

126

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Public Confession and Forgiveness

**Bernard Weiner, Sandra Graham, Orli Peter,
and Mary Zmuidinas**

University of California, Los Angeles

ABSTRACT In this article, we report investigations of four role-playing experiments and one laboratory manipulation that examine the effects of confession on forgiveness and other related judgments. The basic paradigm in the simulation studies was to reveal that a political figure or student in a class confessed either following or not following an accusation, or denied personal responsibility for the act. Among the variables manipulated were the attributions for the wrongdoing and the spontaneity of the confession. The dependent variables in one or more investigations included the perceived personal character of the transgressor, attributions of responsibility for the act, affective reactions of sympathy and anger, forgiveness, and behavioral judgments such as sanctioning and voting likelihood. In the laboratory manipulation study, a mixed-motive game setting was used in which a confederate confessed to having prior knowledge that resulted in his winning the game. We then examined whether this admission influenced subsequent cooperation and competition, as well as the other players' perceptions of the confederate's personality and character. Confession was found to have strong beneficial effects, particularly when given without a prior accusation and in ambiguous causal situations.

The topic of this article, public confession, was instigated by a series of news-making events that called for empirical confirmation and elaboration, as well as theoretical understanding. A few of these incidents are recent, while others further back in time are of great importance and remain salient to the public.

The recent events pertinent to public confession include the scan-

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dals associated with "Jimmy" Swaggart and Jim Bakker, two television evangelists accused of immoral sexual activities. Swaggart immediately confessed, admitting that the charges were true and acknowledging wrongdoing. He stated: "I do not call it a mistake. . . . I call it a sin. . . . I have no one to blame but myself" (see Osting, 1988, p. 46). Bakker, on the other hand, did not ever accept full responsibility. He accused others of blackmail, his wife of lack of caring, and his accuser (Jessica Hahn) of lying. He subsequently did offer a public apology, but not one of overriding repentance (see Hackett, 1987). Among the events involving the absence (or at least the initial absence) of public confession were the more recent drug-taking accusations toward the track star who was denied an Olympic victory, Ben Johnson, and gambling charges against the athlete with the most hits in the history of baseball, Pete Rose. But perhaps the most infamous modern example of lack of confession involves former President Richard Nixon and what is known as the Watergate scandal. As the reader well knows, Nixon never acknowledged personal guilt, although there was compelling evidence of his involvement in this affair, which included an illegal entry into the headquarters of the Democratic party.

Why did Swaggart confess, Bakker, Johnson, and Rose partially confess, and Nixon deny his guilt, when it appears that all five were engaged in untoward actions? That is, what are the goals that encourage or impede confession? In addition, what are the consequences of a public admission of wrongdoing? Does confession "work" in that, for example, it mitigates punishment from others and/or relieves personal guilt? And if confession does have positive benefits, what are the mediating mechanisms and processes involved? These are the broad questions considered in this article.

Before turning to these questions, it is necessary to briefly define confession. The study of "account giving" and impression management has differentiated four categories of accounts: denial, excuse, justification, and concession (which is more commonly known as confession and also includes apology; see Schonbach, 1985). In the latter three types of accounts, the untoward act is admitted, but the perceived cause of the action and/or acceptance of personal blame varies. Denial of responsibility in an excuse can be accomplished by blaming the act on external causes (e.g., economic conditions or peer influence) or on internal factors over which the actor has no control (e.g., mental or physical illness; see Kernis & Grannemann, 1990; Weiner, Amirkhan, Folkes, & Verette, 1987), whereas justification can be gained by appealing to

higher moral principles (e.g., acting for the betterment of the public good; see Scott & Lyman, 1968). In neither case, however, is blame accepted. On the other hand, the act of confession assumes both the acceptance of responsibility and personal blame. The acknowledgment of sin also may be accompanied by reparation (restitution), although it is equivocal whether this is a necessary component of confession.

Concerning, then, the goals of confession, it has been well-documented that the impression management techniques listed above can be effective in defusing anger and increasing pardon (Kremer & Stephens, 1983; Schlenker, 1980; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981; Weiner et al., 1987). Individuals therefore may use confession to manipulate others so that they are exonerated, forgiven, and in general perceived more positively (Blumstein et al., 1974; Holtgraves, 1989; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983; Schonbach, 1980). It should not be surprising that there is a naive confession-forgiveness association, given that this relation is even found in aphorisms, as in the saying: "A fault confessed is half forgiven." Writings in the Scriptures also point to a relation between confession and forgiveness. It is clearly stated that confession is the sine qua non condition for divine pardon. In the Saint John affirmation of the divine, it is written: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us" (I John 1). Prayers also are based on this belief: Witness the supplication, "I have sinned, O Lord; forgive me."

It also is possible that confession is not used as a conscious ploy but rather springs from overriding guilt. Jung (1933), for example, stated that "every personal secret has the effect of sin or guilt" (p. 34). Guilt, in turn, has been postulated as a goad that moves the individual to admit fault and to comply with social rules (Carlsmith & Gross, 1969). Presumptions of a "compulsion to confess" have been noted in the psychoanalytic literature and, like slips of the tongue and dreams, are considered beyond volitional control and a product of unconscious forces acting on the individual (see Belgum, 1963). Hence, Swaggart may have been "overcome" with guilt and impelled to confess, driven by the goal of reducing this negative state.

But do confessions actually result in forgiveness from others and/or decreased personal guilt, as social psychologists and dynamically oriented theorists, respectively, suggest? The data concerning the consequences of confession are sparse. There is some experimental evidence that confession indeed does produce forgiveness. For example, Holtgraves (1989) reports that a "full-blown apology" is rated by others as "most satisfying" following a broken social contract. He defines

a "full-blown apology" as an apology plus self-castigation plus restitution, all possible components of a confession. In a similar manner, McLaughlin et al. (1983) found that confession is most often followed by a retreat of the reproacher, rather than by increased hostility.

There also are "real-world" data supporting the positive effects of confession. For example, opinion polls after the television evangelist scandals revealed less condemnation of Swaggart following his full confession than of Bakker after his partial confession (*Newsweek*, 1987). More recently, Bakker, as well as the incompletely confessing Johnson and Rose, received severe punishments for their misdeeds. The Swaggart-Bakker polls intimate that Bakker, Johnson, and Rose may have met less cruel fates had they publicly acknowledged their wrongdoing and fault. In his popular autobiography, Senator Barry Goldwater (1988) expressed a similar belief in regard to Nixon when he wrote: "I wanted the President . . . to tell . . . the truth. If it was bad, he could ask for help and forgiveness. He could say he made a mistake and explicitly say he was sorry" (p. 269).

Why might confession give rise to forgiveness? That is, what theoretical tools and mediating processes are available to account for this hypothesized relation? To answer this question, we turn to correspondent inference theory as espoused by Jones and Davis (1965) and to some tenets of attribution theory (Weiner, 1985, 1986).

