The fine line of support

The impact of cognitive support on interpersonal closeness: considering the moderating role of emotions

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Abstract:

As social beings, we have a natural inclination to share our emotions with others. Interpersonal emotion regulation plays a vital role in managing these emotions and can help individuals build and maintain relationships. Cognitive support tries to alter the emotional interpretation of the experience through reappraisal. However, it could potentially invalidate the emotions of the sharer and strain the relationship. This study aimed to examine the impact of cognitive support on feelings of closeness after disclosing a negative experience, and whether this varied between the emotions anger and worry. It was hypothesized that cognitive support was related to decreased feelings of closeness, with a stronger effect for anger compared to worry. A total of 208 participants took part in this study, which involved real-life interactions and observed assessments of support provision. The results indicated that there was no significant relationship between cognitive support and reduced feelings of closeness. Furthermore, the type of emotion did not moderate this relationship. Research on this subject can offer valuable insights into the complex interplay between sharing emotions and relationships. Recognizing the potential negative impact of cognitive support on closeness can serve as a foundation for preventing relationship deterioration and fostering harmonious interactions.

Keywords: Interpersonal emotion regulation, Cognitive support, Interpersonal Closeness, Anger, Worry, Emotional Intensity

Introduction

In life, while we encounter many moments of joy, we also experience negative emotions. Negative emotions are an integral part of our lives and play a crucial role in our perceptions and reactions to our world (Mulligan & Scherer, 2012). An individual's ability to control the experience and expressions of their emotions is called emotion regulation (Gross, 1998). Managing our emotions can be difficult, and as social beings, we have a natural inclination to share our negative emotional experiences with others (Rimé, 2009). Sharing emotions highlights the social aspect of emotional experiences and serves as a form of emotion regulation, as we seek guidance from others to manage our own emotions (Burleson, 2008; Rimé, 2009). Interpersonal emotion regulation is an important skill and can help individuals navigate social situations and build or maintain relationships (Burleson, 2008). However, it is crucial to recognize that while effective support is valued within relationships, unsuccessful attempts at providing support can have adverse effects on the recipient and may strain the relationship (Burleson, 2003; Holmstrom, Burleson & Jones, 2005).

The outcome of interpersonal emotion regulation in social interactions depends on the type of support provided by the listener. In instances where the support provided is unsatisfactory, it has the potential to weaken the relationship between the individuals (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Wetzer et al., 2007). Interpersonal closeness, defined as the perception of interconnectedness between oneself and another person, encompasses various dimensions such as shared activities, time spent together, subjective feelings, and observable behaviors (Aron, Aron & Smollan, 1992). Following the sharing of an emotional event, two distinct forms of support can be provided: socio-affective support and cognitive support (Rimé, 2009). Socio-affective support helps the sharer meet their emotional needs by acknowledging and validating their feelings (Nils & Rimé, 2012). This fosters a sense of community and emotional resonance, ultimately reducing the sharer's sense of loneliness (Mogan et al., 2017; Nils & Rimé, 2012). Cognitive support aims to alter the emotional interpretation of the experience through cognitive reappraisal, which contributes to long-term recovery (Nils & Rimé, 2012). However, obtaining a different perspective without acknowledging the sharer's feelings can be invalidating and increase their feelings of loneliness (Burleson et al., 2005; Rimé et al., 2020). Nevertheless, it remains unclear how cognitive support influences an individual's perceived level of closeness to the other person, following the expression of negative emotions.

Previous studies have focused on the impact of cognitive support provision on the emotional intensity of the person sharing. However, the question remains as to how cognitive support affects their sense of closeness to the listener. This current study aims to investigate

how individuals perceive their level of closeness to each other after disclosing negative emotions and receiving cognitive support and whether this varies depending on the specific emotion shared: anger or worry. To address this research question, video-recorded interactions will be coded, and the resulting data, along with self-report measures will be used in subsequent analyses. It is important to understand under which circumstances cognitive support is beneficial or not. Recognizing the potential negative impact of cognitive support on closeness after sharing negative emotions, may help prevent relationship deterioration.

Cognitive support and feelings of closeness

Individuals often believe that others share emotional experiences to obtain emotional support and cognitive clarifications (Delesis & Christophe, 2016). The act of listening and supporting helps to establish and strengthen social connections. Specifically, when it comes to negative experiences, individuals accept social sharing to provide comfort and help to the other (Delesis & Christophe, 2016). However, sharing emotions in a social context can also weaken the relational bond when the support provided is unsatisfactory (Burleson, 2003; Holmstrom et al., 2005). This phenomenon can be explained by the underlying human desire to feel understood (Reis et al., 2017). When we feel understood, it fosters a sense of psychological connection to the other. Therefore, when a listener genuinely displays empathy and validates the emotions being shared, it fosters a sense of understanding and significantly strengthens relational bonds (Mogan, Fischer & Bulbulia, 2017; Nils & Rimé, 2012; Shenk & Fruzzetti, 2011). However, if the listener tries to reconstruct the meaning of the emotional event with cognitive support, it has the potential to undermine the sharer's understanding of the situation, leaving them feeling misunderstood (Shenk & Fruzetti, 2011). Consequently, this sense of misunderstanding diminishes feelings of connection with the other person (Reis et al., 2017). Hence, these findings suggest that providing cognitive support can have a negative impact on the sharer's sense of closeness, as it contributes to feelings of being misunderstood.

