

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: COGNITIVE AND BEHAVIORAL BIASES  
TOWARD CLOSE PARTNERS IN CONFLICT  
WITH OTHERS

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The current research explored whether people exhibited biased perceptions and behavioral responses to conflicts involving close partners relative to more psychologically distant relations. In Study 1, participants read a short vignette describing a conflict between two individuals in which one person (i.e., the perpetrator) upset or hurt another (i.e., the victim). Participants either imagined a close partner filling the role of perpetrator, victim, or neither role, in the conflict scenario. Results indicated that participants both attributed and communicated more blame for individuals who hurt or upset close partners relative to strangers – a “magnification” effect. Participants also communicated less blame for victims who were close partners relative to strangers. In Study 2, participants recalled actual conflicts where either close or distant partners served the role of perpetrator or victims in conflicts with other individuals. Results indicated that participants “magnified” the blame for individuals who hurt or upset close, but not distant, partners. Participants also attributed less blame to close partners than they

empathized with, and this reduction in blame predicted biased behavioral responding, which included more favorable portrayals of partners, less favorable portrayals of adversaries, more consolation of close partners, and more validation of partners who were upset by adversaries when partners were close relative to distant. Implications for these results and suggestions for future directions are discussed.

COGNITIVE AND BEHAVIORAL BIASES TOWARD CLOSE PARTNERS IN  
CONFLICT WITH OTHERS

by

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## **Introduction**

### **Background**

People exhibit biases in their perceptions, including biased perceptions of the self (Bradley, 1978; John & Robins, 1994; Paulhus & John, 1998; Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002), and of others (Brown, 1986; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; Ross, 1977). For instance, people often harbor “positive illusions” of close partners (e.g., friends, romantic partners) (Lemay & Clark, 2015; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b), such that people perceive these close partners as more favorable than they truly are. Moreover, these positive illusions appear beneficial. For instance, people who appear to exaggerate their romantic partner’s virtues tend to have greater relationship quality, such as increased satisfaction and commitment, from which their partners benefit as well (Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b).

However, positive illusions may have some negative consequences in situations where accuracy is necessary for optimal decision-making. For example, people with higher self-esteem are less likely to seek help even when they believe they need it (Tessler & Schwartz, 1972), and people with higher perceptions of self-efficacy are more likely to engage in unproductive task perseverance (i.e., continuing on a task or utilizing a particular strategy despite a lack of results) compared to others (Markman, Baron & Balkin, 2005; McFarlin, Baumeister, & Blascovich, 1984). Importantly, people tend to experience “moralistic” biases of their own qualities and behaviors, such that they underreport their own propensity for deviant or amoral behavior and view themselves as morally unimpeachable (Paulhus & John, 1998). Thus, people’s biased perceptions may be consequential when making moral evaluations as well, such as in the assessment of

conflict. Past work has explored biases during interpersonal conflicts, and found that people generally behave in self-serving ways: people tend to view their own actions as justified and convey more blame for other parties involved in the conflict, regardless of what role they played in the conflict (i.e., perpetrators or victims) (Baumeister & Catanese, 2003; Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005). Additionally, people tend to strategically manipulate their account of the conflict to others: perpetrators provide more background information, less discussion of the aftermath of the events, and tend to use vague language and fewer details to confuse or minimize events or distance the self from their actions. Victims, by contrast, describe their own affective states, such as pain and distress, and provide more detailed accounts of the negative consequences of the perpetrator's behaviors, which might invite sympathy or empathy from audiences or incite anger against perpetrators.

Given that biases in self-perception tend to extend to biases in perceptions of close partners (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Murray et al., 1996; Murray & Holmes, 1997), similar biases may result when close partners are involved in conflicts, whereby people attribute less blame to close partners relative to more distant relations and strategically recount conflicts in ways that manage their close partner's reputation. The current research will test novel predictions regarding the perceptual and behavioral biases people exhibit when their close partners are involved in conflicts. Below, I review research on social-cognitive biases people exhibit towards close others, such as friends and romantic partners, and the sparse literature available that explores outcomes of these biases in conflict situations, as well as the ways in which the current study expands upon this past work. Then, I present novel predictions regarding the mechanisms by which

people may demonstrate such perceptual and behavioral biases for close others. Finally, I discuss how the current research shall expand upon prior work in related areas.

While past research has examined people's biased perceptions of close partners (Fletcher & Kerr, 2010; Fletcher, Simpson, & Boyes, 2006; Lemay & Clark, 2015; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b), the current research will expand upon this work by examining these biases in the context of close partner's conflicts with others. Given that people tend to perceive and describe their own conflicts in self-enhancing ways (Baumeister & Catanese, 2003), it is possible that people may perceive a close partner's conflicts in similarly biased ways, and engage in targeted support and derogation behaviors that benefit close partners at the expense of others. The current research will test the prediction that, relative to when people learn of conflicts that do not involve a close relationship partner, people who are exposed to accounts of a close partner's conflict will perceive these close partners as being less responsible for wrongdoing, and place more blame for the incident on others instead, even when the close partner is the perpetrator of a harmful act. Furthermore, given that people tend to be motivated to manage their close partner's impressions with others (Schlenker & Britt, 1999), people may be likely to communicate a close partner's conflict in ways that present their partners in favorable ways to other people.

Some past work has supported these views. Gino and Galinsky (2012) found that when people feel psychologically close to another person who behaves selfishly, they tend to view the behavior as less morally inappropriate, and may be more likely to engage in that behavior in the future themselves relative to behaviors enacted by people with whom they do not closely identify. Chaikin and Darley (1973) found that people who

identify with one party more than another party in a conflict tend to act in biased ways. In their study, participants viewed videotapes of two students working on a task together, where one student accidentally caused harm to another. Participants who were told that they would be taking over the perpetrator's task in the future (thus, increasing perceiver's identification with the perpetrator) were more likely to evaluate the incident as an accident and more likely to derogate the victim compared to participants who were made to identify with the victim. Additionally, Lee, Gelfand, and Kashima (2014) found that when people recounted conflicts between two groups to others, they attributed significantly less blame if one group consisted of close partners relative to distant partners. This bias also became stronger as information about the conflict was increasingly exaggerated as it was passed "down the line" to others. These findings are consistent with the defensive-attribution hypothesis proposed by Shaver (1970), which posits that similarity to a perpetrator who committed a harmful act decreases attributions of responsibility to that perpetrator (see Burger, 1981, for a review of this work). Furthermore, they are consistent with broader literatures suggesting that close partners receive preferential treatment relative to others (Aron et al., 1991), and that people value the welfare of close partners more than the welfare of other people (Bleske-Rechek, Nelson, Baker, Remiker, & Brandt, 2010). Similarly, recent research suggests that people tend to validate close partners' negativity toward their adversaries as a means of being responsive to close partners, which predicts close partners' negative sentiments toward their adversaries, such as reduced forgiveness (Lemay, Ryan, Fehr, & Gelfand, 2018). Other research has also explored people's responses to the adversaries of close partners (i.e., the people with whom close partners are conflicting). Green, Burnette, and Davis

(2008) found that people are less forgiving of others who have hurt or upset close friends relative to people who have hurt or upset the self. They also found that people made more negative attributions about the adversaries of close partners relative to adversaries of the self, and this increase in negative attributions predicted significantly less forgiveness. People were less forgiving of the adversaries of close partners because they made more negative attributions about these perpetrators relative to adversaries of the self

### **Hypotheses for the Current Research**

The current research explored the perceptual and behavioral biases people exhibit towards close partners involved in a conflict with another person. Conflicts consisted of at least two parties: an “actor” (i.e., a target individual that people identify as being either psychologically close or distant from the self) and an “adversary” (i.e., an individual that the actor is conflicting with). First, I examined the ways in which people perceived an actor’s conflict, and formulated the following hypotheses:

*H<sub>1</sub>* People will “magnify” the blame for adversaries of actors more when actors are psychologically close relative to distant.

*H<sub>2</sub>* People will justify or “minimize” close actor’s negative behaviors in conflict situations more than distant actor’s negative behaviors.

These hypotheses stipulated that actor closeness (*H<sub>1</sub>*) and actor closeness interacting with actor role (*H<sub>2</sub>*) would influence perceptions of adversaries and actors.

I further expected that people would behaviorally respond to actor conflicts in biased ways so as to communicate conflicts in ways that manage an audience’s impression of close actors relative to distant actors. I expected that these tendencies for impression management of a close actor would mimic the ways in which perpetrators themselves might manage their own reputation (Baumeister & Catanese, 2003;

Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005). Specifically, I predicted that people might manipulate the content of their conflict descriptions in the following ways:

*H<sub>3</sub>* People will describe close actors more favorably (i.e., with less blame) than distant actors, even when actors are perpetrators of harmful behaviors.

*H<sub>4</sub>* People will describe adversaries of close actors less favorably (i.e., with more blame) than adversaries of distant actors.

I further expected that people might manipulate the formatting of their descriptions of conflicts involving actors. Specifically, I expected that:

*H<sub>5</sub>* People will provide more information about an actor's motivation and intentions within the conflict when actors are close, relative to distant.

*H<sub>6</sub>* People will provide more information about an actor's thoughts and feelings during the conflict when actors are close, relative to distant.

*H<sub>7</sub>* People will describe close actor's behaviors less clearly when close actors are perpetrators, rather than victims, within the conflict.

In addition to communicating conflicts, the current research also explored other forms of biased behaviors. Specifically, I investigated whether people enacted more support behaviors, such as consolation (i.e., touching or speaking to others in ways that make them feel comforted and supported), validation (i.e., affirming another's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors), encouragement of objectivity or forgiveness (i.e., promotion of a rational perspective of a conflict or suggestions to make amends or reconcile with other parties involved in the conflict), and assistance (i.e., providing direct aid or advice to another) for actors as a function of actor closeness and role within a conflict. I expected that:

*H<sub>8</sub>* People will console, encourage objectivity and forgiveness, and provide assistance for close actors more than distant actors.

*H<sub>9</sub>* People will provide more validation of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of actors who have been hurt or upset by adversaries when actors are psychologically close relative to distant.

I generally expected that people would provide more support behaviors to close actors relative to distant actors, but that some support behaviors, such as validation, may vary as a function of actor's role within the conflict: People may be more likely to validate close actors more when they are victims, relative to when close actors are perpetrators. Such tendencies could be consequential in conflict scenarios. For instance, past work suggests that people who validate a close partner's suffering or distress may reinforce or exacerbate a victim's anger and negative feelings towards adversaries, thereby risking escalation of conflict (Lemay et al., 2018). Other regulation strategies, which were not separately examined in this prior research, such as the encouragement of objectivity or forgiveness, may promote reconciliation and relationship quality between conflicting parties by persuading partners into making amends for wrongdoing, or finding forgiveness for adversaries who have wronged them. I also evaluated derogation (i.e., assaulting another's reputation) of actors and adversaries as a function of closeness and role. I expected that:

*H<sub>10</sub>* People will derogate adversaries of actors more when actors are close, relative to distant.

Derogation of one or more parties involved in conflict could be consequential, such as contributing to the exacerbation of conflict. Understanding what factors might

bias or influence such behavioral responses may be useful in negotiating interpersonal conflict involving close partners and others.

The current research expands upon past findings in a number of important ways. First, in addition to exploring biased recounting of conflicts which may propagate conflict, the current research also explored a number of support and regulatory strategies between people and target actors unaccounted for in past work, including consolation, assistance, and the encouragement of objectivity and forgiveness (described above). Second, the current research explores attributions and behavioral responses of both actors and adversaries fulfilling different roles within the conflict (i.e., perpetrator or victim), using both imagined conflict scenarios (Study 1) and actual conflict experiences from people's lives (Study 2), allowing for the examination of both "minimization" of blame for close partners relative to distant relations ( $H_2$ ), and the "maximization" of blame for adversaries of close partners relative to adversaries of distant relations ( $H_1$ ). Further, the varying methodology of these two studies offers tight experimental control (in Study 1) and high ecological validity (in Study 2). Third, while past research has explored mechanisms for bias in conflict relating to task identification (Chaikin & Darley, 1973), perspective taking (Gino & Galinsky, 2012), group affiliation (Lee et al., 2014), and responsiveness (Lemay et al., 2018), the current research explored additional mechanisms for such biases, including people's assumed similarity between the self and a close actor, "wishful thinking", in which people experience biased perceptions as a result of strong desires for a moral close partner, and people's care for a close partner. These mechanisms of bias are described in more detail below.



**People assume close partners are similar to the self.** People tend to project their own qualities onto their close partners (Ashton et al., 2009; Lemay & Clark, 2015; Murray et al., 1996a, 1996b). In other words, people see their partners as being similar to themselves (i.e., in an “assumed similarity” process). In addition, people tend to see close partners as part of themselves (Aron et al., 1991). Hence, given that people tend to see themselves as moral and communal (Paulhus & John, 1998; Vecchione, Alessandri, & Barbaranelli, 2013), they may see their close partners in similar ways when their partners are involved in conflicts with others. However, it is also possible that a close actor’s involvement in a conflict is perceived by individuals as dissimilar from the self, which may motivate individuals to evaluate partners more harshly as a means of “distancing” the self from the close partner’s conflict. Given the plausibility of each pathway, assumed similarity shall be treated as an exploratory mechanism.

**People wish to have caring and moral partners.** People may wish to have close partners who are morally good and benevolent (Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, & West, 1995; Montoya & Horton, 2014), and these desires may bias how people perceive their partners (i.e., in a “wishful thinking” process). People tend to process information in ways that produce desired conclusions (Kunda, 1990), and this extends to how people perceive their relationships (Lemay & Clark, 2015; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996a, 1996b; Simpson et al., 1995). Hence, when learning of their close partners’ conflicts, this wishful thinking may lead people into giving their partners “the benefit of the doubt” and perceiving them as benevolent. Given that people are less dependent on strangers than close others (Collins & Feeney, 2000), they should have weaker desires for strangers’ benevolence. It is also possible, however, that a close partner’s conflict may violate an

individual's expressed goals of having a caring and moral partner. That is, some individuals with strong desire for caring and moral partners may evaluate close partner's conflicts as indicators that partners are less caring and moral, and may thus inspire more punitive evaluations as a result. Consequently, wishful thinking shall be explored as an exploratory mechanism of bias, which may predict either reduced or increased attributions of blame for actors and adversaries involved in conflicts.

**People are concerned for their own reputation.** People are concerned about the opinions of others – and specifically, whether other people accept or reject them (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Hence, they often engage in tactics to enhance their reputation with others (Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999). As an extreme form of this concern, some people exhibit perfectionistic self-presentation tendencies and seek to present the self as flawless to others (Hewitt et al., 2003). Research on “guilt by association” also posits that people's relational ties to others may sometimes do harm to their own reputation (Rocheleau & Chavez, 2015). It is possible, then, that people who are mindful of their own reputations might portray close partners as less blameworthy as a means of managing their own reputations. However, it is also possible that people who are concerned about managing their own reputation may be vigilant about the behaviors of a close actor in order to monitor whether the actor's behavior may reflect poorly on the self. People tend to derogate in-group members who behave in deviant ways as a means to increase conformity and reinforce social norms within groups (Marques & Paez, 1994; Marques & Yzerbyt, 1988; Marques, Yzerbyt, & Leyens, 1988). People also attempt to publicly distance themselves from negative others that could harm their reputation (Snyder, Lassegard, & Ford, 1986). Thus, people who are worried about indirect

reputational harm due to the behaviors of a close other – “guilt by association” – may judge close actors who have behaved in harmful ways towards others more, relative to less, harshly in order to distance oneself or communicate disapproval of the behavior of close others. Given the plausibility of both patterns of effects, variables assessing reputational concern shall be assessed as exploratory moderators.

**People care for close partners’ welfare.** People tend to care for the needs of their close partners, as is demonstrated in research on communal strength (i.e., the extent to which people are motivated to meet a partner’s needs) (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004; Mattingly, Oswald, & Clark, 2011). Furthermore, empathic concern (i.e., a person’s orientation towards the welfare of another) has been found to motivate helping behaviors (Batson et al., 1991; Batson, Duncan, Ackerman, Buckley, & Birch, 1981; Batson et al., 1998; Fultz, Batson, Fortenbach, McCarthy, & Varney, 1986), such that people who feel empathy for another should feel more motivated to help the other when in need. Additionally, people tend to empathize with close partners (Davis & Oathout, 1987), such that they share in their partner’s experiences. Thus, people may exhibit more care (i.e., more empathy, more communal strength) for partners that are psychologically close relative to partners that are psychologically distant, and this increased care may orient people to be concerned with the needs of their partners, which may yield reduced blame for these partners and, consequently, behavioral responses that are favorable towards partners (e.g., more favorable descriptions of partners, more consolation, validation, and encouragement of partners), but consequential to adversaries of partners (e.g., less favorable descriptions of adversaries, more derogation or retaliation towards adversaries). Thus, I expected the following:

*H<sub>11</sub>* People will exhibit more care for actors that are psychologically close relatively to actors that are psychologically distant, and this increased care predicts the attenuation of blame for close actors.

*H<sub>12</sub>* People's perceptions of reduced blame for close actors will subsequently predict biased behavioral responses, such as the communication of more favor for close actors, less favor for adversaries of close actors, more support behaviors (i.e., consolation, validation, encouragement, assistance) of close actors, and more derogation of adversaries of close actors.

### **Overview of the Current Studies**

The current research includes two studies to test the predictions described above. In Study 1, participants imagined a close partner as either a perpetrator or a victim in conflict with an adversary, or imagined both perpetrators and victims as strangers. After reading and imagining this conflict, participants provided reports of their perceptions of the conflict and then retold the conflict for another person to read. In Study 2, participants recalled conflicts in which either close partners or distant acquaintances were perpetrators or victims and reported on their perceptions of the conflict as well as their actions toward each party after they learned of the conflict. In each study, variables were measured to test the mechanisms described above.

### **Study 1**

In Study 1, I asked participants to imagine either a close partner or a stranger engaged in a conflict with another person, and then complete measures assessing their perceptions of each party involved in the conflict. After a filler task, participants recounted the conflict story from memory. I predicted that participants who imagined close friends or romantic partners filling the role of an actor (i.e., people with which

participants are asked to identify) in the conflict would attribute significantly less blame to these actors and significantly more blame to adversaries (i.e., the other parties that actors are conflicting with) relative to participants who imagined both actors and adversaries as strangers. I also expected that people would exhibit behavioral (i.e., communication) biases, such that they recount conflicts in ways that portrayed actors that are psychologically close as less blameworthy relative to strangers.