It has been contended that a confession signals recognition of the basic rule that has been violated and reaffirms that the transgressor values that rule (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). Hence, accepting personal responsibility may alter inferences about the person who violated expectations and social norms and restore perceptions of that person's moral character. As Blumstein et al. (1974) cogently write:

An offender may also return to a proper moral position by a display of penitence. By showing respect for the rule he broke, the offender lays claim to the right to reenter the moral graces of the offended party who, by demanding an account, becomes the momentary guardian of responsibility (Goffman, 1971, p. 107). Showing penitence, like claiming reduced responsibility, splits the identity of the offender. He asserts his own guilt for the act and accepts the momentary blow to his moral character, while at the same time reaffirms his overriding righteousness (awareness of the rules) and acknowledges the offended's rights to demand an account (Gusfield, 1967, p. 179; Sykes & Matza, 1957, p. 666). (p. 552)

According to the prior analysis, the linkage between the negative act and the correspondent inference of unfavorable personality characteristics of the actor is lessened if he or she confesses. That is, the behavior and the intention that produced it are less likely to be perceived as corresponding to some underlying dispositional attribute of the person. When viewed from a correspondent inference perspective, confession is then presumed to have the same severing effect on act-to-disposition correspondence as does information that all others have engaged in the same action, the existence of situational constraints that did not allow the confessor choice in his or her behavior, and the presence of mitigating circumstances (Kremer & Stephens, 1983). These factors also reduce perceived personal responsibility and trait inferences.

Confession is anticipated to have other consequences in addition to altering perceptions of responsibility and moral character. Two types of consequences can be differentiated: alteration in the perceived properties of the causal inference, and changes in evoked emotion and intended actions. Regarding the properties of causal inference, attribution research has documented three dimensions of causality: locus (internal or external to the person), stability (variable or invariant over time), and controllability (subject or not subject to volitional influence; see Weiner, 1986).¹ Guided by the prior discussion of correspondent inference, confession is expected to result in attributions that are both more external and more uncontrollable by the confessor. Moreover, inasmuch as confession also minimizes dispositional or trait inferences, the attribution for the act also should be perceived as more unstable and not persisting over time.

Concerning changes in emotion and intended action, the specific effects are suggested in attributional studies of helping behavior (see review in Weiner, 1986). In this research, helping is examined when the target of the aid is perceived as personally responsible for his or her need (e.g., the individual was lazy or overindulgent) as opposed to not personally responsible (e.g., the needy target was ill; see review in Schmidt & Weiner, 1988). It has been found that perceived responsibility for a need (or for a negative outcome) elicits anger toward the person rather than sympathy and decreases helping behavior as well as other indicators of concern. On the other hand, when the individual is not considered personally responsible for a need or for a negative

1. In this article we do not differentiate between the concepts of responsibility, controllability, and intentionality. All are used to refer to the perception of volition.

outcome, then sympathy rather than anger is evoked and aid as well as other prosocial behaviors toward the individual are expressed. Hence, from an attributional perspective, a confession is anticipated to change not only the judgments of the moral character and the perceived responsibility of the transgressor, but also to decrease anger, increase sympathy, and reduce the negative repercussions of the untoward act.

Turning to the second goal of confession as a reducer of guilt, Jung (1933) poetically stated: "It is only with the help of confession that I am able to throw myself into the arms of humanity freed at last from the burden of moral exile" (p. 35). The Scriptures also state that confession results in a relief from the "burden of sin" (Belgum, 1963). Based on these beliefs, it has been contended that confession has a cathartic value and has positive effects on coping and adjustment, as well as on therapeutic outcomes (Mowrer, 1961; see also Rychlak, 1981, p. 230). But there is an absence of experimental evidence supporting these beliefs, as well as only weak linkages to theory.

The Present Research

Guided by these observations and diverse literatures, in this article we ask whether confession alters the perceptions of others regarding attributed blame, personal characteristics, and the correlated consequences of these judgments, including affective reactions and forgiveness. We then consider the possibility that confession may be perceived as having either impression management or guilt as its source, while remaining focused on the effects of confession on the judgments and perceptions of others. Finally, we examine whether confession also influences prosocial behavior. This social psychological or interpersonal focus, to the exclusion of an examination of experienced guilt and guilt reduction, is in part due to the fact that the latter issues are difficult, if not unattainable, topics for experimental study at this point in time, and in part due to the training of these investigators.

Four role-playing experiments and one laboratory manipulation investigation are reported. The basic paradigm in the simulation studies was to reveal that a political figure, a member of student government, or a student in class was accused of a moral transgression (see Riordan, Marlin, & Kellogg, 1983). That accusation was typically accompanied by an objective determination or reasonable evidence of wrongdoing. Information was then provided that the accused party confessed either following or not following the accusation or denied either personal re-

sponsibility for the act or the act itself. The confession included the components of contrition, blame, and reparation (restitution) to magnify its effects (see Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Holtgraves, 1989).

Among the variables manipulated were the status of the alleged offender (Experiment 1), the attribution for the wrongdoing (Experiment 2), the type of experimental design (single vs. repeated measure; Experiment 1 vs. Experiment 3), and the spontaneity of the confession (with or without an accusation; Experiment 4). The dependent variables in one or more of the investigations included the perceived personal character of the transgressor, attributions of responsibility for the act, affective reactions of sympathy and anger, future expectations, inferred reasons for the confession, forgiveness, and behavioral judgments including sanctioning and voting behavior. Further, the effectiveness of the confession was compared with either denial of personal responsibility (Experiments 1 and 2), denial of the act itself (Experiments 3 and 4), or no information (a control condition; Experiments 1 through 5).

In the laboratory manipulation study, a mixed-motive game setting was used in which a confederate either spontaneously confessed or confessed following an allegation that he had prior knowledge that resulted in his winning the game. We then examined whether this admission influenced subsequent cooperation and competition with the confederate by the other players in the game, as well as their perceptions of the confederate's personality and character.

Experiment 1

In the initial investigation, vignettes were presented that described a charged individual who either confessed or denied personal responsibility for an act (misusing an expense account), while in a control condition no information about the person's response was given. In addition, the charged individual was either of high status (in the federal government) or of lesser status (in student government). The status of the transgressor was varied to pursue the hypothesis that confession may only be effective for particular roles (Sennett, 1987). We then examined a variety of dependent variables that are described below.

METHOD

Subjects were 125 undergraduates (37 males, 88 females) enrolled in introductory psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). They participated as part of the course requirement and were tested in groups ranging in number from 9 to 20.

The subjects were given one of six vignettes that varied the status of the alleged transgressor (professional politician or student in government) and the response to an allegation (confess, deny responsibility, no response). There were 20 to 22 respondents in each of six conditions (two levels of status \times three levels of response). The political vignette read as follows, with appropriate changes made in the student version:

Senator Joe McNally, one of the favored Presidential candidates, has accused Senator James Dunn, his chief opponent, of misusing his senatorial expense account. Senator McNally stated: "Senator Dunn has used his expense account, which is funded by taxpayers, to print up and mail out advertisements for his presidential election campaign. He knows that current expense account regulations prohibit the use of expenses for election purposes."

In the control condition, no additional information was provided. In the two experimental conditions, the substance of the charge was not questioned; however, acceptance of personal responsibility was either denied or there was a full and elaborate confession. In the confession condition, the vignette concluded as follows:

I apologize; I'm terribly sorry for what has happened. I feel terribly guilty. It's my fault; I am responsible for this. I have gone through all the entries to my expense account and have paid back all expenses that even have a remote possibility of having been used to fund my campaign.