Emotional validation is generally viewed as being equally or more beneficial than other forms of support (Pauw et al., 2018; Sahi et al., 2022). However, research has shown that cognitive reappraisal facilitates greater emotional recovery than socio-affective support (Lepore et al., 2004; Nils & Rimé, 2012). The act of evaluating and reframing the emotional information through reappraisal has the potential to change the emotions that the situation elicits (Dobkin et al., 2004; Sheppes et al., 2014). Extensive research on intrapersonal emotion regulation supports the effectiveness of cognitive reappraisal, as a strategy for regulating one's own emotions (Aldao, Nolen-Hoekstra & Schweizer, 2010; Webb, Miles & Sheeran, 2012). In fact, cognitive behavioral therapy, a clinical treatment program known for its success and

effectiveness, uses reappraisal to challenge negative or dysfunctional beliefs (Cuijpers et al., 2019). Furthermore, research suggests that the effectiveness of reappraisal can be enhanced by social support, as hearing others reappraise the negative experience, is more effective than reappraising it alone (Sahi, Ninova & Silvers, 2021).

Despite that cognitive support has been found to be more effective in aiding emotional recovery, individuals usually prefer receiving socio-affective support (Pauw et al., 2018; Nils & Rimé, 2012). This preference comes from the immediate emotional relief it provides and the increased feelings of interpersonal closeness that comes with it. Additionally, discussing a negative emotional experience can leave individuals in a vulnerable position as they are re-experiencing the event (Ford & Troy, 2019). Consequently, receiving advice or a different perspective without first providing emotional support may feel invalidating and can increase feelings of loneliness (Burleson et al., 2005; Lepore et al., 2000; Nils & Rimé, 2012). The emphasis on 'problem-solving' may thus sometimes miss the emotional side of a person's experience, resulting in a lack of empathy and validation that is crucial for individuals to feel understood and supported (Reis et al., 2017; Shenk & Fruzetti, 2011). Thus, while cognitive support can provide valuable insights, it may fall short in terms of establishing and remaining a deep sense of closeness between individuals.

Expressing worry and anger

Individuals vary in their regulation preferences depending on the type of emotion experienced in a situation (Pauw et al., 2018). The specific type of emotion can thus determine how different types of support are perceived, interpreted, and valued. Emotions are generally considered to be temporary reactions that arise from interpretations or appraisals of events (Roseman, 2013). They can be categorized into different types, such as joy, anger, or worry. Moreover, emotions can stimulate appropriate behaviors to address interpersonal and intrapersonal issues (Keltner & Gross, 1999; Izard et al., 2011). Different emotions are known to arise from diverse interpretations and evaluations of the event (e.g., personal meaning of a situation) and to have distinct regulation preferences (Pauw et al., 2018; Roseman, 2013). Consequently, the perception and impact of cognitive support may also vary between emotions, depending on the subjective interpretations of the event and their distinct regulation preferences.

Worry and anger are emotions that individuals commonly encounter in everyday life (Trampe & Quoidbach & Taquet, 2015). Worry is often triggered by perceived or anticipated threats and is characterized by persistent thoughts and uncertainty about future situations (Borkovec, 1985; Roseman, 2013). However, if not managed effectively, worry can lead to

increased levels of anxiety and depression (Borkovec et al., 1983; Parkinson & Simons, 2012). On the other hand, anger is an emotional response that is characterized by a sense of certainty, frustration, and violent thoughts (Bougie, Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2003). Those experiencing anger perceive a sense of certainty that their goals are blocked by someone else's behavior (Roseman, Spindel & Jose, 1990). Both worry and anger are complex emotions that can have distinct impacts on an individual's well-being and social interactions.

When individuals receive support that does not align with their support preference, it can have detrimental effects on their moods and relationships (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Wetzer et al., 2007). When it comes to seeking support, individuals tend to prefer receiving socio-affective support when they feel angry, whereas when they are worried, they seek both socio-affective and cognitive support (Pauw et al., 2018). Individuals may express their worries to others as a way of seeking social support or warning them of potential threats (Ein-Dor et al., 2010). In turn, individuals become more receptive to cognitive support due to their openness to social support and because it helps them shift their negative appraisals of uncertain situations (Pauw et al., 2018). Consequently, cognitive support might be seen as more supportive and align with the recipient's support preference. In contrast, individuals often express their anger as a way of conveying dissatisfaction and frustrations (Bougie et al., 2003). They have a strong sense of certainty about the situation, leading them to seek for a confirmation, rather than a reappraisal, of their perspective (Pauw et al., 2018). Therefore, cognitive support might be perceived as dismissive and incongruent with their preferred form of support. Individuals may thus be less open to cognitive support when sharing anger compared to worry, as they have a stronger sense of certainty about the situation, making a reappraisal of the situation less desirable (Pauw et al., 2018). Additionally, the absence of preferred support could potentially damage their relationship (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Wetzer et al., 2007). These findings suggest that when individuals express anger, their sense of closeness to the listener may be reduced to a greater extent following the provision of cognitive support, in contrast to when they express worry.

Current Research

It appears clear that people tend to support people after hearing about their emotional situation (Rimé, 2009). However, previous research indicates that individuals may not always appreciate the benefits of cognitive support, and the provision may not always be well-received (Burleson et al., 2005; Lepore, 2000). When the support provided is unsatisfactory, it can have detrimental effects on the strength of relational bonds (Burleson, 2003; Holmstrom, Burleson & Jones, 2005). The objective of the current study is to examine whether the provision of

cognitive support is associated with feelings of closeness to the other and whether it differs between anger and worry. Specifically, it is predicted that cognitive support provision is negatively associated with feelings of closeness to the other. Furthermore, the impact on feelings of closeness is expected to be stronger for anger compared to worry. It is important that this subject is being studied using real-life interactions, as sharing emotions is a natural everyday behavior (Kuppens et al., 2022). By using real-life interactions and emotions, instead of laboratory-induced, this study will contribute to the existing literature by enhancing its ecological validity (Lewkowicz, 2001). Furthermore, the use of objective observations of support provision, instead of relying on self-report measures will avoid biases associated with self-report measures (e.g., response bias) (Field, 2013).

