In this chapter, I consider some consequences of the propositions (a) that people tend to disclose when they are distressed and (b) that they obtain some benefit from doing so. To put it more strongly, I propose that the amount of disclosure tends to increase with the intensity of a person's distress and that this disclosure tends to help to relieve the distress. I call this a fever model because it suggests that disclosure's relation to psychological distress is analogous to a fever's relation to physical infection: both are a sign of disturbance and part of a restorative process.

This chapter first offers a definition of disclosure. Then it reviews disclosure's association with psychological distress and with relief from distress, offering a theoretical understanding of each. Next it considers the central importance of client disclosure in psychotherapy and discusses how the fever model can help resolve three seeming paradoxes in the psychotherapy research literature: first, that high disclosure is associated both with sickness and with restoration of health, that is, with neurosis, anxiety, and depression and with psychotherapeutic “good process,” as judged by experts; second, that despite demonstrations that client disclosure represents good psychotherapeutic process, greater disclosure is not consistently associated empirically with better psychotherapeutic outcomes; and third, that although therapists' verbal techniques
vary greatly depending on their theoretical approach, reviews of psychotherapy outcome research show little or no differential effectiveness of different psychotherapies—that is, outcomes appear equivalent even though contents appear nonequivalent (Stiles, Shapiro, & Elliott, 1986).

Then this chapter focuses on the social meanings of disclosure. Although the fever model takes an intrapsychic starting point, it has implications for target selection (who will be disclosed to when a person is distressed), for the intimacy and relative status of the discloser in his or her social relationships, and for the strategic use of disclosure. Finally, this chapter suggests some questions and directions for further research.

**DEFINITION OF DISCLOSURE**

For the fever model, disclosure is defined as an utterance (e.g., a sentence or an independent clause) that concerns the speaker’s experience and uses the speaker’s internal (subjective) frame of reference (Stiles, 1978, 1981). Thus disclosures are distinguished from attentive utterances, which concern the other person’s experience (e.g., questions, acknowledgements, reflections, judgments, or interpretations of the other), and from informative utterances that use an external, objective frame of reference (statements of fact, descriptions of observable events). This definition also specifies that in the fever model, disclosure (a) refers to observable behavior rather than questionnaire responses, (b) is a discrete category rather than a continuously measured dimension, and (c) concerns the intersubjective, relational aspect of speech rather than its content.

To elaborate, disclosure here refers to the disclosing behavior itself, not to self-report measures, such as Jourard’s (1971a) Self-Disclosure Questionnaire or Miller, Berg, and Archer’s (1983) Self-Disclosure Index. As reviewed elsewhere in this volume, evidence of behavioral prediction from such questionnaires is mixed, though it seems to be better if the target as well as the content is specified (Miller et al., 1983).

Disclosure here is measured by coding rather than rating. Rating measures are continuous scales, and they can be applied to a discourse segment of any length. They assess the degree to which disclosure has taken place, or in some cases the revealingness, intimacy, or some other quality of the disclosure. A particularly well-developed rating scale for disclosure in psychotherapy is the Experiencing Scale (Klein, Mathieu, Gendlin, & Kiesler, 1969; Klein, Mathieu-Coughlin, & Kiesler, 1986), which “attempts to assess the degree to which the patient communicates his personal, phenomenological perspective and employs it productively