situations.

Two undergraduate research assistants trained in the secondary goal structure scheme developed by Dillard et al. coded the participants' justifications for not using strategies. The justifications were coded into one of four categories (Identity, Interaction, Resource, or Arousal)³. The percentage agreement was 84%. Their reliability is Kappa = .76.

From these results of the pilot test, a closed-ended questionnaire measuring the importance of secondary goals to the comfort provider was developed for the main experiment. Following the laboratory session, both friend and stranger participants were asked to identify how important each secondary goal was to her/him in the comforting situation (1 = not important at all and 5 = very important). Participants also indicated in an open-ended format why they opted for the particular comforting strategy exhibited.

Confirmatory factor analysis was performed on all of the goal structure dimensions. In addition, alphas were computed for each scale. Formal tests of internal consistency and parallelism were also performed. In light of the failure of some of the items to meet the requirements of the two tests, several items were removed from the analysis. Please see Appendix B for factor loadings and scale contents of the items used in the goal structure questionnaire.

³ Although an additional category, Physical Resource Goals was included in the original Dillard et al. Secondary Goal Scheme, no pre-test participant mentioned it as a concern they had during the comforting interaction. As such, it was not included in the scheme used here.

RESULTS

The analysis plan used in this investigation began with tests of the measurement model relevant to research question six, and continued with subsequent analyses designed to address the hypotheses relating comfort behavior with relational level, distress type, and secondary goals.

Multiple Comforting Measures

Prior to testing the major hypotheses offered in this study, a test of the measurement model used for comfort in the investigation was performed. Research question six concerned the relationship among the nonverbal and verbal measures of comforting included in the study (Burlinson's verbal sensitivity, nonverbal immediacy, nonverbal intimacy, and verbal immediacy). An inspection of the correlation matrix among the scores presented in Table 2 reveal moderate to strong associations among the four measurement modes, all significant at $p < .05$ levels.

These data suggest that the four different scales may form one unidimensional measure of comfort. Under these circumstances, the proper course of action for testing hypotheses related to comfort provision would be to combine individual responses to the four scales into a single measure for each participant and perform analyses testing relevant hypotheses on the combined scores. The tacit assumption holds that the four measurement methods are in reality assessing a single concept.

A confirmatory factor analysis was performed to assess whether the four items were measuring a single dimension. Because of the difference in the ranges of possible

Table 2

Correlations Among Verbal and Nonverbal Comfort Measures

	GSI	NV Immediacy	NV Intimacy	Burleson
General Spatial Immediacy	<i>1.0</i>			
NV Immediacy	.65*	<i>1.0</i>		
NV Intimacy	.54*	.76*	<i>1.0</i>	
Burleson Verbal Sensitivity	.69*	.47*	.38*	<i>1.0</i>

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ two-tailed.

scores for the four scales, individual scale scores were transformed by the natural log function to achieve a greater degree of consistency. A confirmatory factor analytic approach is preferred because, “The researcher is explicitly able to explicitly test the factor structure of the data due to having the predetermined model specifying the number and composition of the factors” (Stapleton, 1997, p. 3). The results of the confirmatory factor analysis reveal the data is consistent with a single dimensional factor structure. See Table 3 below for the factor loadings and overall scale alpha.

Based on these results, each of the four modes of assessing comfort included in the investigation – Burleson’s verbal sensitivity, nonverbal immediacy, nonverbal intimacy, and verbal immediacy – were combined into a single, omnibus measurement of comfort.

Table 3

Comfort Measures Factor Loadings and Reliabilities

Comfort Measure	Loadings
General Spatial Immediacy	.85

Table 3 (cont'd).

Nonverbal Immediacy	.85
Nonverbal Intimacy	.72
Burleson Verbal Sensitivity	.64

Alpha = .85

Relationship Type, Distress Level, and Comfort Provision

The first three hypotheses made specific predictions about comfort provision under different conditions of distress type and comfort level: hypothesis one predicted that stranger participants would provide more sensitive comforting messages in low distress situations than friends, hypothesis two predicted that friends would produce more sensitive comforting messages than strangers under conditions of high distress, while hypothesis three predicted that friends would provide more sensitive comforting messages under conditions of high distress than under conditions of low distress. The three hypotheses were tested simultaneously in a 2 x 2 ANOVA performed to assess the impact of relational level and distress type on the production of comforting messages. Tests were conducted using the newly created comfort scale.

The results of analysis are consistent with the three main hypotheses in this investigation. Tests show a significant main effect for relational level $F(1, 171) = 42.511$, $p < .001$) and no effect for distress type $F(1, 171) = 1.104$, $p > .05$). More importantly, however, the interpretability of the main effect is overridden by observation of significant differences in the critical two-way interaction between relational level and distress type F

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(1, 171) = 60.39, $p < .001$). Complete information on the ANOVA analysis is found in Table 4.⁴

Table 4

ANOVA Comfort Scale by Distress Type and Relational Level

	SS	D	MS	F	F SIG	ETA
Main Effects	80.669	2	40.3345	27.402	.001	
Relational Level	74.895	1	74.895	42.511	.001	.12
Distress Type	5.774	1	5.774	1.104	.384	.01
Two-Way Interaction						
Relational Level & Distress Type	255.987	1	255.987	60.39	.001	.42
Explained	300.005	3	100.021	27.15	.001	
Residual	401.024	168	2.38			
Total	701.029	171	4.09			

Means associated with the interaction on comforting are presented in Table 5.

Note the change in values as a result of the natural log transformation. The pattern of means is informative. Hypothesis one predicted that stranger participants would provide more sensitive comforting messages in low distress situations than friends. The mean comforting scores for friends ($M = 1.08$) and strangers ($M = 1.22$) under conditions of low distress are not significantly different from one another by the Student Neuman-Keul's test at the $p < .05$ level. Hypothesis two predicted that friends would produce

⁴ The pattern of results for the combined measure show a similar pattern to the findings from individual analyses on the four separate comfort measures – with the exception of a small main effect for distress type in the Burleson-only model. Please see Appendix G for the separate ANOVA and subsequent means analyses.

more sensitive comforting messages than strangers under conditions of high distress. The inspection of the means shows results consistent with the hypothesis. The mean comforting score for friends ($M = 1.42$) is significantly different from the mean comforting score for strangers ($M = .98$) by the Student Neuman-Keul's test at the $p < .05$ level. Hypothesis three predicted that friends would provide more sensitive comforting messages under conditions of high distress than under conditions of low distress. Inspection shows that the means for friends in the high distress condition ($M = 1.42$) is significantly different from the mean for friends in low distress ($M = 1.08$) by the Student Neuman-Keul's test at the $p < .05$ level. Finally, research question one asked if strangers would provide less sensitive comforting messages under conditions of high distress than under conditions of low distress. An examination of the means indicates that strangers do provide less sensitive comforting messages under conditions of high distress ($M = .98$) than under conditions of low distress ($M = 1.22$). This difference was significant by the Student Neuman-Keul's test at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 5

Mean Comfort Scale Scores by Relational Level and Distress Type

	<u>Distress Type</u>		
	Low	High	Marginal
Friend	1.08 ^{ab} N=54	1.42 ^c N=36	1.25 N=90
Stranger	1.22 ^b N=47	.98 ^a N=35	1.15 N=82
Marginal	1.17 N=101	1.26 N=71	

Note. Separate SNK analysis compared each mean with all other means. Means with no superscripts in common differ by $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's Test.

4

Secondary Goals and Relationship Type, Distress Level, and Comfort Provision

Research question two asked what relationship exists between sensitivity of comforting and the comfort provider's secondary goals. The correlations among the goals and the comfort score are given in Table 6. Results reveal no significant correlations among the four goal types and the comfort scale at $p < .05$ levels. There is a significant correlation between interaction and identity goal scores.

Table 6

Correlations Among Secondary Goals and Comfort Scale Measures

	Comfort	ID	IN	Resource	Arousal
Comfort Scale	<i>1.0</i>				
Identity	.11	<i>1.0</i>			
Interaction	.14	.29*	<i>1.0</i>		
Resource	.06	.07	.13	<i>1.0</i>	
Arousal	.02	.09	.14	.03	<i>1.0</i>

Note. *Significant at $p < .05$ two-tailed.