The hypotheses of this study will be tested using already collected and video-recorded data. A total of 208 participants (104 dyads) were randomly assigned to either the role of sharer or listener. They engaged in an 8-minute interaction, which has been video-recorded. The sharer was instructed to tell the listener about the upsetting event they had in mind and the listener was instructed to respond naturally. Before taking part, the participants had never met. The videos were coded on support provision and this data, along with self-report measures, was used in the analyses. This is the first study to investigate the relationship between cognitive support provision and feelings of closeness using actual interactions.

Methods

Participants

The data used in this study was collected and video-recorded by researchers of the University of Amsterdam. There was aimed to collect a sample of 100 dyads, which is a standard sample size for dyadic data studies (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). The final sample consisted of 208 participants, with a total of 146 women (70%) and 62 men (30%). Participants were 18 to 67 years old (M_{age} = 22.9, SD = 6.5). To eliminate the influence of pre-existing relationship dynamics, such as habits, the dyads in this study consisted of strangers who had never met before. Participants were randomly paired with same-sex partners to minimize the potential impact of sexual attraction on behavior (e.g., impression management). The audio recording during the interaction of one dyad was incomplete, so it has been excluded from the data analysis. Each participant took approximately one hour to participate, and they received either 10 euros or course credits as compensation.

Procedure

The present study has obtained ethical approval from the Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences of Utrecht University (file number: 23-1112). The data collected for this study is a subset of a larger study on interpersonal emotion regulation conducted in 2017. Therefore, only the relevant data and procedures specific to this study will be discussed.

The participants in the study were informed about the procedure by the experimenter and then randomly assigned to either the role of sharer or listener. To ensure the sharing of both types of emotions, the participant pairs were randomly assigned to one of two emotion conditions. Prior to the interaction, participants separately signed informed consent, familiarized themselves with role-specific instructions, and shared relevant demographic and mood-related information. Additionally, the sharer was instructed to recall an emotional experience. The interaction took place in a furnished room where the participants were seated, facing each other at a 90-degree angle. An icebreaker task initiated the session, involving a lighthearted discussion on hypothetical dilemmas (e.g., "Gain 25 kilos that will last forever, or go to jail for two years"). Then, the experimenter clarified the procedure and turned on the cameras. Once the experimenter left, a buzzer signaled the start of the conversation. Three different viewpoints were used to record the participants' interactions. Two remote control cameras were pointed at one participant each and were merged afterward into split-screen recordings, displaying the full bodies of both participants. A frontal tripod recorded the overall setting. They were granted an extra minute to finish their conversation after the buzzer signified the end of the interaction. The participants then, in separate cubicles, answered questions related to the interaction, such as perceived feelings of closeness. They then contacted the experimenter to initiate the video-mediated recall (VMR). However, the VMR falls outside the scope of this study and will therefore not be discussed. Finally, the participants were debriefed, received compensation, and were thanked for their contribution to the study.

Materials

Sharing instructions. Depending on their emotion condition, participants were asked to recall a recent or present event (not longer than 5 years ago), that still made them feel angry or worried, and were willing to share with the other participant. They wrote down what happened or was going on and why it made them feel angry or worried, what still bothered them, and how it had affected their lives. The events the participants shared varied widely, from romantic relationships or family issues to study or personal health issues.

Interpersonal closeness. Feelings of interpersonal closeness of the sharer was measured with the following item: "How connected did you feel to your conversational

partner?". Participants answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all,* 7 = *very much*) (*M* = 4.24).

Emotional intensity. Previous research suggests that individuals tend to be more receptive to cognitive support after the emotional episode has passed (Nils & Rimé, 2012). It is important to account for this contextual factor in the analysis. Therefore, emotional intensity will be used as a control variable. The emotional intensity of the sharer was rated using a 100-point slider bar (0 = *not at all*, 100= *very much*) (*M* = 63.44).

Observational assessment. The process of determining the types of support provided involved coding the interactions between the participants. This coding process was conducted by four students from the University of Utrecht, who received training from their professor. Initially, a codebook (Appendix A) was created, which underwent several updates during training sessions. Pilot data were used to train the students and refine the codebook. The coders were randomly assigned to the interactions, resulting in a total of 12 different pairs of coders, and each video was coded twice. The coding process entailed pausing the videos every 20 seconds, as previous research has shown that intervals shorter than 20 seconds do not yield significant additional information (Halford & Sanders, 1990; Welsh & Dickson, 2005). Each video was assessed for cognitive support, socio-affective support, concentration, the sharing of personal experiences, attentive listening, advice, and an overall intuitive score of non-verbal behavior was given. However, the current study will primarily focus on the variables cognitive support and advice. The videos were coded to determine the frequency of the support within 20-second intervals. This data was then used to calculate the total score for each type of support in each video. Since all videos were coded twice, the final score for each support type was obtained by averaging the results from the two coders. Using the means as a measurement method improved the reliability of the variable. This involved grouping the scores together, which positively impacted the estimates of the variable (Melnick, 1993).

