

Affiliation with new peer acquaintances during two initial social support interactions

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Abstract

This investigation examined the influence of a prior social support interaction on a subsequent interaction between new peer acquaintances. Pairs of adolescent peers (recruited in a large metropolitan area in the United States) were videotaped as they met and discussed current life concerns in 2 separate interactions. Results indicated that (a) the behaviors of new interaction partners are coordinated within an interaction (social coordination hypothesis), (b) behaviors exhibited during an initial interaction predict behaviors exhibited during a subsequent interaction (influential interaction hypothesis), (c) individuals affiliate in similar ways across interactions (cross-situational consistency hypothesis), and (d) behaviors reflecting greater comfort with interaction increase across interactions (uncertainty reduction hypothesis). The discussion focuses on implications of results and contributions to existing literatures.

Despite the massive literatures on social support and affiliation, a small percentage of studies have involved observations of actual support-seeking and support-giving behaviors

as they occur during specific interactions in which these behaviors are likely to occur (hereafter referred to as social support interactions). This is surprising given that social support is an interpersonal process that cannot be understood adequately without examining real-time support dynamics as they unfold between specific interaction partners (because self-reports of support behaviors are often biased by preexisting beliefs and expectations and because people are unlikely to be aware of the social influences on their behaviors). Moreover, the existing studies that include observations of specific support interactions have important limitations. Most notably, no prior research has examined the influence of a prior social support interaction on a subsequent interaction as a new relationship is forming. The only research that has examined more than one support interaction in the same study (Cutrona, Hessling, & Suhr, 1997) takes place in a marital context between spouses who already have an established relationship history. Nonetheless, social support dynamics that occur during an

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initial interaction between strangers are likely to have a significant impact on social support dynamics that occur during subsequent interactions—setting the stage for the course of future relationship development. These emerging social support dynamics are best observed as individuals are meeting and interacting for the first and second times. Otherwise, it is impossible to disentangle the effects of prior interactions and relationship events.

The purpose of this investigation is to examine the social support dynamics that occur when pairs of same-sex, same-age adolescent peers meet for the first time and discuss current life concerns with one another in two separate interactions—one in which the individual is in the role of a support seeker and another in which the same individual is in the role of a support provider. Adolescence is a particularly interesting life stage in which to study support dynamics because this is the stage in which individuals begin to turn to peers as an important source of support as they attempt to develop autonomy and come to rely less exclusively on parental support (Allen, Hauser, Bell, & O'Connor, 1994; Grotevant & Cooper, 1985; Hill & Holmbeck, 1986; Moore, 1987; Steinberg, 1990). In addition to becoming less dependent on support from parents, adolescents are also transitioning from being almost exclusive receivers of care or support into taking on the role of support providers or caregivers to others, perhaps facilitated by enhanced perspective-taking abilities and by new social experiences and responsibilities (Allen & Land, 1999). Furthermore, interactions with peers serve important functions for adolescents: They provide opportunities for intimacy, for feedback about social behavior, for obtaining information, for social influence, and for developing attachment relationships (Ainsworth, 1989; Fuligni & Eccles, 1993; Gavin & Furman, 1989, 1996; Parker & Asher, 1987).

Our attempt to contribute to the understanding of social support dynamics among new acquaintances in two initial interactions incorporates ideas from theories of affiliation to indicate how interaction behaviors are coordinated in the context of two specific interactions as individuals are initially getting to

know one another. Although these theoretical perspectives are not specific to social support dynamics, they provide a foundation from which to advance and test hypotheses regarding the ways in which support-seeking and support-giving behaviors that occur in one initial interaction predict those that occur in a subsequent interaction.

Interpersonal theory and interpersonal complementarity

One relevant theory, referred to as interpersonal theory (Markey, Funder, & Ozer, 2003), assumes that during social interactions, the behavior of one person invites complementary behavior from the other person such that individuals alter the interpersonal styles of their interaction partners (see also Ansell, Kurtz, & Markey, 2008; Bluhm, Widiger, & Miele, 1990; Carson, 1969; Kiesler, 1983; Markey & Markey, 2007; Sadler & Woody, 2003; Tracey, 2004; Vaughn & Nowicki, 1999). Complementary behavior occurs when interaction partners behave similarly in terms of affiliation (e.g., warmth in response to warmth) but oppositely in terms of control (e.g., submissive in response to dominance). Interpersonal theory is consistent with other views in the affiliation literature, such as Fiske's (1992) relational models theory, which suggests that in some contexts, individuals attempt to contribute equally to a social interaction (equality matching), and in other contexts, individuals attempt to solve a problem at which one is an expert and directs the other (authority ranking).

In a test of interpersonal theory, Markey and colleagues (2003) observed the behaviors of strangers as they interacted with each other during laboratory tasks such as building with Tinker Toys and playing a memory game, and results supported the predicted associations regarding dominant and submissive behaviors, as well as friendliness of interaction partners. Markey and Kurtz (2006) also tested the idea that as relationships progress through multiple interactions, the behavioral styles of the individuals increase in complementarity, and they showed that the reported behavioral styles of roommates

increased in complementarity over a 15-week period. Also, research on the complementarity of interpersonal behavior, although not always conducted as a test of interpersonal theory, has been quite extensive (Bluhm et al., 1990; Estroff & Nowicki, 1992; Locke & Sadler, 2007; Markey & Markey, 2007; Moskowitz, Ho, & Turcotte-Tremblay, 2007; Nowicki & Manheim, 1991; Smith & Ruiz, 2007; Tiedens & Jimenez, 2003; Tracey, Ryan, & Jaschik-Herman, 2001) and has shown that complementary transactions facilitate relationships and performance on tasks.