Research question three asked about the impact that relationship level has on the comfort provider's secondary goals. Research question four dealt with the effect of distress type on the comfort provider's secondary goals. And finally, research question five concerns the effect of the distress type and relational level interaction on the comfort provider's secondary goals.

Exploration into research questions number three, four, and five began with a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). This multivariate procedure is useful for modeling the linear relationship between several dependent scale variables and one or

more factor/categorical variables. The technique provides an opportunity to investigate the interactions between factors as well as the effects of each individual factor. Table 7 contains the results of the MANOVA where relational level and distress type are the independent categorical variables and the dependent variables are the four goal types – identity, interaction, resource, and arousal.

Table 7

MANOVA Goals by Distress Type and Relational Level - Multivariate Analysis

Effect		Value	F	DF	F SIG	ETA
Relational Level	Pillai's Trace	0.015	2.325	4	0.297	0.001
	Wilks' Lambda	0.885	2.325	4	0.297	0.001
	Hotelling's Trace	0.017	2.325	4	0.297	0.001
	Roy's Largest Root	0.017	2.325	4	0.297	0.001
Distress Type	Pillai's Trace	0.049	2.400	4	0.313	0.003
	Wilks' Lambda	0.751	2.400	4	0.313	0.003
	Hotelling's Trace	0.097	2.400	4	0.313	0.003
	Roy's Largest Root	0.097	2.400	4	0.313	0.003
Relational Level & Distress Type	Pillai's Trace	0.133	3.114	4	0.041	0.033
	Wilks' Lambda	0.797	3.114	4	0.071	0.033
	Hotelling's Trace	0.133	3.114	4	0.071	0.033
	Roy's Largest Root	0.133	3.114	4	0.071	0.033

The results of the analysis indicate that there are few significant differences among secondary goal importance for distress type and relational level at the $p < .05$ level. Neither the main effects nor the interaction effect were significant with the exception of a single Pillai's trace value for the interaction of distress type and relational level. While there is some evidence that the Pillai's trace is the most robust significance test for MANOVA procedures (Olson, 1994), the low ETA value indicates clearly that interaction contributes little to explaining the amount of variation in overall secondary

goal importance. In terms of research questions three, four, and five, the data do not demonstrate a relationship between distress type and relational level – either considered alone, or examining their interaction.

Table 8

MANOVA Secondary Goals by Distress Type and Relational Level- Univariate Effects

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects							
Source	Dependent Variable	Type III SS	D	MS	F	F SIG	ETA
Relational Level	Identity	2.107	1	2.107	2.022	0.059	0.016
	Interaction	0.013	1	0.013	0.093	0.760	0.000
	Resource	0.019	1	0.019	0.077	0.812	0.000
	Arousal	0.002	1	0.002	0.069	0.795	0.000
Distress Type	Identity	0.049	1	0.049	0.065	0.744	0.000
	Interaction	1.057	1	1.057	1.378	0.121	0.011
	Resource	0.018	1	0.018	0.058	0.886	0.000
	Arousal	0.212	1	0.212	0.098	0.722	0.000
Relational Level & Distress Type	Identity	1.940	1	1.940	1.582	0.100	0.013
	Interaction	0.021	1	0.021	0.153	0.695	0.000
	Resource	0.026	1	0.034	0.099	0.712	0.000
	Arousal	0.035	1	0.035	0.161	0.688	0.000
Error	Identity	168.186	168	0.169			
	Interaction	137.683	168	0.138			
	Resource	154.833	168	0.155			
	Arousal	214.737	168	0.216			
Corrected Total	Identity	218.316	171				
	Interaction	249.324	171				
	Resource	208.384	171				
	Arousal	237.004	171				

A MANOVA also provides results from the univariate analysis of variance for the four goal types entered as dependent variables. Table 8 contains the results for each of the goal types. Consistent with the results of the multivariate analysis, there are no

significant effects for either the interaction or the main effects. A main effect for relational level on identity goals come close to significance, but the ETA indicates only a small contribution to explaining the variance (ETA=.016). Similarly, a main effect for distress type on interaction goals nears significance, but again demonstrates a low ETA (ETA=.011). Finally, an interaction effect for distress type and relational level for identity goals approached significance, but the value of ETA indicates a small contribution to the overall explained variance (ETA=.013). As was the case with the multivariate analysis, the univariate comparisons for each of the goal types do not indicate a significant relationship among distress type, relational level, and the importance of the four goal categories.

Although the MANOVA results failed to yield significant differences among goal importance for relational level and distress type, a series of mean comparisons were performed to uncover patterns of results not revealed by the previous analyses. Research question three concerns the impact that relational level has on the importance of goals. Table 9 contains group means for friend and stranger participants. An inspection of the means yields few differences among friends and strangers in secondary goal importance with one exception. Identity goals were significantly more important to friends (M=3.71) than strangers (M=2.04) by the Student Neuman-Keul's test at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 9

Group Means: Secondary Goal Importance and Relational Level

	Secondary Goal Type			
	Identity	Interaction	Relational Resource	Arousal
Friend N=90	3.71 ^b SD=.71	4.02 SD=.91	3.37 SD=.81	3.36 SD=.75

Table 9 (cont'd).

Stranger	2.04 ^a	3.81	3.01	3.24
N=82	SD=.52	SD=.64	SD=.72	SD=.61

Note. Separate SNK analysis compared each mean with all other means. Means with different superscripts differ by $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's Test.

Research question four concerned the impact of distress type on the importance of secondary goals. Table 10 contains group means for the high and low distress conditions. There are few differences between the two conditions, with the exception of the importance of interaction goals. This goal type was significantly more important in the high distress condition ($M = 4.08$) than in the low distress condition ($M = 3.33$) by the Student Neuman-Keul's test at the $p < .05$ level.

Table 10

Group Means: Secondary Goal Importance and Distress Type

	Secondary Goal Type			
	Identity	Interaction	Relational Resource	Arousal
Low N=101	3.11 SD=.67	3.33 ^a SD=.87	3.01 SD=.61	3.01 SD=.71
High N=71	3.05 SD=1.12	4.08 ^b SD=.54	3.34 SD=.81	3.31 SD=.61

Note. Separate SNK analysis compared each mean with all other means. Means with different superscripts differ by $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's Test.

Research question five concerned the impact of the distress type and relational level interaction on the importance of secondary goals. Table 11 contains group means for friends and strangers in the high and low distress conditions. There are two significant differences for identity goals.

Friends in both the high **and** low distress conditions rated the identity goal as more important than strangers in either condition. This goal type was significantly more

Table 11

Group Means: Secondary Goal Importance, Distress Type and Relational Level

Secondary Goal Type				
	Identity	Interaction	Relational Resource	Arousal
Friend Low N=53	3.13 ^b SD=.72	3.62 SD=.95	3.21 SD=.76	3.15 SD=.72
Friend High N=37	3.64 ^b SD=.63	3.79 SD=.79	3.04 SD=.69	3.03 SD=.65
Stranger Low N=48	2.01 ^a SD=.54	3.11 ^a SD=.77	3.17 SD=.74	3.06 SD=.88
Stranger High N=34	2.34 ^a SD=.89	4.18 ^b SD=.92	3.00 SD=1.01	3.40 SD=.57

Note. Separate SNK analysis compared each mean with all other means.

Means with different superscripts differ by $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's Test.

important in the friend high distress condition ($\underline{M} = 3.64$) and in the friend low distress condition ($\underline{M} = 3.13$) than in the stranger high distress condition ($\underline{M} = 2.34$) or the stranger low distress condition ($\underline{M} = 2.01$) by the Student Neuman-Keul's test at the $p < .05$ level. In addition, interaction goals are significantly more important to strangers in the high distress condition ($\underline{M} = 4.18$) than to strangers in the low distress condition ($\underline{M} = 3.11$) by the Student Neuman-Keul's test at the $p < .05$ level.