Cognitive support included three subcategories in the codebook. These subcategories included positive reappraisal, where the listener interpreted the emotional experience in a more optimistic way (e.g., "At least you found out in time"). Secondly, putting the experience in perspective, to lessen the impact of the situation (e.g., "Maybe it isn't that bad"). Lastly, minimizing, to reduce the importance of the event (e.g., "Better than if … were to happen"). Advice included different suggestions provided by the listener to assist the sharer in handling the emotional situation (e.g., "If I were you, I would do…). Advice is recognized as a cognitively engaging support strategy (Niven, Totterdell & Holman, 2009; Nils & Rimé, 2012). It can offer insights and recommendations that help assist individuals in navigating situations

and addressing their concerns, which is why it was included as a component of cognitive support. A new scale score was created by summing the scores of cognitive support and advice within each video ($M = 8.64$).

Data Analysis

The statistical software IBM SPSS Statistics 28.0.1.0 (2021) was used for all analyses, with the data being inspected and cleaned beforehand. Descriptive statistics and frequencies were utilized to obtain standard deviation (*SD*), means (*M*), minimum (MIN), and maximum (MAX) values for the research variables. A correlation analysis was conducted using the total scale scores to test the association between these variables.

The assumptions for conducting a moderation analysis were checked using the linear regression macro in SPSS, including the absence of outliers and multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and normally distributed residuals. For the absence of outliers, the values of the standardized residuals, Mahalanobis Distance, and Cook's Distance were checked. For assessing multicollinearity, the Tolerance values in the coefficients table were examined. Homoscedasticity was checked by plotting the standardized residuals against the standardized predicted values. Lastly, a normal distribution of the residuals was checked by plotting a histogram. The analysis tested whether cognitive support negatively influenced feelings of closeness, and whether this effect was stronger for anger compared to worry. The research question was tested through a moderation analysis, specifically model number 1 in PROCESS (Hayes, 2017). The moderation analysis controlled for the variable emotional intensity of the sharer.

Results

Preliminary analyses

In table 1 means (*M*), inter-correlations (*r*), and standard deviations (*SD*) of all research variables are shown. Contrary to expectations, the research variables feelings of closeness, cognitive support provision, and emotional intensity do not demonstrate a significant correlation. This implies that the research variables are not related to each other.

Table 1

Correlations, means, and standard deviations of all variables.

	M	*SD*	Cognitive support	Closeness	Emotional intensity
Cognitive support	8.64	10.1	--	.16	-.05
Closeness	4.95	1.18	.16	--	.13
Emotional intensity	63.44	23.49	-.05	.13	--

Note. *$p < .05$

Moderation analysis

To answer the research question, a moderation analysis was conducted using Hayes' (2017) model 1 in the PROCESS macro. Prior to the moderation analysis, the assumptions associated with the analysis were checked. This step was taken to ensure there were no false conclusions drawn from the analyses. There was no multicollinearity, heteroscedasticity, or major deviations in the normal distribution of the data observed. However, two outliers have been detected on the x-axis, indicating these participants scored high on cognitive support provision. It was decided to keep these outliers in the dataset, considering that it is indeed possible to achieve high scores on cognitive support provision, and the participants involved are part of the target population. The moderation model aimed to test the main and interaction effects of cognitive support provision on feelings of closeness, with the type of emotion as a moderator and emotional intensity as a control variable. The overall moderation model was tested and yielded insignificant results ($F(4,99) = 1.27$, $p = .29$, $R^2 = 0.05$). To test H1, the main effect of cognitive support on feelings of closeness was examined. The analysis results indicated an insignificant relationship between cognitive support and feelings of closeness ($b = 0.01$, $t(99) = 1.6$, $p = .11$, 95% C.I. [-.00, .04]). Contrary to the first hypothesis, cognitive support provision was not associated with lower levels of feelings of closeness after disclosing a negative experience.

Furthermore, to test H2, the moderation analysis explored the moderating effect of type of emotion on the relationship between cognitive support and feelings of closeness. The results revealed an insignificant interaction effect ($F(1,99) = .32$, $p = .57$, $R^2 = 0.00$). These findings suggest that the type of emotion does not moderate the relationship between cognitive support provision and feelings of closeness. This interaction effect shows that the effect of cognitive support on feelings of closeness is not stronger for anger compared to worry, rejecting H2.

In summary, the moderation analysis revealed that cognitive support provision does not significantly predict lower levels of feelings of closeness. Additionally, the type of emotion was not found to moderate this relationship.

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the potential negative relationship between cognitive support provision and feelings of closeness, specifically examining whether this effect was stronger for anger compared to worry. To assess this, two unacquainted individuals were instructed to talk about an experience that either made them angry or worried. These 8-minute interactions were coded on support provision. This data, along with self-reported measures of feelings of closeness and emotional intensity, were used to conduct the analysis.

The overall moderation model was found to be ineffective. Cognitive support did not significantly relate to lower levels of feelings of closeness. Lastly, when examining the influence of various emotions, neither anger nor worry acted as moderators in the relationship between cognitive support and feelings of closeness.

Cognitive support and feelings of closeness

Given previous research indicated that cognitive support may be invalidating and contribute to increased feelings of loneliness (Burleson et al., 2005; Lepore et al., 2000; Nils & Rimé, 2012), it was expected that cognitive support would lead to decreased feelings of closeness toward the listener. However, the findings suggest that cognitive support does not relate to reduced feelings of closeness.