Three components of confession are included in the above statement: (a) contrition (expressed sorrow); (b) acknowledgment of personal responsibility and guilt; and (c) reparation. The denial condition consisted of a statement by the accused senator that he was not responsible for the act.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variables in this exploratory investigation included 23 rating scales anchored at the extremes and subsequently divided into seven equal intervals. The items were comprised within six general categories of theoretically derived inferences or behaviors, including some thought to mediate forgiveness. The categories were: (a) attributions for the act; (b) perceived character of the accused; (c) affective reactions; (d) expectancies for and perceived consistency of the action; (e) forgiveness; and (f) judged behaviors.

More specifically, eight of the questions related to attributions for the transgression. These items were specific causes that pilot testing revealed would unambiguously fit within one of the eight cells of a Locus (internal or external to the person) \times Controllability (someone had control or did not have volitional control) \times Stability (stable or unstable) dimensional matrix. For example, the items included: "Dunn is a dishonest person" (internal, controllable, and stable); "Dunn's campaign staff sometimes neglects to keep him advised on election regulations" (external, controllable by the staff, and unstable); "Due to injury, Dunn sometimes forgets things" (internal, uncontrollable, and unstable). It was then also possible to combine the individual causal items and obtain overall ratings for the causal dimensions. Regarding locus, which was of prime concern, the ratings of the four internal items were combined and subtracted from the ratings of the four external items. For personal controllability the two internal and controllable causes were combined and subtracted from the remaining six ratings.

Character of the accused, a second broad classification category, was examined with five questions asking about his trustworthiness, sincerity, believability, knowledge, and competence. For the category of affective reactions, two items related to feelings toward the accused (anger and sympathy), whereas three assessed inferences about the accused person's own feelings (guilt, shame, and self-esteem). A fourth class of items, labeled expectancy, was captured with two items that related to the likelihood that similar acts had occurred in the past and would reoccur in the future. In addition, one item examined forgiveness. Finally, regarding consequent behaviors, two items related to punishment and voting likelihood. There were two random question orders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A series of 2×3 (Status \times Confession Type) multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were first performed on the grouped question categories. Status of the accused (politician or student office holder) had only one significant effect, that on the trait of sincerity. Hence, this factor will not be further discussed.

Considering first the eight causal ascriptions, a MANOVA as a function of confession type reached an acceptable significance level, $F(2, 120) = 3.15, p < .05$. Subsequent analyses of variance (ANOVAs) traced this effect to four of the specific attributions (see Table 1). Table 1 reveals that confession, relative to denial of responsibility and/or the control condition, results in fewer attributions to causes that reflect Dunn's negligence (internal, controllable, unstable), his low ability (internal, uncontrollable, stable), and his overtiredness

Table 1
Ratings of Attributions, Traits, and Behaviors as
a Function of Confession Condition: Experiment 1

Dependent variable	Confession condition			<i>F</i> value
	Control	Confess	Deny responsibility	
Attributions				
I, C, U	4.43 ^a	4.84 ^a	5.69 ^b	4.66
I, UC, S	1.81 ^{ab}	1.53 ^a	2.21 ^b	5.55
I, UC, U	2.40 ^b	1.86 ^a	2.52 ^b	3.99
E, UC, U	6.02 ^b	6.67 ^a	5.85 ^b	3.64
Locus (E-I)	4.24 ^a	7.07 ^b	3.64 ^a	6.89
I, C	9.81 ^a	10.04 ^a	11.33 ^b	4.87
Traits				
Competence	3.46 ^b	5.26 ^a	2.79 ^b	29.27
Knowledge	4.24 ^b	5.31 ^a	4.07 ^b	7.41
Forgiveness	4.00 ^{ab}	4.69 ^a	3.38 ^b	5.68

Note. I = internal, C = controllable, U = unstable, UC = uncontrollable, S = stable, and E = external. Superscripts not sharing a common letter differ at the $p < .05$ level (comparisons are within rows, across conditions). All F values are significant at $p < .05$, $df = 2, 120$.

(internal, uncontrollable, unstable), but greater ascriptions to the over-tiredness of his staff (external, uncontrollable, unstable).² Given that confession reduced attributions to three of the internal causes and increased attributions to one external cause, it follows that there would be a significant locus (external-internal) effect when combining causes, $F(2, 120) = 6.89$, $p < .001$, with more external attributions following a confession. In addition, comparisons involving the two internal controllable causes differentiated the three confession conditions in the predicted direction, $F(2, 120) = 4.87$, $p < .01$ (see Table 1). That is, denial of responsibility for the act increased relative inferences of personal responsibility.

Trait perceptions also were influenced by the confession manipulation, multivariate $F(2, 120) = 9.90$, $p < .001$. Univariate analyses traced this finding to the perceived competence and knowledge of the

2. In this and all subsequent investigations, planned comparisons between means were performed with the Bonferroni test.

wrongdoer, which were the only traits significantly enhanced by a confession. Finally, forgiveness was affected in the expected direction by the manipulation, $F(2, 120) = 5.68, p < .005$. The remaining dependent variables (affect, expectancy, voting, and punishment) were not significantly altered by the confession manipulation.

In sum, the evidence in Experiment 1 suggests that confessions do interrupt the inference that bad acts are performed by inferior people. In addition, causal ascriptions were less internal and controllable, and forgiveness increased. This is in accord with a conceptualization linking confession to perceived lack of responsibility (in spite of an admission of responsibility!) and the consequences of this judgment. While all of the anticipated effects were not attained, the data encouraged us to continue with this line of research.

Experiment 2

There were various issues to pursue following this initial investigation. We know from Experiment 1 that confession alters inferences about a misdeed, particularly the perceived causes of the misdeed. When the dependent variables were attributions to specific causes, it appeared that confession lessened the transgressor's perceived responsibility for the outcome. This suggests that in situations where there may be some ambiguity about the cause of a misdeed, as was the case in Experiment 1, one of the ameliorative consequences of confession is that there is an attributional shift toward perceived externality and uncontrollability.

We pursued this question of attributional change more systematically in Experiment 2. Causal conditions were manipulated to locate the cause of the transgression used in Experiment 1 to be clearly internal and controllable by the accused politician, external and uncontrollable, and both internal/controllable and external/uncontrollable to create an ambiguous condition. Among the dependent variables were rating scales directly assessing the causal dimensions of locus, stability, and controllability.

METHOD

Subjects were 61 students (47 females, 14 males) enrolled in introductory psychology at UCLA. They were tested in groups of approximately 30 each. Each subject was given the political vignette from Experiment 1, accompanied by

one of three types of attributional information. The attributional manipulations were as follows:

Internal/Controllable (N = 20)

A thorough investigation of Senator McNally's accusation against Senator Dunn revealed that Senator Dunn had been personally negligent in the management of campaign funds. In accord with congressional guidelines, the senate investigation found Dunn guilty of the charges against him.

External/Uncontrollable (N = 21)

A thorough investigation of Senator McNally's accusation against Senator Dunn revealed that several of Senator Dunn's campaign staff had been dishonest in their use of campaign funds. Dunn had become aware of their dishonesty only shortly before the accusation. In accord with congressional guidelines, the senate investigation found Dunn guilty of the charges against him.

Ambiguous (N = 20)

A thorough senate investigation of the accusation revealed that several of Senator Dunn's campaign staff had been dishonest in their use of his campaign funds. Senator Dunn had become aware of their dishonesty only shortly before the accusation. It was further revealed that Senator Dunn had been personally negligent in the management of his campaign funds. In accord with congressional guidelines, the senate investigation found Dunn guilty of the charges against him.

