Social Support Provision: Effects of Solicitation and Closeness of Relationship

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Abstract

This study focuses on the effects that solicitation and closeness of relationship have on reactions to the provision of support in interpersonal situations. The provision of social support can be either solicited or unsolicited, and whether or not support provided in a particular situation is solicited can have a substantial influence on reactions to the support (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997). In addition, this study investigates the effects of closeness of relationship on instances of social support provision and subsequent reactions. 72 Georgetown University undergraduate students completed a vignette survey designed to measure the effects that solicitation and closeness of relationship, when present in social support provision situations, have on support recipients' levels of satisfaction, perceptions of support providers' interpersonal motives as well as of their own, and levels of support advice incorporation. Results revealed significant main effects of closeness of relationship on the extent to which participants perceived interpersonal love motives in their support providers and interpersonal face-saving motives of their own, as well as those of their support providers. It was found that subjects perceived a higher level of love motives in support providers who were described as having a close relationship with participants, as opposed to a more distant one. It was also found that participants perceived that both they, themselves, as well as their support providers were motivated to a greater degree by matters regarding each person saving his or her own face in vignettes for which the relationships between subjects and support providers were described as being more distant.
**Social Support Provision: Effects of Solicitation and Closeness of Relationship**

**Background and Literature.**

"Social support" is defined as being "an exchange of resources...perceived by the provider or the recipient to be intended to enhance the well-being of the recipient" (Shumaker & Brownell, 1984), and it is critical for physical and psychological well-being (Matthews, Conger & Wiekrama, 1996; Uchino, Cacioppo & Kiecoh-Glaser, 1996). Indeed, there is an immensely robust body of literature that has linked the presence of social support to a wide variety of positive outcomes such as benefits to mental and physical health, abilities to more effectively cope with stressful life experiences, and even survival in the context of a life threatening illness (Beach & Gupta, 2006; Cuningham & Barbee, 2000; Cutrona, 1996). However, a number of studies have revealed that social support can also lead to negative outcomes like increased stress levels or restrictions to freedom of choice (e.g., Fisher et al., 1982; Fisher & Nadler, 1974; Merton, 1968; Nadler & Fisher, 1986).

One important factor in determining whether an instance of social support provision will elicit a negative reaction is whether the support is solicited (i.e., "person A," the support recipient, actively seeks and/or asks for support from "person B," the support provider) or unsolicited ("person B," the support provider, is the one who initiates the provision of support) (Boutin & Foster, 2005; Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Deelstra et al., 2003; Fisher et al., 1982; Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997). On the basis of the threat-to-self-esteem model, social support is more likely to be perceived negatively if it is unsolicited (Deelstra et al., 2003). According to the threat-to-self-esteem model, if a person perceives an instance of social support provision as highly self-threatening and not very self-supportive, the person's reaction to the support will likely be negative (Fisher et al., 1982; Nadler & Fisher, 1986). One factor that causes social
support to be perceived as self-threatening is restriction to freedom of choice (Brehm, 1996; Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Fisher et al., 1982; Nadler & Fisher, 1986). This could imply that unsolicited support may be perceived more negatively than the absence of support, because imposing unsolicited support restricts the support recipient's freedom of choice to a greater degree (Caldwell, 2004; Deelstra et al., 2003).

Existing research has also identified two primary dimensions along which interpersonal behaviors vary. The first is frequently referred to as communion, affiliation, warmth, nurturance, or love; the second is frequently referred to as agency, control, dominance, influence, or status (Horowitz et al., 1997; Horowitz et al., 2001). The various types of social support, and the perceptions of the interpersonal motives that drive them, can be put into two broad categories that correspond to these two dimensions. With regard to the unsolicited provision of social support, literature provides two analogous models for the interpretation of interpersonal motives: the "butting-in" model (i.e., imposed support is interpreted to be indicative of a desire to dominate others - interpersonal motives of this type correspond to the dominance dimension of interpersonal behavior) (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997), and the "being friendly" model (i.e., imposed support is interpreted to be indicative of a desire to be connected to others - interpersonal motives of this type correspond to the love dimension of interpersonal behavior) (Caldwell, 2004).

In addition to whether or not social support is solicited, the current study aims to examine the effects that closeness of relationship has on interpersonal situations in which social support is provided. Although existing literature with regard to this matter is not as extensive as the literature surrounding the effects of solicitation on social support provision, closeness of relationship has been suggested to be an important influencing factor on peoples' reactions to the
The present study aims to investigate the ways in which these two factors influence situations of social support provision. It has been shown in a number of different contexts that whether or not support is sought by its recipient can have a substantial impact on how the person reacts to the support. The same may be said of nature and closeness of the relationship between the support provider and recipient; however, this has been examined largely in context of advisor-client relationships, or relationships of a similar nature, in which the perceived level of expertise of the support provider plays a very important role in the situation. It was expected that isolating these two factors to examine their effects would contribute a worthwhile addition to the well-founded, and growing, body of research and knowledge in this area of psychology. The effects of solicitation and closeness of relationship were evaluated through participants' levels of satisfaction (i.e., degree of satisfaction participants derive from a particular social support provision interaction), their perceptions of the interpersonal motives behind both their own actions during the support provision interaction, as well as those of their support providers, and the extent to which they felt the advice offered by support providers was valuable. Factors considered in the assessment of levels of satisfaction with the interaction included participants' responses to a general measure of satisfaction, how emotionally comforting they perceived the interaction to be, and a measure of how helpful they felt the interaction was. Interpersonal motives were evaluated along sub-scales of dominance and love vector motives and face-saving motives. Advice incorporation was assessed through participants' reports of how likely they would be to take the advice provided into account when making a final decision regarding the interaction, as well as the weight they would likely give to the advice provided (i.e., the extent to
which the advice would influence their decisions vs. the extent to which decisions would be based upon their own, pre-existing thoughts and beliefs) should they need to make such a decision.