One potential explanation for the lack of relationship between cognitive support and feelings of closeness could be the absence of pre-existing closeness and behavioral expectations among the participants, particularly because they were strangers. Closeness plays a crucial role in guiding individuals in forming expectations of interpersonal behaviors from their interaction partners (Florian et al., 1995). As the dyads in this study did not have such expectations, the absence of it might have potentially influenced the sharer's perception of the interaction (Florian et al., 1995). By listening and responding to the sharer, the listener may have showcased a sense of interest and supportive behavior, which surpassed the sharer's expectations (Itzchakov, Reis, & Weinstein, 2021; Jones, 2011). The sharer may value their involvement and attempts to help, which could potentially influence the interaction. Research even shows that meeting the support expectations is more important to the sharer than the support itself (Bar-Kalifa & Rafaeli, 2015). As a result, it cannot fully be concluded that there are no effects. Future studies can shed further light on the relationship between cognitive support provision and the overall perception of interpersonal closeness by accounting for the influence of interpersonal behavioral expectations.

An additional factor that may have overshadowed the results, but has not been examined, is the extent to which individuals communicate their preferred type of support. When individuals open up and disclose their emotional experiences, they not only share their feelings but also signal how they want to be supported (Pauw et al., 2019). Through effective communication of their support needs, they guide listeners in providing the specific support that they require (Pauw et al., 2022). Moreover, these preferences are often reflected by their own support-giving styles, which tend to align with the support they find personally beneficial (Doré et al., 2017; Sahi et al., 2022). While socio-affective support is generally favored over cognitive support (Pauw et al., 2019), it is suggested that individuals who employ cognitive

reappraisal as their own support style may feel more comforted when receiving cognitive support themselves (Doré et al., 2017; Sahi et al., 2022). Hence, the way support is received can be influenced by preferred personal support-giving styles and individual differences in sharers' communication. The current study did not specifically examine this aspect, yet it is worth considering its potential impact on the results. Future studies can enhance the clarity of their findings by addressing the potential influence individual differences have on the interaction.

Expressing worry and anger

Due to variations in certainty appraisal and support preferences associated with different emotions (Pauw et al., 2018), it was expected that the negative effect of cognitive support on feelings of closeness would be stronger for anger compared to worry. However, the findings do not reveal a moderating effect for the type of emotion. This implies that the influence of cognitive support on feelings of closeness does not differ between individuals disclosing anger and those expressing worry.

One potential explanation for the absence of observed effects could be attributed to the participants' levels of emotional processing prior to the study. The timing of support plays a crucial role in how individuals receive and respond to it (Rimé, 2009). Immediately after experiencing an emotional event, when individuals are still high in emotional distress, they tend to seek socio-affective support to have their emotions alleviated (Burleson et al., 2005, Rimé, 2009). However, when individuals process their emotions, they become more open to receiving cognitive support, as their distress level decreases, and more cognitive resources become available (Rimé, 2009). In this study, the participants had to recall an experience from within the past five years, making it likely that they had already engaged in some level of emotional processing. In turn, making them more receptive to cognitive support. While this study controlled for the emotional intensity of the sharer, only a small part of its variance was accounted for, due to this sample's limited range of distress. This might explain why the type of emotion did not moderate the relationship between cognitive support and feelings of closeness. To gain further insights into how cognitive support affects feelings of closeness across different emotions, future studies could aim for a broader range of emotional intensities in their sample, from more distant experiences to acute emotional episodes, and subsequently control for this effect. This will help rule out any confounding effect of emotional intensity.

Strengths and Limitations

The objective of this research was to investigate the impact of cognitive support on feelings of closeness using real-life interactions and observed assessments of support provision.

Instead of inducing emotions in a laboratory, participants were instructed to recall an emotional event that they had personally experienced. This approach contributes to the existing literature by enhancing ecological validity (Lewkowicz, 2001). Additionally, to eliminate biases resulting from pre-existing relationship dynamics and impression management, the study formed same-sex dyads of strangers, rather than acquaintances (Parkinson, Lopez-Perez & Sanchez, 2016; Wilhelm & Perrez, 2004). However, it is also important to acknowledge the several limitations associated with this study.

Firstly, this study used a single-item measurement for measuring interpersonal closeness. Only one question was used, asking them how connected they felt to their conversation partner. However, interpersonal closeness is a concept that encompasses various dimensions, such as shared activities and time spent together (Aron et al., 1992). Relying solely on this single question may have limited a complete understanding of the sharer's sense of closeness (Popovic et al., 2003). Consequently, this approach could have hindered fully capturing the relationship between cognitive support and feelings of closeness. In future studies, developing and validating a questionnaire with multiple items that cover various aspects of closeness would be beneficial. By ensuring consistency in the measurement of closeness, data quality will be improved (Field, 2013). Nevertheless, previous research has demonstrated that a single-item measurement can still be valid in assessing interpersonal closeness (Aron et al., 1992; Gächter et al., 2015).

The second limitation of the current study is the exclusive focus on analyzing the effects of explicit verbal forms of cognitive support. The manner in which the interaction partner listens also significantly influences the outcomes of support interactions (Kuhn et al., 2018). Attentive listening plays a crucial role, particularly in the context of emotional disclosure. It involves backchanneling responses (e.g., "yeah", "hmm"), paraphrasing the sharer, and asking them questions to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings (Weger et al., 2014). Through attentive listening, active listeners demonstrate their interest and understanding of the emotional experience, which contributes to a perception of greater support and understanding (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Reis, Lemay, & Finkenauer, 2017). In fact, some research suggests that listening itself can be viewed as a support strategy (Weger et al., 2014). Future studies can reach a more nuanced conclusion by accounting for the influence of attentive listening on the sharer's perception of the conversation. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that explicit verbal support plays a greater role in determining the outcomes of support interactions, in contrast to other forms of support (Bodie et al., 2015; Jones & Guerrero, 2001), which is what the current research specifically focused on.

