

V89.0300 Advanced Topic:
Social Support Processes
Department of Psychology
New York University

Monday 4:00 – 5:50PM
Spring 2010
3 Points
Room 307, Psychology Building

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Course goals: Students will gain detailed knowledge of what is known about the effects of social support, as well as factors that influence the provision and perception of support. Social support is defined in the literature in different ways. Some authors emphasize networks and structural relationships, others emphasize cognitions and beliefs about the availability of support, and still others emphasize daily transactions of support. The assumed nature of support also varies, ranging from displays of empathy and reassurance to provision of helpful information to the enactment of practical and/or physical acts, including provision of money. Some researchers consider support in the context of stressful life events or health events, while others consider it more broadly as a means to enhance general positive growth and functioning. Depending on the way support is defined and measured, its apparent effects are very positive, mildly helpful, ineffective or even harmful. Studies of the effects of support are challenging because persons who receive support in the general population vary systematically from those who do not. Recipients tend to be more socially connected but also more in need. Students taking this course will review the literature on social support and evaluate experimental and survey-based studies that attempt to reveal the impact of support. The course will be run as a seminar, with different participants leading the discussion of assigned readings.

Prerequisites: We assume that all students have successfully completed an undergraduate course in social psychology.

Requirements: Weekly reading assignments and response papers. (30% of final grade). Class Presentation (25% of grade). Final paper (45% of final grade).

Each week student responses to readings should be posted on Blackboard by 9AM on Monday. Students will take turns organizing the discussion of weekly readings, and can make use of posted reader reactions.

Final paper: The final paper should be approximately 15 pages, double spaced in 11 or 12 point font, and prepared using APA publication conventions. The paper should focus on a topic that extends the range of topics that we consider in class, or digs deeper into a covered topic. Feel free to adapt any of the following examples as a topic, or to formulate your own topic:

- a) Social support in adolescents: Do the principles of social support research discussed in the course apply to adolescents without modifications, or are there aspects of this developmental phase that require special principles? To what extent is there empirical and theoretical literature on this topic?
- b) Social support and genetics: There is some evidence that certain persons might be more susceptible to stressors than others, and that this vulnerability has a genetic basis. There is also considerable evidence that personality style has a genetic basis. How might these genetic factors affect the principles of social support studied in the class?

- c) Gender differences and social support: One way that males and females are said to vary is the degree to which they engage in nurturing behavior. Indeed this is a key component of the masculinity/femininity dimension. What evidence is there that women provide more support and are more effective as supporters? Is there any evidence that women differ from men in how they perceive or receive support, and in the effectiveness of support?
- d) Psychology sections in popular bookstores are filled with self-help books that describe 10 point programs in everything from self-control to achieving marital bliss. Choose one or two best selling self-help books that have sections on social support and write a review of the sections from the perspective of the scientific literature on social support. How accurate and complete are the sections? How effective are they in distilling the science of support for general readers?
- e) Proposal for experimental research. Describe an experiment that one could carry out to provide new information about social support processes. The proposal should contain five sections: 1) Introduction (explain how the proposed study complements the existing literature), Subjects (describe what kind of participants would be recruited), Procedure (describe in detail the conditions that would be defined, and how subjects would be randomly assigned), Measurement (describe any self-report, behavioral or observational measures that would be used to define study outcomes), and Analysis (describe how the data would be analyzed to answer the question).
- f) Proposal for survey or diary study. Describe a survey study that one could carry out to provide new information about social support processes. The proposal should contain five sections: 1) Introduction (explain how the proposed study complements the existing literature), Subjects (describe what kind of participants would be recruited and what population they represent), Measures (describe self report or other report items that would be used to define study outcomes), Procedure (describe how survey would be administered), and Analysis (describe how the data would be analyzed to answer the question).