**Hypotheses.** Hypothesis 1) It is hypothesized that participants will report higher levels of satisfaction, more favorable (i.e., more congruent with the "being friendly" model of the perception of interpersonal motives than with the "butting-in" model) perceptions of motives (both of their own motives, as well as the motives of the provider of the social support), and higher levels of "advice incorporation" for scenarios in which the social support provided is solicited. Hypothesis 2) It is hypothesized that participants will report higher levels of satisfaction, more favorable (i.e., again, tending toward the "being friendly" model, as opposed to the "butting-in" model) perceptions of motives (both own and others'), and higher levels of advice incorporation for scenarios in which the social support provided is provided by a "best friend" (someone with a high closeness of relationship to the participant), as opposed to a co-worker (someone with a low closeness of relationship). Hypothesis 3) It is hypothesized that there will be an interaction between the effects of these two variables as well. More specifically, it is anticipated that, for instance, the difference between levels of interpersonal love vector motives perceived in the actions of co-worker support providers in solicited vs. unsolicited social support provision scenarios will be far greater than the corresponding difference between levels of interpersonal love vector motives perceived in the actions of best friend support providers in solicited vs. unsolicited support provision scenarios.
Method

Participants

Participants were 72 current Georgetown University undergraduate students. The sample included both male and female participants who were between the ages of 18-24 years. In the end, there were 21 males and 51 females who participated in the study. With regard to the distribution of cultural background in the participant pool, 57 participants identified themselves as being predominantly American, with 54 participants reporting Western European heritage. Two people responded as being Asian-American, and one as being African-American. Four subjects reported identifying predominantly with an Asian culture, three with a South or Central American culture, one with African culture (Nigerian), one with Arabic culture and one with Russian and Canadian culture. One person replied as being of a "mixed" cultural identity, and four subjects did not respond. Subjects were selected at random and randomly assigned to one of the four experimental groups in the study. Participants were recruited online using the SONA Systems Experiment Management System software available to the Georgetown University Department of Psychology. Subjects were awarded, through the same SONA Systems software, with psychology course credit for their participation in and completion of the study.

Measures

Satisfaction. Each participant reported his or her level of satisfaction with the supportive interaction described. Questionnaire items assessed the helpfulness (e.g., "How helpful would this interaction be to you?") , satisfaction (e.g., "How satisfied were you with this interaction?") and emotional comfort (e.g., "How emotionally comforting was this interaction?") of the interaction on a scale of 1 = "Not at all" to 4 = "Extremely." Variable measures used to evaluate level of satisfaction were titled "Scenario 1 - Satisfaction" and "Scenario 3 - Satisfaction." These
corresponded with participants' reports of satisfaction levels for the first and third vignettes included in the questionnaires (responses to the second vignette were not included in data analysis; these components of the study are explained in greater detail shortly). For instance, a participant's satisfaction level for scenario 1 (i.e., the first vignette) was calculated as the arithmetic mean of his or her responses to the three questionnaire items, designed to reliably assess satisfaction levels, following scenario 1. The same was done for scenario 3 (using the three questionnaire items corresponding to scenario 3; also see Appendix B).

**Perceived Interpersonal Motives (Own and Others' Motives).** Measuring participants' perceptions of interpersonal motives was designed to provide an indication of the extent to which participants felt that the social support provided was indicative of a desire to dominate and/or manipulate others vs. the extent to which they felt that it was indicative of a desire to be connected to others and/or to genuinely help the support recipient. The perception of interpersonal motives of both the person providing the support ("others' motives") and the participants' own interpersonal motives ("own motives") were assessed using modified versions of Locke's (2000) Circumplex Scales of Interpersonal Values, CSIV. For each of the three scenarios, 30 items were used to evaluate participants' perceptions of support providers' interpersonal motives, and 30 items were used to evaluate participants' perceptions of their own interpersonal motives. Responses to these questions were recorded using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = "Not at all" to 4 = "Extremely."

The variable measures "Saving Face for Others," "Saving My Own Face," "Others Saving My Face," and "Others Saving Their Own Faces" were designed to capture perceived interpersonal face-oriented motives. Others Saving My Face measured the extent to which the support recipient (i.e., participants) perceived the support provider to be motivated by concerns
to save the recipient's (i.e., again, participants) face. Others Saving Their Own Faces was a measure of how much participants perceived their support providers to be motivated by concerns to save their own (i.e., the support provider, him or herself) face. Saving Face for Others was designed to evaluate how much participants felt that they were motivated by concerns to save the support provider's face, and Saving My Own Face was a measure of the extent to which participants felt motivated by concerns to save their own face. Each of these values was calculated as the arithmetic mean of participant responses to a set of three questionnaire items, derived from Locke's (2000) CSIV, designed to assess the extent to which these face-saving motives are perceived as present in a situation.