The last limitation of this study can be applied to the research variable cognitive support, which was summed up to a single score of the overall frequency of cognitive support observed in one video. Cognitive support can be categorized into several forms, such as positive reappraisal, or temporal distancing (Gross, 1998). Previous studies have shown that certain forms of reappraisal may be perceived as more comforting than others (Sahi et al., 2022), suggesting that different types of cognitive support may have distinct effects on feelings of closeness. Phrases such as "those things happen", when used to minimize a situation, may have a stronger negative effect on closeness compared to positive reappraisals like framing it as "a new chapter in your life". While the codebook did differentiate between various types of cognitive support, the coding of the videos did not involve making specific distinctions between these types. Coding a total score of cognitive support may have resulted in the loss of potentially valuable data. Future research could investigate the distinct effects of different forms of cognitive support on feelings of closeness. Nonetheless, by observing and coding the support given during the interaction, a more objective measurement was established, avoiding potential biases associated with self-report measures (e.g., response bias) (Field, 2013).

Conclusion

By studying cognitive support using real-life interactions, this study provides an important step for future research to gain a better understanding of its effects in an interpersonal setting. Despite the absence of a significant relationship between cognitive support and reduced feelings of closeness and not finding a moderating role of emotions, this study contributed to the existing literature by offering valuable recommendations for future research and enhancing its ecological validity. To attain more nuanced conclusions, future studies should address the limitations of this study by using a more comprehensive measurement of closeness and cognitive support, while accounting for the influence of interpersonal behavior expectations. Such advancements will help to better understand how cognitive support affects feelings of closeness, and whether this depends on the specific emotion being shared. Deepening our understanding of how interpersonal emotion regulation affects our relationships empowers us to communicate more effectively and foster harmonious interactions.

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Appendix A-Codebook

Codeerschema VMR video's (MT project 2022-2023)

Socio-affectieve steun:

Dit zijn allerlei vormen van validatie, steun en troost, waaronder:

Bevestiging van emoties

- "Inderdaad",
- "Ja precies"
- "Nou ik ben blij dat ik niet in dezelfde situatie heb gezeten" (heftigheid van hele situatie)
- Ook het bevestigen van een negatief perspectief van de deler.
  → "Wat oneerlijk"

Begrip

- "Ik begrijp het",
- "Ik snap het"

Meeleven

- "Oei"
- "Jeetje"
- "Wow"
- "Oh my god"
- "Awh"
- "Vreselijk"
- "Wat heftig"

Empathie

- "Ik kan me voorstellen dat dat heel vervelend is"

Normaliseren van emotionele reactie van de deler

- "Dat is heel normaal"
- "Dat zou iedereen hebben"

Esteem support: Een vorm van emotionele support waarbij er gefocust wordt op het verbeteren van hoe iemand zichzelf, zijn attributen, capaciteiten of prestaties ziet (Holmstrom, 2012).

- Wat knap van je
- Je bent een goed persoon
- Dat heb je goed gedaan

Vicarious aggression

- Wat een bitch
- Beetje raar om dan van jou te verwachten dat jij daar ok mee bent

Het afmaken van een zin, waaruit een van dergelijke vormen van steun blijkt

- A: “Ja dat was echt heel...” B: “Kut”, o
- A: “ik begrijp gewoon echt niet...” B: “Waarom je zoiets zou doen”
- A: “ja dat was best wel.” B: “heftig”

Sarcasme als een soort bevestiging telt als SA steun.

- E.g., “gaat goed” (sarcastisch) = SA steun

Concentratie:

Concentreren op gevoel:

Aandacht besteden aan en focussen op emotie, of vragen de emotie opnieuw te beleven.
Let op: Dit komt in de buurt van begrip/validatie. Het verschil is dat dit puur constateren is, zonder perspectief, begrip of ‘goedkeuring’ de situatie beschrijven.
Let op: dit kunnen dus ook vragen zijn (!)

- Ik merk dat je nog steeds van hem houdt
- Hoe ziet dat er dan uit bij jou, als je boos bent?
- Dus je bent vooral boos omdat je het niet mocht oplossen?
- Op een gegeven moment probeer je het dan van je af te zetten, als je weer in een andere rol zit (=2x)

Concentreren op oorzaken en implicaties (ruminatie):

Concentreren op de oorzaken, betekenissen of consequenties van de emotionele ervaring – zonder oordeel of expliciete sympathie (dan wordt het socio-affectieve steun).
Let op: dit kunnen dus ook vragen zijn (!)

- Je was natuurlijk zo blij dat je eindelijk de ware hebt gevonden
- Het leek net zo goed te gaan
- “Ook dat ze het niet aan die kinderen wilde vertellen”
- “Jij wilde juist een compromis”
- “Je wilde iedereen tevreden houden en uiteindelijk zit jij ermee”
- Zij wil het allemaal goed doen (oorzaak) en jij zit er vervolgens mee (gevolg). = 2x concentratie
- Heb je een goede band met je vader?
- Hoe ging het dan verder?
- Duurde het lang voordat je je weer een beetje de oude voelde?

Hypothetische beschrijving zonder steun
Als iets hypothetisch gesteld wordt zonder een duidelijke vorm van steun of beschreven wordt zonder het expliciet in perspectief te plaatsen dan coderen we dit als **concentreren**.

- E.g. "stel je had wel een goede band met hem..."

Vragen om de situatie te verduidelijken
Dit kan ter verduidelijking zijn, en kan interesse signaleren, maar kan ook een manier zijn om het gesprek op gang te houden

- e.g. "Dus die boosheid zit en blijft eigenlijk meer binnen?" = concentreren op emotie
- e.g. "Ook de tweede begeleider?" = begrip/verduidelijking van de situatie

Parafraseren en samenvatten:
Informatie van de ander in eigen woorden vertellen of samenvatten/opsommen wat de ander heeft gedeeld.
Let op: Indien het steun bevat (advies, socio-affectief of cognitief) dan coderen we het die vorm van steun (!)