DISCUSSION

Overall Results

This study examined the impact of distress type and relational level on the production of both verbal and nonverbal comforting messages. In addition, the study explored the importance of certain secondary goals to comfort providers. The results with respect to distress type and relational level were consistent with the specified hypotheses. As predicted, under the high distress conditions friends were more comforting than strangers. Under the low distress conditions, however, strangers were more comforting than friends. This pattern of results replicates earlier evidence that strangers can actually be more comforting than friends, but suggests that this behavior occurs only under special conditions.

Another meaningful contribution of the investigation is the consistency of results from the four methods of assessing comfort. In most previous investigations of comfort and social support, the measures have focused on a single technique. Here, both verbal (Burleson's verbal sensitivity and verbal immediacy) and nonverbal (involvement and intimacy) modes of comfort assessment were employed in an attempt to more fully capture the breadth of the comfort experience. Because of the consistency of the results with respect to comfort, all four modes of measuring comfort were combined into a single overall comfort score. The results of the combined measurement were consistent with those found employing the Burleson verbal sensitivity measure alone. The results are crucial because it provides evidence that divergent methods of assessing social

support yield a consistent pattern of results, lending credence to the position that all four modes measure the same underlying concept.

Several research questions were posed dealing with the impact of distress type, relational level, and comforting offered on four types of secondary goals. No significant differences were found with respect to the secondary goals. There were some small differences in the certain means that suggest that there may be some relationship between relational level and distress type and identity and interaction goals. This finding is surprising, especially as the notion of secondary goals has been such a fruitful avenue in compliance gaining and other complex message situations.

Impact of Distress Type and Relational Level

The results concerning the relationship among distress type, relational level, and comfort provision add to our understanding of the results from previous investigations. The study's findings are consistent with the results of a study by Tamborini, Salomonson, and Bahk (1995) that found strangers to be more comforting than friends under conditions of low distress such as academic difficulties in a class or a campus parking ticket problem. These findings replicate earlier evidence that strangers can actually be more comforting than friends. In another study, Tighe, Hale, and Lemieux (1994) revealed important differences in terms of how people provide comfort to one another during interpersonal interactions. They found that people were more motivated to comfort in higher distress situations than in low distress conditions. In the current investigation, there was an interaction between relational level and distress type such that friends were more comforting than strangers under conditions of high distress, and strangers were more comforting than friends under conditions of low distress. The strong

interaction between distress type and relational level tells us that the effect is robust.

Approximately 40% of the variance in comforting was explained by the relationship.

The differences between levels of comfort offered by friends and strangers may be the product of several underlying mechanisms. For example, in the low distress settings, heightened levels of comfort provided by strangers may be the result of impression formation concerns. It could be the case that strangers faced with an individual expressing distress wish to appear polite during the interaction situation in order to make a good first impression. Certainly, friends should no longer be as concerned with impression formation in an established relationship. Perhaps friends know that they do not have to respond sensitively to every problem expressed by their friend in order to maintain their relationship. They may be more selective about what type of assistance they offer and have a better-informed sense of when their friend *really* needs help. This rationale is consistent with the explanation offered by Barker and Lemle (1987) in their study on romantic partners and strangers in a social support situation. They interpreted their results as evidence that strangers are on “good behavior” and are careful to attend to being attentive, non-critical, and demonstrate increased understanding. As a relationship develops, the need to behave well in every interaction with a friend or romantic partner diminishes. Only in times where the distressful situation merits such comforting communication does it occur.

By contrast, different relational mechanisms may govern comfort under conditions of high distress. Perhaps higher levels of comfort result from one’s awareness of her/his friend’s genuine need for comfort. Because of the ongoing relationship, they have personal, individual-level knowledge about their friends. Moreover, in addition to

the greater amount of information they possess, friends care more about their friends' needs. Their motivation to provide comfort in high distress conditions may be higher. This impels friends to offer more sensitive comforting messages. Conversely, strangers may feel awkward in the high distress situation. First, some stranger discloses a personal, highly emotional fact to an individual. Then, she/he is faced with having to respond to this person she/he knows little about. The difficulty created by a negative self-disclosure that may seem socially inappropriate may make the comforter uneasy, and the difficulty of the situation may prompt a message of lesser sensitivity.

Goldsmith (1992) provides a possible explanatory mechanism for the results using the concept of face-threat. She argues that as threat increases, the more polite the speaker will try to be. According to her reasoning, individuals have greater levels of face-threat in situations where they do not have an established relationship with the interaction partner and when the communication task is complex. The results of the current investigation demonstrate that strangers (who by their very definition do not have an established relationship with the other) provide less comforting messages under conditions of high distress (a complex, threatening communication task).

The findings with respect to distress type are also consistent with the communal and exchange orientation notion and their results that demonstrated people in communal relationships offered more help than those in exchange relationships (Mills & Clark, 1982). They view comforting as an expectation people have in close relationships. People ought to feel an obligation to help when there is a need for such support, and have an expectation that those feeling are reciprocated.

Finally, the findings of the current investigation have implications for more recent work concerning self-disclosure and comforting (Goei & Tamborini, in press). In the study, confederates made a deep negative disclosure to a stranger. The disclosure was the same as one employed in the present study about the possibility of a skin growth being cancerous. Results indicated that the levels of comforting were higher for people who reported they also were deep, negative disclosers. Clearly, additional variables need to be examined to further explore the relationship of distress type, relational level, and comfort.

Overall, it is clear that the type of distress and the level of the relationship impact the sensitivity of verbal comforting messages provided to a distressed individual. Friends will not always provide more sensitive comforting than strangers as we might anticipate. This finding has important implications for friendships and expectations associated with these relationships. In fact, it points to a source of negative expectancy violations with the potential to cause relational problems repeatedly in everyday social situations.

There is a good deal of evidence that highlights the relational significance of being a competent communicator. Burleson (1983) argues that since comfort is viewed as an important function that people serve, friends value such abilities in their relationships. One of the expectations we have of friends is that they serve as primary support givers Teach (1983). Those individuals displaying more sophisticated comforting strategies are considered nicer and more likable people than those employing less sophisticated comforting strategies (Burleson, 1985; and Samter, 1989). As such, it seems clear that being a competent comfort-giver is an important trait for friendship. The impact on friendships resulting from failing to provide comfort is unclear. However, the results of this study indicate that friends fulfill their role well when faced with a serious

problem, while for low distress situations people may do better by turning to strangers for more sensitive comforting words.

Finally, the results of the investigation relate to work on the empathy-communication model (e.g. Tamborini, Salomonson, & Bahk, 1993, Salomonson & Tamborini, 1995, and Tamborini, Salomonson, Bahk, & Huang, 1996). In a series of investigations, consistent relationships were observed among dimensions of empathy (including empathic concern, perspective taking, fictional involvement, and emotional contagion,) mood, relational level, and comforting. Given the strong interaction effect found in the current study, future investigations employing the empathy-communication perspective may benefit from including distress type as a predictor of comforting in the model.

Multiple Techniques of Measuring Comfort

One of the major contributions of the study concerns the discovery of a relationship among the four methods employed to assess comfort. Previous research on comforting behavior had focused on measuring the verbal sensitivity of the messages provided to the distressed individual using a scheme developed by Burleson. In addition to this measure, nonverbal immediacy, nonverbal intimacy, and verbal immediacy were included as measures of comfort. As a result of the level of consistency among these measures, the four were combined into a single scale with one dimension using confirmatory factor analysis. The combined scale was used as the dependent variable to perform the tests of the hypotheses in the study.

The finding has several implications salient to comforting research. First, as a result of these findings, we have begun to identify the structure of the underlying set of

comforting measures. The data are consistent with having a single factor – including verbal and nonverbal components, and assessing sensitivity, immediacy and intimacy – for the measurement of comfort. The process of data reduction in the sciences should always be encouraged.