Extending interpersonal theory specifically to the domain of initial social support interactions between strangers, we propose that complementarity will occur within social support interactions. Within an interaction (when one adolescent is in a support-seeking role and the other is in a support-giving role), complementarity should occur as follows: Support seeking should be associated with responsive support provision (because support seeking and support giving are opposite behaviors in terms of control), and affect should be reciprocated (because there should be similarity in terms of affiliation).

Uncertainty reduction theory and predicted value outcome theory

Communication scholars introduced uncertainty reduction theory to explain the initial entry stage of interpersonal interaction between strangers (Berger & Calabrese, 1975); thus, this theory may also help to explain emerging support dynamics between strangers. The theory stipulates that strangers, upon meeting, go through certain steps in order to reduce uncertainty about each other and decide whether one likes or dislikes the other. The theory states that strangers enter an interaction with high levels of uncertainty about one another. Then, as they begin to talk to one another, the level of uncertainty decreases. Also, as nonverbal expressive communication increases, uncertainty levels decrease, and vice versa. The theory further states that high levels of uncertainty prompt strangers to ask more questions of the other,

to share less information and emotional intimacy, to exchange more symmetrical questions, and to like one another less. Low levels of uncertainty, however, allow for more sharing and emotional intimacy, reduce the need for an equal exchange of talk, and increase liking. Moreover, the theory postulates that personal similarity decreases uncertainty about another person, whereas dissimilarity produces higher levels of uncertainty (see also Berger, 1986, 1997, for extensions and tests of the theory, as well as Gundykunst, 1985; Parks & Adelman, 1983; Planalp & Honeycutt, 1985, for studies extending the theory to the realm of established relationships).

It is important to note that uncertainty reduction theory has sparked debate in the literature, and some researchers have argued that reducing uncertainty is not the driving force in interactions with strangers (Gundykunst, 1985; Kellermann & Reynolds, 1990; Sunnafrank, 1986a). For example, Sunnafrank (1986a, 1986b) proposed predicted outcome value theory, which views uncertainty reduction as subordinate to the more central concern of increasing positive relational outcomes and experiences. According to this perspective, during initial interactions, uncertainty reduction enhances individuals' ability to forecast future relational outcomes. The idea is that initial interaction behaviors follow from the values individuals place on these forecasted outcomes, and not from the individuals' desire to reduce uncertainty. In support of this idea, Sunnafrank and Ramirez (2004) showed that reactions to a randomly assigned classmate after a brief conversation on the first day of class predicted the nature and quality of relationships between these individuals 9 weeks later (see also Sunnafrank, 1990). Sunnafrank (1988) also showed that predicted outcome value in initial conversations predicts amount of verbal communication, intimacy level of communication content, nonverbal affiliative expressiveness, liking, and perceived similarity.

Our goal for the current investigation is to combine and extend these theoretical perspectives to make predictions about behaviors that emerge specifically during initial social support interactions between new acquaintances.

We propose that initial social support interactions between strangers involve both uncertainty reduction motives (as these interactions likely begin with a high degree of uncertainty) and motives for obtaining positive outcomes and experiences (e.g., receiving social support that may aid in problem resolution, making a good initial impression, having a smooth and pleasant interaction, potentially developing friendships). Within the context of social support interactions, a reluctance to seek and provide support indicates high levels of uncertainty as these behaviors reflect dependence and trust and may communicate a desire for increased intimacy. Uncertainty reduction would be reflected in increases in these behaviors from a first to a second interaction. Also, given that uncertainty is an unpleasant experience, affect may become more positive with decreases in uncertainty. Because all dyads in the current investigation expected the potentially positive outcome of receiving support from a similar, same-sex peer, we expected that all would be motivated to both reduce uncertainty and establish positive relations.

Cross-situational consistency of social behavior

A great deal of theorizing and research has attempted to explain patterns of behavior that people manifest over time and across situations (Allport, 1937; Epstein, 1979; Funder & Colvin, 1991; Kenrick & Funder, 1988; Mischel, 1984; Shoda & Mischel, 2000). Because a core assumption of personality is that individuals possess qualities that are relatively invariant across situations and over time, researchers have looked for evidence of high cross-situational consistency in behavior. Although there has been some evidence for variability across situations (Bem, 1983; Epstein, 1983; Funder, 1983; Jackson & Paunonen, 1985; Mischel & Peake, 1983), the most current research and theorizing support cross-situational consistency in behavior (Funder & Colvin, 1991; Kenrick & Funder, 1988; Shoda & Mischel, 2000) and specify the way in which “consistency” should be viewed. For example, in a study involving observations of undergraduates in each of

three different laboratory settings, consistency emerged in behaviors coded at a general level (e.g., awkward interpersonal style, behaves in a cheerful manner, fearful behavior; Funder & Colvin, 1991). The current thinking is that when examining consistency of behavior across time and contexts, one should conceive of behavior not in terms of its concrete manifestations (which may differ across situations and partners) but in terms of its more general psychological meaning. Similarly, Shoda and Mischel (2000) have theorized and shown that people have characteristic and stable patterns of behavioral variation, which they view as “behavioral signatures” of a stable personality system (see also Shoda, Mischel, & Wright, 1994).