- Dus als ik het goed begrijp ben je vooral boos omdat je het niet mag oplossen
- Ik hoor je zeggen dat je het oneerlijk vindt
- Het klinkt alsof jij nu eigenlijk alles op je neemt

Cognitieve steun

Dit is altijd een inhoudelijk perspectief van B, een vorm van betekenisgeving, wat verschillende vormen aan kan nemen. Vaak is dit een tegengeluid, met als doel om de situatie anders te bekijken (positiever of minder negatief).

Positievere kijk

Reappraisal van de situatie: emotionele situatie *anders* of *positiever* interpreteren (e.g. is er een 'silver lining'?)

- E.g. Eigenlijk komt deze situatie wel goed uit
- Het is een nieuwe stap in je leven
- Misschien is het beter dat het nu gebeurt, dan later wanneer je al kinderen hebt
- "Gelukkig kwam je er in ieder geval op tijd achter",
- "In ieder geval was je niet alleen", "dat is wel fijn/positief toch?"

→ Elke vorm van benadrukken van positieve kant

Let op: Dit kan dus ook herhaling of bevestiging zijn van A die zelf al positieve kant noemde (= co-reappraisal) (!)

- e.g. 2x cognitieve steun: "Misschien is het daarom wel goed om eventjes uit elkaar te zijn". "Het is een redelijk on-war-baar knoopje dit"

Vragen die een bepaalde type steun bevatten, coderen we niet als vraag (wat voornamelijk onder concentreren valt) maar als die type steun. Bijv:

- "Maar jij moet ook door?" = een vraag maar bevat (re)appraisal, een ander perspectief, daarom is het cognitieve steun
- "Maar dat is ook positief toch?" = een vraag met cognitieve steun (positievere kijk), dus cognitieve steun

Cognitieve steun kan ook zijn een tegengeluid geven, en dus **ander perspectief**, zoals:

- "Maar hij bedoelde het misschien helemaal niet zo?"
- "Maar *jij* moet ook verder"

Minder negatieve kijk

Relativeren door perspectief te nemen (ook wel minimizen genoemd):

Meer afstand nemen, een breder perspectief innemen (e.g. afstandelijker, objectiever perspectief, groter tijdsperspectief) met als doel hierdoor de *impact van de situatie te verminderen*. Dit kan dus zowel temporal discounting bevatten (over tijd wordt het beter) als minimizing (het kan erger)

Let op: Het gaat hier dus om het relativeren van de situatie, het *minder negatief* beschouwen.

- E.g. Met de tijd zal het beter gaan
- "Misschien valt het mee";
- "Het hoort er ook gewoon een beetje bij"
- Zo erg is de situatie niet
- Het is niet het einde van de wereld
- Het is maar tijdelijk
- Het komt wel goed
- "Het zal wel meevallen"
- "Ik denk dat het niet al te slecht is geweest in vergelijking met andere dingen" / Het kan erger
- "Ik denk dat andere mensen veel ergere ervaringen hebben"
- "Beter dan als … zou gebeuren"
- "Die dingen gebeuren"

Extra:

- "Ik zou er niet van uitgaan" (van dit negatieve perspectief --> positieve reappraisal)
    - à Dit is geen advies omdat het geen advies is m.b.t. gedrag (hoe te handelen) maar m.b.t. hoe naar de situatie te kijken.

Het afmaken van een zin, waaruit een van dergelijke vormen van cognitieve steun lijkt

- e.g. A: "Misschien dat het dan ook wel...", B: "Meevalt"
- e.g. A: "Het kan daardoor ook..." B: "Positiever uitpakken"

Bevestiging van onzekerheid/negativiteit van de situatie.

- "Dat weet je in principe niet"/"Je weet het niet" = cognitieve steun

Eigen ervaring/vergelijkbare ervaring

Het vertellen over eigen ervaringen. Dit kunnen vergelijkbare maar ook minder relevante ervaringen zijn.

Vergelijkbare ervaringen waarin mensen aangeven dat ze ook ooit zoiets hebben meegemaakt

- ik was er zelf ok helemaal kapot van toen mijn vriend het uitmaakte

Maar ook wanneer mensen vertellen over iets wat zij hieraan gerelateerd vinden

- bijv de mevrouw die vertelt over het televisieprogramma Schuldig

Kan ook de *afwezigheid* van eigen ervaring zijn

- e.g. "Ik heb nog nooit een relatie gehad, dus ik zou niet weten hoe het voelt" = 2x

Verteller vraagt bijvoorbeeld: “heb jij ook zoiets meegemaakt?”. Luisteraar zegt bijvoorbeeld: “ja, natuurlijk”. Dit coderen we als eigen ervaring, omdat de luisteraar dus iets deelt over zichzelf.

Advies

Dit zijn allerlei vormen van advies met betrekking tot wat iemand zou kunnen doen in reactie op de emotionele situatie. **Advies** betreft dus situaties waarin de luisteraar suggesties geeft om met de situatie *om te gaan*. Bij advies gaat het dus om suggesties voor gedrag: Suggesties om anders naar de situatie te *kijken* daarentegen, zijn een vorm van reappraisal (e.g. “ik zou het vooral zien als haar verlies” is (positieve) reappraisal van de situatie)

- Vaak begint de ander met “ik zou...”
- “Ik zou nog even afwachten”
- Misschien kun je er over praten met hem?
- Als ik jou was, zou ik dit doen..
- Er zijn ook heel veel andere varianten (om te reageren)
- “Misschien kun je haar vragen wat ze bedoelde?”