Variable measures "Perceived Own Interpersonal Love Vector Motives," "Perceived Own Interpersonal Dominance Vector Motives," "Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others," and "Perceived Interpersonal Dominance Motives in Others" assessed participants' perceptions of motives along the vectors of love and dominance. The two DVs measuring Perceived Interpersonal Dominance Vector Motives of one's own, and those of others, assessed perceptions of the interpersonal dominance motives of participants and support providers, respectively, with higher values of these variables indicating a higher degree of perceived dominance motives. The two DVs assessing the Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives of one's own, as well as those of others, measured perceptions of interpersonal love motives in participants and support providers, respectively, with higher values indicating the perception of a higher degree of love motives (for an example of how values for these measures were calculated, please see Appendix D).

Advice Incorporation. Advice incorporation was measured by participants' reports of how likely they would be to take the suggestion offered by the social support provider into
consideration, rated on a scale from 1 = "Not at all" to 5 = "To a great extent." The variable used to measure this was titled "Advice Incorporation Likelihood." Participants' reports of how much weight they would likely give the suggestion, should they need to make a final decision regarding the social support provision scenario, were also measured (e.g., "How much weight would you be likely to give this person's suggestion? That is, to what degree would your choice or course of action be the result of this person's suggestion vs. the result of your own (unchanged by the suggestions offered) thoughts, beliefs, etc.?). Participants rated their responses to this item on a scale from 1 = "Very little or no weight at all" to 10 = "A tremendously great degree of weight." The variable designated to measure this was titled "Extent of Advice Incorporation."1

**Design and Procedure**

A vignette study was conducted to investigate the stated hypotheses. The experiment was set up as a 2x2 factorial design within which the independent variables of solicitation and closeness of relationship were manipulated. There were two conditions for each of the two independent variables. For solicitation, the social support provided to participants in a given trial was either solicited (solicitation condition 1; i.e., the interaction in which social support was provided was initiated by the participant, the support recipient) or unsolicited (solicitation condition 2; i.e., the interaction was not initiated by the participant). For closeness of relationship, the social support provided to participants in a given trial was provided either by someone with a high closeness of relationship to the participant (closeness of relationship condition 1; in the current study, a "best friend"), or by someone with a low closeness of relationship to the participant (closeness of relationship condition 2; in the current study, a co-worker).
The experimental structure, then, allowed for four different possible combinations of these independent variable conditions. Accordingly, in order to examine the ways in which solicitation and closeness of relationship affected participants' reactions to the provision of social support in a given situation, each participant was assigned to one of the following four experimental groups: Group I: Co-worker/Solicited, Group II: Co-worker/Unsolicited, Group III: Friend/Solicited, and Group IV: Friend/Unsolicited.

The dependent variables in the study included level of satisfaction with the interaction, perceived interpersonal motives of the advice provider, participants' perceptions of their own interpersonal motives, and the likelihood and extent to which participants felt they would take the advice offered into consideration, should they be required to make a final decision concerning the situation.

After signing a written consent form, each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire packet designed to collect demographic information, and to assess various aspects of participants' reactions to a series of different scenarios in which social support was provided. Questionnaires were handed out to participants individually. Participants filled out their questionnaires alone and were not allowed to discuss the study with anyone until after they had finished. The average time to complete the questionnaire was approximately 40 minutes. An experimenter was available (in person or via email) to answer any questions that subjects had throughout the course of their participation in the study. Incomplete questionnaires were discarded.

Each questionnaire packet began with a demographic survey containing items which asked participants to provide information about their cultural background, parents' cultural background, upbringing, age, gender, and socioeconomic status (for the full demographic
questionnaire used in this study, please see Appendix A). Following the demographic segment, there was an experimental questionnaire which correspond with one of the four aforementioned experimental groups (for an example of a full experimental questionnaire used in this study, please see Appendix B). Each experimental questionnaire contained three vignettes, each followed by a series of questions. Of the three vignettes, scenario 1 and scenario 3 were designed as experimental measures. Scenario 1 dealt with a situation in which the participant, who is about to go outside on a cold and windy day, is exhibiting signs of illness. Social support (either solicited or unsolicited) is then provided (either by a friend or by a co-worker) in the form of a suggestion that the participant put on his or her jacket. Scenario 3 described a situation in which the participant is working on his or her resume, and social support (again, either solicited or unsolicited) is then provided (and again, either by a friend or by a co-worker) in the form of advice regarding how to change the resume in order to make it more professional. Unlike the other two vignettes, Scenario 2 was not designed as an experimental measure; it was included in order to mask the true nature and objective of the study from participants, and thereby minimize any related biases that may otherwise have skewed the results. After completion of the questionnaire packet, participants were debriefed and released from the study.