In addition, researchers can have the confidence to utilize a **combination** of measures of comforting behavior in order achieve a greater degree of realism in their assessment of comforting. Individuals in conversations do not only attend to the sensitivity or immediacy of verbal messages, nor do they only concentrate on nonverbal cues. With the addition of the two verbal and two nonverbal measures of comforting a richer, more complete sense of the interaction can be assessed. Patterson notes that one of the functions that nonverbal communication can serve is to echo the verbal messages conveyed by the speaker (1984). Nonverbal communication appears to be performing that function in the case of comforting. The results of the investigation suggest that various verbal and nonverbal components comprise comforting. Certainly, investigations may explore this issue in greater detail by adding more and different modes of measuring comfort. For example, research on the empathy-communication model has utilized the Burleson verbal sensitivity scale only. Future investigations may improve by using a combination of measures for comforting behavior.

Secondary Goals, Distress Type and Relational Level

Although the results of the analysis indicated no significant differences with respect to the impact of distress type, relational level, and comfort scores on goal importance, we observed some differences in the mean importance scores in the goal structures of the comfort provider. The results demonstrate that there were few

differences, but one difference that did arise was the finding that identity goals were more important to friends than strangers. Identity goals focus on an individual's internal standards of behavior in terms of how others are treated. This goal may be more salient to friends because the set of standards regarding how people ought to be treated are important to adhere to when interacting with a friend as opposed to a stranger. In essence, the friendship relationship casts a longer shadow than does a chance encounter with a stranger.

Another difference in goals occurred with interaction goals under conditions of high and low distress. Interaction goals were more important under conditions of high distress. Interaction goals involve the desire to behave in socially appropriate ways. The results of the investigation indicate that individuals in the high distress condition were more concerned with saying the correct thing during their interaction than any other secondary goal. This finding is consistent with the work of Hale et al. (1994) that underscored the role of motivation to comfort in high distress situations. Participants may have been more concerned about interaction goals (saying the right thing) because they were highly motivated to provide comfort and were committed to performing the task effectively. Conversely, participants may have rated interaction goals as most important for another reason. Comfort providers may have been concerned about appearing competent and this egoistic explanation may have contributed to the importance of interaction goals under conditions of high distress.

In terms of goal importance and the interaction between distress type and relational level, two pertinent findings emerged. First, identity goals were significantly more important to friends in both the high and low distress conditions when compared

with strangers. Adhering to the internal standards of behavior – irrespective of the intensity of distress – was more important to friends than strangers. The work of Clark and Mills (1987) indicates that people hold the belief that friends ought to have a greater concern for each other's well-being. The fact that friends in this investigation deem identity goals more salient than strangers do is consistent with these expectations of friendship. Also, interaction goals were more important to strangers in the high distress situation than for strangers in the low distress condition. Because interaction goals focus on the desire to behave appropriately in social situations, perhaps strangers in high distress situations did not want to appear to be incompetent in the comfort situation. Faced with the difficult task of trying to assist a stranger with a serious issue, strangers had to focus on saying the correct things.

There were no other real differences in the importance of goals. Interestingly, there were no differences in arousal goals for any group. Arousal goals center on how people attempt to maintain a preferred level of arousal during social interactions. The lack of findings with respect to arousal goals is surprising given that participation in a situation where an individual expresses distress is likely to be emotionally charged. However, the results of previous investigations involving goal structures have not found meaningful differences in arousal goals either (e.g. Dillard et al., 1991). It may be that our experimental situations do not produce sufficient emotions for arousal goals to be salient.

The failure to observe any significant differences in goals in the MANOVA procedure is disappointing and puzzling. Previous work employing secondary goals as an explanatory mechanism has yielded differences, particularly in the compliance gaining

and sexual harassment contexts (e.g. Dillard et al., 1991; Bingham & Burleson, 1989). Perhaps relational level and distress type are not critically involved in determining the importance of secondary goals, and as a result other variables related to the comforting process need to be examined. Such variables may include measuring an individual's motivation to provide comfort and their levels on various empathy dimensions.

Limitations

While the results of the investigation indicate there are significant differences in comforting with varying relational levels and distress types, several issues remain for additional inquiry. Salient aspects of the study's design that warrant further attention include the nature of the relationship between the participants and a greater focus on the comfort receiver.

In the present study, two type of relationships were examined – strangers and friends. While this is an improvement over looking solely at stranger populations, the implications of several different types of relationships remain unexplored. These relationships include romantic partners, coworkers/classmates, and familial relationships (e.g. parents, siblings). For example, would a family member be more or less comforting than a friend? How would distress type impact the comfort they provide? Is the length of the relationship a pertinent variable? Future investigations may focus on differentiating comfort responses among these many types of relationships.

Finally, the current investigation utilized confederates to serve as the distressed party. Each followed a script and essentially played the role of a person who is upset. While the practice does produce actual spontaneously generated comforting messages, there is no opportunity to assess the degree to which the distressed party (the confederate)

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feels the comfort provided was effective. Future work in the comforting area may benefit from examining the phenomenon more from the perspective of the comfort-receiver participating in a live comforting situation.

The goal of this investigation was to examine the impact of relational level, distress type, and secondary goals on comfort. Comfort was assessed utilizing four measurement tools. The results of the study suggest that the interaction between relational level and distress type is a critical determinant of comfort provision.

APPENDICES

1

APPENDIX A

Script for the Study

Both the participant and the confederate in the experiment wait outside the experiment room. The confederate greets the participant with a simple “hello” and does not initiate further conversation. The experimenter seats the participant farthest from the door, while the confederate sits closest to the door.

Experimenter: Hello. My name is _____. We would like the two of you to participate in a television viewing study. Before we begin today, I would like to be sure that I have the people I am supposed to have with me. (Verifies). The study deals with reactions to different types of short film. After the films are over, I will be back to ask the two of you some questions. Remember, if at any time you feel uncomfortable with any of the events depicted in the film, you are free to leave and will still receive credit for the experiment. I will begin the film now; please wait here and I will return after the completion of the film.

The experimenter places a tape into the machine and leaves the room. The experimenter then begins to videotape the confederate and the participant.

Confederates, while viewing the film, react to the content of the film in a regular way. They want to appear wrapped up in their own problems, so extensive emotional reactions are not acceptable. If during the film the participant tries to initiate conversation, it is to be discouraged. The confederate waits until the film is over to initiate conversation with the participant after the special video signal.

Distress Expression Options

Minor Stressors

1. I don't know about you, but I could sure use this extra credit. If I don't pass Comm 200, I don't know what I am going to do. I bombed the midterm, and I blew all the other assignments. Even with this, I don't know if I can pass. My folks are going to kill me. What am I going to do?
2. I got a notice from DPS today. They said I have six unpaid parking tickets and I have to pay all the fees plus a huge late fine or else they won't let me register next semester. I just don't know where I am going to get the money. What am I going to do?
3. I went to see my advisor today. He said that he doesn't think I'll have enough credits to graduate on time. Even if I take six classes next semester, it still won't be enough. I'm running out of money and my parents are out of patience. What am I going to do?

Major Stressors

1. I got a call from my parents and they are having some problems. They are even talking about getting a divorce. I know it shouldn't bother me so much, I don't even live at home anymore. It's just that I never thought this would happen. What am I going to do?
2. I found this bumpy mole thing on my stomach. The doctor thinks it may be cancer. I have to have a biopsy on it and I won't know the results for a week. This waiting sucks. What am I going to do?
3. I got a call from my parents this morning. My grandmother died. I was really close to her. I am going to go to the funeral at the end of the week. The trouble is I am swamped with work. I don't know how I'll catch up. What I am going to do?

Wait for a response from the participant. If the participant says nothing, ask again **"What am I going to do?"** Only once. If the participant still says nothing, just sit quietly and wait for the experimenter to return. If the participant makes any suggestions, repeat **"I don't know what good that will do."**

The experimenter returns to the experiment room.

Experimenter: This is the end of the first part of the study. In the second part, I need to ask the two of you some questions. _____, please come with me.

The confederate waits in the experiment room, while the participant is escorted to another room in the lab.