To our knowledge, there has been no research specifically examining the extent to which one’s support-seeking and support-giving behaviors exhibited in one support interaction are predictive of one’s behaviors exhibited in a subsequent support interaction. We predicted that a participant’s behavior in one interaction and role (e.g., a support-seeking role) should be strongly predictive of his or her behavior in a different interaction and role (e.g., a support-giving role). In addition to general consistency in interpersonal style, we make this prediction because beliefs about support seeking and support giving are likely to be consistent (Kunze & Shaver, 1994). For example, adolescents who are comfortable disclosing feelings and seeking support from others should be the same adolescents who are comfortable listening to the problems of others and providing support to them.

Summary of hypotheses

Our theoretical and empirical contribution centers on support-seeking and support-giving behaviors, as well as expressions of warmth and negativity, over the course of two interactions shared between pairs of adolescents. For each pair, one member served in a “support-seeking” role and the other served in a “support-giving” role for the first interaction. In the second interaction, they switched roles. We summarize our predictions as follows:

1. Social coordination hypothesis: During an initial encounter with an unfamiliar peer who may or may not be supportive (a situation that involves much uncertainty), interaction partners are likely to coordinate their social behaviors with those of the interaction partner. Specifically, support-seeking behavior should be linked with responsive support provision, and expressions of warmth or negativity should be reciprocated.
2. Influential interaction hypothesis: Behaviors exhibited during an initial interaction will predict behaviors exhibited in a subsequent interaction such that initial interactions will shape the course of future interactions. That is, support-seeking behavior by one interaction partner in an initial interaction is likely to predict support-seeking behavior by the other interaction partner in a subsequent interaction. Likewise, support provision by one interaction partner in a first encounter is likely to predict support provision by the other interaction partner in a second encounter.
3. Uncertainty reduction hypothesis: Uncertainty should decrease with increased interaction. In social support interactions, uncertainty reduction should be indicated by a greater willingness to seek support (which involves trusting another person enough to share information and emotional intimacy), as well as a greater willingness to provide responsive support (which includes emotional forms of support and implies intimacy) in the second interaction than in the first interaction. Because uncertainty is an unpleasant experience, affect also should become more positive with decreases in uncertainty.
4. Cross-situational consistency hypothesis: An adolescent's behavior during an initial interaction in one role (e.g., a support-seeking role) should be strongly predictive of his or her behavior in a subsequent interaction when in a different role (e.g., a support-giving role).

Gender differences

There is good reason to expect gender differences in the strength of some of the proposed effects. First, it is noteworthy that studies have indicated gender differences in interpersonal complementarity, with women reporting more complementarity than men (Ansell et al., 2008; Yaughn & Nowicki, 1999). Second, the utility theory of affiliation (Rofé, 1984) and Taylor's theory of tending and befriending (Taylor et al., 2000) predicts gender differences in the tendency to affiliate (and discuss stressful events) with others. These theories state that females affiliate more than males and derive greater benefit from doing so (Rofé & Lewin, 1988; Taylor, 2006; Taylor et al., 2002). Third, traditional gender roles defined and reinforced by society perpetuate the belief that females seek and provide more support than males during social support exchanges (Barbee et al., 1993; Derlega, Barbee, & Winstead, 1994; Maccoby, 1990; Mickelson, Helgeson, & Weiner, 1995). Thus, gender may be the most salient individual difference characteristic available for people to use as an informational source regarding the likely behavior and preferences of an unfamiliar interaction partner.

Based on this literature, we expect to observe women engaging in more affiliative-type behaviors such as support seeking and support giving. We also expect that our predicted affiliative dynamics will be stronger for women than for men.

Method

Participants

Participants were 270 eleventh-grade students (168 females, 102 males). We recruited the majority of adolescents ($n = 189$) from public high schools in a large metropolitan area in the United States to serve as participants for a project on family and peer relationships in adolescence. We recruited the remaining 81 students from these schools to serve as participants in only the laboratory visit described in this article. The mean age of participants was 16.5 (range = 15–18, $SD = .58$). The ethnicity and gender demographics of the 270

participants include: 23 Asian (12 females, 11 males), 38 Black (27 females, 11 males), 11 Hispanic (6 females, 5 males), and 198 Caucasian (123 females, 75 males). Thus, 26.7% of the sample includes participants from ethnic minorities (8.5% Asian, 14.1% Black, 4.1% Hispanic), and 62.2% of the sample is female. Adolescents participated in the study in pairs, and each pair was matched on gender and not attending the same school (to ensure that the dyads were strangers). Otherwise, the pairings were random. We selected same-sex dyads as the focus of this investigation in order to alleviate potentially confounding effects of romantic attraction that may more frequently emerge in mixed-sex dyads. In the current investigation, the pair or dyad is the unit of analysis ($N = 135$ adolescent dyads). Adolescents who participated in the larger study of family and peer relations received US\$100 for their participation; adolescents who participated only in the portion of the investigation reported here received US\$25. The use of this convenience sample enabled us to obtain participants that fit criteria consistent with the theoretical population of adolescents from whom we wished to sample, and it was large enough to provide sufficient power for detecting predicted effects and to provide some degree of regional and ethnic diversity. Of course, we cannot assume that the findings obtained for this sample will be representative of the entire United States or will generalize to samples obtained in other countries. The University of Maryland's Internal Review Board approved all recruitment and study procedures.