Results

Principal Dependent Variable Measures

Of the numerical constructs used to measure the dependent variables in this study, the following were of particular importance (DVs were measured and analyzed separately for vignettes 1 and 3, and statistics for both scenarios are shown): "Satisfaction (3 items; in scenario 1 $\alpha = 0.823$, in scenario 3 $\alpha = 0.845$)," "Advice Incorporation Likelihood (comprised of only 1 item)" and "Extent of Advice Incorporation (also comprised of only 1 item),"1 "Saving Face for
Significant Findings

Significant findings were of main effects of closeness of relationship on dependent variable measures "Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others," "Scenario 1 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Love Vector Motives," "Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces," and "Scenario 1 - Saving My Own Face." (For a more detailed review of these results, please see Appendix C).
The significant main effect of closeness of relationship on Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others (Co-worker/Solicited $M = 1.21; SD = 0.94$; Friend/Solicited $M = 1.62; SD = 0.93$; Co-worker/Unsolicited $M = 1.44; SD = 0.95$; Friend/Unsolicited $M = 1.90; SD = 0.78$; $F(1,68) = 4.089, p < 0.05$) indicates that, in the case of the first vignette, participants perceived a greater degree of love vector motives behind the social support they had just been provided during the interaction if the support was provided by a best friend, rather than a co-worker. This provides support for hypothesis II. Similarly, the significance of the main effect that closeness of relationship had on Scenario 1 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Love Vector Motives (Co-worker/Solicited $M = 0.92; SD = 0.76$; Friend/Solicited $M = 1.59; SD = 0.65$; Co-worker/Unsolicited $M = 1.22; SD = 0.81$; Friend/Unsolicited $M = 1.81; SD = 0.89$; $F(1,68) = 11.391, p < 0.01$) indicates that, in scenario 1, participants perceived themselves as being motivated to a greater degree by factors corresponding to the love vector when they were interacting with a best friend, as opposed to a co-worker. This supports hypothesis II as well.

The significant main effect of closeness of relationship on Scenario 1 - Saving My Own Face (Co-worker/Solicited $M = 2.57; SD = 0.89$; Friend/Solicited $M = 1.84; SD = 0.95$; Co-worker/Unsolicited $M = 2.47; SD = 0.89$; Friend/Unsolicited $M = 2.12; SD = 1.22$; $F(1,68) = 5.189, p < 0.05$) indicates that, for the first vignette, participants perceived themselves to be motivated to a greater extent by concerns regarding saving their own face when interacting with a co-worker, rather than with a best friend. The significant main effect of closeness of relationship on Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces (Co-worker/Solicited $M = 2.17; SD = 0.91$; Friend/Solicited $M = 2.12; SD = 1.09$; Co-worker/Unsolicited $M = 2.68; SD = 0.69$; Friend/Unsolicited $M = 1.75; SD = 1.09$; $F(1,68) = 4.803, p < 0.05$) suggests that, for scenario 3,
participants perceived that a given support provider was motivated to a greater degree by matters regarding saving his or her own face (i.e., the support provider's face) if the support provider was a co-worker, rather than a friend. These two observations also provide support for hypothesis II.

**On the Verge of Significance**

In addition, the interaction effects that solicitation and closeness of relationship had on dependent variables "Scenario 3 - Others Saving My Face" and "Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces" were very nearly significant, although p-values in both cases were greater than 0.05 (for Scenario 3 - Others Saving My Face*Interaction $F(1,68) = 2.787, ns (p = 0.10)$; for Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces*Interaction $F(1,68) = 3.897, ns (p = 0.052)$). These findings, had only slightly higher levels of significance been attained, would be able to provide some substantiation for hypothesis III. Furthermore, it is likely that a sample size of perhaps but a few more participants would have allowed these two interaction effects to come to significant levels.

**Non-Significant Findings**

The results from a number of additional two-way ANOVA tests that did not yield any significant findings are reported in the following paragraphs. The findings are grouped by dependent variable, according to what each variable was designed to measure (i.e., satisfaction, others' interpersonal motives, own interpersonal motives, and advice incorporation). Again, scenarios 1 and 3 were analyzed separately; the results for both are included for each variable.

**Satisfaction.** For Scenario 1 - Satisfaction: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 1.513, ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 0.992, ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.396, ns$. For Scenario 3 - Satisfaction: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.257, ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 0.055, ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.638, ns$. 
**Perceived Own Interpersonal Motives.** (includes both "face-saving" and love/dominance vector motives) For Scenario 1 - Saving Face for Others: main effect of solicitation $F(1,67) = 0.652$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,67) = 0.066$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,67) = 0.005$, $ns$. For Scenario 3 - Saving Face for Others: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 1.763$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 2.063$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.777$, $ns$.

For Scenario 1 - Saving My Own Face: main effect of solicitation $F(1,67) = 0.134$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,67) = 0.637$, $ns$. For Scenario 3 - Saving My Own Face: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.159$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 1.388$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.353$, $ns$. For Scenario 1 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Love Vector Motives: main effect of solicitation $F(1,67) = 1.865$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,67) = 0.066$, $ns$. For Scenario 3 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Love Vector Motives: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.127$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 1.766$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.017$, $ns$. For Scenario 1 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Dominance Vector Motives: main effect of solicitation $F(1,67) = 0.123$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,67) = 0.697$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,67) = 1.368$, $ns$. For Scenario 3 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Dominance Vector Motives: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.247$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 1.023$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 1.367$, $ns$.