The type of confession (confess, deny, control) varied as in Experiment 1, with confession again including contrition, responsibility, and reparation. However, the confession type was a within-subjects variable. Subjects were instructed to "suppose that, instead of making the statement you read previously (or not making any statement), Dunn had made the following statement. . . ." In the control or no information condition, subjects merely were told that there was no further information or comments from Dunn after the accusation. This design has the danger of sensitizing subjects to the confession manipulation. However, it was also evident in the between-subjects design that we were examining the effects of confession or denial on judgments about the accused.

For each confession type within the manipulated attributional condition, there were 12 dependent variables. Six questions were direct attribution probes, two for each of the three causal dimensions. For example, one of the items asked "Was the reason the expense account was misused something about Dunn or something about the environment/situation?" Following Russell (1982), the two individual probes for each dimension were averaged to form a single score. Of the remaining six nonattributional response scales, two assessed anger and sympathy, one asked about the likelihood that Senator Dunn would misuse his expense account again, one measured forgiveness, and two

examined judgments of voting and punishment. All responses were made on 8-point rating scales. There were two orders of dependent variables, a random order and its mirror image. In addition, there were six different stimulus orders of the three confession types. Inasmuch as subjects received all three confession types within an attributional condition, they gave 36 responses (12 dependent variables \times 3 confession conditions).

RESULTS

The causal dimension, affect, and behavioral intention variables were analyzed in a series of 3×3 (Attribution \times Confession Type) MANOVAs, with repeated measures on the second factor. The mean ratings of the variables are shown in Table 2. There was a main effect of attributional information only for the locus variable, with attributions more internal to the guilty party given the internal/controllable manipulation, $F(2, 58) = 7.73, p < .001$. Regarding the confession manipulation, there were significant main effects for causal stability, expectancy, affects, forgiveness, and judgments of behavior, with confession lowering perceived causal stability, increasing the positivity of the affective ratings, lowering future expectancies, increasing forgiveness, and enhancing positive behavioral judgments relative to both denial of responsibility and the control condition, all F s > 6 ; all p s $< .001$.

Even though the overall analyses revealed no interaction between confession type and attributional condition, in this investigation we were particularly interested in the effects of confession type on dimensional ratings, affect, and behavioral intents within rather than between causal conditions. Within each attributional condition, we therefore conducted a series of planned contrasts between means as a function of confession type. For the dimensional ratings, it is evident in Table 2 that neither perceived locus, stability, or controllability varied significantly by confession type when the causal cue was clearly internal/controllable or external/uncontrollable. However, in the ambiguous condition, confession significantly altered causal perceptions such that the cause of the transgression was perceived as less internal, more unstable, and more uncontrollable. For each of the other variables examined in the ambiguous condition, confession resulted in the more positive response (e.g., more sympathy, less anger, etc.) than did denial or the control condition. This was not as consistently the case in the less ambiguous attributional conditions. When the transgressor's misdeed was portrayed as internal and controllable, only expectancy for repeating the transgression

Table 2
Mean Judgments in the Three Experimental Conditions as
a Function of Attributional Information: Experiment 2

Variable	Attributional information											
	Internal/controllable				External/uncontrollable				Mixed (Ambiguous)			
	Control	Confess	Deny		Control	Confess	Deny		Control	Confess	Deny	
Locus	5.61 ^a	5.93 ^a	5.25 ^a		4.74 ^a	4.48 ^a	3.93 ^a		5.55 ^b	4.25 ^a	5.33 ^b	
Stability	3.88 ^a	3.53 ^a	3.93 ^a		4.81 ^a	4.24 ^a	4.60 ^a		4.88 ^b	4.15 ^a	5.08 ^b	
Control	5.74 ^a	5.85 ^a	5.63 ^a		5.05 ^a	4.81 ^a	4.41 ^a		6.00 ^b	4.90 ^a	5.93 ^b	
Expectancy	5.29 ^b	3.95 ^a	4.50 ^b		4.62 ^b	3.19 ^a	4.48 ^b		6.00 ^b	4.95 ^a	6.36 ^b	
Sympathy	2.76 ^a	3.57 ^a	2.85 ^a		3.52 ^a	4.14 ^b	3.71 ^a		3.15 ^a	4.60 ^b	3.10 ^a	
Anger	5.10 ^a	4.48 ^a	5.40 ^a		5.52 ^b	4.57 ^a	5.00 ^{ab}		5.50 ^b	4.60 ^a	5.70 ^b	
Forgive	4.10 ^a	4.90 ^a	4.15 ^a		4.52 ^a	5.81 ^b	4.71 ^a		3.55 ^a	5.40 ^b	3.75 ^a	
Punish	6.14 ^a	5.95 ^a	5.80 ^a		5.33 ^a	4.10 ^a	5.19 ^a		5.95 ^b	4.65 ^a	5.95 ^b	
Vote	3.62 ^a	3.57 ^a	3.15 ^a		3.29 ^a	4.62 ^b	3.52 ^a		3.05 ^a	3.95 ^b	2.65 ^a	

Note. Superscripts not sharing a common letter differ at the $p < .05$ level. All comparisons are made within an attributional condition. High numbers indicate more internal, stable, and controllable ascriptions.

varied by confession type. In the external/uncontrollable condition, the positive effects of confession were evident for expectancy, affects, forgiveness, and voting intent but not for the other dependent variables. In sum, although the confession effect was rather robust, there was evidence that it was particularly effective when the cause of the transgression was unclear. Such situations of attributional uncertainty generally capture real-world conditions of political or other transgressions by public figures.

Experiment 3

In Experiment 3, we turn to the question of the *change* in perceptions toward the confessor or denier. If confession does alter act-to-disposition linkages, as has been suggested, then it is important to document that added knowledge about a confession does in fact break this association. In Experiments 1 and 2, this question was not directly addressed inasmuch as ratings were made at only one point in time, after all the information had been received. In Experiment 3, ratings were made both following the accusation and again after the confession or denial.

METHOD

Subjects were 72 undergraduates (36 females and 36 males) participating for credit in their introductory psychology class at UCLA. They were tested in groups ranging in size from 5 to 12.

A 3×2 (Confession \times Time) repeated measures experimental design was employed, with time as the repeated factor. Each subject first read a short vignette, similar to those used in the first two experiments, in which a senate investigating committee determined that a senator was guilty of wrongdoing. After reading the vignette, subjects responded to nine questions, primarily taken from the initial experiment. Three questions related to the senator's traits (honesty, sincerity, and trustworthiness); two concerned emotional reactions of anger and sympathy, one assessed forgiveness, two were the behavioral judgments about voting likelihood and recommended punishment, while a final question examined perceptions of the senator's feelings of guilt. All ratings were made on 8-point scales anchored at the extremes. There were two orders of the dependent variables, a random order and its mirror image.

Following the initial ratings, subjects were randomly assigned to one of the three confession types (all-component confession, act denial, and control). There were 24 subjects in each condition. The confession condition began by

first reconfirming the senator's wrongdoing; it ended with a full confession by the senator as in the first two experiments. The denial condition also began with the committee's restatement of the senator's transgression, but ended with his denial of the act. This denial was stated firmly, with the senator reported as saying: "This committee's decision comes as a complete shock to me. I did not do it. My expense account was never misused to finance my campaign." The control condition consisted only of the committee's reconfirmation of wrongdoing.