Experimenter: This questionnaire will tell you a bit more about the study. Please read it and answer the questions. (Collects). Please complete this form about what you thought about the experiment. (Collects). The study was designed to assess the impact of different types of film materials on social interactions. In order to accomplish this, we wanted to observe the manner in which you interacted with a friend or a stranger who expressed distress. They were part of the experiment and were instructed to display distress. They were not really upset. These interactions were videotaped and will be coded to assess how they differ as a function of what type of film you watched. Some participants watched a different film. We apologize for videotaping you without your knowledge. If you feel uncomfortable in any way, we will erase the tape immediately. This will be done without penalty and you will still get credit for the experiment. After the coding of the tapes by the researchers, the tapes will be erased. Your name will not be connected with the tape or its contents in any way. The tape is completely confidential. Since we feel that the interaction is part of everyday life, we hope you will allow us to use the tape.

Now that you understand the purpose of the experiment, I need to you to fill out an additional questionnaire. (Collects). You have now completed the research requirements. Thank you for your participation. If you have any further questions, please feel free to ask. The only other thing I need to ask you is not to discuss the experiment with others. If they ask, please tell them you were told not to say.

The experimenter answers any questions, then the participant and the confederate leave the room. The experimenter does the report and then readies herself/himself for the next participant.

APPENDIX B

Goal Structure Factor Loadings and Reliabilities

Loadings	Identity Goals
.75	I was concerned with not violating my own ethical standards
.61	I wanted to act in a mature, responsible way
.78	I was concerned with being true to myself and my own values
.81	I was concerned with maintaining my ethics

Alpha = .75

Loadings	Interaction Goals
.65	I was concerned with making a good impression on this person
.70	I was careful to avoid saying things that were not socially acceptable
.66	I was concerned with not putting myself in a bad light
.72	I did not want to look stupid while trying to help this person
.69	I was conscious about what was and was not appropriate in this helping situation

Alpha = .69

Loadings	Relational Resource Goals
.80	Revealing my true opinion about their problem was more important to me than preserving our relationship
.74	I really did not care if I made this person mad or not
.74	I did not want to risk relational damage by not helping this person

Alpha = .72



Loadings

Physical Resource Goals

- .79 This person could have made things difficult for me had I not tried to help**
- .81 This person might have tried to take advantage of me.**
- .78 I was worried about threats to my safety if I did not help this person**

Alpha = .78

Loadings

Arousal/Emotional Goals

- .71 I avoided saying things that would have made me apprehensive or nervous**
- .70 I was afraid of being nervous or uncomfortable**
- .74 The situation's potential for making me nervous worried me**

Alpha = .73

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APPENDIX C

Burleson Verbal Sensitivity Comforting Coding Scheme

Denial of Individual Perspective: The speaker condemns or ignores the specific feelings that exist in the situation for the person addressed. Denial may be explicit or implicit.

The speaker condemns the feelings of another.

The speaker challenges the legitimacy of the other's feelings.

The speaker ignores feelings experienced by the other. Frequently this includes a statement telling the other just to forget about the situation or tells one how to feel about the situation.

Implicit Recognition of Individual Perspective: The speaker provides some implicit acceptance of/or positive response to the feelings of others, but does not special mention, elaborate, or legitimate those feelings.

The speaker attempts to divert the other's attention from the distressful situation and the feelings arising from it.

The speaker acknowledges the feelings of the other, but does attempt to help the other understand why those feelings are experienced or how to cope with them.

The speaker provides a non-feeling centered explanation of the situation intended to reduce the distressed emotional state of the other. This often references mitigating circumstances.

Explicit Recognition and Elaboration of Individual Perspective: The speaker explicitly acknowledges, elaborates, and legitimizes the feelings of others. These strategies may include attempts to provide a general understanding of the situation. Coping strategies may be suggested in conjunction with an explication of the other's feelings.

The speaker explicitly recognizes and acknowledges the feelings of the other, but provides only a truncated explanation of these feelings.

The speaker provides an elaborated acknowledgement and explanation of the other's feelings.

The speaker helps the other gain perspective on her/his feeling and attempts to help the other see her/his feelings in relation to the broader context of the feelings of others.

APPENDIX D

Verbal Immediacy Coding Scheme

Spatial Immediacy Coding Scheme

Language elements that appear to bring the subject and the object closer together, or further apart are evidence of spatial immediacy. The use of demonstrative pronouns **the**, **this**, and **these** – in contrast to **that** and **those** – signal a desire for decreased distance between the conversational participants. Words specifying contact or nearness on one hand and words that specify physical separation on the other show contrasting degrees of spatial immediacy. Distance may be expressed when a communicator wishes to protect herself/himself from a perceived adversary.

Coding Specifics

The degree of avoidance in the communication is determined by the sum of the negative scores, the degree of approach by the sum of the positive scores, and the global spatial immediacy by subtracting the negative score from the positive score.

+1 Approach

For each instance of a language element that appears to bring the subject and the object closer together, a score of +1 is assigned. Four main categories include

- 1) **Demonstrative Pronouns:** Words that point out persons or things in a way that brings the people or things closer to the individual. Look for specific demonstratives such as **This**, **The**, and **These**, and the like.
- 2) **Adverbs Specifying Space:** Words that bring the objects closer to the individual such as **Here**.

- 3) Words Specifying Nearness: Verbs, adjectives, or adverbs may specify nearness such as **Near, Among, Close, Adjacent, and Proximal**, and the like.
- 4) Words Specifying Contact: Verbs and adjectives that specify contact such as **Meet, Contact, Touch, Connect, Close to**, and the like.

-1 Avoidance

For each instance of a language element that appears to bring the subject and the object farther apart, a score of -1 is assigned. Four main categories include

- 1) Demonstrative Pronouns: Words that put things in a way that place distance between people or between people and objects such as **That, Those**.
- 2) Adverbs: Words that bring the objects farther from the individual such as **There**.
- 3) Displacement Words: Words or terms that express dislocation and removal such as **Expulsion, Remove, Shifting, Disturb, Set Aside, Take Away, Empty, Vacate, Depart**, and the like.
- 4) Distance Words: Words or terms that suggest distance and space between people or between people and objects such as **Far, Far off, Away, Beyond, Farther, Somewhere, Someplace**, and the like.

If no spatial cue exists – the utterance receives a 0.

APPENDIX E

Nonverbal Immediacy and Intimacy Coding Scheme

Each bipolar adjective pair is assessed on a scale of 1 to 7. Coders examine the subject's overall nonverbal presence to determine a score for each element. Each measurement is to be taken at three points. The highest level rating for each of the adjectives is the recorded score.

Immediacy

Pleasant (7)/Unpleasant (1)
Warm (7)/Cold (1)
Friendly (7)/Unfriendly (1)
Calm (7)/Anxious (1)
Involved (7)/Uninvolved (1)
Interested (7)/Disinterested (1)
Connected (7)/Detached (1)
Attentive (7)/Inattentive (1)
Expressive (7)/Non-expressive (1)
Encouraging (7)/Discouraging (1)
Receptive (7)/Unreceptive (1)
Concerned (7)/ Not Concerned (1)
Focused (7)/Not Focused (1)
Approachable (7)/Distant (1)

Intimacy

Open (7)/Closed (1)
Harmonious (7)/Discordant (1)
Concerned (7)/ Not Concerned (1)
Not Controlling (7)/Controlling (1)

APPENDIX F

Suhr Social Support Coding Scheme

Informational Support

- Advice** - Offers suggestions and ideas
- Referral** - Refers the recipient to some other source for help
- Appraisal** - Reassesses or redefines the situation
- Teaching** - Provides detailed information, facts, or news about the situation or about the skills needed to deal with the situation

Tangible Assistance

- Loan** - Offers to lend the recipient something (including money)
- Direct Task** - Offers to perform a task directly related to the stress
- Indirect Task** - Offers to take over one or more of the recipient's other tasks while under stress
- Active Participation** - Offers to join the recipient in action to relieve stress
- Willingness** - Expresses willingness to help

Esteem Support

- Compliment** - Says positive things about the recipient or emphasize abilities
- Validation** – Expresses agreement with the recipient's perspective
- Relief of Blame** – Tries to alleviate the recipient's feelings of guilt

Network Support

- Access** – Offers to provide access to new companions
- Presence** – Offers to spend time with the person
- Companions** - Reminds of available people with similar interests

Emotional Support

- Relationship** – Stresses the importance of closeness and love
- Physical Affection** – Offers contact, including hugs, kisses, pats, etc.
- Confidentiality** – Promises not to disclose the problem to others
- Sympathy** – Expresses sorrow or regret for the situation
- Listening** – Makes attentive comments as the person speaks
- Empathy** – Expresses understanding and/or disclose a personal situation that communicates understanding
- Encouragement** – Provides recipient with hope and confidence
- Prayer** – Prays with the recipient

APPENDIX G

Separate Analyses For The Four Comforting Measures

Table G1

Mean Sensitivity of Comforting Messages by Distress Type and Relational Level

	Distress Type		
	Low	High	Marginal
Friend	2.54 ^a N=54 SD=.50	4.80 ^c N=36 SD=.85	3.75 N=90 SD=1.71
Stranger	3.79 ^b N=47 SD=.97	2.04 ^a N=35 SD=1.0	3.28 N=82 SD=1.48
Marginal	3.34 N=101 SD=1.15	3.86 N=71 SD=2.11	

Note. Separate SNK analysis compared each mean with all other means. Means with no superscripts in common differ by $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's test.