**Perceived Interpersonal Motives of Others.** For Scenario 1 - Others Saving My Face: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.036$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 0.806$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.228$, $ns$. For Scenario 3 - Others Saving My Face: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.770$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 0.222$, $ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 2.787$, $ns$. For Scenario 1 - Others Saving Their Own Faces: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.029$, $ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 1.140$, $ns$;
interaction $F(1,68) = 0.009, ns$. For Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.102, ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 3.897, ns$. For Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Dominance Vector Motives in Others: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.029, ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 1.642, ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 1.369, ns$. For Scenario 3 - Perceived Interpersonal Dominance Vector Motives in Others: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 1.206, ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.627, ns$. For Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 1.456, ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.014, ns$. For Scenario 3 - Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others: main effect of solicitation $F(1,68) = 0.026, ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship $F(1,68) = 0.100, ns$; interaction $F(1,68) = 0.043, ns$.

**Advice Incorporation Variables.** For Scenario 1 - Advice Incorporation Likelihood, main effect of solicitation: $F(1,17) = 0.749, ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship: $F(1,17) = 0.998, ns$; interaction: $F(1,17) = 0.749, ns$. For Scenario 3 - Advice Incorporation Likelihood, main effect of solicitation: $F(1,17) = 1.179, ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship: $F(1,17) = 0.114, ns$; interaction: $F(1,17) = 0.434, ns$. For Scenario 1 - Extent of Advice Incorporation, main effect of solicitation: $F(1,17) = 0.008, ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship: $F(1,17) = 0.001, ns$; interaction: $F(1,17) = 0.193, ns$. For Scenario 3 - Extent of Advice Incorporation, main effect of solicitation: $F(1,17) = 1.179, ns$; main effect of closeness of relationship: $F(1,17) = 0.114, ns$; interaction: $F(1,17) = 0.434, ns$.

**Further Observations**

Out of keeping with hypotheses I, II and III, no significant main effects were found for solicitation. Also at odds with all three hypotheses, neither IV, nor any interaction between them, was able to significantly affect participants' levels of satisfaction. This was true for both
scenario 1 and scenario 3. Similarly, neither independent variable, nor interaction between the two, was able to significantly affect participants' levels of advice incorporation. This true for both of the "Advice Incorporation" variable measures in both vignettes 1 and 3. Finally, providing evidence against hypotheses I, II and III, there was a significant main effect of closeness of relationship on DV measure "Scenario 3 - Perceived Interpersonal Dominance Vector Motives in Others (Co-worker/Solicited $M = 0.19; SD = 0.40$; Friend/Solicited $M = 0.51; SD = 0.45$; Co-worker/Unsolicited $M = 0.16; SD = 0.42$; Friend/Unsolicited $M = 0.29; SD = 0.58$; $F(1,68) = 4.251, p < 0.05$). This finding implies that, for scenario 3, participants perceived greater degrees of dominance motives in best friend social support providers than they did in co-worker support providers. This goes against what was expected, and it stands contrary to all other findings of significant main effects for closeness of relationship. Some possible causes are discussed shortly.

**Discussion**

**Limitations - Falling Short of Significance**

There are a number of factors that may have been part of the cause behind the lack of significant effects observed in the results. To begin, the size of the participant pool for the study ($n = 72$) was, despite recruitment efforts, still rather small. Consequently, standard error was rather large. This established the need for a higher minimum critical value that a given difference between two means would have had to equal or surpass in order to be statistically significant.

It is also possible that there was a confound inherent in the way that closeness of relationship was manipulated for the study. Particularly in social relationships at work, receiving social support can arouse feelings of incompetence in the support recipient. As a result, then, it
is possible that the provision of social support at work, or in context of a similar situation, may give rise to more negative responses than it otherwise would under different circumstances (Buunk et al., 1993; Peeters et al., 1995; Deelstra et al., 2003). When marking their responses to a vignette in which an interaction with a co-worker is described (used for the low closeness of relationship condition), participants were likely to have envisioned the situation as taking place at work. The potential for these more acute feelings of incompetence is thus a relevant and possibly confounding factor.

In addition, the moods of the two parties involved in a support provision interaction have been shown to have a considerable effect on the kinds of social support that arise (Barbee, 1990; Cohen, Gottlieb & Underwood, 2004). In general, support providers who were in positive moods were more likely to offer social support in the form of suggestions, as opposed to those in a negative mood, who were more likely to engage in avoidant behaviors (e.g., withdrawal or changing the subject) (Barbee, 1990). With this in mind, it is also possible that, depending on a support recipient's mood, there could exist important differences in the kinds of social support that are preferred, or perceived more positively. If this were the case, it would likely alter a support recipient's reaction to the social support (of whatever kind) that had actually been provided in a particular situation. It is quite probable that, throughout the times during which they were filling out questionnaires for this study, there was a good deal of variability between moods of the participants. If such influences on the perception of social support were, in fact, present, they could have confounded the results.

Moreover, despite the fact that information on the cultural background and gender of each participant was collected via the demographic portion of the questionnaire, these factors were randomized in the data analysis. Although cultural background was randomized for the
purposes of obtaining results that could be applied to the Georgetown undergraduate student body as a whole, rather than just a particular cultural sub-set within it, the contrast between cultures of individualist and collective value orientations has been amongst the most important concepts in the field of social psychology (Adams & Plaut, 2003). It is, therefore, possible that the cultural background of participants in this study did have a substantial influence on their responses to questionnaire items. Concerning gender differences, the majority of participants who completed the study were female, though there were males who participated. It is a possibility, then, that the level of sensitivity in participants' reactions to the social support provision scenarios described differed between male and female subjects. It could be that the data from the minority of male subjects in the sample, when analyzed along with the data from female participants, caused the levels of significance in the results to be weaker than they would have been had the data from female participants alone been analyzed.