Procedure

The paired adolescents (matched on gender but from different schools) visited a university laboratory at the same time. The pair of adolescents had not met before (the experimenter verified the lack of prior acquaintance), and the adolescents in each pair participated in two discussions with one another. Prior to the discussions, the experimenter gave each adolescent a written list of topics that adolescents typically identify as areas of difficulty in their lives ("being concerned with my appearance,"

"choosing a college," "being respected as an adult") and asked each adolescent to indicate the degree to which he or she was currently concerned about each topic. For each adolescent, the experimenter then arranged a series of cards (each listing one topic) in order of most to least concern based on the adolescent's ratings. These cards were used as discussion topics.

Each pair of adolescents had two 10-min discussions. For the first discussion, the experimenter randomly designated one member of each pair of adolescents to be in a discloser or support-seeker role and the other to be in a caregiver role. For the second discussion, the adolescents switched roles. The experimenter communicated the roles to participants as follows: For each discussion, the experimenter gave the adolescent assigned to the "support-seeking" role his or her stack of cards and asked him or her to discuss each topic, in the arranged order, with the peer acquaintance. Instructions given were: "(Person's name in the support-seeking role), here is a stack of cards each labeled with a topic. I've put them in the order I would like you to talk about them. I would like you to explain to (person's name in the support-giving role) what it is about that topic that worries you, and see if (s/he) can be of help to you. . . ." The experimenter videotaped interactions from behind a two-way mirror.

The experimenter led all dyads to expect the potentially positive outcome of receiving support from a similar, same-sex peer. Although attitude similarity has predicted (albeit inconsistently) interpersonal attraction during initial interactions (Sunnafrank, 1983, 1984, 1986a, 1992), we gave adolescents no prior information regarding one another's attitudes given that individuals rarely have that information when meeting strangers in real life. Also, because all adolescents were in the 11th grade and matched on gender, we controlled for the most obvious similarity variables that could influence interaction behaviors, perceptions of attraction to others, and perceptions of others' attraction to the self (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Byrne & Nelson, 1965). Social support interactions were appropriate to consider given

prior research showing that acquaintances and strangers are desirable objects of affiliation (in ways similar to intimates; Fox, 1985; Rofé & Lewin, 1986).

Coding of discussions

We developed a coding system to measure the support-seeking and support-providing behaviors exhibited during each social support interaction. This coding system is a modified version of coding systems used to assess support seeking and support provision in adult romantic relationships (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Feeney, 2004). Independent raters coded all dimensions on rating scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*consistent/highest quality*). Five coders were trained to reliability and independently rated the videotaped interactions. Different coders rated the first and second interactions for each pair of adolescents. All coders were unaware of hypotheses and other information about the participants. A set of randomly selected interactions (37%, $n = 101$) was assessed for reliability. A sixth independent coder, who was also blind to other participant information and to hypotheses, coded disagreements. We computed interclass correlation coefficients (ICC) for each scale. The support-seeking scales had ICC values that ranged from .68 to .85 ($M = .76$), and the support-providing scales had ICC values that ranged from .65 to .89 ($M = .79$). We describe all scales below.

Support-seeking behaviors

The coded support-seeking behaviors are as follows: (a) *acknowledgment of concern/distress*: expressions of distress, concern, or worry about the problems being disclosed; (b) *emotional disclosure*: openly describing and sharing emotions and feelings related to the problems discussed; (c) *descriptive disclosure*: openly talking about the details of a particular problem or asking for tangible or informational support in dealing with it; (d) *indirect support seeking/avoidance*: reluctance to openly and directly seek support or express thoughts, feelings, needs, or concerns related to a problem—includes indirect sup-

port-seeking behaviors (e.g., hinting about a problem or “beating around the bush”) and avoidance behaviors (e.g., changing the topic and making excuses not to stay on task); (e) *warmth/friendliness*: interacting in a warm, friendly, and positive manner; (f) *negative/hostile affect*: exhibiting negative or hostile behavior, including (but not limited to) nonverbal expressions of disapproval (e.g., rolling eyes), as well as verbal expressions that criticize, belittle, or make fun of the suggestions the interaction partner offered; and (g) *overall support-seeking effort*: a summary rating of the extent to which the disclosing person made an active effort to communicate his or her concerns, worries, or problems by actively disclosing the details of his or her problems, as well as his or her thoughts and feelings about the problems.

Support-providing behaviors

The coded support-providing behaviors are as follows: (a) *listening/attentiveness*: displaying clear signs of being focused on the disclosing person and of processing his or her disclosure of information (e.g., by making eye contact, nodding, not appearing distracted or bored, and verbally indicating that the information has been heard); (b) *emotional support*: expressing empathy, encouragement, compassion, and validation of feelings; (c) *warmth/friendliness*: interacting in a warm, friendly, and positive manner; (d) *negative/hostile affect*: being overtly negative, hostile, or critical during the interaction; (e) *avoidance/dismissing*: avoiding discussion of the issues the disclosing person raised or dismissing the importance of the issues under discussion (e.g., changing the subject, ignoring the disclosing person, engaging in another activity while the person is speaking, and physically moving away from the disclosing person); and (f) *overall sensitivity/responsiveness*: a summary rating of the extent to which the adolescent in the support-providing role demonstrated an active effort to be sensitive and responsive to the disclosing person throughout the discussion (e.g., by remaining engaged and making a persistent effort to help the disclosing person as needed).