Aandachtig luisteren

Aandacht luisteren bevat back channeling (verbaal aangeven dat je luistert), korte verhelderingsvragen als iemand iets niet verstaat en het aanvullen van zinnen.

Backchanneling

- "Ok
- "Oh/ah ja"
- "Hm-mm"
- "Ja" of "nee"

Als iemand meer zegt dan "ja", kun je de eerste "ja" scoren, en de rest onder de andere categorie waar het valt (inclusief alle ja's die dan nog volgen) Dus bijvoorbeeld:

- "Ja ik snap het ja" = 1x ja + socio-affectieve steun
- "Ja, maar.." = 1x ja + hoogstwaarschijnlijk cognitieve steun (afhankelijk wat er nog achteraankomt, maar waarschijnlijk dus een ander perspectief)

--> in 1 adem: "Ja, nee, ja", coderen we als 1x aandachtig luisteren

Vraag:

Alleen de vragen die verifiëren wat er is gezegd, als er iets niet verstaan is.

- e.g. "Wat zei je?"

Het afmaken van een zin

Wanneer de zin wordt aangevuld, maar niet met steun, coderen we dit als aandachtig luisteren. Bijvoorbeeld:

- A: "maar ik denk dat dat een derde is..." B: "een derde is"

Non-verbaal:

Geef nadat je het hele filmpje hebt afgekeken je **algemene indruk over de mate waarin non-verbale steun is geboden**. Doe dit op een schaal van 1 tot 5, waarbij 1 staat voor helemaal niet betrokken en steunend, en 5 voor heel erg betrokken en steunend. Het gaat hierbij dus met name om een algehele betrokkenheid, een vorm van non-verbale expressiviteit, welke geuit kan worden door o.a.:

- Knikken
- Glimlachen

- Gezichtsexpressies: bijv meelevend kijken of fronsen in reactie op verhaal van de deler (bijv wanneer A vertelt dat een ander iets geks of onaardigs heeft gedaan)
- Lichaamshouding (gericht op de deler)

→ intuïtief scoren in hoeverre we ervaren dat B non-verbale steun geeft.

Appendix B-Syntax

```
*Averaging the scores of the coders*

COMPUTE
AverageConc=MEAN(Totaal_Conc_1,Totaal_Conc_2,Totaal_Conc_3,Totaal_Conc_4).
EXECUTE.

COMPUTE AverageSA=MEAN(Totaal_SA_1,Totaal_SA_2_2,Totaal_SA_3,Totaal_SA_4).
EXECUTE.

COMPUTE AveragEigenErv=MEAN(Totaal_EigenErv_1, Totaal_EigenErv_2,
Totaal_EigenErv_3, Totaal_EigenErv_4).
EXECUTE.

COMPUTE
AveragCognSteun=MEAN(Totaal_CognSteun_1,Totaal_CognSteun_2,Totaal_CognSteun_3,
Totaal_CognSteun_4).
EXECUTE.

COMPUTE
AverageAdvies=MEAN(Totaal_Advies_1,Totaal_Advies_2,Totaal_Advies_3,Totaal_Advies_
4).
EXECUTE.

COMPUTE
AverageAandLui=MEAN(Totaal_AandLui_1,Totaal_AandLui_2,Totaal_AandLui_3,Totaal_A
andLui_4).
EXECUTE.

*Total score cognitive support, including advice*

COMPUTE Toav_Cog=SUM(AverageCognSteun,AverageAdvies).
EXECUTE.
```

```
*Emotional intensity each condition (Worry and Anger)*

IF  (Emotieco=1) Emo_ints=EmotieManCheck_1.
IF  (Emotieco=2) Emo_ints=EmotieManCheck_6.
EXECUTE

*Descriptives*

FREQUENCIES VARIABLES=Leeftijd Geslacht Opleiding
  /STATISTICS=STDDEV MINIMUM MAXIMUM MEAN
  /ORDER=ANALYSIS.


FREQUENCIES VARIABLES=Verbnd Emo_int Toav_Cog
  /STATISTICS=STDDEV MEAN
  /ORDER=ANALYSIS.

*correlation between research variables*

CORRELATIONS
  /VARIABLES=Emocond Toav_Cog Verbhd Emo_int
  /PRINT=TWOTAIL NOSIG FULL
  /STATISTICS DESCRIPTIVES
  /MISSING=PAIRWISE.


DATASET ACTIVATE DataSet1.
RECODE Emocond (1=0) (2=1).
EXECUTE.

*assumption check*

REGRESSION
  /MISSING LISTWISE
```

```
  /STATISTICS COEFF OUTS R ANOVA COLLIN TOL
  /CRITERIA=PIN(.05) POUT(.10)
  /NOORIGIN
  /DEPENDENT Verbhd
  /METHOD=ENTER Toav_Cog Emocond
  /SCATTERPLOT=(*ZRESID ,*ZPRED)
  /RESIDUALS HISTOGRAM(ZRESID)
  /SAVE MAHAL COOK ZRESID.

DATA LIST FREE/
   Toav_Cog   Emocond    Verbhd     .
BEGIN DATA.
    -8.6442     -.5000     4.8309
     .0000     -.5000     4.9376
    10.0951     -.5000     5.0622
    -8.6442      .5000     4.7714
     .0000      .5000     4.9964
    10.0951      .5000     5.2591
END DATA.
GRAPH/SCATTERPLOT=
 Toav_Cog WITH     Verbhd   BY       Emocond.
```