After reading one of the vignettes containing the confession manipulation, subjects again answered the same nine questions about the wrongdoer's traits, affective reactions, etc. Hence, each subject made 18 ratings.

RESULTS

The mean ratings of the dependent variables are shown in Table 3. Multivariate analyses revealed a Condition \times Time interaction for seven of the nine dependent variables (all p s $<$.05; the two variables not displaying significant interactions were reported sympathy and perceived guilt of the transgressor). Across the two time periods, reactions toward the confessor became significantly more favorable for all the dependent variables (p s $<$.05), while none of the ratings became significantly more favorable in either the control or the denial condition. Further analyses revealed that there were no significant differences between the experimental conditions at Time 1, whereas there were significant differences between conditions for all of the variables at Time 2 (all p s $<$.05), with confession differing in the predicted direction from both the denial and control conditions or from the control condition only. Hence, confession enhanced character inferences, decreased negative affect, and the like. In general, the pattern of data supported the findings of Experiments 1 and 2 and documented that confession indeed alters prior opinions.

Experiment 4

We have thus far documented that confession generally does result in perceived changes in personality traits, causal attributions, affective reactions, expectancies, forgiveness, and judgments of behavior toward the confessor. We also have documented that these effects generalize across persons of different status or relevance to the raters and when given varied information about the cause of the misdeed. But we have

Table 3
Mean Judgments in Three Experimental Conditions, before and after a Confession: Experiment 3

Variable	Time 1 (Before)			Time 2 (After)		
	Control	Confess	Deny	Control	Confess	Deny
Honesty	1.95 ^a	1.96 ^a	2.38 ^a	1.71 ^a	4.13 ^c	2.71 ^b
Sincerity	2.29 ^a	2.69 ^a	3.13 ^a	1.83 ^a	4.13 ^c	2.72 ^b
Trustworthy	2.12 ^a	2.25 ^a	2.62 ^a	1.75 ^a	3.16 ^b	2.62 ^b
Sympathy	2.00 ^a	2.29 ^a	2.54 ^a	2.75 ^a	3.20 ^b	2.58 ^a
Anger	5.70 ^a	5.25 ^a	4.87 ^a	6.13 ^b	4.25 ^a	4.37 ^a
Forgive	2.16 ^a	2.95 ^a	3.38 ^a	1.96 ^a	4.08 ^b	2.66 ^a
Punish	5.79 ^a	6.04 ^a	5.66 ^a	6.33 ^c	4.38 ^a	5.38 ^b
Vote	1.96 ^a	2.29 ^a	3.00 ^a	1.75 ^a	3.29 ^b	3.29 ^b
Senator guilt	3.17 ^a	3.41 ^a	4.08 ^a	3.48 ^a	4.79 ^b	3.54 ^a

Note. Superscripts not sharing a common letter differ at the $p < .05$ level. All comparisons are within-trials.

yet to address a central issue raised in the introduction, namely, whether there might be disparate perceived sources of a confession (impression management vs. guilt), and whether perceptions of these distinct origins will have disparate consequences.

In Experiment 4, we examine whether a freely given confession, as opposed to a confession following an accusation, generates distinctive perceptions about the causes or goals of the confession and, in turn, different consequences. If one voluntarily confesses without a prior accusation, then the only plausible cause of the confession appears to be internal to the confessor, such as personal integrity or overriding guilt. On the other hand, confession following an accusation conceivably could be attributed to an impression management strategy, with high moral character relatively discounted as a causal factor (see Kelley, 1973). Hence, we anticipated that individuals voluntarily or spontaneously confessing without a prior charge of wrongdoing would be perceived as having confessed because of guilt rather than impression management. Such individuals would then be judged as having more positive personality traits, would evoke greater sympathy and less anger, would more likely be forgiven, and would elicit more positive behavioral intentions than would individuals confessing after an accusation. These latter persons, conversely, would more likely be judged as using confession as an im-

pression management ploy. Both confession conditions, however, were anticipated to result in more positive judgments than would denial of wrongdoing.

METHOD

Subjects were 32 male and 33 female undergraduates at UCLA, participating for credit in introductory psychology. They were tested in groups ranging in number from 3 to 10.

Subjects were first told that they would be reading different versions of the same basic scenario, with the names of the individuals altered in the different vignettes. Each subject read two distinct scenarios, one in a political setting and the other in an educational context, in which two different confession conditions as well as a denial condition were described. Hence, each subject made judgments for six vignettes in this completely within-subjects design (two contexts \times three confession types). The presentation order of the two stories was counterbalanced, as was the order of the three vignettes within each scenario. The educational scenario read as follows:

Imagine that you are in a highly competitive high-school class. It is important for you to get a good grade on the final exam because you are applying to college. When you get your exam back, your grade is not as high as you had hoped, and you feel very disappointed. One student (we will call him Tom) had done so well that it raised the curve and caused you to get a lower grade.

In the act-denial condition, the story was completed with:

Later, the teacher calls Tom into her office and indicates that she has evidence that he cheated on the exam. Tom responds: "I've never cheated on an exam and I did not cheat on this one." The teacher then submits her evidence to a school committee. The committee concludes that Tom did, in fact, cheat. The exams are graded on a new curve.

In the accused-confession condition, the story read:

Later, the teacher calls Tom into her office and indicates that she has evidence that he cheated. Tom responds: "Yes, you are right. I cheated. I'm sorry; I feel very bad about it. Please change the curve so that the other students' grades will be as high as they should be."

In the spontaneous (voluntary) confession condition, the story concluded:

Later, much to everyone's surprise, Tom goes on his own initiative to the teacher and says: "I cheated on the exam. I'm sorry; I feel very bad about it. Please change the curve so that the other students' grades will be as high as they should be."

The political vignette was very similar in form to the educational story, using material from the prior experiments. In both simulated settings there was hypothetical involvement of the reader, although we did not conceive of this as a necessary condition for the predicted effects.

The dependent variables were similar to those used in the previous studies: four questions assessed the traits of morality, honesty, sincerity, and trustworthiness; two items assessed sympathy and anger toward the accused; one item elicited judgments of forgiveness; and two questions assessed judgments about preferred punishment and voting likelihood. Finally, one question tapped perceptions of guilt feelings of the confessor, while two other queries examined the motivation for confessing—personal guilt versus concerns about impression management. All ratings were made in 8-point scales anchored at the extremes. There were two orders of the 12 dependent variables, a random order and its mirror image.

In addition, following each of the two story themes, two questions involved comparisons between the confession conditions. We asked which of the two individuals confessing (the control condition was ignored) was more likely to have confessed because of guilt, and in an independent question, which of the two individuals was more likely to have confessed because of concerns about impression management. Hence, each subject made 76 judgments ([6 vignettes \times 12 ratings] + 4 comparisons).

RESULTS

There were no significant interactions with story type, so the data from the two vignettes were combined by simple averaging. There were highly significant differences on all 12 dependent variables between the three conditions (multivariate F s ranged from 37 to 180, all p s < .0001; see Table 4). In addition, for all variables except the ratings on impression management, there were significant differences such that the spontaneous confessor was perceived as more trustworthy and moral, and elicited greater sympathy and forgiveness, than the accused confessor, who in turn was judged more favorably than the denier (all p s < .01). Moreover, the accused confessor was perceived as more concerned about impression management than was the denier or spontaneous confessor, which also is consistent with our predictions.