Schedule

Week	Topic	Reading #	Other
01/25/10	Overview		
02/01/10	Themes in Social Support	27	
02/08/10	Structural relationships and support	2, 3, 15	
02/15/10	Measuring Support 1 (no class)	21, 5	
02/22/10	Measuring Support 2	31	
03/01/10	Biological aspects of support	7, 8, 9, 26, 28	
03/08/10	Perception of support	14, 22	
03/15/10	Spring break!		
03/22/10	Enacted support	4, 24	
03/29/10	Evaluating support helpfulness	10, 12, 13	Final paper topic due
04/05/10	Who provides support?	11, 17, 25	
04/12/10	Exchange and equity	1, 16, 20, 30	
04/19/10	Support and physical health	6, 23	
04/26/10	Cross cultural perspectives	18, 19, 29	First draft due
05/03/10	Presentations		Peer review due

Reference List (All available on class Blackboard site)

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2. Berkman, L. F. & Syme, S. L. (1979). Social networks, host resistance, and mortality: A nine-year followup study of Alameda County residents. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 109, 186-204.
3. Berkman, L.F. (1995). The role of social relations in health promotion. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 57, 245-254.
4. Bolger, N., & Amarel, D. (2007). Effects of social support visibility on adjustment to stress: Experimental evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(3), 458-475.
5. Brissette, I., Cohen, S., & Seeman, T. E. (2000). Measuring social integration and social networks. In S. Cohen, L. G. Underwood & B. H. Gottlieb (Eds.), *Social support measurement and intervention: A guide for health and social scientists*. (pp. 53-85). New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.
6. Brown, S. L., Nesse, R. M., Vinokur, A. D., & Smith, D. M. (2003). Providing social support may be more beneficial than receiving it: Results from a prospective study of mortality. *Psychological Science*, 14(4), 320-327.
7. Clark, R. (2006). Perceived racism and vascular reactivity in black college women: Moderating effects of seeking social support. *Health Psychology*, 25(1), 20-25.
8. Coan, J. A., Schaefer, H. S., & Davidson, R. J. (2006). Lending a hand: Social regulation of the neural response to threat. *Psychological Science*, 17(12), 1032-1039.
9. Cohen, S., Doyle, W. J., Skoner, D. P., Rabin, B. S. & Gwaltney Jr., J. M. (1997). Social ties and susceptibility to the common cold. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 277, 1940-1944.
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12. Cutrona, C. E. (1996). *Social support in couples [Chapter 3: Giving and taking support: A complicated process]*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
13. Cutrona, C. E., Shaffer, P. A., Wesner, K. A., & Gardner, K. A. (2007). Optimally matching support and perceived spousal sensitivity. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 21(4), 754-758.
14. Feeney, B. C. (2004). A secure base: Responsive support of goal strivings and exploration in adult intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 87(5), 631-648.
15. Gardner, J., Oswald, A. (2004). How is mortality affected by money, marriage, and stress? *Journal of Health Economics*, 23, 1181-1207.
16. Gleason, M. E. J., Iida, M., Bolger, N., & Shrout, P. E. (2003). Daily supportive equity in close relationships. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29(8), 1036-1045.
17. Iida, M., Seidman, G., Shrout, P. E., Fujita, K., & Bolger, N. (2008). Modeling support provision in intimate relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(3), 460-478.
18. Kim, H. S., Sherman, D. K., & Taylor, S. E. (2008). Culture and social support. *American Psychologist*, 63(6), 518-526.
19. Kim, H. S., Sherman, D. K., & Taylor, S. E. (2009). The irony of cultural psychology research. *American Psychologist*, 64(6), 564-565.
20. Knoll, N., Burkert, S., & Schwarzer, R. (2006). Reciprocal support provision: Personality as a moderator? *European Journal of Personality*, 20(3), 217-236.
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26. Smith, T. W., Ruiz, J. M., & Uchino, B. N. (2004). Mental activation of supportive ties, hostility, and cardiovascular reactivity to laboratory stress in young men and women. *Health Psychology*, 23(5), 476-485.
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