Participants also completed measures related to the theorized mechanisms described above. According to the assumed similarity prediction, a perceiver's communal and moral self-evaluations should predict more positive biases toward a close partner relative to a stranger. Inclusion of the partner in the self may magnify this tendency. According to the wishful thinking prediction, increased desire for a caring and moral partner should predict more positive biases for close partners relative to strangers. According to the reputational concern prediction, people who are highly concerned about their reputation may exhibit either positive or negative biases for close partners. According to the care prediction, actor closeness should predict increased empathic concern, which should predict reduced attributed blame. In turn, biased perceptions of close partners may predict behavioral favoritism (i.e., retelling conflicts in ways that construe close partners as more innocent or righteous, or adversaries as more blameworthy).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited through an undergraduate psychology participant pool of a university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Two hundred participants (93 male, 106 female, 1 with missing sex data) completed the study in exchange for

partial fulfillment of a research participation assignment in their psychology courses. Mean age of participants was 19.62 years. A majority of participants were of Caucasian descent ( $n = 97$ ), followed by Asian ( $n = 43$ ), Black or African American ( $n = 40$ ), and other racial and ethnic categories ( $n = 20$ ). A majority of the sample identified themselves as heterosexual ( $n = 180$ ).

### **Procedure**

Participants were escorted into private rooms. First, participants were asked to type the name of a specific close partner who is personally important to them<sup>1</sup>. Next, participants completed a battery of measures designed to assess individual difference variables and qualities of the relationship between the participant and their close partner, including all measures described below except the Evaluations of Partners A and B measure.

Then, participants read a vignette that described a conflict between two parties in which one party (the perpetrator) behaved in a way that hurt or upset another party (the victim) (please see Appendices

Appendix A). Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a “close partner as perpetrator” condition, a “close partner as victim” condition, or a “both parties as stranger” condition. In the “close partner as perpetrator” condition, participants were instructed to imagine a close friend or romantic partner as the perpetrator within the conflict between two parties, in which the close partner harmed an unknown person. In the “close partner as victim” condition, the participant was instructed to instead imagine their close friend or romantic partner as the wronged party within the conflict, who has been harmed by an unknown perpetrator. Participants in the “both parties as strangers” condition did not imagine a close partner in the story and instead imagined a conflict

between two strangers. All participants also completed brief questions to ensure comprehension of the story while the story was still accessible to them.

Participants then completed questions assessing their perceptions of each party's responsibility and blame for the conflict. Then, all participants completed a filler task which required them to recount the names of states in the United States and items in their bedroom, for no more than five minutes.

Then, participants were instructed to recount the story of the conflict from memory and type the account up at a computer terminal. They were told that the story they typed up might be shared with another person to read for a future study on conflicts. Upon completion, participants were debriefed and informed of the purpose of the study and the study's hypotheses. Independent coders who were blind to research hypotheses, but not condition assignment, then reviewed and coded participant's retelling of the story content and format utilizing the coding strategy described below.

## **Materials**

**Identification of a Relationship Partner.** Participants identified a relationship partner by providing the name and biological sex of this person, as well as the type of relationship (e.g., close friend, romantic partner, acquaintance, etc.), their frequency of interactions, and the length of time that they have had a relationship with this person. Where appropriate, I inserted this relationship partner's name into question and conflict materials (described below).

**Conflict vignette.** Participants read a description of a conflict adapted from literature on relational and physical aggression (Basow, Cahill, Phelan, Longshore, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2007). The actual text of the conflict was dependent upon which condition the participant had been assigned to. In the narrative, two parties were required

to submit a paper copy of an important assignment in person before a strict deadline for a course. One student (i.e., the victim) was unable to turn the paper in and asked their friend in the same course (i.e., the perpetrator) to turn the paper in for him/her instead. This friend agreed. Upon traveling to turn the paper in shortly before the deadline, however, the perpetrator got distracted by a conversation with another friend, and ultimately missed the deadline. As a result, the victim received a poor grade in the class and lost an academic scholarship, and consequently had a difficult time forgiving the perpetrator.

The remaining scales (below) utilized a 7-point response scale, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*, unless otherwise noted.

**Evaluation of communal and moral qualities.** In order to assess the extent to which participants assumed a close partner is similar to the self, participants evaluated themselves on a list of traits (18 traits,  $\alpha = .87$ ; see Appendix B.). Participants reported the extent to which a list of traits described the self. Traits included communal and moral qualities (e.g., *understanding, accepting, kind, patient, loving, affectionate, warm, responsive / supportive, open / disclosing, loyal, honest, considerate, sincere, righteous, trustworthy, respectful, friendly, and helpful*), adapted from research on perceptions of communal (Anthony, Holmes, & Wood, 2007) and moral (Leach, Ellemers, & Barreto, 2007) qualities, respectively.

**Desired Close Partner Traits.** In order to ascertain whether people's desire for having a close partner with particular traits altered people's perceptions of close partners, participants evaluated their desire to have a close partner that expressed the same



communal and moral qualities that they evaluated the self on (18 traits,  $\alpha = .93$ ; see Appendix C.).

**Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale.** In order to assess the extent to which people include close partners in their own self-conception, participants completed Aron and colleagues' (1992) Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale. The scale includes a series of overlapping circles which represents the self and a target, and individuals choose one diagram that best represents the extent to which their own self-concept overlaps with the close partner (see Appendix D.).

**Partner-Focused Empathic Concern.** To assess participant's tendencies to feel empathy for relationship partners, they completed partner-specific measures of empathic concern (4 items,  $\alpha = .83$ )<sup>2</sup> (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998; see Appendix E.). Example items included, "I feel terribly sorry when things aren't going well for my partner", and, "When my partner has problems in his/her life, I feel really terrible."

**Perfectionistic Self-Presentation.** To assess whether people's concerns about their reputation predicted outcomes, I measured people's perfectionistic self-presentation<sup>3</sup> (see Appendix H.). This scale assessed the extent to which people try to promote themselves as perfect (10 items,  $\alpha = .86$ ), conceal their own imperfections (10 items,  $\alpha = .87$ ), or avoid admission of mistakes or wrongdoing (7 items,  $\alpha = .78$ ). Example items included, "I try always to present a picture of perfection", "I will do almost anything to cover up a mistake", and, "I never let others know how hard I work on things."

**Attributions of Blame for Parties A and B.** In order to ascertain participant's perceptions of each party during the conflict, participants responded to a series of questions regarding each party's responsibility (e.g., "How much responsibility does

Person A have for the conflict?”), blameworthiness (e.g., “How much blame should be attributed to Person A for his/her actions during the conflict?”), and deservingness of punishment (e.g., “How deserving of punishment is Person A for his/her actions during the conflict?”). Actual partner names, or the names of perpetrators or victims as described in the conflict vignette, were inserted into the question text where appropriate. Responses to these three items were averaged into a composite score of blame ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

**Coding Strategy.** To examine whether people recounted conflict narratives in biased ways, objective coders rated participant’s narrative accounts of the conflict. Coders evaluated the narratives on the extent to which the perpetrator was portrayed as positive (2 items with 4 raters, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author portray the perpetrator’s behavior as positive?”, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author portray the perpetrator’s behavior as negative?”, reverse-scored;  $\alpha = .778$ , ICC = .732), and the extent to which the victim was portrayed as positive (2 items with 4 raters, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author portray the victim’s behaviors as positive?”, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author portray the victim’s behaviors as negative?”, reverse-scored;  $\alpha = .642$ , ICC = .481), on a 7-point response scale where 1 = *none / not at all* and 7 = *extreme / complete*. Coders also evaluated the extent to which the author portrayed the behaviors of the perpetrator as intentional (2 items with 4 raters, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator’s behaviors as intentional?”, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator’s behaviors as avoidable?”;  $\alpha = .739$ , ICC = .624) and to what extent the author portrayed the behaviors of the victim as intentional (2 items with 4 raters, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim’s behaviors

as intentional?”, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim’s behaviors as avoidable?”;  $\alpha = .666$ , ICC = .546), on a 7-point response scale where 1 = *completely accidental / unavoidable*, and 7 = *completely intentional / avoidable*. Coders also evaluated the extent to which the author portrayed the perpetrator as blameworthy (3 items with 4 ratings, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator as responsible for the conflict?”, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator as deserving of punishment?”, with a 7-point response scale where 1 = *none / not at all* and 7 = *extreme / complete*, and a reverse-scored item, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator’s actions as justified?”, with a 7-point response scale where 1 = *completely unjustified* and 7 = *completely justified*;  $\alpha = .842$ , ICC = .781), and to what extent the author described the victim as blameworthy, using (3 items with 4 ratings, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim as responsible for the conflict?”, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim as deserving of punishment?”, with a 7-point response scale where 1 = *none / not at all* and 7 = *extreme / complete*, and a reverse-scored item, “On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim’s actions as justified?”, with a 7-point response scale where 1 = *completely unjustified* and 7 = *completely justified*;  $\alpha = .863$ , ICC = .846).

### **Study 1 Results and Discussion**

Mean perceptions for the behavior of each party involved in the conflict (Party A and Party B) were computed to allow for comparisons across all (“close partner as perpetrator”, “close partner as victim”, “both parties as strangers”) conditions in an analysis of variance framework.

I examined the effect of condition (3 levels: close partner as perpetrator, close partner as victim, stranger) on perceived and communicated blame and positivity of both perpetrators and victims. Means for each outcome across condition are reported in **Table 1**. One-way analyses of variance evaluated effects of condition on outcomes, while Tukey's *honestly significant differences (HSD)* post hoc test compared means across each level of condition. Analyses revealed a significant main effect of condition on perceived blame for perpetrators,  $F(2, 196) = 6.14, p = .003$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .059$ . Perceived blame differed between the "both parties as stranger" and "close partner as victim" conditions, and between the "close partner as perpetrator" and "close partner as victim" conditions. Consistent with  $H_1$ , people who imagined their close partners as victims of an unknown perpetrator attributed more blame and responsibility to these perpetrators relative to people who imagined both victims and perpetrators as strangers and people who imagined their close partner as perpetrators. However, inconsistent with  $H_2$ , condition did not have a significant effect on perceived blame for victims,  $F(2, 196) = 0.83, p = .437$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .008$ . There was also a significant main effect of condition on communicated blame for perpetrators,  $F(2, 194) = 12.44, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .114$  whereby communicated blame in the "close partner as victim" condition was higher than both the "both parties as stranger" and "close partner as perpetrator" conditions. Consistent with  $H_4$ , people who imagined their close partner had been hurt or upset by someone else described perpetrators as more blameworthy relative to people who imagined victims were strangers. There was also a significant main effect of condition on communicated blame for victims,  $F(2, 194) = 5.22, p = .006$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .051$ . People who imagined close partners as perpetrators described victims as more blameworthy relative to people

who imagined victims were close partners. There was also a main effect of condition on the positivity of descriptions for perpetrators,  $F(2, 194) = 5.92, p = .003$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .057$ . Consistent with  $H_3$ , people described perpetrators more positively if perpetrators were imagined to be close partners relative to unfamiliar individuals who had harmed close partners. There was also a main effect of condition on the positivity of descriptions for victims,  $F(2, 194) = 5.99, p = .003$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .058$ . When people imagined their close partners had been hurt or upset by someone else, they described these partners more positively, and the adversaries of these partners less positively, relative to people who imagined partners serving the role of perpetrator, or neither role. There were no significant effects of condition on descriptions of intentionality for perpetrators or victims.

**Mechanism of effects.** A number of mechanisms for biased perceptions and behaviors were explored, including assumed similarity, wishful thinking, reputation concern, and care. Factors associated with the assumed similarity, wishful thinking, and reputation concern mechanisms were presumed to be individual differences which would moderate the relationship between actor closeness and perceptual and behavioral responses to actor conflicts. Assumed similarity between the self and partner, concern about one's own reputation, and desire for a caring and moral partner were thought to either increase or attenuate bias. By contrast, factors associated with care (i.e., partner-specific empathy) were expected to be predicted by people's psychological closeness with partners, and would, in turn, predict perceptions and behavioral responses to actor conflicts. Squared semi-partial correlation coefficient values ( $sr^2$ ), which provide the

unique variance associated with predictors within the model, were used as estimates of effect size and are reported below.

*Moderation.* In order to examine whether factors moderated the effects of condition on perpetrator and victim attributions, dummy codes were created to assess condition (e.g., “close partner is perpetrator” and “close partner is victim”, where 0 = participant is not in condition, 1 = participant was in condition). Regression analyses were run with both dummy codes, the moderator, and product terms representing interactions between the moderator and experimental conditions. Hence, in these analyses, the two conditions involving a close partner (as perpetrator or victim) were contrasted against the control condition in which both parties were strangers, which served as the reference category. Only significant effects are reported below. All effects not reported were not significant.<sup>4</sup>

*Wishful Thinking.* I examined whether people’s desire for communal and moral qualities in a close partner predicted attributions of perpetrator blame or responsibility. I regressed perpetrator attributions on condition dummy variables, desired qualities, and desired quality interaction terms with dummy variables, [ $R^2 = .329$ ,  $F(5, 193) = 4.67$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. The analysis revealed a significant effect of “close partner as perpetrator” condition ( $B = 4.20$ ,  $p = .012$ ,  $sr^2 = 0.03$ ), desired qualities ( $B = 0.68$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $sr^2 = 0.05$ ), and desired qualities \* “actor is perpetrator” dummy term ( $B = -0.68$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $sr^2 = 0.03$ ). I further probed the interaction term by examining the conditional effects of desired qualities across levels of condition. Desire for moral and communal relationship partners was a significant predictor of blame for perpetrators in the “both parties as stranger” condition ( $B = 0.68$ ,  $t = 3.20$ ,  $p = .002$ ), but not the “close partner as

perpetrator” ( $B = .01, t = .04, p = .966$ ) or “close partner as victim” ( $B = 0.14, t = 0.60, p = .549$ ) conditions. When people imagined both victims and perpetrators as strangers, people with a stronger desire for caring and moral actors attributed more blame to perpetrators relative to people with a weaker desire for moral actors. I also evaluated whether desire for a caring and moral relationship partner moderated the effect of condition on attributions of blame for victims, but these effects were not significant, [ $R^2 = .132, F(5, 193) = 0.69, p = .634$ ]. There were also no significant effects of desire on recounting of conflicts. These results do not provide strong support for the wishful thinking hypothesis, given that desire for moral partners did not predict how partners were evaluated.

*Assumed Similarity, Reputation Concern, and Care.* I also investigated whether people’s assumed similarity between a close partner and the self, people’s concern for their own reputation, or their care for partners would moderate effects. I examined whether participant’s own moral qualities and IOS, perfectionistic self-presentation, or empathic concern for partners predicted outcomes. However, analyses revealed no significant interactions with condition assignment. Thus, I found no evidence for these qualities as mechanisms of bias.

*Mediation.* I investigated whether condition predicted attributions of blame for individuals in the conflict, which in turn predicted biased recounting of conflicts. I first regressed attributions of perpetrator blame onto condition dummy variables as predictors, [ $R^2 = .243, F(2, 196) = 6.14, p = .003$ ]. The “partner as victim” dummy code ( $B = .44, p = .007, sr^2 = 0.036$ ) was a significant predictor. Next, I regressed outcomes related to descriptions of conflicts onto models which included condition dummy codes and

attributions of perpetrator blame as predictors. However, perpetrator attributions did not predict any such outcomes. I also evaluated a mediation pathway involving attributions of blame for victims, but condition was not a significant predictor of victim blame, [ $R^2 = .092$ ,  $F(2, 196) = 0.83$ ,  $p = .437$ ]. These results do not demonstrate support for a mediation model.

All together, these results suggest that people both perceive and communicate more blame and less favor for individuals who have harmed or upset close partners. These results are consistent with the proposed “magnification” effect of actor closeness on adversary blame, such that people attribute more blame to individuals who have victimized someone close to the self, as opposed to a stranger. I also found that people communicated more blame for victims of close partner’s transgressions relative to close partner victims who were hurt or upset by a stranger. I did not find compelling evidence for any mechanisms of bias, or that blame mediated the relationship between closeness and behavioral descriptions of conflicts.

In sum, the results of this study support the notion that people exhibit perceptual biases for close actors relative to other parties in conflict scenarios. This study utilized a hypothetical vignette methodology in order to obtain tight experimental control over the conflict situation. By utilizing imagined scenarios, I was able to tightly control factors related to the conflict and the parties involved. However, this design may be limited in ecological validity. To investigate whether such biases may be found in response to actual conflicts involving actors, and to explore additional components of behavioral bias, a second study was conducted.



## **Study 2**

In Study 2, I asked participants to recall an actual conflict that occurred between a close (e.g., close friend, romantic partner) or distant (e.g., acquaintance, stranger) actor and another person (an “adversary”), where actors were either perpetrators (i.e., upset or hurt someone else) or victims (i.e., were upset or hurt). I predicted that participants would attribute and communicate less blame for close actors relative to distant actors.

Participants also described their behavioral response to the conflict, including what they said or did to actors and adversaries. I predicted that participants would report consoling, validating, encouraging objectivity or forgiveness, and assisting close actors more than distant actors. I also expected that participants would derogate and attribute and communicate more blame for adversaries of close actors relative to adversaries of distant actors. This study extended Study 1 by examining actual, rather than hypothetical, conflicts, to evaluate whether people not only perceived conflicts in biased ways, but whether people engaged in differential amounts of support and derogation behaviors as a function of actor’s closeness to the self, as well as the presumed mechanisms explored in Study 1, including assumed similarity, wishful thinking, reputation concern, and care.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants were recruited through an undergraduate psychology participant pool of a university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. One-hundred ninety-five participants completed the study in exchange for partial fulfillment of a research participation assignment in their psychology courses. However, the data of 15 cases were excluded due to failure to follow directions. As a result, the final sample consisted of 180 participants (76 male, 103 female, 1 identified as “Other”). Mean age of participants was 20.25 years. A majority of participants were of Caucasian descent ( $n = 75$ ), followed by

Asian (n = 44), Black or African American (n = 34), and other racial and ethnic categories (n = 27). A majority of the sample identified themselves as heterosexual (n = 156).

### **Procedure**

Participants first completed some of the same measures as those collected at the start of Study 1, including evaluations of the self on a number of moral qualities, desire for a partner to exhibit these same moral qualities, people's empathic concern and IOS for partners, and people's perfectionism.

Next, each participant was instructed to recall an incident in which a close or distant actor was involved in a conflict (see Appendix I.). Participants were randomly assigned to describe an incident that involved either a close or distant actor. Half of all participants were randomly assigned to an "actor as perpetrator" condition, while the remaining participants were randomly assigned to an "actor as victim" condition. Participants described both the conflict, and their response to the conflict, utilizing the prompts described below. Participants also reported their blame for both parties in the conflict.

Upon completion, all participants were debriefed and informed of the project's hypothesis. Independent coders coded the content (e.g., how blameworthy each target was) and format (e.g., whether clear descriptions were provided for the behaviors of each target) of the respondent's accounts of the conflict, using the strategy described below (see Appendix M.). Coders that evaluated the content of the narratives were blind to research hypotheses, but not condition assignment. Coders that evaluated the format of the narratives were blind to condition assignment, but not research hypotheses.

## **Materials**

The same materials of Study 1 were utilized in Study 2, with the exception of the conflict vignette. Some additional materials were also included, and are described below.