Regarding the two paired-comparison questions, in the political and educational situations, respectively, 92% and 86% of the subjects perceived the spontaneous confessor rather than the person confessing after an accusation as admitting wrongdoing more because of guilt. Conversely, in the two contexts, 63% and 74%, respectively, of the subjects perceived that a confession following an accusation is due more to

Table 4
 Mean Judgments in the Three Experimental
 Conditions: Experiment 4

Variable	Experimental condition		
	Spontaneous confession	Confession after accusation	Deny
Morality	6.05 ^a	4.61 ^b	3.07 ^c
Honesty	6.22 ^a	4.80 ^b	2.63 ^c
Sincerity	6.42 ^a	4.84 ^b	2.95 ^c
Trustworthy	5.70 ^a	4.12 ^b	2.83 ^c
Sympathy	5.23 ^a	4.01 ^b	2.85 ^c
Anger	3.64 ^a	4.83 ^b	5.95 ^c
Forgive	6.20 ^a	5.03 ^b	4.20 ^c
Punish	3.89 ^c	4.90 ^b	5.95 ^a
Vote	5.09 ^a	3.73 ^b	2.22 ^c
Guilt	6.93 ^a	6.20 ^b	3.72 ^c
Motivated by guilt	5.45 ^a	3.46 ^b	1.35 ^c
Motivated by impression management	2.45 ^b	3.36 ^a	2.22 ^b

Note. Superscripts not sharing a common letter differ at the $p < .05$ level.

impression management concerns than a spontaneous confession would be (all p s $< .01$).

In sum, spontaneous confession, as well as confession following an accusation, is a source of information used by respondents to infer the causes or goals of a confession. The different perceived sources of confession then produce disparate consequences.

Experiment 5

The experiments thus far have relied upon a simulation and self-report methodology. While this certainly is a legitimate empirical approach, it also is desirable to study confession at its moment of expression in a more real context. To accomplish this, we created a mixed-motive (cooperation vs. competition) game setting that enabled us to examine the effects of both spontaneous confession and confession following an accusation on cooperative behavior as well as on person perception.

Overview

In the mixed-motive paradigm we employed, subjects played a puzzle-solving game in a group setting and the winner of this game received more money than the other members of the group, who nonetheless received some share of the reward. One member of the group was a confederate and won the initial two games that were played. After these wins, the confederate confessed that he had prior information about the puzzles used in the two games. In one condition, the confession was stated following an accusation by the experimenter, while in the second condition the confession was spontaneous. There also was a control condition in which nothing was said by the confederate. Then the game was played again. Throughout all the games, subjects could share instrumental information with the confederate, whom they also rated on a number of traits, including intelligence, honesty, and cooperativeness. The pre- and post-confession sharing behavior and trait ratings were the dependent measures used to examine the effects of confession.

METHOD

Procedure

Subjects were 95 students at UCLA (30 males, 65 females) enrolled in introductory psychology and participating for course credit. They had signed up to take part in an experiment entitled "Perceptions of Others in Mixed-Motive Games." The subjects appeared in groups of six. However, one of these was a confederate, an undergraduate male student in the drama department blind to the experimental hypotheses. Subjects were greeted by the experimenter, a female in her mid-30s, who seated them in separate cubicles arranged horizontally across the room. The experimenter then read the following:

This experiment makes use of what is called a mixed-motive situation. You will be playing a game that is familiar to you because it is played on television. It involves filling in letters to a quotation until you are able to guess what the quote is. If the quote is solved, then every member of the group wins \$1. But the person who actually guesses the quote wins \$5. Thus, you have good reason to cooperate as well as reason to compete and be selfish.

Subjects were led to believe that there would be four quotes, payment would be made after the second and/or fourth games (depending on the experimental condition) and that, in the case of multiple winners, the \$5 prize would be divided.

The quotes used averaged 17 words and 68 letters. Each subject initially

received a sheet of paper containing the "shell" of the first quote (the number of words and the number of letters in each word). In addition, eight letters from the quote were entered onto each player's shell in the correct position. Each subject, including the confederate, was given a unique set of eight letters, and this fact was communicated to the participants. As the game began, each subject was first asked if they wanted to share one of their letters with the group, and the experimenter periodically pointed out the group advantage and personal disadvantage of this kind of cooperation. The shell of the quote was also displayed on the blackboard in front of the players and the experimenter entered letters that the subjects in turn chose to share. After each member of the group had made a decision to share or not, a "round" was completed.

Each participant was assigned a number (1 to 6) and the experimenter called out the number of that player prior to the announced player decision to share or not share a letter. Players also received information that they would be required to answer some questions about one other player (their "target person"), and thus were asked to pay careful attention when that player was responding. Unbeknownst to the subjects, they all were rating the confederate (who was in Position 5). These ratings, made on 7-point scales anchored at the extremes, were similar to those in the simulation studies. However, they had to be appropriate to this context so that ratings of forgiveness and source of confession could not be included. The players did rate personal characteristics of the confederate (honesty, morality, cooperativeness, and intelligence); whether they would like to participate with this player again; whether they would help this player in a class, if asked; and the affects of irritation and admiration. The ratings appeared reasonable inasmuch as the experimenter stated that one purpose of the study was to assess how the participants felt about and perceived the other players.

At the end of one "round," that is, when all six participants had the opportunity to share a letter with the group, the experimenter asked if anyone wanted to guess the quote. We had selected quotes that typically would not be solved at that time, but also did not appear to be unachievable. The final quotes selected were: "Somewhere, over the rainbow . . ."; "We hold these truths to be self-evident . . ."; and "Dashing through the snow. . . ." Following the anticipated inability of the players to guess the quote, ratings of the target person (i.e., the confederate) were made.

Then an additional instruction was introduced. Subjects were told that they must share three of their unique set of letters with their target person, and that they also would receive three letters in return. They did not know, however, from whom they would be receiving letters. Subjects were instructed to write these letters on an empty shell of the quote and to put the shell in an envelope to be collected and "delivered" to the designated target person by the experimenter. The experimenter then was able to create conditions so that all the actual subjects received the same three letters. These were in identical

envelopes surreptitiously received from the confederate when collecting the letter-passing envelopes from subjects. This exchange was possible because of the visual barriers between subjects formed by the cubicles and the horizontal row seating.

After receiving the letters and following an appropriate time lapse during which players could study the quote, the confederate exclaimed that he knew the answer. He was asked to write it out and announce it to the group, and it was proclaimed correct. As the experimenter filled in the entire quote on the board, each subject was able to confirm that he or she indeed had eight letters of the quote and was passed three additional letters that fit. At the same time, the experimenter expressed mild surprise that the solution was reached so quickly.

The same procedure was followed for the second quote—receiving the shell with eight inserted letters, sharing or not sharing letters, rating the confederate, passing letters, and a solution by the confederate. For the second quote, however, the experimenter indicated that the participants could now share from two to four letters with their target person. (In the actual letter pass, subjects again surreptitiously received the same three letters.) We imposed a three-letter pass followed by a two to four letter pass so that participants could gain familiarity with the procedure and ceiling effects (passing all letters) and floor effects (not passing any letters) could be avoided. Letter passing after the third quote was to be the second type of dependent variable and was our operational definition of cooperation or competition with the confederate.