Results

Preliminary analyses

In an effort to simplify presentation of results, we aggregated some of the individually coded variables. A principal components analysis of the seven coded support-seeker variables identified a dimension with high loadings (i.e., $>.67$) of five of these variables (acknowledgment of concern/distress, emotional disclosure, descriptive disclosure, overall support seeking, and indirect support seeking/avoidance reverse coded), each of which had minimal cross-loadings (i.e., $< .24$). Hence, we averaged these variables to create a single support-seeking behavior composite index (Cronbach's alpha reliability = .85). We retained the two remaining variables (warmth/friendliness and negative/hostile affect) as separate support-seeker variables.

A principal components analysis of the six support-provider variables identified a dimension with high loadings (i.e., $> .67$) of four variables (overall sensitivity/responsiveness, emotional support, listening/attentive, and avoidance/dismissing reverse coded), each of which had minimal cross-loadings (i.e., $< .17$). We averaged these variables to create a single responsive support behavior index (Cronbach's alpha = .77). We retained the two remaining variables (warmth/friendliness and negative/hostile affect) as separate support-provider variables. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for all study variables.

Testing correlational predictions

Predictions regarding social coordination, influential interaction, and cross-situational consistency involve linear relationships among the study variables. To test these predictions, we conducted a multigroup path analysis using Amos 17.0. Dyads were the units of analysis, and we specified dyad gender as a grouping variable. Within each interaction, we modeled disclosers' support-seeking, negativity, and warmth as predictors of analogous behaviors of caregivers (support provision, negativity, and warmth, respectively). Our reasoning for doing so was that disclosers likely initially set the tone of the interaction through the manner in which they

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics*

	Disclosers		Caregivers	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First interaction behaviors				
Support composite	3.19	.65	3.50	.58
Warmth	3.24	.60	3.28	.64
Negativity	1.04	.16	1.14	.33
Second interaction behaviors				
Support composite	3.37	.66	3.62	.60
Warmth	3.26	.60	3.40	.68
Negativity	1.05	.24	1.06	.26

disclose, and caregivers' ability to provide support is, in part, dependent on disclosers' tendencies to seek support. (We acknowledge, however, that causal relationships cannot be established in this study.) Significant effects of disclosers' behavior on caregivers' behavior within the same interaction would suggest social coordination—a tendency to reciprocate behavior within the same interaction.

In addition, we modeled effects of disclosers' behavior in the first interaction on the same behaviors disclosers performed (but now the other adolescent) in the second interaction. We did the same for caregivers' behavior. Significant effects would support our influential interaction prediction, as it would suggest a tendency to reciprocate support-seeking, caregiving, warm, and negative behavior received during the first interaction once people switch roles in the second interaction.

To test cross-situational consistency predictions, we modeled the behavior of disclosers in the first interaction as a predictor of their behavior as caregivers in the second interaction. Likewise, we modeled the behavior of caregivers in the first interaction as a predictor of their behavior as disclosers during the second interaction. Significant effects would suggest cross-situational consistency, a consistent tendency to engage in support transactions or to express warmth or negativity across the two interactions and roles.

In addition to these effects, we modeled covariances between the three behavioral indices performed by a dyad member within the same interaction (e.g., covariances between discloser's support seeking, warmth,

and negative affect in the first interaction), as it is likely that such behaviors are correlated. The initial unconstrained model was a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(72) = 74.30$, $p = .40$; Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .99; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .02.

Equality constraints

We placed equality constraints on all paths and covariances across dyad gender when (1 *df*) chi-square difference tests suggested no significant gender differences. With the few exceptions described below, these tests were not significant, $\chi^2\Delta < 3.50$, $ps > .07$. The final model with most estimates constrained across gender maintained a good fit to the data, $\chi^2(98) = 96.10$, $p = .54$; TLI = 1.01; RMSEA = 0.

Parameter estimates

Figure 1 displays estimates of unstandardized path coefficients and covariances. To reduce complexity, the figure displays only statistically significant estimates and omits error terms and variance estimates. We discuss findings in terms of each of the theoretical perspectives that we tested.

The social coordination perspective predicts that, within each interaction, behaviors should be coordinated across disclosers and caregivers. This was the case in both interactions: Disclosers' support-seeking behavior predicted caregivers' responsive support provision, disclosers' warmth predicted caregivers' warmth, and, in the second interaction, disclosers' negativity predicted caregivers' negativity (see horizontal paths in Figure 1).

The influential interaction view suggests a positive relationship between same-role behavior enacted in the two interactions. Several effects support this perspective (see vertical paths in Figure 1). Disclosers' support seeking and (for male dyads only) negativity predicted these same behaviors by disclosers in the second interaction after members switched roles. Likewise, negative behavior caregivers enacted in the first interaction predicted these same behaviors by their

interaction partners when they became the caregivers in the second interaction.

Cross-situational consistency effects, tendencies to exhibit similar behaviors after switching roles, also emerged (see diagonal lines in Figure 1). Disclosers' warmth and, for male dyads, negativity during the first interaction predicted analogous behaviors when they entered the caregiving role in the second interaction. Similarly, caregivers' responsive support provision, warmth, and, for female dyads, negativity during the first interaction predicted analogous behaviors when they entered the discloser role in the second interaction.