**Conflict Prompt.** Participants were instructed to briefly (i.e., 500 words or less) describe an experience in which a close or distant actor engaged in a conflict with someone else (see Appendix I.). In the “actor as perpetrator” condition, participants were instructed to recount an experience where an actor “hurt or upset someone else”, while participants in the “actor as victim” condition were instructed to recount an experience where an actor “was hurt or upset by someone else.” In both conditions, participants were asked to prioritize experiences in which the close or distant actor conflicted with an unknown party or distant acquaintance, rather than experiences where a close or distant actor quarreled with a close relation to the participant.

**Response Prompt.** After recounting the details of a close or distant actor’s conflict, participants were asked to describe the aftermath of the conflict, and, specifically, what they did or said to either the actor or the adversary. Participants were instructed to include specific details, including direct quotations, when possible. Also, participants were asked to indicate whether they attempted to support (e.g., console, validate, assist) either party, or retaliate against either party (see Appendix J.).

**Regulation of Actor’s Thoughts and Feelings Scale.** In order to assess the ways in which people attempted to regulate actor’s thoughts, emotions, and acts, participants responded to questions regarding the extent to which they consoled (3 items,  $\alpha = .64$ ) or validated (5 items,  $\alpha = .89$ ) actors, or encouraged rationality or forgiveness (7 items,  $\alpha = .87$ ) for actors. Example items included, “During or after the experience that I described, I told ACTOR not to worry about what he/she did” (i.e., consolation), “During or after

the experience that I described, I told ACTOR that his/her actions were not that bad” (i.e., validation), “During or after the experience that I described, I encouraged ACTOR to view the situation in a more objective manner” (i.e., encouragement; please see Appendix K.). Response scales ranged from 1 to 7, where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 7 = *strongly agree*.

**Coding Strategy.** Objective coders evaluated people’s descriptions of each party within the conflict by reading people’s written accounts of the conflict and response and evaluating the narratives on a number of items. Utilizing the same strategy of compositing items as was described in Study 1, coders evaluated the positivity attributed to actors (2 items with 7 raters,  $\alpha = .941$ , ICC = .900) and adversaries (2 items with 7 raters,  $\alpha = .927$ , ICC = .883), the intentionality attributed to the behaviors of actors (2 items with 7 raters,  $\alpha = .850$ , ICC = .824) and adversaries (2 items with 7 raters,  $\alpha = .924$ , ICC = .900), and the blame attributed to actors (3 items with 7 raters,  $\alpha = .962$ , ICC = .945) and adversaries (3 items with 7 raters,  $\alpha = .961$ , ICC = .937) through individual’s descriptions of the conflict. The primary author of this paper also evaluated conflict narratives on a number of other criteria, and a second researcher reviewed a subset of these cases ( $n = 25$ ) to ensure reliability of these ratings. These responses included the clarity of description of each party’s behaviors (ICC = .882 and .739 for actors and adversaries, respectively), description of thoughts and feelings of each party (ICC = .750 and .762 for actors and adversaries, respectively), description of the motives or intentions of each party (ICC = .798 and .803 for actors and adversaries, respectively), description of the negative consequences or suffering of each party (ICC = .894 and .897 for actors and adversaries, respectively), and whether authors expressed or described any agreement

with either party (ICC = .869 and .902 for actors and adversaries, respectively). See Appendix M for exact wording of items used.

Principal axis factoring with Varimax rotation was then used to examine the latent factor structure of the coding items described above. Separate analyses were conducted for actor and adversary items. Rotated factor loadings are reported in **Table 2**. Items relating to author's description of positivity, agreement with, suffering of, and intentionality and blame of actors and adversaries loaded on the same factor. Thus, partner blame and intentionality for actors were subsequently reverse-scored, such that higher values indicated less blame and less intentionality to behaviors of actors, and were then averaged together with individual's description of agreement with the behaviors of actors, description of negative consequences or suffering of actors, and positivity of portrayals of actors to yield a composite score of actor favorability (5 items,  $\alpha = .861$ ). A composite score of favorability of adversary in individual's portrayals was created using the same methods for ratings related to adversary behaviors (5 items,  $\alpha = .862$ ). Clarity of description of behaviors for actors and adversaries, description of the thoughts and feelings of actors and adversaries, and description of the motives or intentions of actors and adversaries, were evaluated separately as independent behavioral outcomes. Finally, coders also evaluated descriptions of individual's response to the conflict to determine whether the individuals described providing assistance to actors (2 with 5 raters items,  $\alpha = .825$ , ICC = .670) or adversaries (2 items with 5 raters,  $\alpha = .805$ , ICC = .639), or derogated or retaliated against either actors (3 items with 5 raters,  $\alpha = .864$ , ICC = .752) or adversaries (3 items with 5 raters,  $\alpha = .822$ , ICC = .678; see Appendix N). Coders also evaluated the individual's description of the conflict for perceived severity of the conflict

(i.e., “Based on the author’s description, how severe was the conflict?”; ICC = .709 with 5 raters).

## Study 2 Results and Discussion

Perceptions and behavioral responses (e.g., communication, support, and derogation) to each party involved in the conflict (i.e., actor and adversary) were computed to allow for comparisons across dimensions of actor closeness (2 levels, 0 = distant, 1 = close) and actor role (2 levels, 0 = victim, 1 = perpetrator). Analyses of variance were run to examine the effects of actor closeness, actor role, and the actor closeness X actor role interaction on a number of outcomes. Results are summarized in **Table 3**. Simple effects testing was used to probe significant interactions.

With regard to perceptions, actor perpetrators were attributed with more blame ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ) than victims ( $M = 2.55$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ), and adversaries were blamed more when they upset or harmed close actors ( $M = 5.52$ ,  $SD = 0.95$ ) relative to distant actors ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ), [ $F(1, 171) = 4.92$ ,  $p = .028$ ]. Adversaries who were victimized by actors were attributed with similar amounts of blame regardless of whether actors were close ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ) or distant ( $M = 4.44$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ), [ $F(1, 171) = 2.95$ ,  $p = .088$ ]. These results are depicted in **Figure 1** and, consistent with  $H_1$ , suggest that people attribute more blame to the people who have upset or hurt close partners relative to those who have hurt or upset more distant relations.

Communication of conflicts was also examined for bias. **Figure 2** illustrates the results of favorability of descriptions of actors and adversaries. Close actors were portrayed as more favorable ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = 1.0$ ) than distant actors ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ), and victims were portrayed as more favorable ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ) than perpetrators ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ), while adversaries of close actors were portrayed less

favorably ( $M = 3.01$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ) than adversaries of distant actors ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ), and adversary victims were portrayed more favorably ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 0.91$ ) than adversary perpetrators ( $M = 2.47$ ,  $SD = 0.62$ ). As **Figure 3** illustrates, consistent with  $H_5$ , motives were also described for actor perpetrators more frequently when they were close ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) relative to when they were distant ( $M = 1.14$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Consistent with  $H_6$ , participants also described the thoughts and feelings of perpetrators more when they were close actors ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD = 0.47$ ) relative to distant actors ( $M = 1.19$ ,  $SD = 0.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in a pattern that mirrors those depicted in Figure 3. There was no significant difference in description of motives or thoughts and feelings between close and distant actor victims. Participants also described the thoughts and feelings of adversaries more when adversaries were victims ( $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 0.48$ ) relative to when they were perpetrators ( $M = 1.16$ ,  $SD = 0.37$ ).

Support behaviors were also evaluated. Consistent with  $H_8$ , participants reported providing assistance to close actors ( $M = 1.17$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ) more than distant actors ( $M = 0.86$ ,  $SD = 0.56$ ), and more consolation ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) and more encouragement of objectivity and forgiveness ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) for close actors relative to distant actors ( $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ ;  $M = 3.53$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ , for consolation, and encouragement of objectivity and forgiveness, respectively). Participants also provided assistance to adversary victims ( $M = 0.86$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) more than adversary perpetrators ( $M = 0.55$ ,  $SD = 0.14$ ).

**Figure 4** depicts results relating to the validation of actors. Participants reported validating victim behaviors ( $M = 5.00$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) more than perpetrator behaviors ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 1.67$ ), but consistent with  $H_9$ , participants validated close victims ( $M = 5.49$ ,

$SD = 1.16$ ) more than distant victims ( $M = 4.51, SD = 1.62$ ). Close perpetrators ( $M = 3.54, SD = 1.58$ ) were validated at roughly equivalent rates as distant perpetrators ( $M = 3.75, SD = 1.79$ ).

In exploring derogation, results revealed that actors ( $M = 1.20, SD = 0.54$ ) and adversaries ( $M = 1.28, SD = 0.50$ ) were derogated more when they were perpetrators relative to victims ( $M = 0.79, SD = 0.20$  for actors,  $M = 0.95, SD = 0.36$  for adversaries), and consistent with  $H_{10}$ , adversaries of close actors were derogated more ( $M = 1.20, SD = 0.52$ ) than adversaries of distant actors ( $M = 1.02, SD = 0.38$ ).

**Mechanisms.** A number of mechanisms for biased perceptions and behaviors were evaluated, including assumed similarity, wishful thinking, reputation concern, and care. As in Study 1, factors associated with the assumed similarity, wishful thinking, and reputation concern mechanisms were presumed to moderate the relationship between actor closeness and perceptual and behavioral responses to actor conflicts. Factors associated with care (i.e., partner-specific empathy) were expected to be predicted by people's psychological closeness with partners, and would, in turn, predict perceptions and behavioral responses to actor conflicts. Estimates of effect sizes were reported using semi-partial correlation coefficients ( $sr^2$ ).

*Moderation.* Each outcome variable was regressed upon models that contained actor closeness, actor role, and moderator variables along with all relevant 2-way and 3-way interaction terms. Significant effect terms are reported below.<sup>5</sup> To probe interactions, conditional effects were tested by pooling the effects across variables that were not significant moderators in the model using dummy coding where zero served as the midway point between values (e.g.,  $-.5, +.5$ ).



***Assumed Similarity.*** I assessed whether participant's self-reported moral qualities predicted outcomes, either independently, or in tandem with participant's "oneness" with actors. Outcomes were regressed onto predictors including actor closeness, actor role, perceiver's own moral qualities and perceiver's IOS, along with all available interaction terms. In these models, IOS was used as a proxy measure for psychological closeness between perceivers and actors.<sup>6</sup> When full models were not significant, more parsimonious models were examined in a stepwise fashion. Significant results are summarized in **Table 4**. Interactions involving perceiver's morality and IOS were probed by examining conditional effects.<sup>7</sup> In sum, I did not find evidence of biased attributions of blame or behavioral response as a function of assumed similarity between perceivers and actors.

***Wishful Thinking.*** I examined whether people's desire for communal and moral qualities in an actor predicted attributions of perpetrator blame or responsibility. Analyses revealed a significant effect of desire for a moral relationship partner (i.e., "desire") when evaluating clarity of description of actor's behaviors during the conflict. Clarity of description was regressed on actor closeness, actor role, actor closeness X role, desire, desire X actor role, desire X actor closeness, and desire X actor closeness X actor role, [ $R^2 = .310$ ,  $F(7, 165) = 2.51$ ,  $p = .018$ ]. Actor closeness ( $B = 2.25$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $sr^2 = .03$ ), actor closeness X role ( $B = -2.66$ ,  $p = .045$ ,  $sr^2 = .02$ ), desire X actor closeness ( $B = -0.33$ ,  $p = .038$ ,  $sr^2 = .02$ ), and desire X actor closeness X role ( $B = 0.41$ ,  $p = .047$ ,  $sr^2 = .02$ ) were significant predictors. I further probed the desire X actor closeness interaction for perpetrators and for victims, which was significant for victims ( $B = -0.33$ ,  $t = -2.09$ ,  $p = .038$ ), but not perpetrators ( $B = 0.07$ ,  $t = 0.57$ ,  $p = .568$ ). I further examined the

conditional effect of desire for both close and distant victims. Desire was a significant predictor of clarity of description for distant victims ( $B = 0.18, t = 1.98, p = .050$ ) but not close victims ( $B = -0.15, t = -1.16, p = .247$ ). People described the behaviors of distant actors who had been hurt or upset by someone else in clearer detail when those people had stronger desires for moral relationship partners relative to when people had weaker desires for moral relationship partners. However, I did not find compelling evidence for a “wishful thinking” mechanism: people’s desire for a moral partner did not predict biased perceptions or behavioral responses for close actors relative to distant actors in the expected direction.<sup>8</sup>

***Reputation concern.*** In order to examine whether people’s concern for their own reputation predicted perceptual and behavioral biases in favor of close actors over distant actors, people’s perfectionism (i.e., the desire to be seen as perfect by others) was assessed as a moderator of effects.<sup>9</sup> I did not find evidence that reputation concern moderated people’s biased perceptions or behavioral responses towards close actors relative to distant actors.<sup>10</sup>

***Mediation.*** I examined whether actor blame mediated the relationship between actor closeness on each dependent variable while controlling for actor role and the interaction of actor closeness and role. Actor closeness and actor role were dummy coded such that zero served as a midway point between values (e.g.,  $-.5, +.5$ ), and entered into models along with interaction terms. I regressed perceptions of actor blame onto these predictors, [ $R^2 = .377, F(3, 171) = 9.45, p < .001$ ]. Actor role ( $B = 1.11, p < .001, sr^2 = .19$ ) was a significant predictor, but actor closeness ( $B = 0.18, p = .416$ ) was not. Thus, I

found no evidence that actor blame mediated the relationship between actor closeness and behavioral outcomes.

*Care.* I expected that people's empathic concern for actors would mediate the relationship between actor closeness and perceived actor blame, and that actor blame would subsequently predict a number of behavioral outcomes. I expected this pathway would be significant while controlling for the effects of actor role and the actor closeness X role interaction as well. Using PROCESS software for SPSS (Hayes, 2017), I tested the path depicted in **Figure 6** for communicated favorability of actors. Results revealed that this indirect effect pathway (i.e., actor closeness → empathic concern for actors → attributions of blame for actors → favorability of actor portrayals) was significant [ $B = 0.08$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ , 95%  $CI = .03, .15$ ], as was the direct effect of actor closeness, [ $B = 0.40$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ,  $p = .001$ ]. Consistent with  $H_{11}$  and  $H_{12}$ , empathic concern mediated the effect of actor closeness on actor blame, which then predicted the favorability of actor descriptions. People attributed less blame to actors they empathized more strongly with. Further, people who perceived actors as less blameworthy described actors more favorably. These effects occurred regardless of whether actors had hurt or upset someone else, or been hurt or upset by someone else. This indirect pathway was also significant in predicting favorability of adversary portrayals, [ $B = -0.05$ ,  $SE = 0.03$ , 95%  $CI = -.12, -.02$ ]. I utilized the same approach described above but regressed the favorability of adversary portrayals onto predictors, [ $R^2 = .705$ ,  $F(5, 168) = 33.15$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. Actor blame ( $B = 0.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ), actor closeness ( $B = -0.36$ ,  $p = .006$ ), and actor role ( $B = 1.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were significant predictors. People described adversaries in more favorable ways when adversaries were hurt or upset by actors, or when actors were

attributed with more blame relative to less blame. Conversely, adversaries were described less favorably if they were in conflict with close, relative to distant, actors.

This indirect pathway was also significant for a number of other outcomes, including consolation [ $B = 0.06$ ,  $SE = 0.04$ , 95%  $CI = .01, .17$ ], validation [ $B = 0.19$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ , 95%  $CI = .07, .36$ ], encouragement of objectivity and forgiveness for actors [ $B = -0.12$ ,  $SE = 0.05$ , 95%  $CI = -.25, -.04$ ], and derogation of actors [ $B = -0.03$ ,  $SE = .01$ , 95%  $CI = -.06, -.01$ ] and adversaries [ $B = 0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ , 95%  $CI = .01, .08$ ].

Regression coefficients for predictors are summarized in **Table 5**. People consoled and validated actors and derogated adversaries less as they attributed more blame to actors, and encouraged objectivity and forgiveness and derogated actors more as blame increased. I also probed the actor closeness X role interaction on actor validation by exploring the effect of role across levels of actor closeness. Actor role predicted validation of close actors ( $B = -1.19$ ,  $t = -4.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not distant actors ( $B = -0.33$ ,  $t = -1.11$ ,  $p = .270$ ). People validated the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of actor perpetrators less when they were close relative to distant.

Mediation models with other outcomes were not significant. Furthermore, empathy for actors did not predict adversary blame. Thus, models utilizing empathy and adversary blame as mediators instead were not supported. These results provide evidence for care as a mechanism for biased perceptions and behaviors<sup>11,12</sup>: people perceive actors they empathize more strongly with as less blameworthy, and this reduced blame predicts more favorable behavioral responses (i.e., more support of actors and derogation of adversaries).

**Countervailing Effects.** I also examined whether participants recounted more severe conflicts for close actors relative to distant actors as a function of increased familiarity or disclosure amongst close partners. However, results suggested that actor closeness ( $B < 0.01$ ,  $p = .974$ ) did not predict conflict severity, [ $R^2 = .002$ ,  $F(1, 173) = .001$ ,  $p = .974$ ]. People did not report more severe conflicts as a function of actor closeness.

In sum, the results of Study 2 suggest that people exhibit biases that generally favor close partners relative to distant partners, whereby people “magnify” blame for individuals who have hurt close, relative to distant, partners, communicate conflicts in ways that manage close partner’s reputations (e.g., by communicating more favor or information about motives or thoughts or feelings), and engage in more support (e.g., assistance, consolation, validation, and encouragement) for partners and more derogation of adversaries when partners are close, relative to distant. Further, these biased perceptions appear to be driven by people’s care for partners: people perceive less blame for actors they empathize more strongly with, and this reduced blame predicts biased behavioral responses.

### **General Discussion**

The current research examined whether people exhibit perceptual and behavioral biases toward close partners in conflict with others. I expected that people’s perceptions of blame for both parties would depend upon both the psychological closeness and the role (e.g., perpetrator or victim) of partners involved in conflicts. I predicted that people would attribute less blame to psychologically close, relative to psychologically distant or unfamiliar, perpetrators, in a “minimization” effect. I also predicted that people might attribute more blame to people who have hurt or offended someone psychologically close

to the self, relative to someone who is psychologically distant or unfamiliar, in a “magnification” effect. Across two studies, I found support for some of these predictions.

Study 1 utilized an experimental design in which people imagined a close partner serving the role of a perpetrator, victim, or neither, in a hypothetical conflict scenario, then provided evaluations of the responsibility and blameworthiness for each party involved in the conflict. Then, after a filler task, people recounted the conflict from memory. I found evidence that people attributed more blame to people who have victimized close partners relative to strangers, and described these adversaries of close partners as less favorable and more blameworthy as well. People also communicated less blame for close partners who had been hurt or upset by someone else, relative to strangers. This study design offered tight experimental control over variables at the expense of ecological validity. To account for this limitation, a second study using accounts of actual conflicts involving partners was conducted.