The significance of a person's idiosyncratic expectations about the motives of the person with whom they are interacting has also been demonstrated (Holmes, 2002). Given the likelihood that subjects' idiosyncratic expectations about support providers' motives varied considerably from participant to participant, this, too, may have confounded results.

This study utilized self-report measures and was therefore subject to self-presentation biases. The order in which vignettes were presented to subjects remained constant for all participants, subjecting the results of the study to sequencing biases as well. This issue of ordering may have affected the results as participants fatigued or grew less attentive, even if only slightly, throughout the process of completing the study. Responses to the questionnaire items following scenario 3, then, may have been recorded under these subtly different conditions and differed from scenario 1 responses as a result. If this were the case, varying the presentation
order of the vignettes would be, at least to a degree, an effective way to minimize any potential biases in the results. Finally, the study utilized hypothetical vignettes to prompt the participant reactions that were measured. As a result, participant reactions measured are not necessarily indicative of how they would have responded to actual interaction scenarios.

Limitations - Inconsistencies of Findings between Scenarios 1 and 3

The significant findings observed for scenario 1 did not align with those observed for scenario 3. For example, in scenario 1, closeness of relationship had significant main effects on variables "Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others," "Scenario 1 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Love Vector Motives," and "Scenario 1 - Saving My Own Face," while, in scenario 3, closeness of relationship had a main effect only on the variable "Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces." Furthermore, in scenario 3, interaction effects were very nearly significant for variables "Scenario 3 - Others Saving My Face" and "Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces," while, in scenario 1, the strength of interaction effects on these variables was considerably less.

These inconsistencies are likely the result of fundamental differences between the two scenarios. These two scenarios have probably tapped into two different areas of life, activating two different sets of cognitive processes associated with them, which thereby evoked two reactions that were different in nature. Despite the fact that the two scenarios were analyzed separately, it is possible that the differences between them contributed to the overall lack of robustness of the results.

Of the differences between scenarios 1 and 3, three stood out as being particularly relevant. First, differences in the level of ego-involvement have been shown to significantly affect recipients' receptiveness toward social support. In general, it has been observed that
people are more resistant toward accepting support for ego-involving tasks than for non-ego-involving tasks (Gergen, Morse & Kristeller, 1973; Tessler & Schwartz, 1972; Wallston, 1976). The job resume problem in scenario 3 was a much more ego-involving situation than the jacket-donning situation described in scenario 1.

Second, it has been suggested that negative reactions to unsolicited social support are mediated by the degree of difficulty of the problem at hand. That is, perceptions of social support tend to become more positive as task difficulty increases (Mikesell, 1971). Putting together a good, professional-looking job resume is far more difficult a task than walking outside while feeling a bit under the weather.

Finally, there is evidence that the situation described in scenario 1 presents a more "communal" problem, while the situation described in scenario 3 presents more of an "agentic" problem (Horowitz et al., 2001). Communal problems (i.e., those which tend to elicit communal social support) involve "strivings for love, intimacy, friendship, affiliation, emotional relatedness, belongingness, mutuality, group cohesion, communality, and relationship maintenance," while agentic problems (i.e., those which tend to elicit agentic social support) involve "strivings for mastery, power, achievement, work performance, and instrumental task completion" (O'Brien & DeLongis, 1996). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that "controllable" problems tend to elicit agentic social support, while "uncontrollable" problems tend to elicit communal social support (Cutrona, 1990; Cutrona & Russell, 1990; Cutrona & Suhr, 1992, 1994). That being said, being sick in scenario 1 is rather out of the person's control, making it an "uncontrollable" problem - one more likely to elicit communal social support - and, thus, a communal problem. Putting together a good, professional job resume in scenario 3, on
the other hand, is rather within the person's control, making it a "controllable" problem - one more likely to elicit agentic social support - and, thus, an agentic problem.

**Future Directions**

The present study could easily be improved by collecting data from a larger population sample, avoiding the use of a co-worker to simulate the condition of low closeness of relationship (perhaps, for example, an old high school or college classmate could be used for this condition in place of a co-worker), controlling for cultural background and gender differences, randomizing the presentation order of vignettes, and utilizing vignettes designed to tap into more closely related aspects of life.

**Endnotes**

1 The first of the three advice questionnaire items was a simple, binomial "yes" or "no" question that led into items "Advice Incorporation Likelihood" (the second item of the three) and "Extent of Advice Incorporation" (the third of the three) and, as a result, it was not included in the quantitative data analysis.

2 In order to run the data analysis, each independent variable condition was assigned a numeric value of either 0 or 1. For solicitation, unsolicited = 0, and solicited = 1. For closeness of relationship, co-worker = 0, and friend = 1. Thus, the numeric values for the four experimental groups were as follows: Group I: Co-worker/Solicited = 0/1, Group II: Co-worker/Unsolicited = 0/0, Group III: Friend/Solicited = 1/1, and Group IV: Friend/Unsolicited = 1/0.

3 e.g., (vignette used for Scenario 1, Group I: Co-worker/Solicited) 'You are about to go outside. You are coughing and sneezing. When you pass by your coworker, you cough and
complain that you are not feeling well and it may be cold outside. Your coworker tells you: "Put on your jacket, it is windy outside."