Experimental manipulation. At the end of the second quote the experimenter began to pay out winnings for the two quotes (\$2 to each participant, \$10 to the confederate) to subjects in the two confession conditions. At this point the experimental manipulation was introduced. There were three experimental conditions: spontaneous confession ($N = 30$), confession after an accusation ($N = 30$), and a control condition ($N = 35$).³ In the spontaneous confession condition the confederate said:

Wait, I cannot take the money. My roommate had been in this experiment before so I knew the answers. I did not think that the same quotes would be used. I want to be fair to everyone, so I can't take the money.

This was elaborated in an exchange with the experimenter. The script was based on extensive pilot research to assure that it was both believable and accomplished our goals.

3. In pilot research, we attempted to also create a denial condition. However, this merely resulted in a perceived disagreement between the accuser (the experimenter) and the denier (the confederate). Given the lack of any evidence of wrongdoing, the other subjects disbelieved the experimenter. We therefore did not pursue this condition.

In the confession following an accusation condition, the experimenter cast suspicion on the confederate by commenting again after the second quote on how rapidly the puzzles had been solved. She stated that these puzzles had never been guessed so quickly in all the prior testings of many participants. The experimenter then directly confronted the confederate, asking if he had any prior knowledge of the quotes that had been used. The confederate then admitted prior knowledge because his roommate had already been in the experiment. He also stated that he did not think the same quotes would be used again. This was also elaborated in an exchange with the experimenter.

In both confession conditions, after some visibly troubled deliberation, the experimenter announced that the experiment could proceed, but that new quotes that had never been used before would be substituted. She did not continue with the distribution of winnings, saying that she would now wait until after the fourth quote. The experimenter then went to a cabinet that differed from the one containing the prior quotes and removed what was indicated to be an "unused" quote. This was done in clear view of all participants.

In the control condition, the confederate also guessed the first two quotes but no experimental manipulation was introduced. The experimenter proceeded in a matter-of-fact manner with the quote-solving procedure, verbally keeping track of the confederate's as well as subjects' winnings. Subjects in this condition had been told that they would receive their winnings at the end of the game (i.e., after the fourth quote).

In all conditions, a third quotation was then passed out and the game proceeded as it had, with a new shell, letters shared or not shared, ratings made of the confederate, and letter passing. However, it was now indicated that subjects were free to pass as many or as few of their letters (zero to seven) as they wished. This provided an index of cooperation or competition with the confederate. After the letter passing, the game was declared over. The experimenter then debriefed the participants in detail, gave a written debriefing report, and paid each subject \$3 for his or her participation, which was the amount that would have been won had the three quotes been solved by someone in the group other than the participant. No group or individual had to be excluded from the data analysis because of lack of cooperation, unambiguous suspicion, or the like.

RESULTS

On six occasions, a subject, along with the confederate, correctly identified the quote after the initial round. Of these subjects, three were in the control condition, one in the spontaneous confession condition, and two in the accusation condition. We excluded the data of these subjects, inasmuch as there might have been some residual anger among those in the confession conditions because of the withholding of their

winnings. We did, however, include the data of the four remaining subjects in these particular sessions. Inspection of their data suggested that the ratings were not affected by two players rather than one guessing a quote. This left a final sample of 89 subjects (control condition, $N = 32$; spontaneous confession, $N = 29$; accusation confession, $N = 28$).

The means of the dependent variables are shown in Table 5. All variables except letter passing were analyzed in a 3×3 (Confession Condition \times Quote) MANOVA with repeated measures on the second factor. The MANOVA revealed a significant Condition \times Quote interaction, $F(4, 172) = 26.81, p < .0001$, that also was documented in each univariate ANOVA. Turning first to intelligence, the Condition \times Quote interaction was $F(4, 172) = 29.04, p < .0001$. This is due to perceived intelligence rising overall between Quotes 1 and 2, and then falling in the two confession conditions with the third quote. These data to some extent indicate a successful experimental manipulation, for the correct response is no longer being ascribed to the skill of the confederate after Quote 2. For the remaining variables, three different significance patterns were observed, due to disparities in the ratings at Quote 3. For the ratings of honesty, morality, and admiration, there were no significant differences at Quote 3 between the spontaneous confession and the control condition, while in both of these conditions the ratings were significantly more positive than ratings in the accusation confession condition (all p s $< .01$). For the ratings of cooperativeness and willingness to help, all three conditions significantly differed from one another (p s $< .01$) in the order of control, spontaneous confession, and then confession after accusation, with ratings most positive in the control condition and least favorable in the accusation condition. Finally, for the variables of irritation and willingness to play again, the control condition yielded more favorable ratings than both confession conditions (p s $< .01$), which did not differ from one another.

To further analyze the Condition \times Quote interactions, change scores were calculated for each variable to show the increase or decrease from Quote 2 to Quote 3 in subjects' ratings (see Table 6). For each rating, the relative magnitude of the change was largest in the accusation condition. That is, decreases in perceived honesty, morality, etc., and increases in level of reported irritation were greatest toward the confederate who confessed only after being accused. As anticipated, the least change across all the variables occurred in the control condition.

Turning next to letter passing, the index of cooperative behavior, we only analyzed the data for Quote 3 inasmuch as the range and

Table 5
Mean Ratings and Cooperative Behavior as a Function of
Quote Number and Experimental Condition: Experiment 5

Variable	Quote 1		Quote 2		Quote 3	
	Control	Spontaneous	Control	Spontaneous	Control	Spontaneous
Intelligence	5.28 ^a	6.12 ^a	7.19 ^a	7.16 ^a	7.69 ^b	4.74 ^a
Honesty	5.90 ^a	6.54 ^a	5.81 ^a	6.51 ^a	6.75 ^b	5.96 ^b
Morality	6.31 ^a	6.45 ^a	6.19 ^a	6.26 ^a	6.16 ^b	5.74 ^b
Cooperate	7.56 ^a	6.80 ^a	7.09 ^a	6.90 ^a	7.12 ^c	5.52 ^b
Admire	4.00 ^a	4.35 ^a	4.75 ^a	5.74 ^a	5.19 ^b	4.45 ^b
Irritated	1.91 ^a	2.03 ^a	2.25 ^a	2.87 ^a	3.16 ^a	5.29 ^b
Help	7.03 ^a	6.52 ^a	7.15 ^a	6.97 ^a	7.12 ^c	5.41 ^b
Play again	5.37 ^a	6.03 ^a	6.97 ^a	6.97 ^a	6.97 ^b	4.10 ^a
Letter pass	3.00	3.00	3.25	3.21	2.75 ^a	3.44 ^a

Note. $N = 32$ in the control condition. Spontaneous = spontaneous confession ($N = 29$); Accused = confession after an accusation ($N = 28$). Superscripts not sharing a common letter differ at the $p < .05$ level. All comparisons are within a quote condition. The letter-passing data only were analyzed for Quote 3.

Table 6
Change Scores from Quote 2 to Quote 3 as a Function of
Experimental Condition: Experiment 5

Variable	Experimental condition		
	Control	Spontaneous confession	Confession after accusation
Intelligence	+ .50*	-2.42***	-2.97***
Honesty	+ .94	-.55	-3.29***
Morality	-.03	-.52	-2.93***
Cooperate	+ .03	-1.38**	-2.54***
Admire	+ .44	-1.29**	-2.93***
Irritated	+ .91**	+2.42***	+3.47***
Help	-.03	-1.56***	-2.74***
Play again	.00	-2.86***	-4.14***

Note. Positive numbers indicate increases in the rating from Quote 2 to Quote 3, while negative numbers indicate decreases. Tests of significance are between-condition *t* test comparisons.