To compliment the limitations of Study 1, Study 2’s design offered more ecological validity at the expense of experimental control. In Study 2, people recounted actual conflicts involving either close or distant partners in their lives in which these partners either hurt or upset someone else, or were hurt or upset by someone else. People described these conflicts, as well as the ways in which they responded to them, including whether they supported either party (e.g., consoled, validated, encouraged objectivity or forgiveness, assisted), or derogated either party involved in the conflict. In evaluating people’s perceptions, I found the same “magnification” effect as in Study 1, in which people attributed more blame to people who have hurt close, rather than distant, partners. I also found evidence of minimization through people’s care: when people had greater

care and concern for the welfare of partners, they attributed less blame to these partners, regardless of whether they had hurt, or had been hurt by, someone else.

The magnification of blame for adversaries of close partners is consistent with past literature that explored the “third party forgiveness” effect (Green et al., 2008), which demonstrated that people are less forgiving of the offenders who have upset or hurt close partners relative to offenders who have upset or hurt the self, and that this inability to forgive is mediated by more negative attributions of these offenders. In the current research, I found evidence of a similar effect when comparing the adversaries of close and distant partners: people attribute more blame and responsibility, and desire more punishment, for individuals who have hurt or upset close, rather than distant, partners. The current research also suggested that people may “minimize” the blame for partners who are cared for. This minimization of blame is consistent with past research that demonstrates that identification with partners predicts increased endorsement of partners’ harmful or unethical behaviors (Chaikin & Darley, 1973; Gino & Galinsky, 2012; Lee et al., 2014). This pattern of results is also consistent with some work on empathic concern, which suggests that when people empathize with victims of transgressions, they have greater desire to punish the perpetrators of such acts (Vitaglione & Barnett, 2003). More generally, these findings are also consistent with contemporary scrutiny of empathic concern as a motivator solely for prosocial behaviors (Bloom, 2017).

The current research also suggests that people engage in biased behavioral responding to close partner’s conflicts. People tended to respond in ways that helped close partners more than distant relations. Past work has demonstrated that people retell conflicts in ways that manage their own reputation (Baumeister & Catanese, 2003;

Baumeister et al., 1990), and the reputation of a social group (Lee et al., 2014), in ways that exonerate either the self or in-group members from blame, or exaggerate the blame for adversaries. Consistent with these past findings, I expected that a similar process would occur when people recounted conflicts involving close partners. I found some support for these predictions. For example, in Study 2, I found that people tended to describe the intentions and motives, as well as the thoughts and feelings, of partners who had hurt or upset someone else more when these partners were psychologically close relative to when partners were psychologically distant. These descriptions of motivations, thoughts, and feelings, may have been provided in order to allow audiences to understand, excuse, justify, or even empathize with the experiences of these close partners who committed harm to others.<sup>13</sup> Such behaviors that might manage the reputation of partners was not found when people recounted conflicts involving partners who were psychologically distant from the self. I also did not find that people described the thoughts, feelings, or motivations of actor victims when actors were close relative to distant. This may be because when actors are hurt or upset by another person's actions, rather than a transgressor of such harmful behaviors themselves, people may not feel as motivated to describe conflicts in ways that will strategically appeal to audiences by describing actor's state of mind.

The current research also extended past work on perceptual and behavioral biases in conflict scenarios in a number of ways. First, naturalistic, relational bonds, which are prevalent in everyday life, were used as a means of measuring people's identification with a particular target of evaluation in place of task identification (Chaikin & Darley, 1973), group membership (Lee et al., 2014), or perspective taking (Gino & Galinsky,



2012). Importantly, people often discuss conflicts involving people in their social network (Eaton & Sanders, 2012; Volkema, Farquhar, & Bergmann, 1996), and this tendency allows for people to hear about conflicts involving close partners and others through “secondhand” means. Understanding the ways in which people both perceive and communicate conflicts that involve close partners is important to understand due to the prevalence of exposure to these conflicts, and due to the impact these perceptions and behavioral responses may have on multiple individual’s social lives.

A second important contribution of this research is the exploration of a number of mechanisms of bias unique to the current studies, including assumed similarity between people and partners, wishful thinking, and care. I found some evidence for care as a mechanism of bias, such that people’s empathic concern for partners predicted reduced blame and, subsequently, biased communication and support responses that favored close partners and appeared costly to adversaries of close partners. I did not find compelling evidence for other mechanisms of bias. One possible explanation for this fact is due to the existence of countervailing effects that could occur with these other mechanisms. While it is possible that people’s assumed similarity between the self and partners, their desire for moral partners, or their concern about their own reputation may predict reduced blame and more favorable responses to conflicts involving partners, it is also possible that these factors could invite more punitive evaluations of partners. These countervailing patterns may suppress any observable bias effects as a result. Care, by contrast, seems less susceptible to such countervailing effects, and may be a strong motivator that orients people towards the welfare of close partners, even at the expense of others.

A third important contribution of this research is the inclusion of behavioral responses to conflicts unique to the present studies, including people's consolation, validation, and encouragement of objectivity for actors, as well as people's assistance and derogation of either party involved in the conflict. I found that people varied their support behaviors as a function of closeness to partners. People consoled and encouraged objectivity and forgiveness for close partners more than for distant partners. There are a few possible explanations for why people encouraged close partners to be objective and to forgive more than distant partners. For instance, people may vary in the extent to which they believe forgiveness is a useful means of fostering social connections with others. As a result, people may be more likely to encourage close partners more than distant partners to forgive adversaries because it may benefit these close partner's social networks over time, while such considerations are not made as frequently for distant partners. Likewise, people may also vary in the extent to which they believe forgiveness and objectivity may improve close partner's wellbeing, and result in people's encouragement of these responses for close partners more than distant partners as a function of their concern for their close partner's mental health. Additionally, people may also be inclined to encourage close partners to forgive adversaries when adversaries are other close partners, such as other good friends, family members, or significant others. I also found that people were more likely to validate the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of partners who were hurt or upset by someone else when these partners were close relative to distant. This suggests that people expressed understanding and approval of partner's behaviors primarily when they were the victim of an initial harmful act, rather than the perpetrator of such an act.

In sum, I found evidence that people do perceive and behaviorally respond to conflicts involving close partners in biased ways. Importantly, these tendencies could have significant consequences for social-relational functioning. For instance, we found that people tend to validate close partners who have been hurt or offended by another person. While such behaviors could reinforce one's relationship with a partner or make the partner feel understood or accepted, validation of a partner might also reinforce a partner's negativity, such as anger or hostility towards someone else (Lemay et al., 2018). Such validation could risk exacerbating conflict by reinforcing partner's distress or anger, and increase their desire to retaliate against adversaries or decrease their desire to make amends or reconcile with other parties. However, we did also find encouragement of more prosocial orientations. For instance, consistent with past work on third party support strategies (Eaton, 2013; Eaton & Sanders, 2012), people tended to encourage close partners more than distant partners to view conflicts more objectively and to forgive adversaries, and this encouragement may be beneficial to partner's overall well-being by improving these partner's relationship quality with others. In other words, by encouraging partners to evaluate conflicts more objectively and make amends when needed, people may assist partners in increasing their relationship quality with others, which should pose benefits for these partners.

The current research is not without limitations. Independent coders were utilized to evaluate the communication of conflict, and were blind to research hypotheses, but not condition assignment. Furthermore, due to time constraints, the primary author of the paper also conducted coding of narratives while aware of research hypotheses, but blind to condition. It is possible that these methods may have influenced outcomes. For

example, independent coder's suspicious of the nature of the research question being examined could have influenced responses. Similarly, the primary author's knowledge of the research question could have primed suspicions of condition assignment during coding procedures. Utilizing procedures that ensure that all coders are double-blind – both to condition assignment and hypotheses – could be useful in reducing methodological bias.

It is also possible that perceptions of norms of social interactions could explain observed differences in support provision for close and distant actors. For example, it may be perceived as deviant or odd to provide support for a distant partner, while it might be normative, or even expected, to do the same for a closer partner, such as a friend or significant other. Perceptions of whether support is expected or desired could subsequently inform people's support provision behaviors. Future research might explore these perceptions, and whether people's expectancies of norms relating to support provision for close and distant partners predicts behavioral responses to partner's conflicts.

Past literature on positive illusions suggests that people's biases for close partners may encompass moral qualities, such as honesty and authenticity (Paulhus & John, 1998). Given that people tend to share and receive stories of conflicts with individuals who are close to them in everyday life (Eaton & Sanders, 2012; Volkema, Farquhar, & Bergmann, 1996), future research might explore whether people's positive illusions for partners predicts increased trust in partner's stories of conflict, and decreased objectivity or critical assessment of the story as a result of this trust. That is, people who hear about conflicts from a secondary source whom they care about may give these partners the

“benefit of the doubt” and assume that partners are telling them the truth with little to no exaggeration or fabrication. People with less inclination towards positive illusions, by contrast, might be more suspicious or discerning of such information in evaluating its veracity before acting.

Longitudinal research designs might be useful in exploring the above effect, as well as others. Such designs would allow for the assessment of long-term effects for people who are actually involved in conflicts themselves, but receive support from partners, and whether this support from partners fosters relationship quality both within the dyad, and outside of it. For example, people who benefit from close other’s biased perceptions and behavioral responses of their conflicts might experience higher frequency or intensity of conflicts across time, which may be less likely to be resolved. That is, people who are in relationships with others who tend to validate and “take the side” of the self, regardless of what role the self played in a conflict, may express greater confidence in their own morality and righteousness due to a lack of objectivity over time. The effects of behavioral bias could also be explored to determine whether people who engage in more consolation or validation of close partners, or derogation or retaliation against adversaries of close partners, also experience more frequent or intense conflicts over time. Additionally, such tendencies could also be consequential for relationship satisfaction across time, both within the dyad, and outside of it. People want to feel valued, understood, and cared for by partners (Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004), and such responsive behaviors may pose benefits by making partners feel more intimacy and satisfaction within their relationship. Indeed, recent research suggests that people perceive partners as more responsive to their needs when partners validate their

negativity toward adversaries (Lemay et al., 2018). People also tend to view individuals who validate them more positively than individuals who don't (Eaton, 2013). As such, the way people choose to respond to close partner's conflicts may prove influential not only in how partners respond to conflict in the future, but may be consequential within the relationship dyad between perceiver and partner as well. For example, while some people may be satisfied by a partner's constant approval, others could become suspicious of their partner's tendencies to engage in indiscriminate support provision, where validation is provided to partners regardless of what role the partner played within the conflict.

Conversely, people might also lose faith over time in the authenticity of a partner's response if a partner engages in consolation and validation indiscriminately, regardless of whether one had hurt or offended someone else, or had been hurt or offended by someone else. In other words, people may become suspicious, or feel less encouraged, if partners always exhibit favoritism, regardless of circumstance, because it is viewed as disingenuous. Importantly, perceptual and behavioral biases regarding a partner's conflict might also pose consequences to the relational health of the extended social network of dyad members. For instance, people may be critical of others who are thought to continuously attenuate fault for close partners, exaggerate fault for adversaries of close partners, and communicate information about conflicts in ways that misrepresent blame across parties in the conflict. In this regard, people may be critical of other's tendencies towards "making excuses" for close partners, or "taking the side" of close partners. However, a reverse effect is also possible whereby people who are also close

partners with another might view these tendencies more favorably, which is consistent with some research on blame and attribution in group dynamics (Lee et al., 2014).

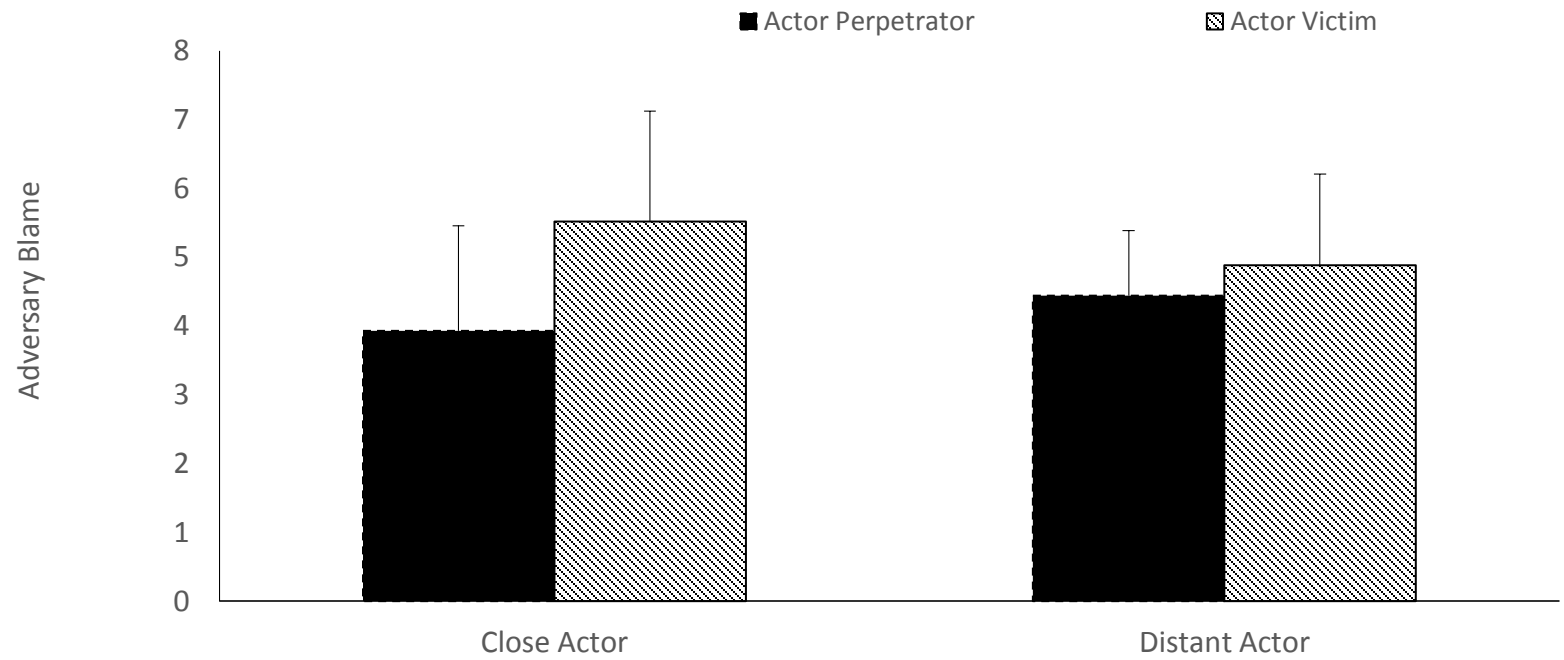
Future research might also explore conflicts that involve more than one close partner. In the current research, participants were instructed to prioritize describing conflicts in which a close partner quarreled with someone who is less familiar to the participant. However, if participants described conflicts that involved one close partner feuding with another, it is possible that different effects would be observed. For example, individuals may be less inclined towards providing some support behaviors, such as validation, for either side due to the risk of harming relationships with a close partner adversary, or because one's own allegiances might be divided between multiple close partners. Alternatively, conflicts that involve multiple close partners might be more likely to inspire certain kinds of support provision – such as the encouragement of objectivity and forgiveness, which may be viewed as a prosocial response, relative to more potentially socially destructive responses, such as the derogation of one party over another.

Cultural factors may also play a role in the present findings. Importantly, this research was conducted using a predominantly white, affluent, college-aged sample from an individualistic society (i.e., the United States). It is possible that different cultures may experience conflicts differently. For instance, some studies comparing individualistic with collectivistic cultures found some discrepancies in the positive illusions that people exhibit for romantic partners (Fowers, Fismanoglu, & Procacci, 2008). It is possible that cultural factors might also influence perceptions of partners during conflicts as well. Future research might explore such factors with a more diverse sample.

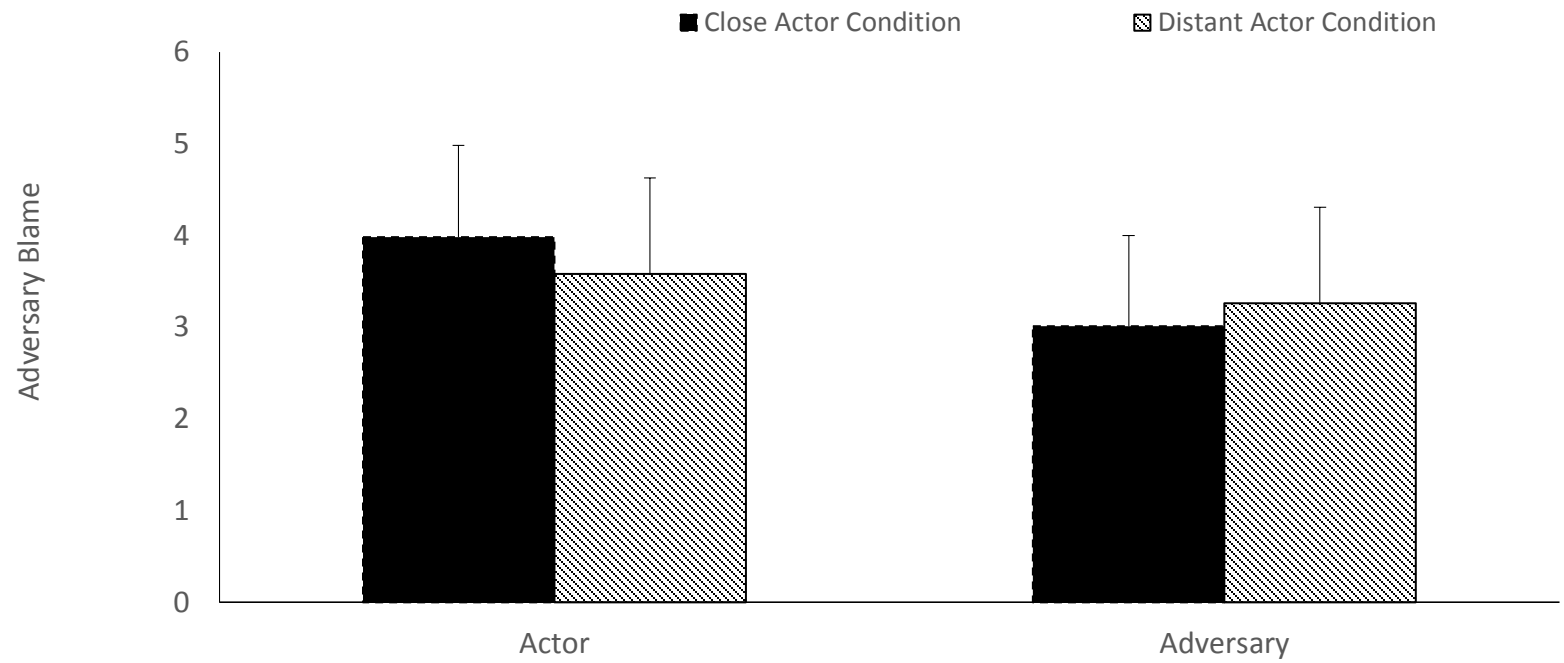
Altogether, the results of the current research support the notion that people exhibit perceptual and behavioral biases for close partners relative to more distant relations. People tended to magnify the blame for individuals who are perceived to have upset or hurt close, rather than distant, partners. People also tended to attribute less blame to partners that they care more deeply for, and these attributions of blame subsequently predicted people's enactment of a litany of behaviors, including the ways in which people chose to describe conflicts and provide support for partners. Specifically, people described partners more favorably and adversaries less favorably when people attributed less blame to partners, and engaged in more consolation and validation for partners who were attributed with less blame. Alternatively, partners who were attributed with more blame were more strongly encouraged to be objective and to forgive adversaries. Results also suggested that people tend to describe conflicts in ways that may manage partner's reputations by describing partner's intentions or motivations, or thoughts or feelings, when partners are close, as opposed to distant.