Table G2

ANOVA Verbal Sensitivity Comfort by Distress Type and Relational Level

	SS	D	MS	F	F SIG	ETA
Main Effects	38.908	2	19.454	28.414	.001	
Relational Level	31.694	1	31.694	46.291	.001	.093
Distress Type	7.877	1	7.877	11.504	.005	.023
Two-Way Interaction						
Relational Level & Distress Type	137.609	1	137.609	94.25	.001	.402
Explained	154.446	3	51.482	35.26	.001	
Residual	187.637	168	1.11			
Total	342.083	171	2.00			

Table G3

Mean Nonverbal Immediacy by Distress Type and Relational Level

	Distress Type		
	Low	High	Marginal
Friend	2.72 ^a N=54 SD=.80	3.45 ^c N=36 SD=.94	3.01 N=90 SD=1.12
Stranger	2.91 ^{ab} N=47 SD=1.11	2.66 ^a N=35 SD=.88	2.80 N=82 SD=1.61
Marginal	2.81 N=101 SD=1.29	3.06 N=71 SD=2.09	

Note. Separate SNK analysis compared each mean with all other means. Means with no superscripts in common differ by $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's test.

Table G4

ANOVA Nonverbal Immediacy by Distress Type and Relational Level

	SS	D	MS	F	F SIG	ETA
Main Effects	54.404	2	27.202	3.22	.043	
Relational Level	47.873	1	47.873	5.659	.05	.051
Distress Type	4.600	1	4.600	.544	.462	.005
Two-Way Interaction						
Relational Level & Distress Type	503.166	1	503.166	59.477	.001	.539
Explained	511.603	3	170.534	20.158	.001	
Residual	421.254	168	2.507			
Total	932.857	171	5.455			

Table G5

Mean Nonverbal Intimacy by Distress Type and Relational Level

	Distress Type		
	Low	High	Marginal
Friend	2.44 ^a N=54 SD=.71	3.13 ^b N=36 SD=1.17	2.72 N=90 SD=1.05
Stranger	2.54 ^a N=47 SD=1.22	2.11 ^a N=35 SD=.99	2.36 N=82 SD=1.37
Combined	2.49 N=101 SD=1.41	2.63 N=71 SD=1.94	

Note. Separate SNK analysis compared each mean with all other means. Means with no superscripts in common differ by $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's test.

Table G6

ANOVA Nonverbal Intimacy by Distress Type and Relational Level

	SS	D	MS	F	F SIG	ETA
Main Effects	142.431	2	71.216	8.396	.000	
Relational Level	141.350	1	141.350	16.665	.01	.132
Distress Type	3.015	1	3.015	.355	.552	.003
Two-Way Interaction						
Relational Level & Distress Type	394.366	1	394.386	46.497	.000	.368
Explained	645.684	3	215.228	25.375	.000	
Residual	424.975	168	2.529			
Total	1070.658	171	6.261			

Table G7

Mean Verbal Immediacy by Distress Type and Relational Level

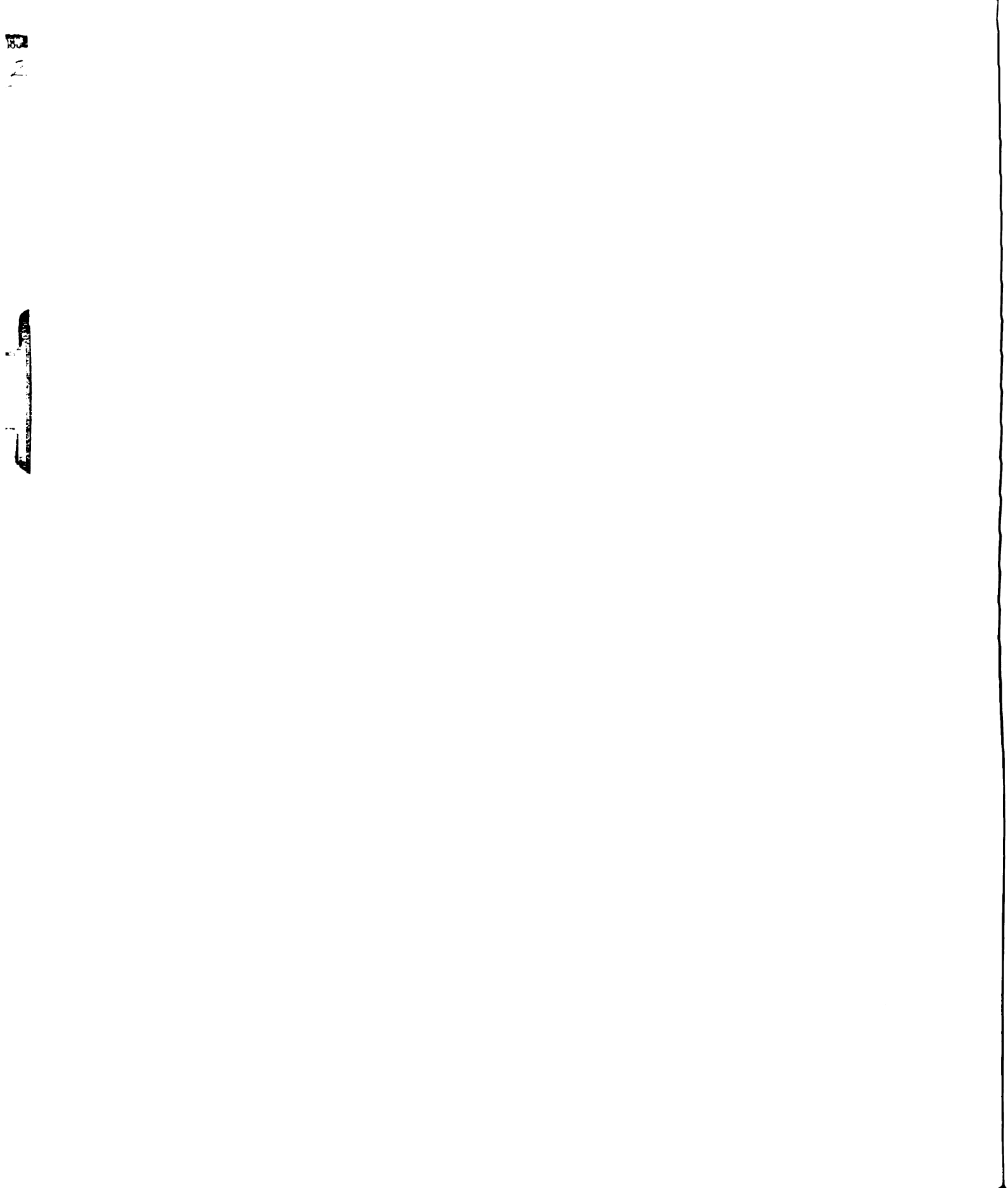
	Distress Type		
	Low	High	Marginal
Friend	4.11 ^a N=54 SD=.88	5.12 ^b N=36 SD=1.01	4.51 N=90 SD=1.19
Stranger	4.34 ^a N=47 SD=1.19	3.87 ^a N=35 SD=.95	4.14 N=82 SD=1.52
Marginal	4.22 N=101 SD=1.36	4.50 N=71 SD=2.02	

Note. Separate SNK analysis compared each mean with all other means. Means with no superscripts in common differ by $p < .05$ by the Student Newman-Keul's test.