4 e.g., (vignette used for Scenario 3, Group I: Co-worker/Solicited) 'You are working on your resume. You tell your coworker that you do not know how to improve it. Your coworker comes over and suggests several changes to the resume to make it more professional.'
References


ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks so much to Professor Yulia E. Chentsova Dutton, without whom I would absolutely not have been able to undertake and complete this project. Her patience, toleration of my fearsomely disorganized lifestyle and willingness to teach and guide me through this process was indispensable to making this project possible. Thanks, too, to Professor Rachel F. Barr and Professor Fathali M. Moghaddam for all the help, for putting up with me, and for accommodating me into the honors program. To everyone who completed the survey questionnaire for this project: a sincere thanks. A thanks as well to the people in the Georgetown College Dean's Office for reading through and approving my petition to join the honors program six months late. Thanks to Professor Steven R. Sabat for all the help you've given me as my academic advisor, as well as for an engaging and informative experience in physiological psychology last Fall. And finally an enormous thanks to Professor James T. Lamiell for a truly remarkable experience - in introductory psychology, history of modern psychology, and throughout my time spent with the psychology department. Thanks, too, for inspiring me to declare a major in psychology, and for all the help throughout my years here at Georgetown.
Appendix A

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (same for all four experimental groups)

Date __________

BASIC INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

1) Age __________ Sex (please circle): a. Female  b. Male
2) Religion (if any) __________ How would you identify yourself culturally? __________
3) Where were you born? (city/state or province/country) __________
4) Where did you spend the majority of your childhood? (city/state or province/country) __________
5) If born abroad, how old were you when you moved to the United States? __________
6) If born abroad, how many years have you lived in the United States? __________
7) If born in the US, have you lived in or spent more than 6 months in any other country other than the U.S.?  
Yes ______ No ______ If yes, what country? __________ How old were you when you lived in that country? __________ How long did you live in that country? __________
8) What is your MOTHER's cultural background? __________
9) What is your FATHER's cultural background? __________
10) What country was your MOTHER born in? __________ Raised in? __________
11) What country was your FATHER born in? __________ Raised in? __________
12) What country was your MATERNAL GRANDMOTHER born in? __________
   Raised in? __________
13) What country was your MATERNAL GRANDFATHER born in? __________
   Raised in? __________
14) What country was your PATERNAL GRANDMOTHER born in? __________
   Raised in? __________
15) What country was your PATERNAL GRANDFATHER born in? __________
   Raised in? __________
16) Please circle the number that corresponds to the socioeconomic level of your household while you were growing up
   1 Lower Income  2 Lower Middle Income  3 Middle Income  4 Upper Middle Income  5 Upper Income
### APPENDIX B

**EXPERIMENTAL QUESTIONNAIRE EXAMPLE**

**GROUP I: CO-WORKER/SOLICITED - SCENARIO 3**

Subject #: 

3) You are working on your resume. You tell your coworker that you do not know how to improve it. Your coworker comes over and suggests several changes to the resume to make it more professional.

In your opinion, in this interaction with you, how important would it be for your coworker to act or appear or be treated this way?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Mildly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would be important for your coworker to:
- appear confident
- do what you want him/her to do
- maintain your pride
- appear forceful
- feel that you respect what he/she has to say
- ensure that you mind your own business
- avoid saying something stupid
- avoid appearing weak in front of you
- get along with you
- ensure that you keep your distance from him/her
- feel connected to you
- feel that you acknowledge when he/she is right
- help you save face
- feel that you do not reject him/her
- keep his/her feelings to him- or herself
- not reveal what he/she is really like
- feel that you listen to what he/she has to say
- be the one in charge
- feel that you approve of him/her
- project his/her personal pride
- have an impact on you
- feel that you understand him/her
- feel that you avoid telling him/her what to do
- avoid exposing himself/herself to the possibility of rejection
- appear detached
- go along with what you want to do
- feel that you show concern for how he/she is feeling
- live up to your expectations
- maintain your credibility
- maintain his/her own dignity in front of you
In your opinion, in this interaction with your coworker, how important would it be for YOU to act or appear or be treated this way?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Mildly</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Very</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It would be important for you to:

- appear confident
- do what this person wants you to do
- maintain this person's pride
- appear forceful
- feel that this person respects what you have to say
- ensure that this person minds his/her own business
- avoid saying something stupid
- avoid appearing weak in front of this person
- get along with this person
- ensure that this person keeps his/her distance from you
- feel connected to this person
- feel that this person acknowledges when you are right
- help this person save face
- feel that this person does not reject you
- keep your feelings to yourself
- not reveal what you are really like
- feel that this person listens to what you have to say
- be the one in charge
- feel that this person approves of you
- protect your personal pride
- have an impact on this person
- feel that this person understands you
- feel that this person avoids telling you what to do
- avoid exposing yourself to the possibility of rejection
- appear detached
- go along with what this person wants to do
- feel that this person shows concern for how you are feeling
- live up to this person's expectations
- maintain this person's credibility
- maintain your own dignity in front of this person

How would you evaluate this interaction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not at All</th>
<th>Slightly</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>A Lot</th>
<th>Extremely</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How helpful would this interaction be to you? 0 1 2 3 4
How satisfied would you be with this interaction? 0 1 2 3 4
How emotionally comforting would this interaction be? 0 1 2 3 4
1. In this situation, is there a possibility that you would take this person's suggestion into account when deciding what you will do?  
   Yes       No

2. Elaborating upon the previous question, how likely would you be to take this person's suggestion into account?  
   1  2  3  4  5

3. In this situation, how much weight would you be likely to give this person's suggestion? That is, to what degree would your choice or course of action be the result of this person's suggestion vs. the result of your own (unchanged by the suggestions offered) thoughts, beliefs, etc?  
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others
There was a significant main effect of closeness of relationship on "Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others" (labeled "rawX1other" in the output tables).