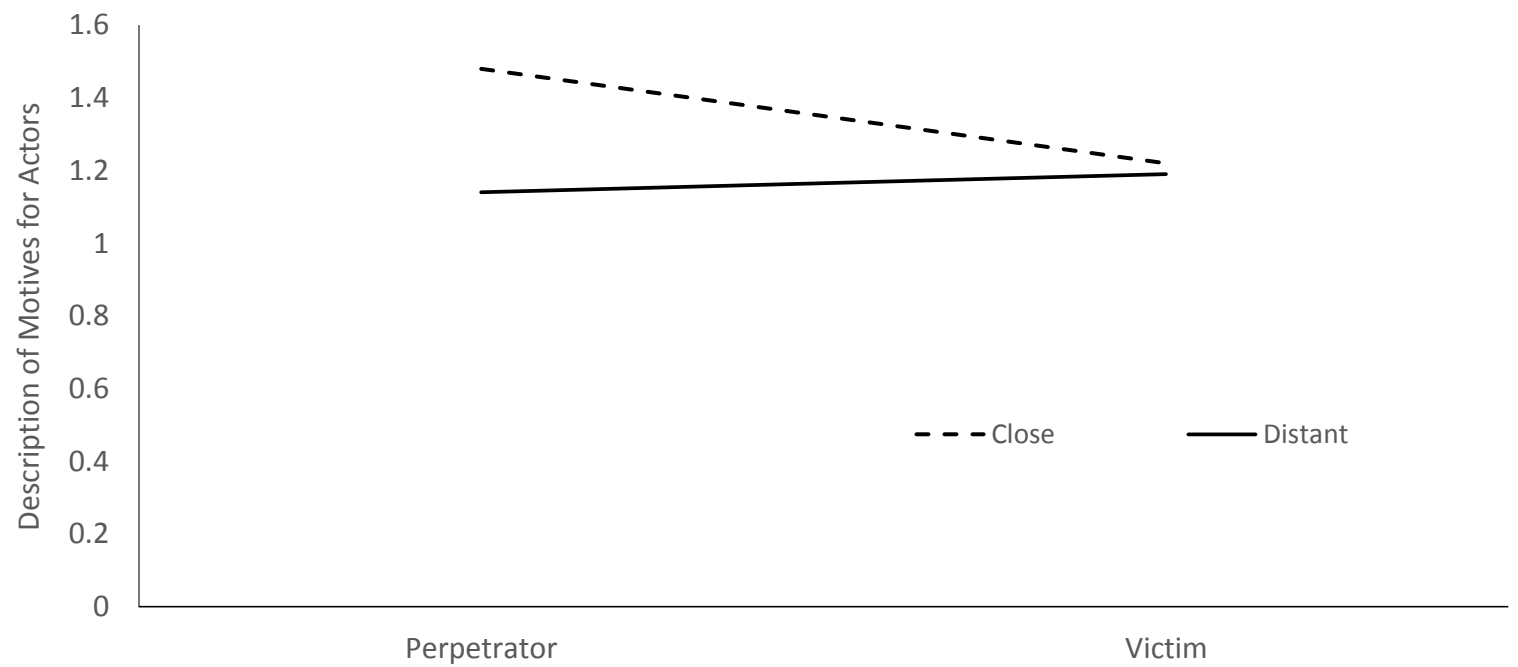
## Figures



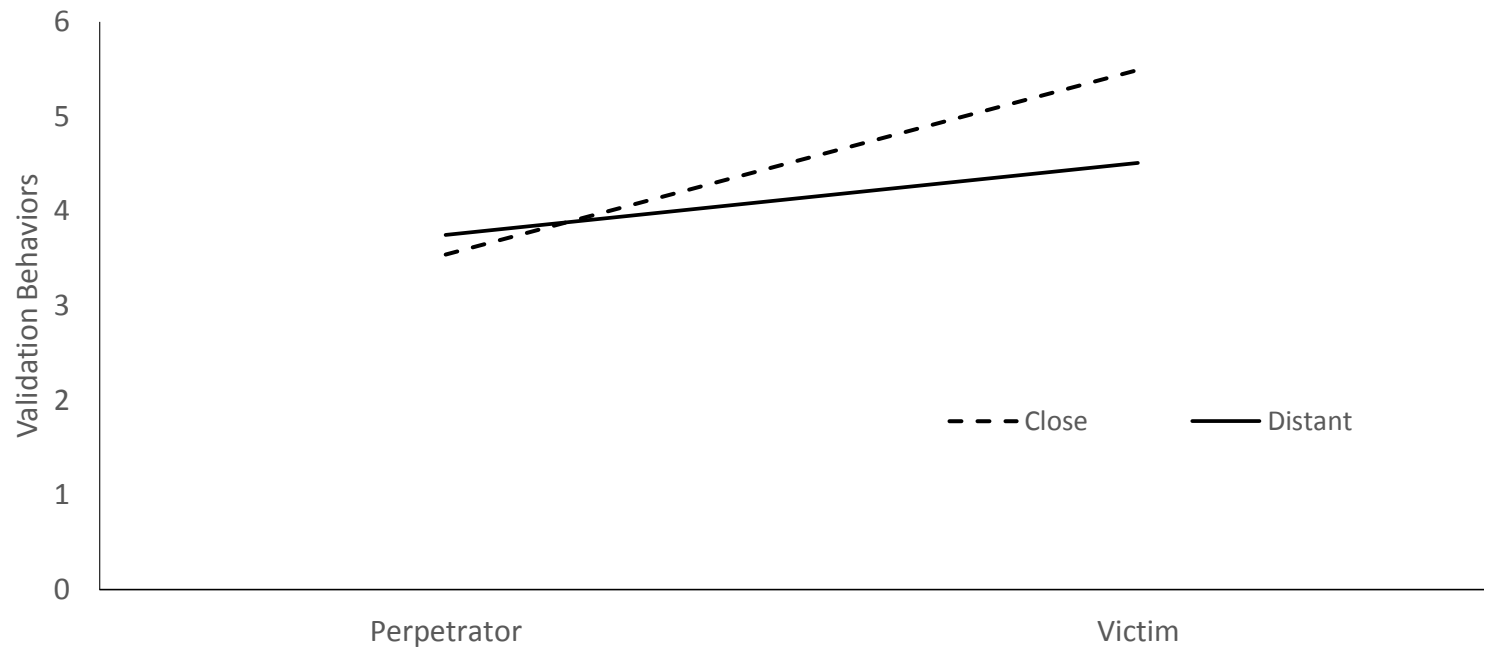
**Figure 1.** Attributions of Blame for Adversaries by Role and Actor Closeness in Study 2



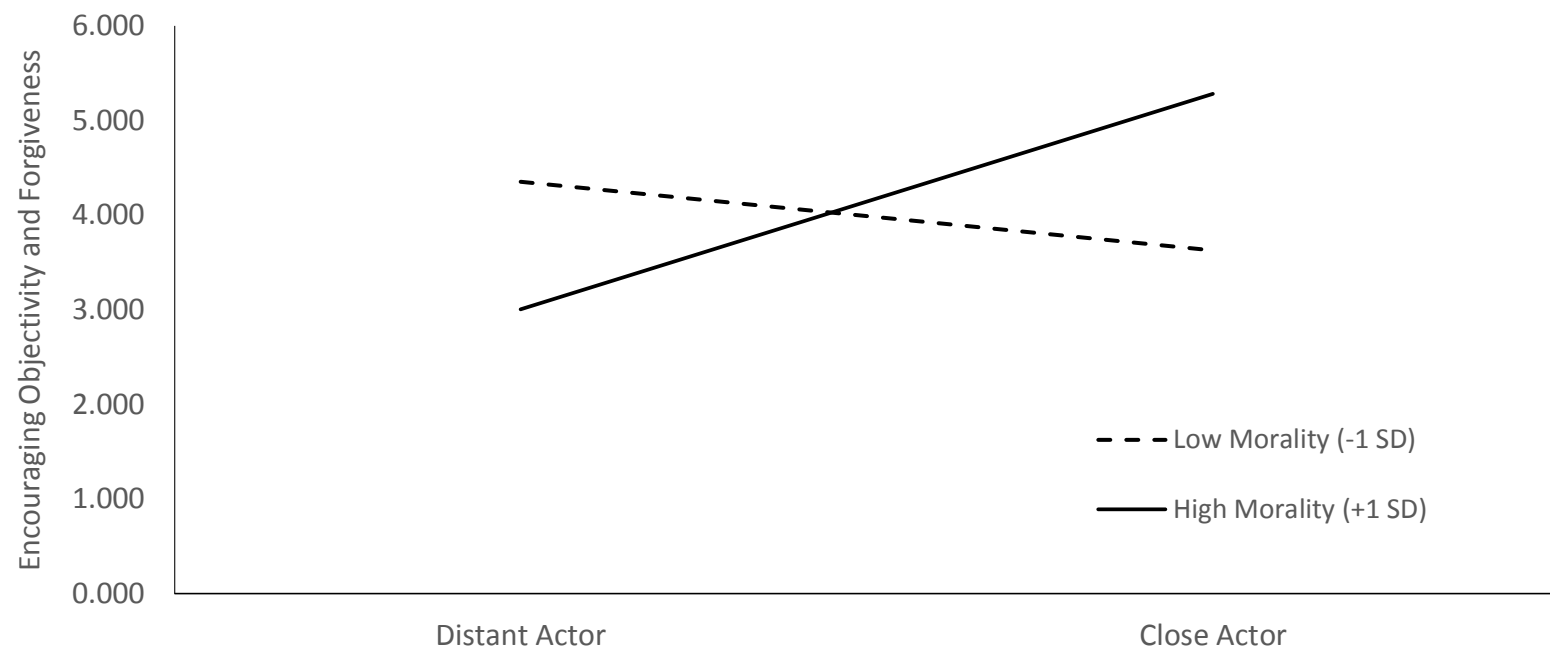
**Figure 2.** Favorability of Portrayals for Actors and Adversaries by Actor Closeness in Study 2



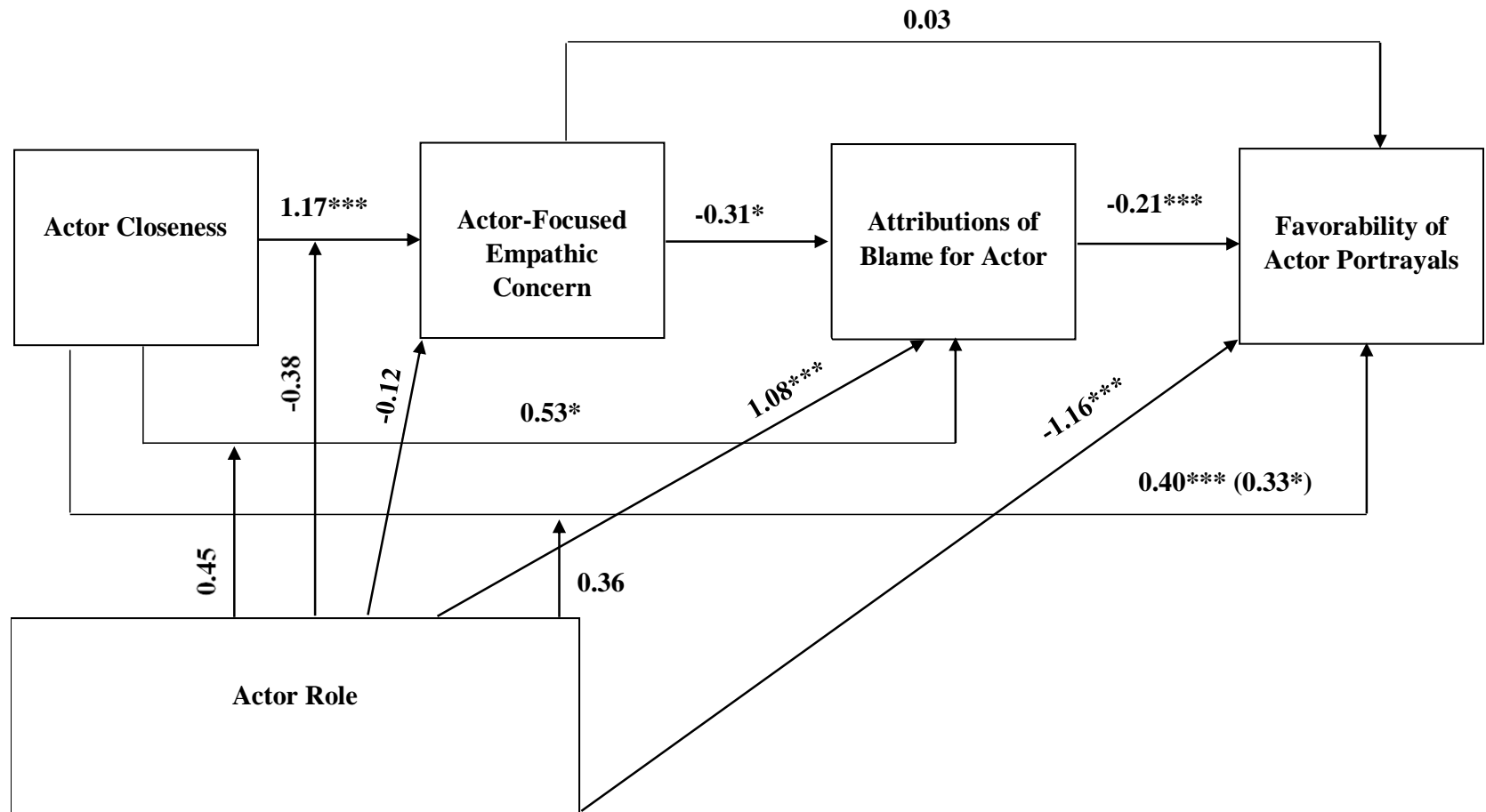
**Figure 3.** Description of Actor Motives and Intentions by Actor Closeness and Role in Study 2



**Figure 4.** Validation of Actor's Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviors by Actor Role and Closeness in Study 2



**Figure 5.** Encouragement of Objectivity and Forgiveness by Perceiver's Self-Reported Morality and Actor Closeness in Study 2



**Figure 6.** Unstandardized regression coefficients for the effect of actor closeness on favorability of actor portrayals, as mediated through actor-focused empathic concern and attributions of blame for actor, while controlling for actor role and the interaction of actor role and actor closeness. The unstandardized regression coefficient for the total effect of actor closeness on favorability of actor portrayals is in parentheses.

## Tables

Table 1

*Mean Differences of Outcomes across Experimental Condition in Study 1*

Outcomes		Condition					
		Close Partner as		Both Parties as		Close Partner as	
		Victim		Stranger		Perpetrator	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Perceived</b>	Perpetrator	5.70 <sub>1,2</sub>	0.85	5.26 <sub>1</sub>	0.90	5.18 <sub>2</sub>	1.01
<b>Blame</b>	Victim	4.03	1.13	3.97	1.24	4.22	1.17
<b>Communicated</b>	Perpetrator	4.77 <sub>3,4</sub>	0.82	4.31 <sub>3</sub>	0.73	4.10 <sub>4</sub>	0.80
<b>Blame</b>	Victim	2.25 <sub>5</sub>	0.71	2.51	0.83	2.70 <sub>5</sub>	0.85
<b>Communicated</b>	Perpetrator	3.41 <sub>6,7</sub>	0.85	3.77 <sub>6</sub>	0.69	3.85 <sub>7</sub>	0.79
<b>Positivity</b>	Victim	4.63 <sub>8,9</sub>	0.55	4.33 <sub>8</sub>	0.56	4.37 <sub>9</sub>	0.49

*Note.* <sub>1</sub>  $p = .018$ , <sub>2</sub>  $p = .004$ , <sub>3</sub>  $p = .003$ , <sub>4</sub>  $p < .001$ , <sub>5</sub>  $p = .004$ , <sub>6</sub>  $p = .005$ , <sub>7</sub>  $p = .015$ , <sub>8</sub>  $p = .005$ , <sub>9</sub>  $p$

$= .015$

Table 2

*Factor Loadings for Codings of Conflict Narratives in Study 2*

Item	Factor Loadings			
	Actor		Adversary	
	1	2	1	2
Did the author describe any motives or intention for the negative behaviors of the [actor/adversary]?	.038	.282	-.036	.157
Did the author describe any agreement with the behaviors of the [actor/adversary]?	<b>.661</b>	.410	<b>.690</b>	.150
Did the author describe the thoughts or feelings of the [actor/adversary]?	.505	.622	.499	.643
Did the author describe negative consequences of this event for the [actor/adversary]?	<b>.558</b>	.407	<b>.555</b>	.356
Did the author describe the [actor/adversary]'s behaviors clearly?	.032	.338	-.015	.524
Did the author describe the [actor/adversary] as positive?	<b>.935</b>	.155	<b>.947</b>	-.138
To what extent did the author describe the [actor/adversary]'s negative behaviors as intentional?	<b>-.903</b>	-.030	<b>-.957</b>	.083
To what extent did the author describe the [actor/adversary] as blameworthy?	<b>-.978</b>	-.176	<b>-.964</b>	.121

*Note.* Rotated factor loadings of |.55| or greater are reported in bold.