Tests of mean differences

The uncertainty reduction perspective predicts that, relative to the first interaction, disclosers should seek more support, caregivers should provide more responsive support, and both members should express more warmth and less negativity in the second interaction. To test this prediction, we conducted repeated measures analyses of variance with dyad as the unit of analysis and interaction number as a repeated factor. We specified gender composition of the dyad as a between-subjects factor. Consistent with the uncertainty reduction view, disclosers sought more support in the second interaction relative to the first interaction, $F(1, 133) = 8.61$, $p < .01$, and caregivers exhibited less negativity in the second interaction relative to the first interaction. No other effects of interaction number and no interactions with gender were significant, $ps > .11$. Two nonsignificant trends also supported the uncertainty reduction hypothesis. Caregivers' support provision and warmth tended to be greater in the second interaction than in the first interaction, $F_s(1, 133) = 2.44$ and 2.54 , $ps = .12$ and $.11$, respectively. (Both of these trends became somewhat more reliable when we eliminated dyad gender, which did not interact with either trend, from the model, $p = .07$ and $p = .10$, respectively.)

Gender composition of the dyad did have a main effect on several variables, including disclosers' support-seeking, $F(1, 133)$

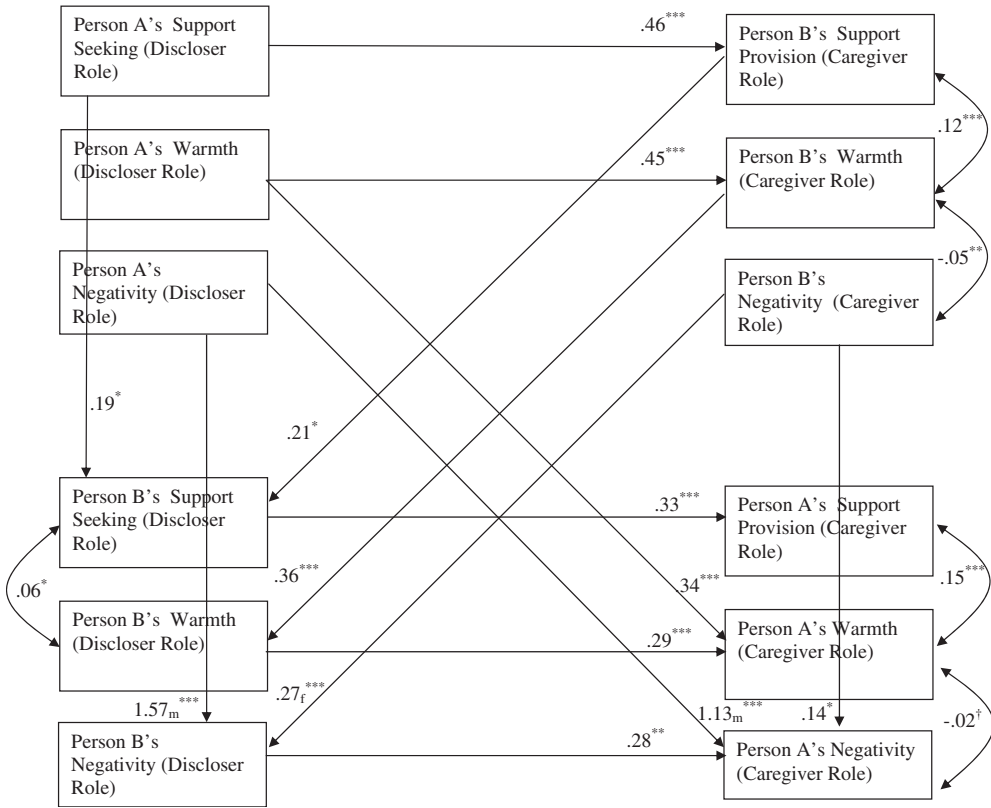


Figure 1. Results of path analysis. † $p < .07$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

= 14.39, $p < .001$; disclosers' warmth, $F(1, 133) = 12.24$, $p < .01$; caregivers' responsive support provision, $F(1, 133) = 12.91$, $p < .001$; and caregivers' warmth, $F(1, 133) = 3.98$, $p < .05$. Female disclosers sought more support ($M = 3.41$) and displayed more warmth ($M = 3.35$) than male disclosers ($M_s = 3.07$ and 3.08 , respectively). Likewise, female caregivers provided more responsive support ($M = 3.66$) and displayed more warmth ($M = 3.41$) relative to male caregivers ($M_s = 3.39$ and 3.23 , respectively).

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to examine the social support dynamics that occur when pairs of same-sex, same-age adolescent peers meet for the first time and discuss current life concerns with one another in two separate interactions—one in which the

adolescent is in the role of a support seeker or discloser, and another in which the adolescent is in the role of a support provider or caregiver. Although social support and affiliation dynamics have been widely studied, research examining the influence of a prior social support interaction on a subsequent interaction as strangers are getting to know one another has not been conducted. Based on a review and integration of theories of affiliation and relevant empirical work, we proposed and tested four core hypotheses. We review and discuss the evidence for each of these hypotheses, and for moderating effects of gender, in the following sections.

Social coordination

There was strong evidence for the predicted pattern of social coordination. Specifically, disclosers' support-seeking behavior was

linked with caregivers' responsive support provision. In addition, partners reciprocated displays of warmth and hostility. These results are consistent with interpersonal theory's emphasis on the complementarity of behavior during social interactions (Markey et al., 2003), with the body of research on interpersonal complementarity, and with research indicating that individuals are heavily influenced by their immediate social environments (Ross & Nisbett, 1991). The current investigation extends interpersonal theory to the context of social support interactions and supports the idea that it is important to consider specific contextual variables when defining and making predictions regarding complementarity.

It is important to note, however, that partners reciprocated negativity only in the second interaction. This suggests that coordination of negative behaviors may occur only as interaction partners become more familiar with one another. Social norms of politeness, as well as uncertainty regarding a new interaction partner who expresses negativity, may explain why partners did not reciprocate negativity during a first encounter. The precise mechanisms underlying the reciprocation of negativity (as well the extent to which one interaction partner provokes reciprocation) must be established in future research.