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$.

therefore the variance of letter-passing choices was greatly constricted for the first two quotes. Recall that subjects had to share three letters with their target person after Quote 1 and only between two and four letters after Quote 2. A one-way ANOVA on the number of letters passed for the third quote failed to reach an acceptable significance level, $F(2, 86) = 1.91, p = .15$, although the differences are in the predicted direction. Table 5 shows that subjects passed the most letters to the confederate who spontaneously confessed ($M = 3.43$) and the fewest letters to the confederate who confessed only after an accusation ($M = 2.36$). The difference between these means approached significance ($p = .06$).

In sum, the results of the laboratory study generally support the findings of Experiment 4: Spontaneous confession, which appears to be attributed to guilt and high moral character, has positive benefits relative to a confession following an accusation. Furthermore, there was the greatest actual cooperation toward the spontaneous confessor. In this particular context, however, even the spontaneous confessor was perceived more negatively than his control condition counterpart in whom no suspicions were evoked.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In the series of studies presented here, we moved from the taxonomic analysis of accounts so prevalent in the impression management literature to a detailed examination of confession as one particular type of account. We primarily focused on why an admission of guilt accompanied by contrition, responsibility, and/or reparation might have positive benefits for the confessor (although we did not examine which of these components of confession most influences subsequent reactions). Our data suggest that the presence and type of confession alter perceptions of the confessor's moral character and causal attributions for the negative action. Hence, correspondent inference theory and other attributional approaches are particularly relevant to the explanation of the positive effects of confession. In addition, it was found that affective reactions, forgiveness, and actual as well as intended behavior also were altered by a confession.

Does confession always have such ameliorative consequences? The present research, other data in the literature, and some speculations on our part yield answers to this question. We propose that confession will be most advantageous to the giver of the confession when the actor is perceived as having done something wrong, when the attribution for the act is ambiguous, when an accusation appears to be forthcoming, and when judgments are made on criteria other than outcome.

Considering first the perceived existence of a misdeed, our simulation studies revealed that when the accused individual was clearly guilty, it was better for him or her to confess than to deny wrongdoing. On the other hand, in the laboratory investigation even a spontaneous confession resulted in more negative inferences when compared to the control condition where no doubts were raised about guilt. In research in progress, we have found that confession by someone perceived to be innocent, such as a member of the president's staff who accepts blame to "cover up" the participation of others, produces particularly negative inferences about the confessor. In short, if misgivings are not held, then it appears to be deleterious for the confessor to confess.

In addition, our data in Experiment 2 revealed that when there was attributional uncertainty, confession was especially adaptive. Clearly, if confession is in part effective because it produces an attributional shift, then the greater the attributional certainty, the less the effectiveness of the confession.

Experiments 4 and 5 provide support for a third condition of success-

ful confession. Experiment 4 documented that confession following an accusation tends to be ascribed to impression management and is less beneficial to the confessor than confession without a prior accusation. Experiment 5 then replicated the latter finding in a situation of "actual" confession. Hence, if there is perceived guilt and an accusation appears to be forthcoming, then confession prior to the accusation has especially beneficial consequences for the transgressor.

Even if there is some suspicion of guilt, if the cause of the transgression is unclear, and if one spontaneously acknowledges wrongdoing, confession still may not be advantageous to the confessor unless the evaluative response is based on inferences other than actual fault. For example, if an individual confesses to a traffic violation, then that person is more likely to be required to pay a fine than if the judgment of the law enforcement official is questioned, i.e., the act is denied (Cody & McLaughlin, 1988). In this context, the crucial decision regarding punishment is negatively affected by an admission of guilt, even if the confessor is nonetheless perceived as a "good person." That is, evaluation must be determined by factors other than the outcome, particularly the perceived character of the accused, if confession is to have positive effects for the confessor.

Given these principles, one can make some judgments concerning the fate of certain nonconfessing public figures (e.g., Bakker, Nixon, Rose) had they publicly confessed. The cases of Bakker and Nixon are perhaps most clear. First, they were perceived by the majority of the public and their peers as guilty. Second, both Bakker and Nixon were surrounded by casts of characters to whom an observer could attribute responsibility. Hence, attributions for the wrongdoing were somewhat ambiguous. Third, for a long period of time it was evident that Bakker and Nixon would be accused. And finally, it obviously is of great importance to the public to have trust in their political and spiritual leaders and to perceive them as moral persons. That is, evaluations of Bakker and Nixon depend more on perceived personal characteristics than on their actions per se, such as selling too many hotel shares or breaking into Watergate. Thus, we argue, as did many others (e.g., Goldwater) that confession would have been beneficial.

The case of Pete Rose, however, presents a less clear argument for the benefits of confession. As with Bakker and Nixon, Rose also was perceived as guilty by many of his fans and the media. Given the perception of guilt, a confession therefore certainly would have been more adaptive for him than a denial, particularly if that confession came prior

to the accusation. However, perception of Rose as a "moral person" may be less important in his evaluation than the fact that he bet on baseball games, which tends to jeopardize the game itself. In addition, there was no attributional ambiguity; Rose did not have a contributing social network that could have been perceived as responsible for his betting behavior.

This is not to imply, however, that Rose had no other impression management techniques available to mitigate his punishment. For example, he might have supplied an excuse, that is, another cause that absolved him from personal responsibility. Excuses have been the most studied of the impression management techniques, and it has been documented that in situations of transgression they are used to alter perceptions of responsibility and, in turn, reduce anger. Rose could have contended, for example, that his gambling was an addiction and that he was "sick" rather than a sinner. It is known that uncontrollable stigmas tend to elicit sympathy and offers of help, as opposed to controllable stigmas, which generate anger and negative reactions (see Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988).

It is evident from the example of Pete Rose that confessions and excuses are not as distinct as prior classifications have intimated. One can confess and publicly accept personal blame, and yet supply an excuse denoting that one is not truly blamable! Confessing to a sickness is paradoxical from the viewpoint of contemporary impression management theory, for one is accepting responsibility while at the same time indicating that the behavior is not personally controllable.

Given that there is a confession-forgiveness relation in naive psychology, and given that a confession-excuse package is possible, a puzzling fact that we have not examined at all is why Nixon, Rose, and other public figures chose *not* to confess when it appeared that they were guilty and about to be accused. Here again we can appeal to two sources, one related to impression management and the other to personal guilt. It may be that these individuals incorrectly miscalculated reactions to their misdeeds and wrongly assumed that public indignation would eventually dissipate. In this case, the absence of confession was guided by impression management concerns and, in hindsight, the wrongdoers selected the wrong tactic. On the other hand, it may be that lack of public confession is better explained by the dynamics of denial and ego defensiveness, and is thus a topic more for clinical than for social psychologists. And, of course, these possible reasons for failure to confess are interrelated, inasmuch as psychodynamic principles can interfere

with rational judgments. In sum, the determinants of nonconfession may be quite similar to the causes of confession.

Finally, our conclusions considered "benefit" only from the perspective of the confessor. What is beneficial to the confessor ultimately may be harmful to the larger society. Thus, forgiving Swaggart because he publicly confessed could encourage others, or Swaggart himself, to entertain the same questionable behaviors. The final long-term social consequences of forgiveness and the conditions that promote it are complex issues that have not been addressed in this article.

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