Table 3

*Effects of Actor Closeness, Actor Role, and Actor Closeness X Role on Outcomes in Study 2*

Outcomes		Effects								
		Actor Closeness			Actor Role			Actor Closeness X Actor Role		
		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	E.S.	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	E.S.	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	E.S.
<b>Perceived</b>	Actor	0.66	.416	.004	24.56	<.001	.126	1.52	.220	.009
<b>Blame</b>	Adversary	0.09	.762	.001	24.24	<.001	.124	7.71	.006	.043
<b>Communicate</b>	Actor	12.57	.001	.069	151.90	<.001	.472	1.03	.312	.006
<b>d Favor</b>	Adversary	7.51	.007	.042	137.71	<.001	.448	0.51	.476	.003
<b>Communicate</b>	Actor	8.42	.004	.047	2.66	.105	.015	5.84	.017	.033
<b>d Motives</b>	Adversary	2.32	.130	.014	0.31	.576	.002	0.83	.364	.005
<b>Communicate</b>	Actor	23.67	<.001	.122	54.79	<.001	.244	12.81	<.001	.070
<b>d Affect</b>	Adversary		.511	.003	55.22	<.001	.246	0.31	.581	.002
	Actor	1.06	.305	.006	0.73	.394	.004	0.14	.706	.001

<b>Clarity of Description</b>	Adversary	1.54	.216	.009	0.43	.513	.003	3.67	.057	.021
<b>Assistance</b>	Actor	13.66	<.001	.074	2.43	.121	.014	0.77	.381	.004
	Adversary	0.30	.586	.002	31.66	<.001	.156	0.02	.888	<.001
<b>Derogation</b>	Actor	1.08	.301	.006	46.12	<.001	.212	0.33	.564	.002
	Adversary	8.73	.004	.049	24.10	<.001	.124	3.04	.083	.017
<b>Consolation of Actor</b>		9.46	.002	.053	1.77	.185	.010	0.36	.549	.002
<b>Validation of Actor</b>		2.74	.100	.016	33.64	<.001	.164	15.35	.012	.037
<b>Encouragement of Actor</b>		11.23	.001	.062	2.63	.107	.015	.002	.961	<.001

*Note.* Degrees of freedom were equivalent across all effects, where  $df_{\text{between groups}} = 1$ , and  $df_{\text{within groups}} = 171$ .  
E.S. = effect size using partial  $\eta^2$

Table 4

*Models with Predictors of Assumed Similarity on Outcomes in Study 2*

Predictors	Outcomes											
	Adversary Blame			Validation of Actors			Assistance of Actors			Encouragement of Actor		
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	E.S.	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	E.S.	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	E.S.	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	E.S.
Actor Closeness	-0.13	.949	<.01	2.65	.219	.01	2.82	.021	.03	-3.99	.034	.02
Actor Role	-0.27	.888	<.01	-1.13	.596	<.01	1.06	<.001	<.01	0.38	.213	.01
Actor Closeness X Role	-0.99	.021	.03	-1.06	.025	.02	-3.47	<.001	.03	0.04	.915	<.01
P's Morality	0.91	.033	.03	1.01	.032	.02	0.24	<.001	.02	-0.35	.122	.01
IOS	1.54	.020	.03	1.97	.008	.03	---	---	---	---	---	---
P's Morality X IOS	-0.26	.019	.03	-0.29	.018	.03	---	---	---	---	---	---
P's Morality X Actor Closeness	0.12	.711	<.01	-0.36	.313	<.01	-0.43	.033	.02	0.78	.012	.03

P's Morality X Actor Role	-0.05	.879	<.01	0.05	.893	<.01	-0.22	.249	.01	---	---	---
P's Morality X Actor Closeness X Role	---	---	---	---	---	---	0.61	.022	.03	---	---	---

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*Note.* P = Perceiver, E.S. = effect size using semi-partial correlation coefficient ( $sr^2$ )

Table 5

*Models for Presumed Mediation Analyses on Outcomes in Study 2*

Predictors	Outcomes									
	Actor		Actor		Actor		Actor		Adversary	
	Consolation		Validation		Encouragement		Derogation		Derogation	
	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>p</i>
Actor Closeness	0.52	.038	0.34	.144	0.42	.064	-0.08	.249	0.22	.002
Actor Role	-0.08	.729	-0.76	<.001	-0.02	.934	0.33	<.001	-0.21	.002
Actor Closeness X Role	-0.12	.780	-0.86	.036	-0.13	.731	-0.11	.345	-0.18	.159
Empathic Concern	0.14	.167	0.12	.229	0.18	.061	<0.01	.956	-0.01	.723
Actor Blame	-0.17	.026	-0.52	<.001	-0.34	<.001	0.08	<.001	-0.10	<.001

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Relationship type was evaluated as a potential moderator of effects in Studies 1 and 2. The type of relationship that existed between individual and actor (e.g., close friend, romantic partner, acquaintance, stranger) did not moderate the effects of actor closeness or role for any outcome, and is not discussed further.

<sup>2</sup> Consistent with predictions regarding care, partner-focused perspective taking and communal strength were also evaluated as potential mediators of the effect of actor closeness on blame for actors (see Appendices E and F, respectively).

<sup>3</sup> Self-presentation tactics were also evaluated as potential mechanism of effects of reputation concern (see Appendix G).

<sup>4</sup> There were two unexpected main effects of moderator variables on attributions of victim blame in Study 1. Specifically, when dummy codes for condition, moderator variables, and interaction terms were entered into regression models, actor-focused empathy [( $B = -0.32$ ,  $p = .031$ );  $R^2 = .179$ ,  $F(5, 193) = 1.28$ ,  $p = .273$ ], and perfectionism [( $B = -0.32$ ,  $p = .002$ );  $R^2 = .234$ ,  $F(3, 195) = 3.78$ ,  $p = .011$ ] were significant predictors of blame for victims. People with more empathy for actors, or who were more perfectionistic, attributed less blame to victims regardless of condition assignment (i.e., regardless of whether victims or perpetrators were imagined to be close partners, strangers, or neither).

<sup>5</sup> In Study 2, only interactions between moderators and actor closeness are discussed. Interactions between moderator variables and actor role are not discussed within the text, or any footnotes below.

<sup>6</sup> IOS was also tested independently as a moderator of effects without perceiver's moral qualities in models in Study 2. Full models with all possible 3-way and nested 2-way interactions were tested first. If such models were not significant, more parsimonious models were subsequently examined. There was a significant 3-way interaction of IOS X actor role X actor closeness ( $B = 0.84$ ,  $p = .019$ ) when predicting attributions of blame for actors. I further probed the conditional effect of IOS X actor closeness across victims and perpetrators. IOS X closeness was a significant predictor of actor blame when actors were perpetrators ( $B = 0.56$ ,  $t = 2.02$ ,  $p = .045$ ), but not when actors were victims ( $B = -0.28$ ,  $t = -1.27$ ,  $p = .207$ ). I further examined the IOS X actor closeness interaction when actors were perpetrators by examining the conditional effect of IOS across levels of actor closeness when actors were perpetrators. IOS was a significant predictor of actor blame for actors who had hurt or upset someone else when actors were psychologically distant ( $B = -0.49$ ,  $t = -2.03$ ,  $p = .044$ ), but not when actors were psychologically close ( $B = -0.11$ ,  $t = -1.36$ ,  $p = .177$ ). I also probed the conditional effect of actor closeness across low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of IOS for actor perpetrators. Actor closeness was a significant predictor of blame for actors who had hurt or upset someone else when IOS was high ( $B = 1.98$ ,  $t = 2.50$ ,  $p = .013$ ), but not when IOS was low ( $B = 0.02$ ,  $t = 0.05$ ,  $p =$

.963). Amongst people with high IOS for actors, people attributed more blame to close relative to distant actors who had hurt or upset someone else. I also probed the IOS X actor closeness interaction for victims. I examined the effect of IOS for actors who had been hurt or upset by someone else while pooling effects across levels of actor closeness. IOS was not a significant predictor of actor blame for actor victims ( $B = -0.10$ ,  $t = -0.94$ ,  $p = .351$ ). I also examined the effect of actor closeness among low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of IOS for actors who had been hurt or upset by someone else. Actor closeness was not a significant predictor of actor blame for actor victims when IOS was low ( $B = 0.64$ ,  $t = 1.25$ ,  $p = .213$ ) or high ( $B = -0.34$ ,  $t = -0.58$ ,  $p = .562$ ). There was also a significant main effect of IOS ( $B = 0.20$ ,  $p = .016$ ) when predicting actor validation, [ $R^2 = .425$ ,  $F(7, 167) = 5.25$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. People validated actors more when they had more “oneness” with these actors.

<sup>7</sup> In assessing people’s perceptions of blame for adversaries, I probed the perceiver’s moral qualities (i.e., “morality”) X IOS interaction by exploring the conditional effects of morality across low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of perceiver’s “oneness” with actors while controlling for the effects of actor role, actor closeness, and actor closeness X actor role. Morality was a significant predictor of adversary blame when “oneness” was low ( $B = 0.58$ ,  $t = 2.24$ ,  $p = .027$ ), but not when “oneness” was high ( $B = -0.30$ ,  $t = -1.33$ ,  $p = .184$ ). Among people with low “oneness” for actors, participants blamed adversaries more when they self-reported more, rather than less, morality. I used the same method to probe the morality X IOS interaction for validation of actors as well. Morality was a significant predictor of actor validation when IOS was high ( $B = -0.57$ ,  $t = -2.30$ ,  $p = .023$ ), but not when IOS was low ( $B = 0.48$ ,  $t = 1.69$ ,  $p = .092$ ). Among people with high “oneness” with actors, people who self-reported as more moral engaged in less validation of actors.

I also probed the morality X actor closeness interaction on people’s encouragement of actors by examining the conditional effects of morality on each level of actor closeness while pooling the effect across levels of actor role. As **Figure 5** illustrates, people who reported themselves to be more moral encouraged objectivity and forgiveness more for close ( $B = 0.43$ ,  $t = 2.04$ ,  $p = .043$ ) relative to distant ( $B = -0.35$ ,  $t = -1.56$ ,  $p = .122$ ) actors. The 3-way interaction of morality X actor closeness X role on actor assistance was examined by testing the morality X actor closeness interaction at each level of actor role. The interaction was significant for victims ( $B = -0.43$ ,  $t = -2.15$ ,  $p = .033$ ), but not perpetrators ( $B = 0.18$ ,  $t = 1.04$ ,  $p = .298$ ). I further probed the effect of closeness at both low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of morality in assistance for victims. Closeness was a significant predictor of victim assistance when self-reported morality was low ( $B = 0.54$ ,  $t = 2.86$ ,  $p = .005$ ), but not high ( $B = -0.04$ ,  $t = -0.25$ ,  $p = .806$ ). Among people with low self-reported morality, people assisted close victims more than distant victims.

<sup>8</sup> Desire for a moral partner (i.e., “desire”) had a main effect in Study 2 that was not relevant to the primary research hypotheses of this research. Specifically, there was a significant main effect of desire ( $B = -0.23$ ,  $p = .019$ ) when predicting favorable portrayals of adversaries when actor closeness, actor role, and actor closeness X actor role were also in the model, [ $R^2 = .689$ ,  $F(4, 168) = 38.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. People with

stronger desire for moral partners presented actors less favorably in their accounts of conflict.

There was also a significant effect of desire on clarity of the description of actor's behaviors during conflict that did not provide compelling evidence of wishful thinking as a mechanism for bias. Analyses revealed a significant effect of desire for a moral relationship partner (i.e., "desire") when evaluating clarity of description of actor's behaviors during the conflict. Clarity of description was regressed on actor closeness, actor role, actor closeness X role, desire, desire X actor role, desire X actor closeness, and desire X actor closeness X actor role, [ $R^2 = .310$ ,  $F(7, 165) = 2.51$ ,  $p = .018$ ]. Actor closeness ( $B = 2.25$ ,  $p = .033$ ), actor closeness X role ( $B = -2.66$ ,  $p = .045$ ), desire X actor closeness ( $B = -0.33$ ,  $p = .038$ ), and desire X actor closeness X role ( $B = 0.41$ ,  $p = .047$ ) were significant predictors. I further probed the desire X actor closeness interaction for perpetrators and for victims, which was significant for victims ( $B = -0.33$ ,  $t = -2.09$ ,  $p = .038$ ), but not perpetrators ( $B = 0.07$ ,  $t = 0.57$ ,  $p = .568$ ). I further examined the conditional effect of desire for both close and distant victims. Desire was a significant predictor of clarity of description for distant victims ( $B = 0.18$ ,  $t = 1.98$ ,  $p = .050$ ) but not close victims ( $B = -0.15$ ,  $t = -1.16$ ,  $p = .247$ ). People described the behaviors of distant actors who had been hurt or upset by someone else in clearer detail when those people had stronger desires for moral relationship partners relative to when people had weaker desires for moral relationship partners.

<sup>9</sup> Self-presentation tactics was also a significant predictor in a number of effects on perceptions and behaviors in Study 2. Full models with all possible 3-way and nested 2-way interactions were tested first. If such models were not significant, more parsimonious models were subsequently examined. Self-presentation tactics interacted with both actor role and closeness ( $B = -0.66$ ,  $p = .035$ ) to predict people's portrayals of adversaries as favorable when actor closeness, actor role, self-presentation tactics, and all possible 2-way and 3-way interaction terms were used as predictors, [ $R^2 = .690$ ,  $F(7, 166) = 21.60$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. I further probed the 3-way interaction by examining the self-presentation tactics X actor closeness effect across levels of actor role. The self-presentation tactics X actor closeness effect was significant for perpetrators ( $B = -0.45$ ,  $t = -2.07$ ,  $p = .040$ ), but not for victims ( $B = 0.21$ ,  $t = 0.95$ ,  $p = .346$ ). I further probed the interaction for perpetrators by examining the effect of self-presentation tactics across levels of actor closeness. Self-presentation tactics was a significant predictor of portrayals of favorability of adversaries when actors who had hurt or upset someone else were psychologically distant ( $B = 0.35$ ,  $t = 2.09$ ,  $p = .038$ ), but not when actors were psychologically close ( $B = -0.10$ ,  $t = -0.72$ ,  $p = .475$ ). Individuals with more reputation concern and greater tendencies to behave in ways as to manage their own reputation presented people who had been hurt or upset by distant actors more favorably relative to people with less reputation concern. I also probed the effect of actor closeness at both low (-1 SD) and high (+1 SD) levels of self-presentation tactics for perpetrator actors. When actors were perpetrators, actor closeness was a significant predictor of adversary favorability when tactics were high ( $B = -0.71$ ,  $t = -3.15$ ,  $p = .002$ ), but not when tactics were low ( $B = -0.02$ ,  $t = -0.10$ ,  $p = .925$ ). People with strong reputation concern and tendencies towards managing their own reputation tended to portray the victims of a close actor's transgressions less favorably than the victims of a distant actor's transgressions. Self-presentation tactics also had a significant



main effect ( $B = 0.33, p = .033$ ) on validation of actors when actor closeness, role, actor closeness X role, and self-presentation tactics were predictors, [ $R^2 = .480, F(4, 170) = 12.71, p < .001$ ]. People with greater reputation concern and tendencies to manage their own reputation validated actors more.

<sup>10</sup> Models with actor closeness, actor role, perfectionism, and all possible 2-way and 3-way interactions revealed a significant perfectionism X actor closeness interaction ( $B = -0.22, p = .009$ ) as a predictor of clarity in descriptions of partner's behaviors, and a significant perfectionism X actor role ( $B = -0.21, p = .025$ ) and perfectionism X actor closeness ( $B = -0.20, p = .033$ ) interactions as predictors of clarity in adversary's behaviors, but these overall models were not significant [ $R^2 = .242, F(7, 166) = 1.48, p = .178$  and  $R^2 = .268, F(7, 165) = 1.82, p = .086$ , for clarity of partner and adversary's behaviors, respectively].

<sup>11</sup> Communal strength followed the same pattern of results as empathic concern when substituted into the model depicted in Figure X. Using PROCESS software for SPSS from Hayes (2017), I first regressed communal strength onto actor closeness, actor role, and actor closeness X actor role as predictors, [ $R^2 = .575, F(3, 170) = 27.96, p < .001$ ]. Actor closeness was a significant predictor ( $B = 2.17, p < .001$ ) of communal strength. People reported more communal strength for close actors than distant actors. Next, I regressed attributions of blame for actor onto communal strength, actor closeness, actor role, and actor closeness X actor role as predictors, [ $R^2 = .452, F(4, 169) = 10.84, p < .001$ ]. Communal strength ( $B = -0.25, p < .001$ ), actor closeness ( $B = 0.72, p = .008$ ), and actor role ( $B = 1.06, p < .001$ ) were significant predictors. People attributed less blame to actors for whom they had more communal strength, and more blame to close actors than distant actors and actors serving as perpetrators relative to actors serving as victims. Next, I regressed favorability of portrayals of actors onto communal strength, actor attributions of blame, actor closeness, actor role, and actor closeness X actor role as predictors, [ $R^2 = .767, F(5, 168) = 47.89, p < .001$ ]. Attributions of blame for actors ( $B = -0.20, p < .001$ ), actor closeness ( $B = 0.32, p = .012$ ), and actor role ( $B = -1.17, p < .001$ ) were significant predictors. People were less favorable in their descriptions of actors for whom they had more blame relative to less blame, and actors that served as perpetrators within the conflict relative to victims. People described close actors more favorably than distant actors. This indirect pathway was significant [ $B = 0.11, SE = 0.04, 95\% CI = 0.05, 0.21$ ], as was the direct effect [ $B = 0.32, SE = 0.13, p = .012$ ]. I also regressed favorability of portrayals of adversaries onto the same predictors described above, [ $R^2 = .708, F(5, 168) = 33.69, p < .001$ ]. Attributions of blame for actor ( $B = 0.13, p = .001$ ) and actor role ( $B = 1.21, p < .001$ ) were significant predictors of favorability of descriptions of adversaries. People described adversaries more favorably when they attributed more, relative to less, blame to actors, or when actors were perpetrators relative to victims. The indirect effect was significant [ $B = -0.07, SE = 0.03, 95\% CI = -0.16, -0.02$ ], though the direct effect was not [ $B = -0.24, SE = 0.14, p = .082$ ].

<sup>12</sup> Partner-focused perspective taking was substituted in mediation models in place of empathy to determine if perspective taking and attributions of blame for actors mediated the relationship between actor closeness and outcome variables of interest. First, partner-

focused perspective taking was regressed onto actor closeness, actor role, and actor closeness X role as predictors, [ $R^2 = .225$ ,  $F(3, 170) = 3.03$ ,  $p = .031$ ]. Actor closeness was a significant predictor ( $B = 0.48$ ,  $p = .004$ ). People adopted the perspective of actors they felt closer to more so than actors they felt distant from. Next, I regressed attributions of blame for actors onto perspective taking, actor closeness, actor role, and actor closeness X actor role as predictors, [ $R^2 = .395$ ,  $F(4, 169) = 7.82$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. Actor role was a significant predictor ( $B = 1.12$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but perspective taking was not a significant predictor ( $B = -0.17$ ,  $p = .114$ ). Thus, a mediation model using partner-focused perspective taking was not supported.

<sup>13</sup> Actor blame was regressed onto description of actor's motives ( $B = 0.67$ ,  $p = .013$ ) and descriptions of actor's thoughts and feelings ( $B = -0.71$ ,  $p = .005$ ). People communicated actor's motivations and intentions more when they found actors to be more blameworthy, and communicated thoughts and feelings of actors more when they found actors to be less blameworthy. Similarly, actor role was a significant predictor of description for actor's thoughts and feelings ( $B = -0.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ). People described actor's thoughts and feelings more when actors were victims as opposed to perpetrators. Actor role was a marginally significant predictor of description of actor's motives ( $B = 0.13$ ,  $p = .058$ ), suggesting people were more likely to describe actor's motivations when actors were perpetrators as opposed to victims. These results are consistent with past work by Baumeister and Catanese (2003), among others, and offer some additional evidence that the descriptions of actor's thoughts and feelings and motivations were strategically utilized in order to manipulate the blame assigned to partners from other individuals who are audience members of the conflict communication (i.e., individuals who read the conflict description that involves a partner).