Influential interaction

Results also provided support for our hypothesis that the behaviors exhibited by one dyad member in a particular role during an initial interaction should predict the same behaviors by the other dyad member when he or she adopts that role during a subsequent interaction. This occurred specifically with regard to support-seeking behavior and expressions of negative affect. That is, adolescents' support-seeking behavior while in the disclosing role in the first interaction predicted their interaction partners' support-seeking behavior when they entered that role in a subsequent interaction. Also, adolescents' negativity in the caregiver role predicted their interaction partners' later negativity when in the caregiver role, and for males only, adolescents' negativity in the disclosing role predicted their partners'

later negativity in the disclosing role. These results both support and extend the work of the only other study, to our knowledge, that has considered two social support interactions in the same study, albeit with married couples (Cutrona et al., 1997).

In the structural equation modeling (SEM) analyses conducted for this investigation (in which we entered all variables into the model together), caregivers' support-giving behavior, caregivers' warmth, and disclosers' warmth did not significantly covary across interactions. It is interesting to speculate about why this may be the case. First, our results suggest that other dynamics in the model are likely to account for covariation of support giving and warmth. For instance, cross-situational consistency in caregivers' warmth or support provision (such that warm and involved caregivers become warm and involved disclosers) discussed below, accompanied by the social coordination effects, seem to explain better the covariation of these variables. Second and relatedly, support provision and warmth are behaviors that involve social skills (developed over a history of experiences with others); thus, they may be less amenable to immediate influence from an unfamiliar interaction partner. An adolescent who experiences a supportive interaction with an unfamiliar peer may wish to provide the same level of support to the peer in a subsequent interaction, but he or she may not have the requisite skills for doing so. Third, because support seeking involves expressing vulnerability, and expression of negative affect may be risky (particularly with an unknown partner), it makes sense that these behaviors would be predicted to a greater extent (than support giving and warmth) by what happens in a prior interaction. That is, one is more likely to engage in these more risky or vulnerable behaviors with an interaction partner who has previously engaged in them. In contrast, because support provision and warmth are less risky or vulnerable behaviors, their occurrence in a second interaction may not be determined as much by their occurrence in an initial interaction. As discussed above, their occurrence

may be better predicted by one's more stable dispositional tendencies to be friendly and nurturing toward others. All of these speculations are post hoc and must be tested in future studies.

Cross-situational consistency

Another contribution of this work is that it contributes to the literature examining the cross-situational consistency of social behavior (Allport, 1937; Funder & Colvin, 1991; Mischel, 1984; Shoda & Mischel, 2000). We contribute by considering this issue within the context of social support interactions. We predicted that an adolescent's behavior in one interaction and role (e.g., support-seeking role) should be strongly predictive of his or her behavior in a different interaction and role (e.g., caregiving role). Consistent with hypotheses, results support a cross-situational involvement in support transactions: Adolescents' responsive support behavior (while in the caregiving role) predicted their support-seeking behavior (while in the disclosing role). Results also support a cross-situational social-emotional orientation: Adolescents' warm behavior and negative behavior while in one role predicted these same behaviors while in the other role.

These results not only support prior work showing cross-situational consistency in other domains (Funder & Colvin, 1991; Kenrick & Funder, 1988), but they also support the proposition that beliefs about support seeking and support giving are likely to be consistent and influence support-seeking and caregiving behavior in similar ways (Kunce & Shaver, 1994). In addition, these results are consistent with research showing that certain characteristics of a person, such as attachment security, are associated both with seeking and providing care (Feeney, Cassidy, & Ramos-Marcuse, 2008). Our results suggest that adolescents who are comfortable listening to the problems of others and providing support to them are the same adolescents who are comfortable disclosing feelings and seeking support from others. The fact that support seeking (in the disclosing role during the first interaction) was not as predictive of support-giving behavior

(in the caregiving role during the second interaction) may reflect the idea discussed above that support giving is a skill that requires more knowledge and experience than does support seeking.

Uncertainty reduction

Results also supported predictions regarding uncertainty reduction. The idea is that there is a high degree of uncertainty in an initial interaction that decreases with increased interaction. Although this idea has been tested within other contexts (Berger & Calabrese, 1975), it had not been considered within the context of social support interactions. In this context, we proposed that a greater willingness to seek support as interaction increases reflects uncertainty reduction because this behavior indicates trust and a willingness to depend on another person. Also, because the provision of responsive support (which includes emotional support) implies a comfort with intimacy, we expected to see increases in responsive support provision across interactions as indicative of uncertainty reduction. The results supported these predictions: Behaviors indicating a willingness to depend on partners (i.e., support seeking) increased from the first interaction to the second interaction, and there was a trend for willingness to become intimate with partners (i.e., responsive support provision) to increase from the first to second interaction.

We also proposed the possibility that increases in positive affect and decreases in negative affect across interactions reflect uncertainty reduction given that uncertainty is an unpleasant experience. This idea was supported with regard to caregivers' affect across interactions; however, it was not supported with regard to support seekers' affect. We suspect that support seekers' affect may not have shown this pattern because support seeking involves exposing problems and vulnerabilities to another person, a task that might constrain the degree of positive and negative affect expressed in both interactions. Of course, this speculation is post hoc, and future research must be conducted to explore its validity.