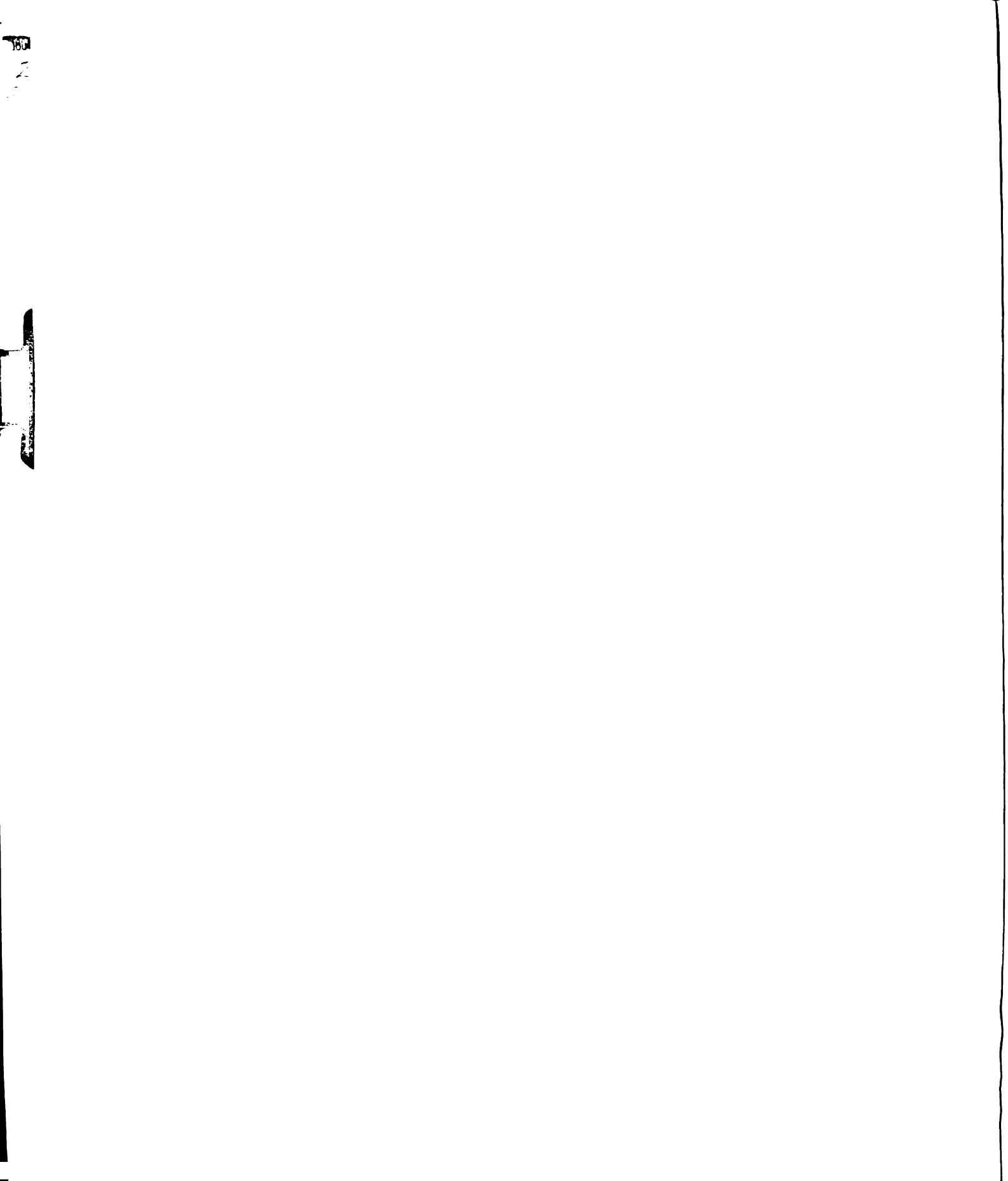
Table G8

ANOVA Nonverbal Immediacy by Distress Type and Relational Level

	SS	D	MS	F	F SIG	ETA
Main Effects	78.410	2	39.205	5.05	.01	
Relational Level	74.610	1	74.61	7.19	.01	.073
Distress Type	3.800	1	3.80	.477	.505	.004
Two-Way Interaction						
Relational Level & Distress Type	340.381	1	340.38	37.022	.001	.333
Explained	362.412	3	120.80	14.211	.001	
Residual	658.743	168	3.921			
Total	1021.155	171	5.971			