## Appendices

### Appendix A.

**Conflict Vignette (for Study 1)** (adapted from Basow, Phelan, Longshore, & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2007)

#### Identifying a Close Partner

Please take a moment to identify a **close partner** in your life. This should be someone who is personally important to you, such as a close friend, or a romantic partner. Please think of a specific person in your life that you value and care about. Then, when you have decided on someone, please enter their first name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What is this close partner's first name? Please type it: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is the relationship between you and this person?
  - a. Close friend
  - b. Romantic partner
  - c. Acquaintance (i.e., someone you know "a little")
  - d. Distant relation (i.e., a friend of a friend, etc.)
3. How frequently do you interact (i.e., see in person, speak over the phone, etc.) with this person?
  - a. Daily
  - b. Once or twice a week
  - c. Once or twice a month
  - d. Once or twice a year
  - e. Less frequently than above

#### Instructions for "Stranger" Condition:

Next, you will read a brief story about two people engaged in a conflict. Please read the story carefully, as you will not be able to return to it later.

#### Vignette for the "Stranger" Condition

Alex and Sam are in a literature course together. On the day that a term paper is due, Alex is called into work, and cannot make it to campus to drop off his/her paper. The professor will only accept paper copies of the assignment, and is very strict about deadlines. Alex asks Sam if he/she would be willing to deliver it to the professor's office for him/her. Sam has already turned in his/her own paper, but agrees to help a friend. Alex emails the paper to Sam a few hours before the deadline so that he/she can print it out and deliver it.

Sam prints out Alex's paper, and is taking it to the professor's office shortly before the submission deadline. However, on the way, Sam runs into an old friend that he/she has not seen in a long time. Sam is caught up talking with his/her friend, and misses the paper submission deadline. By the time Sam arrives at the professor's office to deliver the paper, it is well past the deadline, and the professor will not accept the paper.

Alex receives a "D" in the course, despite having done "A" level work prior to the paper. As a result of the poor grade, Alex loses an academic scholarship. Although Sam apologizes to Alex for delivering the paper late, Alex has a very difficult time forgiving Sam.

**Instructions for the “Close Partner as Perpetrator” Condition:**

Next, you will read a brief story about two people engaged in a conflict. **As you read the story, please imagine that your close partner is in the story.** That is, please imagine that your close partner fills the role of “PARTNER” throughout the course of the story, and the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of PARTNER are actually those of your close partner’s. Please read the story carefully, as you will not be able to return to it later.

**Vignette for the “Close Partner as Perpetrator” Condition****Close Partner as Perpetrator Condition:**

Alex and PARTNER are in a literature course together. On the day that a term paper is due, Alex is called into work, and cannot make it to campus to drop off his/her paper. The professor will only accept paper copies of the assignment, and is very strict about deadlines. Alex asks PARTNER if he/she would be willing to deliver it to the professor’s office for him/her. PARTNER has already turned in his/her own paper, but agrees to help a friend. Alex emails the paper to PARTNER a few hours before the deadline so that he/she can print it out and deliver it.

PARTNER prints out Alex’s paper, and is taking it to the professor’s office shortly before the submission deadline. However, on the way, PARTNER runs into an old friend that he/she has not seen in a long time. PARTNER is caught up talking with his/her friend, and misses the paper submission deadline. By the time PARTNER arrives at the professor’s office to deliver the paper, it is well past the deadline, and the professor will not accept the paper.

Alex receives a “D” in the course, despite having done “A” level work prior to the paper. As a result of the poor grade, Alex loses an academic scholarship. Although PARTNER apologizes to Alex for delivering the paper late, Alex has a very difficult time forgiving Sam.

**Instructions for the “Close Partner as Victim” Condition:**

Next, you will read a brief story about two people engaged in a conflict. **As you read the story, please imagine that your close partner is “PARTNER” in the story.** That is, please imagine that your close partner fills the role of “PARTNER” throughout the course of the story, and the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of PARTNER are actually those of your close partner’s. Please read the story carefully, as you will not be able to return to it later.

**Vignette for the “Close Partner as Victim” Condition**

PARTNER and Sam are in a literature course together. On the day that a term paper is due, PARTNER is called into work, and cannot make it to campus to drop off his/her paper. The professor will only accept paper copies of the assignment, and is very strict about deadlines. PARTNER asks Sam if he/she would be willing to deliver it to the professor’s office for him/her. Sam has already turned in his/her own paper, but agrees to help a friend. PARTNER emails the paper to Sam a few hours before the deadline so that he/she can print it out and deliver it.

Sam prints out PARTNER’s paper, and is taking it to the professor’s office shortly before the submission deadline. However, on the way, Sam runs into an old friend that he/she has not seen in a long time. Sam is caught up talking with his/her friend, and

misses the paper submission deadline. By the time Sam arrives at the professor's office to deliver the paper, it is well past the deadline, and the professor will not accept the paper.

PARTNER receives a "D" in the course, despite having done "A" level work prior to the paper. As a result of the poor grade, PARTNER loses an academic scholarship. Although Sam apologizes to PARTNER for delivering the paper late, PARTNER has a very difficult time forgiving Sam.

### **Questions to Verify Vignette Comprehension**

#### **For the "Stranger" Condition:**

1. In the story, Alex and Sam must:
  - a. Turn in a term paper
  - b. Take a test
2. In the story, who could not make it to campus to turn in their paper?
  - a. Sam
  - b. Alex
3. In the story, why did Sam not turn in Alex's paper?
  - a. He/she lost track of time while talking to a friend
  - b. Because he/she dislikes Alex
4. In the story, what were the consequences of Sam turning in Alex's paper late?
  - a. Nothing happened
  - b. Alex received a poor grade in the course, and lost an academic scholarship

#### **For the "Partner as Perpetrator" Condition:**

1. In the story, PARTNER and Alex must:
  - a. Turn in a term paper
  - b. Take a test
2. In the story, who could not make it to campus to turn in their paper?
  - a. PARTNER
  - b. Alex
3. In the story, why did PARTNER not turn in Alex's paper?
  - a. He/she lost track of time while talking to a friend
  - b. Because he/she dislikes Alex
4. In the story, what were the consequences of PARTNER turning in Alex's paper late?
  - a. Nothing happened
  - b. Alex received a poor grade in the course, and lost an academic scholarship

#### **For the "Close Partner as Victim" Condition:**

1. In the story, PARTNER and Sam must:
  - c. Turn in a term paper
  - d. Take a test

2. In the story, who could not make it to campus to turn in their paper?
  - a. Sam
  - b. PARTNER
3. In the story, why did Sam not turn in Alex's paper?
  - a. He/she lost track of time while talking to a friend
  - b. Because he/she dislikes Alex
4. In the story, what were the consequences of Sam turning in Alex's paper late?
  - a. Nothing happened
  - b. Alex received a poor grade in the course, and lost an academic scholarship

**Instructions for Recounting Conflict (for all conditions)**

Now, from memory, please describe the conflict that you had previously read about. Please be thorough in your descriptions, but keep your description of the conflict relatively brief (i.e., 500 words or less). The account that you write up may be shared with another person later on for use in another study.

**Appendix B.****Evaluation of Self's Communal and Moral Qualities**

Please indicate the extent to which each trait is descriptive of **you**, using the scale below.

1 = *strongly disagree*

2 = *disagree*

3 = *somewhat disagree*

4 = *neutral*

5 = *somewhat agree*

6 = *agree*

7 = *strongly agree*

1. Understanding
2. Accepting
3. Kind
4. Patient
5. Loving
6. Affectionate
7. Warm
8. Responsive / Supportive
9. Open / Disclosing
10. Loyal
11. Honest
12. Considerate
13. Sincere
14. Righteous
15. Trustworthy
16. Respectful
17. Friendly
18. Helpful

**Appendix C.****Desired Close Partner Traits**

Please indicate the extent to which you desire to have friends and romantic partners who are described by the traits below, using the scale provided.

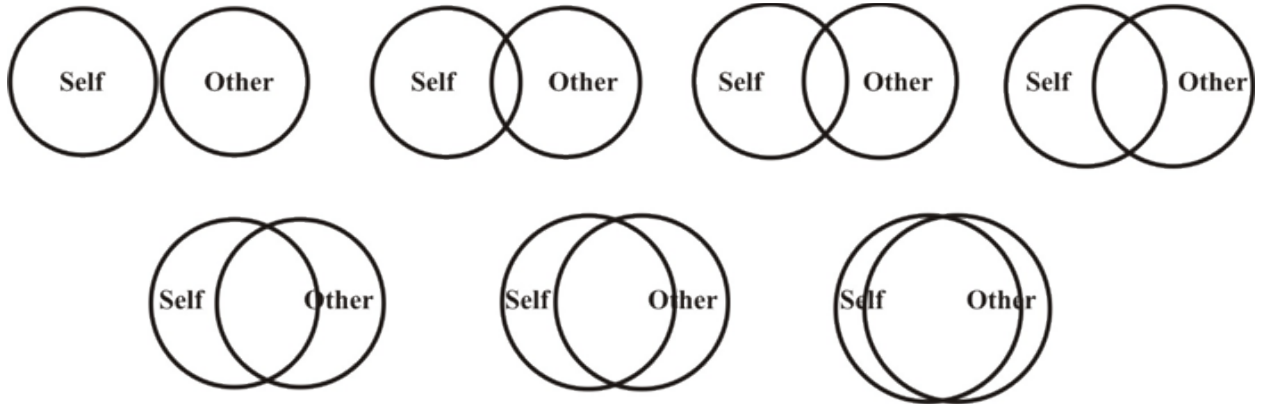
- 1 = *strongly disagree*
- 2 = *disagree*
- 3 = *somewhat disagree*
- 4 = *neutral*
- 5 = *somewhat agree*
- 6 = *agree*
- 7 = *strongly agree*

- 1. Understanding
- 2. Accepting
- 3. Kind
- 4. Patient
- 5. Loving
- 6. Affectionate
- 7. Warm
- 8. Responsive / Supportive
- 9. Open / Disclosing
- 10. Loyal
- 11. Honest
- 12. Considerate
- 13. Sincere
- 14. Righteous
- 15. Trustworthy
- 16. Respectful
- 17. Friendly
- 18. Helpful



**Appendix D.****Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale**

Instructions: Please circle the picture that best describes your current relationship with PARTNER.



**Appendix E.****Partner-Specific Perspective Taking and Empathy (Arriaga & Rusbult, 1998)**

To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements regarding yourself? Please use the following scale to record an answer for each statement listed below.

**Response Scale:**

- 1 = *strongly disagree*
- 2 = *disagree*
- 3 = *somewhat disagree*
- 4 = *neutral*
- 5 = *somewhat agree*
- 6 = *agree*
- 7 = *strongly agree*

**Empathy Scale:**

1. I don't feel all that upset when PARTNER fails at something he/she cares about.
2. I don't become all that upset about negative events in PARTNER's life.
3. When PARTNER has problems in his/her life, I feel really terrible.
4. I feel terribly sorry when things aren't going well for PARTNER.

**Perspective Taking Scale:**

1. When PARTNER and I are having a fight and I'm sure I'm right, I don't waste a lot of time discussing my partner's ideas about the situation.
2. I try to look at PARTNER's side of a disagreement before I make a decision.
3. When I'm upset or irritated by PARTNER, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in PARTNER's shoes.
4. When PARTNER has hurt me, before I get angry I try to imagine how I would be feeling and thinking if I were in his/her place.

**Appendix F.****Communal Strength Scale** (Mills, Clark, Ford, & Johnson, 2004)

Instructions: Keeping in mind your specifically chosen close partner, answer the following questions. As you answer each question, fill in the person's initials in the blank. Circle one answer for each question. Your answers will remain confidential.

Response scale:

0 = *not at all*

1

2

3

4

5 = *neutral / average*

6

7

8

9

10 = *completely*

1. How far would you be willing to go to visit ACTOR?
2. How happy do you feel when doing something that helps ACTOR?
3. How large a benefit would you be likely to give ACTOR?
4. How large a cost would you incur to meet a need of ACTOR?
5. How readily can you put the needs of ACTOR out of your thoughts?
6. How high a priority for you is meeting the needs of ACTOR?
7. How reluctant would you be to sacrifice for ACTOR?
8. How much would you be willing to give up to benefit ACTOR?
9. How far would you go out of your way to do something for ACTOR?
10. How easily could you accept not helping ACTOR?

**Appendix G.****Self-Presentation Tactics** (Lee, Quigley, Nesler, Corbett, & Tedeschi, 1999)**Response Scale:**

- 1 = *strongly disagree*
- 2 = *disagree*
- 3 = *somewhat disagree*
- 4 = *neutral*
- 5 = *somewhat agree*
- 6 = *agree*
- 7 = *strongly agree*

**Excuse**

1. When I am blamed for something, I make excuses.
2. When things go wrong, I explain why I am not responsible.
3. I try to convince others that I am not responsible for negative events.

**Justification**

1. I offer socially acceptable reasons to justify behavior that others might not like.
2. After a negative action, I try to make others understand that if they had been in my position they would have done the same thing.
3. When others view my behavior as negative, I offer explanations so that they will understand that my behavior was justified.

**Disclaimer**

1. I offer explanations before doing something that others might think is wrong.
2. I try to get the approval of others before doing something they might perceive negatively.
3. When I believe I will not perform well, I offer excuses beforehand.

**Apology**

1. I apologize when I have done something wrong.
2. I accept blame for bad behavior when it is clearly my fault.
3. I express remorse and guilt when I do something wrong.

**Ingratiation**

1. When I want something, I try to look good.
2. I tell others about my positive qualities.
3. I use flattery to win the favor of others.

**Enhancement**

1. When I succeed at a task, I emphasize to others how important the task was.
2. I exaggerate the value of my accomplishments.
3. I tell people when I do well at tasks others find difficult.

**Blasting**

1. I make negative statements about people belonging to rival groups.
2. I have put others down in order to make myself look better.

3. I exaggerate the negative qualities of people who compete with me.

**Appendix H.****Perfectionistic Self-Presentation Scale** (Hewitt et al., 2003)

Listed below are a group of statements. Please rate your agreement with each of the statements using the following scale.

- | 1                            | 2               | 3                            | 4              | 5                         | 6            | 7                         |
|------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Strongly<br/>Disagree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Somewhat<br/>Disagree</b> | <b>Neutral</b> | <b>Somewhat<br/>Agree</b> | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Strongly<br/>Agree</b> |
| 1.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 2.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 3.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 4.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 5.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 6.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 7.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 8.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 9.                           |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 10.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| <b>11.</b>                   |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 12.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 13.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 14.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 15.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| <b>16.</b>                   |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 17.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 18.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 19.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 20.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 21.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| <b>22.</b>                   |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 23.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 24.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 25.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 26.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |
| 27.                          |                 |                              |                |                           |              |                           |

\* **Note:** Bold items are reverse-scored.

**Appendix I.****Conflict Prompt for “Partners as Perpetrators” Conditions (for Study 2)****Conflict Prompt for “Close Actor as Perpetrators” Condition:**

**Please think of an incident in which someone you are very close to did something that hurt, offended, or angered someone else. The person you think of should be a close partner, such as a close friend or romantic partner that is personally important to you. You should think of a specific incident with this close partner in which this person did something that hurt or upset someone else. This situation should NOT directly involve you.**

**Do not describe a conflict that you have had with a close partner. Instead, describe a situation in which this close partner did something that made another person feel hurt or upset.** If possible, please try to consider situations from your memory where this close partner did something that hurt or upset someone with whom you were not very well acquainted. For instance, if you recall an incident where this close partner upset a stranger, or a distant acquaintance, this would be more preferable than describing an incident in which two of your own close friends were in conflict.

**Do not describe the consequences or “aftermath” of the conflict yet. You will instead do that next on a separate page.**

Please be sure to:

- Choose a situation where this close partner hurt or upset someone else (**not you**)
- Describe the parties involved
- Explain what happened (what did this close partner do, what did the other party do)

**Conflict Prompt for “Distant Actor as Perpetrators” Condition:**

**Please think of an incident in which someone you are not very close to did something that hurt, offended, or angered someone else. The person you think of should be a distant partner, such as an acquaintance or someone you don’t know very well who is not personally important to you. You should think of a specific incident with this distant partner in which this person did something that hurt or upset someone else. This situation should NOT directly involve you.**

**Do not describe a conflict that you have had with a distant partner. Instead, describe a situation in which this distant partner did something that made another person feel hurt or upset.** If possible, please try to consider situations from your memory where this distant partner did something that hurt or upset someone with whom you were not very well acquainted. For instance, if you recall an incident where this distant partner upset a stranger, or another distant acquaintance, this would be more preferable than describing an incident in which this distant partner engaged in conflict with a close friend.

**Do not describe the consequences or “aftermath” of the conflict yet. You will instead do that next on a separate page.**

Please be sure to:

- Choose a situation where this distant partner hurt or upset someone else (**not you**)
- Describe the parties involved

- Explain what happened (what did this distant partner do, what did the other party do)

**Conflict Prompt for “Close Actor as Victim” Condition:**

Please think of an incident in which someone you are very close to felt hurt, offended, or was angered by someone else. The person you think of should be a close partner, such as a close friend or romantic partner that is personally important to you. You should think of a specific incident with this close partner in which this person was hurt or upset by someone else. This situation should NOT directly involve you.

Do not describe a conflict that you have had with a close partner. Instead, describe a situation in which this close partner was hurt or upset by someone else. If possible, please try to consider situations from your memory where this close partner was hurt or upset by someone with whom you were not very well acquainted. For instance, if you recall an incident where this close partner was upset by a stranger, or a distant acquaintance, this would be more preferable than describing an incident in which two of your own close friends were in conflict.

Do not describe the consequences or “aftermath” of the conflict yet. You will instead do that next on a separate page.

Please be sure to:

- Choose a situation where this close partner was hurt or upset by someone else (not you)
- Describe the parties involved
- Explain what happened (what did this close partner do, what did the other party do)

**Conflict Prompt for “Distant Actor as Victim” Condition:**

Please think of an incident in which someone you are not very close to felt hurt, offended, or was angered by someone else. The person you think of should be a distant partner, such as an acquaintance or someone you don’t know very well who is not personally important to you. You should think of a specific incident with this distant partner in which this person was hurt or upset by someone else. This situation should NOT directly involve you.

Do not describe a conflict that you have had with a distant partner. Instead, describe a situation in which this distant partner was hurt or upset by someone else. If possible, please try to consider situations from your memory where this distant partner was hurt or upset by someone with whom you were not very well acquainted. For instance, if you recall an incident where this distant partner was upset by a stranger, or another distant acquaintance, this would be more preferable than describing an incident in which this distant partner engaged in conflict with a close friend.

Do not describe the consequences or “aftermath” of the conflict yet. You will instead do that next on a separate page.

Please be sure to:



- Choose a situation where this distant partner was hurt or upset by someone else (*not you*)
- Describe the parties involved
- Explain what happened (what did this distant partner do, what did the other party do)

***Conflict Type Question***

Using one of the categories below, please identify the type of action that initiated the conflict.