Gender differences

Most clearly relevant to our predictions, female dyads exhibited more responsive support provision, support seeking, and warmth than male dyads. These gender differences are generally consistent with prior theory and research indicating that females affiliate more than males (Rofé, 1984; Taylor, 2006; Taylor et al., 2000) and that behaviors during support interactions may reflect gender role socialization (Barbee et al, 1993; Derlega et al., 1994; Mickelson et al., 1995). Given no prior information regarding the appropriateness or acceptability of particular behaviors to an unfamiliar interaction partner, it makes sense that gender role expectations will guide adolescent behaviors to some degree. That is, males may have been careful to exercise greater emotional control, whereas females may have felt freer to disclose feelings and seek assistance. It is important to keep in mind, however, that in this investigation, females were interacting with females and males were interacting with males. It remains for future research to determine whether the gender differences would hold if both men and women were interacting with a female partner (who is likely to elicit greater support seeking and support giving).

Overall, however, gender did not moderate the predicted effects that emerged from the social coordination, influential interaction, cross-situational consistency, and uncertainty reduction hypotheses. There were only two instances in which gender played a role. First, with regard to the influential interaction hypothesis, discloser negativity in the first interaction predicted discloser negativity in the second interaction only for males (but not for females). We suspect that this may have occurred because males are less comfortable in a support-seeking role than females—particularly when this involves disclosing vulnerabilities to other males. It may be the case that male discomfort in this role emerges as negativity, which then sets the precedence for how one's male interaction partner should behave when he later enters that role. Females' expression of negativity in the support-seeking role, on the other hand,

may be better predicted by their dispositional negativity, or by the level of stress they are experiencing regarding the specific problems they are disclosing (given that women are likely to have more experience seeking support from and disclosing vulnerabilities to other females).

Second, with regard to the cross-situational consistency hypothesis, male adolescents (but not female adolescents) who were negative when in the discloser role first were also more negative when in the caregiver role later, whereas female adolescents (but not male adolescents) who were negative when in the caregiving role first were also more negative when in the disclosing role later. Why might males show greater cross-situational consistency of negativity when in the support-seeking role first, whereas females show greater cross-situational consistency of negativity when in the caregiving role first? Our speculation for males is that they are less comfortable in a disclosing role, experience it more negatively, and thus carry this negativity forward into a subsequent interaction with the same partner. Because females, on the other hand, are socialized to be more nurturing, they may express negativity in a caregiving role when their interaction partner is especially difficult to support (and perhaps evokes this behavior). If this is the case, then it makes sense that they will carry this negativity into subsequent interactions with the same partner. It is important to emphasize, however, that we did not predict these gender differences, and future research must both replicate these patterns and uncover the mechanisms underlying them.

Conclusions and caveats

We believe that an important and innovative contribution of this work is that, in addition to its contribution to the relatively small literature involving observations of social support dynamics as they unfold during actual interactions, this study examines two support interactions between new acquaintances in the same investigation. This allows consideration of reciprocal influences that are consistent with real-life interactions in which

individuals take turns seeking and giving care, and in which individuals are influenced by prior interactions that have occurred. With regard to practical implications, this work contributes to an understanding of how specific behaviors enacted during an initial interaction with a new acquaintance may set the course for future interactions with that person and for future relationship development. This knowledge may be useful in assisting individuals in establishing positive relations with others. Additional work examining the influence of prior interactions on subsequent interactions will be an important and exciting direction for future research.

Although these data are correlational and do not permit us to draw unqualified causal inferences, they provide a foundation for future research and theory development in this area. In future research, it will be important to replicate the pattern of results obtained to ensure that the findings reflect stable interpersonal processes, and to examine support dynamics across additional interactions over longer periods of time. With regard to study limitations, we acknowledge that this investigation considered support behavior in a somewhat structured setting, that social support interactions may not be the typical types of interactions people have when they are meeting for the first time, and that this investigation included only same-sex (and not mixed-sex) dyads—all of which may limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other situations and dyad compositions. Replications will be necessary to confirm the findings and to determine how generally applicable they are. For example, it will be important for future research to examine the extent to which these affiliative dynamics occur in other contexts and with mixed-sex dyads. In particular, it will be important to determine the extent to which the findings would be similar in other cultural contexts. We suspect that there may be some differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. On the one hand, we may expect to see even greater coordination between interactions for peers in collectivistic cultures given that there is greater cohesion and stronger norms for how to behave in those

cultures. On the other hand, uncertainty reduction may be less important in the interactions of peers in collectivistic cultures because they are likely to be more certain of what to expect from one another.

Although we controlled for some potential effects of similarity in the current investigation because all participants were in the 11th grade and matched in terms of gender, we acknowledge that there are many other types of similarity to consider in future investigations. For example, similarity of attitudes (Sunnafrank, 1983, 1984, 1986a, 1992), as well as similarity of physical attractiveness, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Byrne & Nelson, 1965) may predict the nature and quality of interactions between strangers. In addition, the consideration of perceived similarity (aside from actual similarity) may provide insight into why individuals communicate the way they do in affiliative interactions.

Despite these limitations, the current investigation takes an important first step toward elucidating the interpersonal dynamics that unfold across two support interactions between new peer acquaintances. This study contributes to the existing literature by including two support interactions in the same study, by examining actual support-seeking and support-giving behaviors during real interactions, by integrating relevant theoretical perspectives to explain affiliative dynamics, and by focusing on a period of development (adolescence) that has been understudied in this regard. We hope that this research will help to lay a foundation for the development of future work in this area.

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