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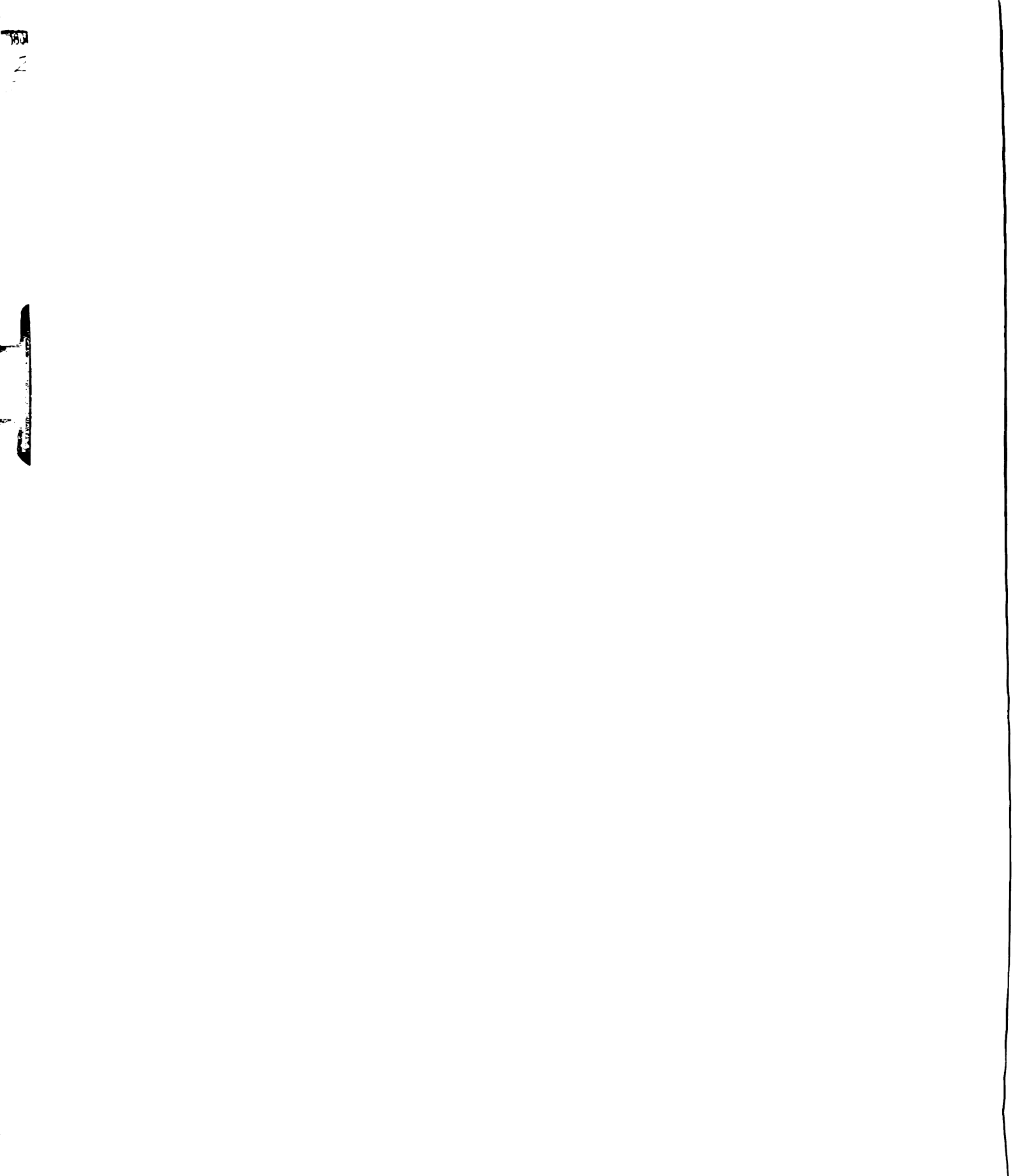
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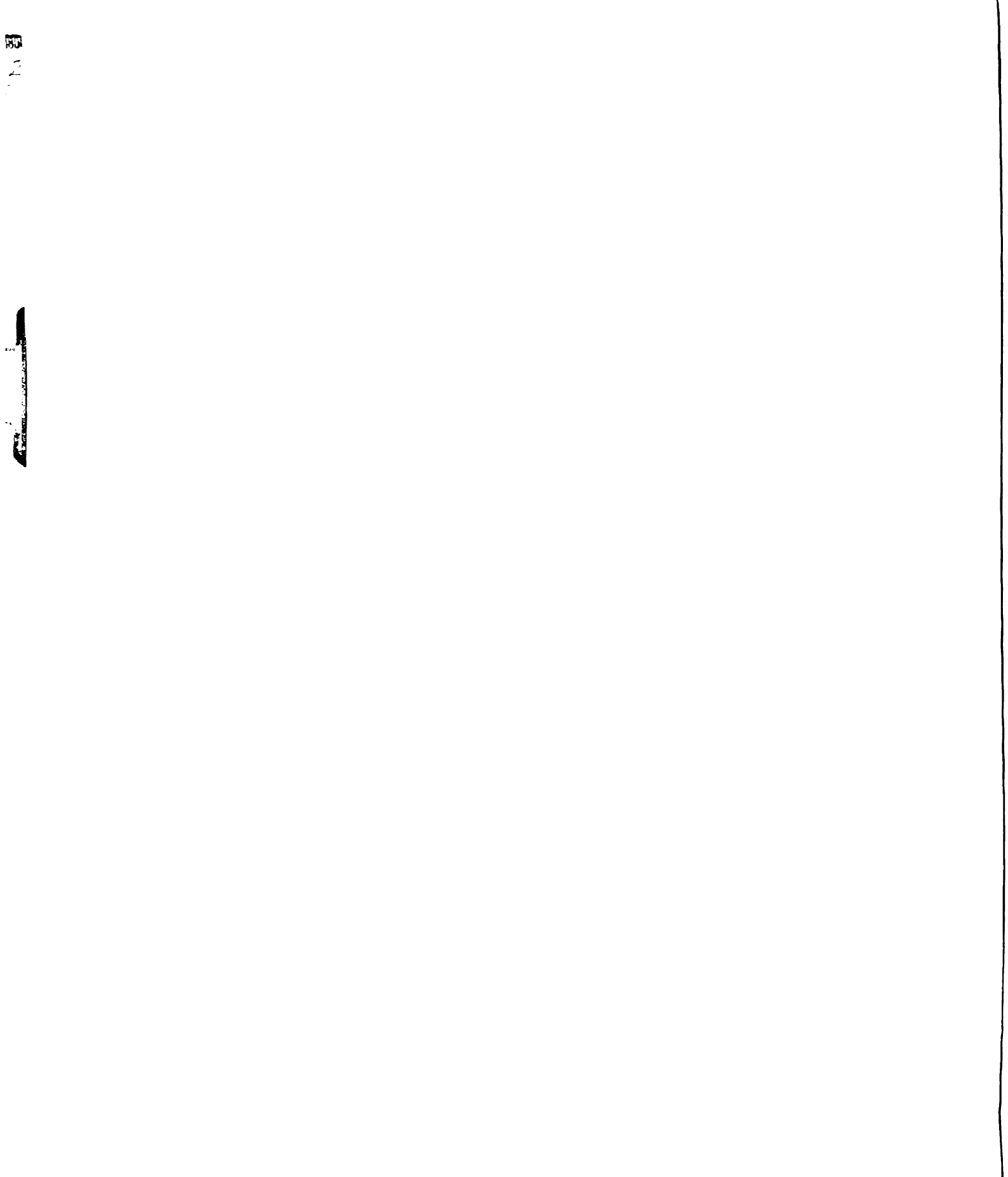
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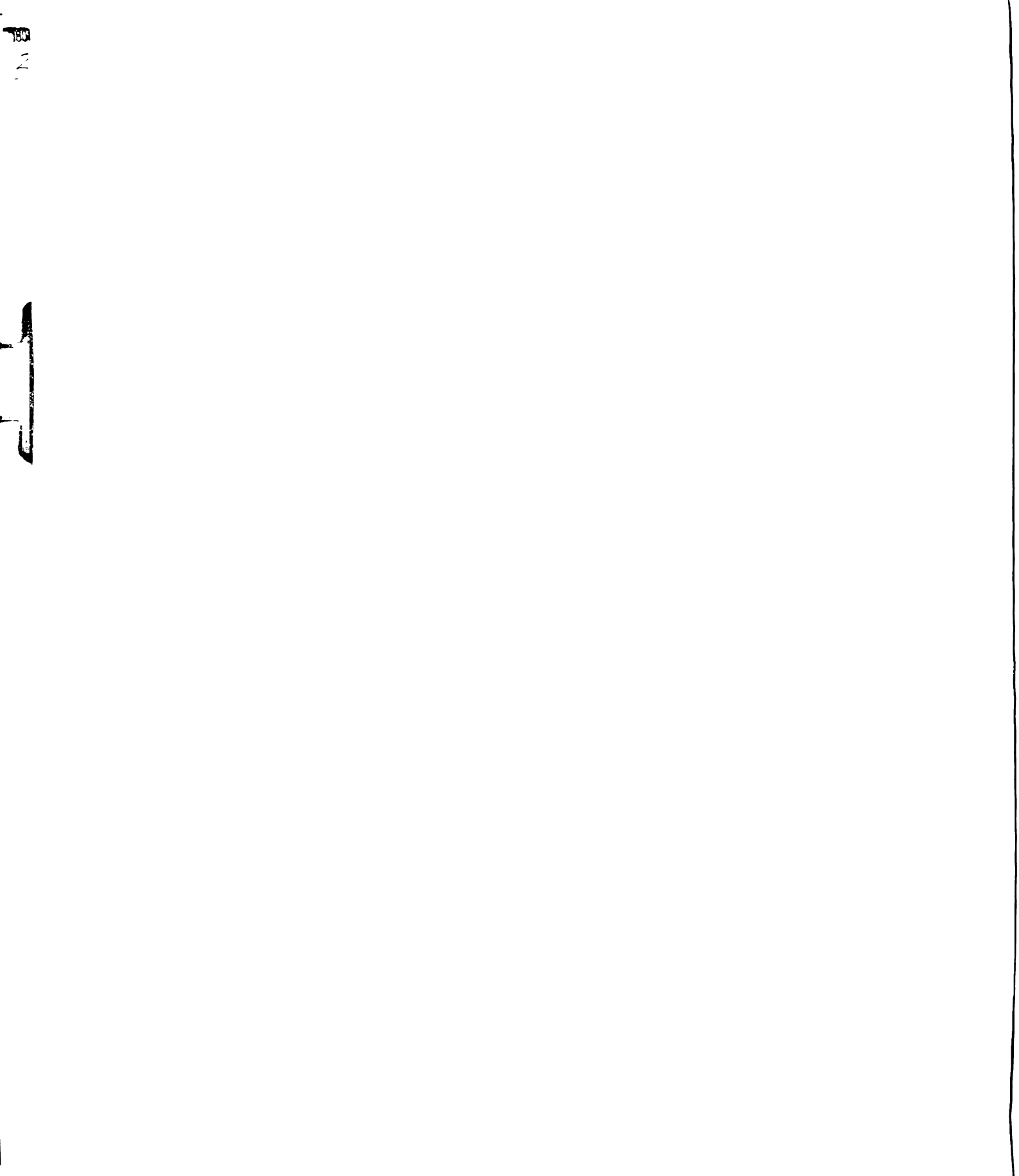
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