- Betrayal:** For example, your partner told someone else something in confidence, and that person then used the information to exploit / take advantage of your partner.
- Rebuff:** For example, your partner had a plan or agreement with someone else, such as a friend or coworker, who then did not hold up their end of the bargain.
- Unwarranted criticism:** For example, someone criticized some aspect of your partner without provocation.
- Negligence / lack of consideration:** For example, someone cut in front of your partner in a line, or forgot your partner's birthday.
- Cumulative annoyance:** For example, someone had an annoying habit that your partner found irritating, which eventually resulted in a dispute.
- Unprompted aggression:** For example, someone pushed, shoved, or otherwise attacked your partner, seemingly without reason.

**Appendix J.****Response Prompt**

**Next, please briefly describe (i.e., 500 words or less) what happened after the initial conflict. What did you do or say to your partner? What did you do or say to the other party involved in the conflict?**

**Please be as specific and detailed as possible.** If possible, please include direct quotations of things you may have said to your partner, or to or about the other party. Please be sure to mention if you:

- Attempted to console either of the people involved in this conflict
- Expressed agreement with either of the people involved in this conflict
- Retaliated against or spoke negatively about either of the people involved in this conflict

Engaged in any other behavior directed at either of the people involved in this conflict

**Please be clear regarding what behaviors you enacted and toward whom.**

**Appendix K.****Regulation of Partner's Thoughts and Feelings Scale**

Using the scale below, please respond to each statement.

**Response Scale:**

- 1 = *strongly disagree*
- 2 = *disagree*
- 3 = *somewhat disagree*
- 4 = *neutral*
- 5 = *somewhat agree*
- 6 = *agree*
- 7 = *strongly agree*

**Consolation Subscale:**

1. During or after the experience that I described, I told PARTNER not to worry about what he/she did.
2. During or after the experience that I described, I told PARTNER that the other person will get over it.
3. During or after the experience that I described, I tried to get PARTNER to think about something else instead.

**Validation Subscale:**

4. During or after the experience that I described, I told PARTNER that his/her actions were not that bad.
5. During or after the experience that I described, I told PARTNER that he/she has the right to be angry.
6. During or after the experience that I described, I told PARTNER that he/she is right and the other person is wrong.
7. During or after the experience that I described, I told PARTNER that the other person deserves to be blamed.
8. During or after the experience that I described, I expressed anger toward that person, too.

**Encouraging Objectivity Subscale:**

9. During or after the experience that I described, I encouraged PARTNER to view the situation in a more objective manner.
10. During or after the experience that I described, I tried to get PARTNER to take the other person's perspective.
11. During or after the experience that I described, I tried to get PARTNER to consider the repercussions or consequences of his/her actions.
12. During or after the experience that I described, I tried to help PARTNER understand their own, or the other party's, thoughts, feelings, or behaviors.

**Encouraging Forgiveness / Amends Subscale:**

13. During or after the experience that I described, I told PARTNER that he/she should let it go.

14. During or after the experience that I described, I tried to get PARTNER to forgive the other person.
15. During or after the experience that I described, I encouraged PARTNER to reconcile or make amends with the other person.

**Appendix L.****Coding Criteria for Conflict Recounting in Study 1*****Perpetrator***

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author portray the perpetrator's behaviors as positive?

*1 = none / not at all*

*2 = very little*

*3 = a little*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = a lot*

*6 = very much*

*7 = extreme / complete*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author portray the perpetrator's behaviors as negative?

*1 = none / not at all*

*2 = very little*

*3 = a little*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = a lot*

*6 = very much*

*7 = extreme / complete*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator's behaviors as intentional?

*1 = completely accidental*

*2 = mostly accidental*

*3 = somewhat accidental*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = somewhat intentional*

*6 = very intentional*

*7 = completely intentional*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator's behaviors as unavoidable?

*1 = completely unavoidable*

*2 = mostly unavoidable*

*3 = somewhat unavoidable*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = somewhat avoidable*

*6 = very avoidable*

*7 = completely avoidable*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator's actions as justified?

*1 = completely unjustified*

*2 = mostly unjustified*

*3 = somewhat unjustified*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = somewhat justified*

*6 = very justified*

*7 = completely justified*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator as responsible for the conflict?

*1 = none / not at all*

*2 = very little*

*3 = a little*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = a lot*

*6 = very much*

*7 = extreme / complete*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the perpetrator as deserving of punishment?

*1 = none / not at all*

*2 = very little*

*3 = a little*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = a lot*

*6 = very much*

*7 = extreme / complete*

### **Victim**

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author portray the victim's behaviors as positive?

*1 = none / not at all*

*2 = very little*

*3 = a little*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = a lot*

*6 = very much*

*7 = extreme / complete*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author portray the victim's behaviors as negative?

*1 = none / not at all*

*2 = very little*

*3 = a little*

*4 = neutral*  
*5 = a lot*  
*6 = very much*  
*7 = extreme / complete*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim's behaviors as intentional?

*1 = completely accidental*  
*2 = mostly accidental*  
*3 = somewhat accidental*  
*4 = neutral*  
*5 = somewhat intentional*  
*6 = very intentional*  
*7 = completely intentional*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim's behaviors as unavoidable?

*1 = completely unavoidable*  
*2 = mostly unavoidable*  
*3 = somewhat unavoidable*  
*4 = neutral*  
*5 = somewhat avoidable*  
*6 = very avoidable*  
*7 = completely avoidable*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim's actions as justified?

*1 = completely unjustified*  
*2 = mostly unjustified*  
*3 = somewhat unjustified*  
*4 = neutral*  
*5 = somewhat justified*  
*6 = very justified*  
*7 = completely justified*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim as responsible for the conflict?

*1 = none / not at all*  
*2 = very little*  
*3 = a little*  
*4 = neutral*  
*5 = a lot*  
*6 = very much*  
*7 = extreme / complete*

On a scale of 1 to 7, to what extent did the author describe the victim as deserving of punishment?

*1 = none / not at all*

*2 = very little*

*3 = a little*

*4 = neutral*

*5 = a lot*

*6 = very much*

*7 = extreme / complete*



**Appendix M.****Coding Criteria for Conflict Recounting in Study 2*****Partner*****Content**

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author portray the (close or distant) partner's behaviors as positive? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no evidence of positivity (either neutral, or only negative)*

*2 = very little evidence of positivity*

*3 = some evidence of positivity*

*4 = much evidence of positivity*

*5 = very much evidence of positivity*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author portray the (close or distant) partner's behaviors as negative? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no evidence of negativity (either neutral, or only positive)*

*2 = very little evidence of negativity*

*3 = some evidence of negativity*

*4 = much evidence of negativity*

*5 = very much evidence of negativity*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the (close or distant) partner's behaviors as intentional? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no evidence of intentionality (any harm by partner was completely by mistake)*

*2 = very little evidence the behaviors were intentional*

*3 = some evidence the behaviors were intentional*

*4 = much evidence the behaviors were intentional*

*5 = very much evidence the behaviors were intentional*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the (close or distant) partner's behaviors as unavoidable? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no evidence (any harm by partner could have been avoided)*

*2 = very little evidence the behaviors were unavoidable*

*3 = some evidence the behaviors were unavoidable*

*4 = much evidence the behaviors were unavoidable*

*5 = very much evidence the behaviors were unavoidable*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the (close or distant) partner's actions as justified? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no evidence of justification (the partner's acts are described as excessive or wrong)*

*2 = very little evidence of justification*

*3 = some evidence of justification*

*4 = much evidence of justification*

*5 = very much evidence of justification*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the (close or distant) partner as responsible for the conflict? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no evidence of responsibility (the partner had no responsibility for the harm/conflict)*

*2 = very little evidence of responsibility*

*3 = some evidence of responsibility*

*4 = much evidence of responsibility*

*5 = very much evidence of responsibility*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the (close or distant) partner as deserving of punishment? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no indication of warranting punishment (the partner should not be punished)*

*2 = very little evidence of warranting punishment*

*3 = some evidence of warranting punishment*

*4 = much evidence of warranting punishment*

*5 = very much evidence of warranting punishment*

### **Format**

Did the author describe any motive or intention in order to justify or excuse the behavior of the partner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

Did the author describe any agreement with the behaviors of the partner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

Did the author describe the thoughts or feelings of the partner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

Did the author describe negative consequences of this event for the partner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

Did the author describe the partner's behaviors in a clear and interpretable manner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

### ***Other Party (Non-Partner)***

#### **Content**

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author portray the non-partner's behaviors as positive? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no evidence of positivity (either neutral, or only negative)*

*2 = very little evidence of positivity*

- 3 = *some evidence of positivity*  
 4 = *much evidence of positivity*  
 5 = *very much evidence of positivity*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author portray the non-partner's behaviors as negative? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 = *none / no evidence of negativity (either neutral, or only positive)*  
 2 = *very little evidence of negativity*  
 3 = *some evidence of negativity*  
 4 = *much evidence of negativity*  
 5 = *very much evidence of negativity*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the non-partner's behaviors as intentional? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 = *none / no evidence of intentionality (any harm by non-partner was completely by mistake)*  
 2 = *very little evidence of intentionality*  
 3 = *some evidence the behaviors were intentional*  
 4 = *much evidence the behaviors were intentional*  
 5 = *very much evidence of intentionality*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the non-partner's behaviors as unavoidable? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 = *none / no evidence (any harm by non-partner could have been avoided)*  
 2 = *very little evidence the behaviors were unavoidable*  
 3 = *some evidence the behaviors were unavoidable*  
 4 = *much evidence the behaviors were unavoidable*  
 5 = *very much evidence the behaviors were unavoidable*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the non-partner's actions as justified? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 = *none / no evidence of justification (the non-partner's acts are described as excessive or wrong)*  
 2 = *very little evidence of justification*  
 3 = *some evidence of justification*  
 4 = *much evidence of justification*  
 5 = *very much evidence of justification*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the non-partner as responsible for the conflict? \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 = *none / no evidence of responsibility (the non-partner had no responsibility for the harm/conflict)*  
 2 = *very little evidence of responsibility*  
 3 = *some evidence of responsibility*  
 4 = *much evidence of responsibility*  
 5 = *very much evidence of responsibility*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author describe the non-partner as deserving of punishment? \_\_\_\_\_

*1 = none / no indication of warranting punishment (the non-partner should not be punished)*

*2 = very little evidence of warranting punishment*

*3 = some evidence of warranting punishment*

*4 = much evidence of warranting punishment*

*5 = very much evidence of warranting punishment*

### **Format**

Did the author provide any motive or intention in order to justify or excuse the behavior of the non-partner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

Did the author describe any agreement with the behaviors of the non-partner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

Did the author describe the thoughts or feelings of the non-partner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

Did the author describe negative consequences of this event for the non-partner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

Did the author describe the non-partner's behaviors in a clear and interpretable manner?

*1 = no*

*2 = yes*

### **Conflict Type**

Using one of the categories below, please identify the type of action that **initiated** the conflict.

a. **Betrayal:** For example, a partner told someone else something in confidence, and that person then used the information to exploit / take advantage of a partner.

b. **Rebuff:** For example, a partner had a plan or agreement with someone else, such as a friend or coworker, who then did not hold up their end of the bargain.

c. **Unwarranted criticism:** For example, someone criticized some aspect of a partner without provocation.

d. **Negligence / lack of consideration:** For example, someone cut in front of a partner in a line, or forgot a partner's birthday.

e. **Cumulative annoyance:** For example, someone had an annoying habit that a partner found irritating, which eventually resulted in a dispute.

f. **Unprompted aggression:** For example, someone pushed, shoved, or otherwise attacked a partner, seemingly without reason.



**Appendix N.****Coding Criteria for Conflict Response in Study 2*****Partner***

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author validate the partner's **feelings** (e.g., tell the partner that he/she was right to feel angry, behave so as to accept/endorse the partner's feelings)?

*1 = none / no validation of feelings (did not endorse feelings directly or indirectly)*

*2 = very little validation of feelings*

*3 = some evidence of validation of feelings*

*4 = much validation of feelings*

*5 = very much evidence of validation of feelings*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author validate the partner's **behaviors** (e.g., tell the partner that his/her actions were not that bad, behave so as to accept/endorse the partner's behavior)?

*1 = none / no validation of behaviors (did not endorse behaviors directly or indirectly)*

*2 = very little evidence of validation of behaviors*

*3 = some evidence of validation of behaviors*

*4 = much evidence validation of behaviors*

*5 = much evidence of validation of behaviors*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author console the partner **verbally** (e.g., "I'm sorry this happened to you", "You will feel better in time")?

*1 = none / no verbal consolation (did not speak to partner in a supportive manner)*

*2 = very little evidence of verbal consolation*

*3 = some evidence of verbal consolation*

*4 = much evidence of verbal consolation*

*5 = very much evidence of verbal consolation*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author console the partner **physically** (e.g., hug)?

*1 = none / no evidence of physical consolation (did not physically touch or support partner)*

*2 = very little evidence of physical consolation*

*3 = some evidence of physical consolation*

*4 = much evidence of physical consolation*

*5 = very much evidence of physical consolation*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author encourage the partner to view the situation in a more objective manner (e.g., discuss the negative aspects of their behavior, point out possible explanations or rationales for the other party's behavior, etc.)?

*1 = none / not at all (did not try to promote objectivity at all)*

*2 = very little evidence of encouraging objectivity*

*3 = some evidence of encouraging objectivity*

*4 = much evidence of encouraging objectivity*

*5 = very much evidence of encouraging objectivity*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author encourage the partner to forgive or make amends with the other party that was involved in the conflict?

*1 = none / not at all (did not try to promote forgiveness or reconciliation)*

*2 = very little evidence of encouraging forgiveness*

*3 = some evidence of encouraging forgiveness*

*4 = much evidence of encouraging forgiveness*

*5 = very much evidence of encouraging forgiveness*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author offer direct assistance (e.g., negotiate with the other party, call the police, etc.) to their partner to help resolve the conflict?

*1 = none / no evidence of offering assistance (did not use any means to help the partner)*

*2 = very little evidence of offering assistance*

*3 = some evidence of offering assistance*

*4 = much evidence of offering assistance*

*5 = very much evidence of offering assistance*

Based upon the author's description, did the author actually provide assistance if offered?

*0 = No*

*1 = Yes*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author derogate/disparage the partner?

*1 = none / no evidence of derogation or disparaging (did not insult or criticize partner)*

*2 = very little evidence of derogation*

*3 = some evidence of derogation*

*4 = much evidence of derogation*

*5 = very much evidence of derogation*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author consider retaliation (e.g., yelling at the partner, spreading negative rumors about the partner, etc.) against the partner?

*1 = none / no evidence of considering retaliation (did not discuss/mention)*

*2 = very little evidence of considering retaliation*

*3 = some evidence of considering retaliation*

*4 = much evidence of considering retaliation*

*5 = very much evidence of considering retaliation*

Based upon the author's description, did the author actually engage in retaliation against the partner?

*0 = No*

*1 = Yes*

### ***Other Party***

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author validate the other party's **feelings** (e.g., tell the other party that he/she was right to feel angry)?

*1 = none / no validation of feelings (did not endorse feelings directly or indirectly)*

- 2 = very little validation of feelings*
- 3 = some evidence of validation of feelings*
- 4 = much validation of feelings*
- 5 = very much evidence of validation of feelings*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author validate the other party's **behaviors** (e.g., tell the other party that his/her actions were not that bad)?

- 1 = none / no validation of behaviors (did not endorse behaviors directly or indirectly)*
- 2 = very little evidence of validation of behaviors*
- 3 = some evidence of validation of behaviors*
- 4 = much evidence validation of behaviors*
- 5 = much evidence of validation of behaviors*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author console the other party involved in the conflict **verbally** (e.g., "I'm sorry this happened to you", "You will feel better in time")?

- 1 = none / no verbal consolation (did not speak to non-partner in a supportive manner)*
- 2 = very little evidence of verbal consolation*
- 3 = some evidence of verbal consolation*
- 4 = much evidence of verbal consolation*
- 5 = very much evidence of verbal consolation*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author console the other party involved in the conflict **physically** (e.g., hug)?

- 1 = none / no evidence of physical consolation (did not physically touch or support non-partner)*
- 2 = very little evidence of physical consolation*
- 3 = some evidence of physical consolation*
- 4 = much evidence of physical consolation*
- 5 = very much evidence of physical consolation*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author encourage the other party involved in the conflict to view the situation in a more objective manner (e.g., discuss the negative aspects of their behavior, point out possible explanations or rationales for the partner's behavior, etc.)?

- 1 = none / not at all (did not try to promote objectivity at all)*
- 2 = very little evidence of encouraging objectivity*
- 3 = some evidence of encouraging objectivity*
- 4 = much evidence of encouraging objectivity*
- 5 = very much evidence of encouraging objectivity*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author encourage the other party involved in the conflict to forgive or make amends with their partner?

- 1 = none / not at all (did not try to promote forgiveness or reconciliation)*
- 2 = very little evidence of encouraging forgiveness*
- 3 = some evidence of encouraging forgiveness*
- 4 = much evidence of encouraging forgiveness*



*5 = very much evidence of encouraging forgiveness*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author offer direct assistance (e.g., negotiate with the other party, call the police, etc.) to other party involved in the conflict to help resolve the conflict?

*1 = none / no evidence of offering assistance (did not use any means to help the non-partner)*

*2 = very little evidence of offering assistance*

*3 = some evidence of offering assistance*

*4 = much evidence of offering assistance*

*5 = very much evidence of offering assistance*

Based upon the author's description, did the author actually provide assistance if offered?

*0 = No*

*1 = Yes*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author derogate/disparage the other party involved in the conflict?

*1 = none / no evidence of derogation or disparaging (did not insult or criticize non-partner)*

*2 = very little evidence of derogation*

*3 = some evidence of derogation*

*4 = much evidence of derogation*

*5 = very much evidence of derogation*

On a scale of 1 to 5, to what extent did the author consider retaliation (e.g., yelling at the other party, spreading negative rumors about the other party, etc.) against the other party involved in the conflict?

*1 = none / no evidence of considering retaliation (did not discuss/mention)*

*2 = very little evidence of considering retaliation*

*3 = some evidence of considering retaliation*

*4 = much evidence of considering retaliation*

*5 = very much evidence of considering retaliation*

Based upon the author's description, did the author actually engage in retaliation against the other party?

*0 = No*

*1 = Yes*

Based upon the author's description, did the conflict between the two parties get resolved (i.e., parties reconciled or achieved forgiveness, or some other mutually beneficial resolution)?

*0 = No*

*1 = Yes*

Based on the author's description, how severe was the conflict in the author's estimation (i.e., how severe did they perceive the conflict to be)?

*1 = not severe at all (e.g., no serious or lasting consequences or damages)*

*2 = a little severe (e.g., minor, if any, consequences or damages)*

*3 = somewhat severe (e.g., some relatively serious or lasting consequences or damages)*

*4 = severe (e.g., serious or long-term psychological, physical, monetary harm caused)*

*5 = extremely severe (e.g., extremely serious and long-lasting damages)*

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