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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>208.351</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicit</td>
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<td>1.197</td>
<td>1.456</td>
<td>.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>68</td>
<td>.822</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>72</td>
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<td>Corrected Total</td>
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<td>71</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</table>

a. R Squared = .074 (Adjusted R Squared = .033)

Estimated Marginal Means of rawX1other
Scenario 1 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Love Vector Motives
There was a significant main effect of closeness of relationship on "Scenario 1 - Perceived Own Interpersonal Love Vector Motives (labeled "rawX1me" in the output tables).

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
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<th>Mean Square</th>
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<td>Relationship</td>
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<td>Solicit * Relationship</td>
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<td>.066</td>
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<tr>
<td>Error</td>
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<td>.619</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. R Squared = .162 (Adjusted R Squared = .124)

Estimated Marginal Means of rawX1me

Graph showing estimated marginal means for Solicit (Unsolicited and Solicited) and Relationship (Coworker and Friend) with lines indicating decreasing trends for Solicited conditions compared to Unsolicited conditions.
Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces
There was a significant main effect of closeness of relationship on "Scenario 3 - Others Saving Their Own Faces" (labeled "ownface3oth" in the output tables).

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
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<td>4.803</td>
<td>.032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicit * Relationship</td>
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<td>3.897</td>
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<tr>
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<td>.909</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Total</td>
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</table>

a. R Squared = .119 (Adjusted R Squared = .080)

Estimated Marginal Means of ownface3oth

- Relationship
  - Coworker
  - Friend
Scenario 1 - Saving My Own Face
There was a significant main effect of closeness of relationship on "Scenario 1 - Saving My Own Face" (labeled "ownface1me" in the output tables).
APPENDIX D

CALCULATION OF PERCEIVED INTERPERSONAL LOVE VECTOR MOTIVES (RAWX) AND PERCEIVED INTERPERSONAL DOMINANCE VECTOR MOTIVES (RAWY) VARIABLE MEASURES

Calculation of "Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Love Vector Motives in Others"
(referred to also as "rawX1other" in the explanation below)

*NB: This measure was calculated for scenario 3 ("rawX3other") in exactly the same way, only using participant responses to the questionnaire items corresponding to scenario 3. Additionally, the calculation for rawX measures of participants' perceptions of their own motives ("rawX1me," "rawX3me") is also done in exactly the same way, only using participant responses to the questionnaire items for the assessment of "own motives" that correspond to scenarios 1 and 3.

All participant responses to the items used in the calculation of these values were recording using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = "Not at all" to 4 = "Extremely.

⇒ rawX1other = rawC1other - rawunC1other

→ rawC1other = 0.414*(LM1other + (0.707*(JK1other + NO1other)))

• LM1other = mean(Sit1other11, Sit1other22, Sit1other27)
  · Sit1other11: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel connected to you.
  · Sit1other22: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you understand him/her.
  · Sit1other27: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you show concern for how he/she is feeling.

• JK1other = mean(Sit1other14, Sit1other19, Sit1other9)
  · Sit1other14: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you do not reject him/her.
  · Sit1other19: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you approve of him/her.
  · Sit1other9: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to get along with you.

• NO1other = mean(Sit1other5, Sit1other17, Sit1other21)
  · Sit1other5: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you respect what he/she has to say.
· Sit1other17: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you listen to what he/she has to say.

· Sit1other21: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to have an impact on you.

→ rawunC1other = 0.414*(DE1other + (0.707*(BC1other + FG1other)))

• DE1other = mean(Sit1other16, Sit1other10, Sit1other25)

    · Sit1other16: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to not reveal what he/she is really like.

    · Sit1other10: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to ensure that you keep your distance from him/her.

    · Sit1other25: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to appear detached.

• BC1other = mean(Sit1other4, Sit1other6, Sit1other18)

    · Sit1other4: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to appear forceful.

    · Sit1other6: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to ensure that you mind your own business.

    · Sit1other18: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to be the one in charge.

• FG1other = mean(Sit1other7, Sit1other15, Sit1other24)

    · Sit1other7: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to avoid saying something stupid.

    · Sit1other15: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to keep his/her feelings to him/herself.

    · Sit1other24: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to avoid exposing himself/herself to the possibility of rejection.
Calculation of "Scenario 1 - Perceived Interpersonal Dominance Vector Motives in Others"
(referred to also as "rawY1other" in the explanation below)

*NB: This measure was calculated for scenario 3 ("rawY3other") in exactly the same way, only using participant responses to the questionnaire items corresponding to scenario 3. Additionally, the calculation for rawY measures of participants' perceptions of their own motives ("rawY1me," "rawY3me") is also done in exactly the same way, only using participant responses to the questionnaire items for the assessment of "own motives" that correspond to scenarios 1 and 3.

All participant responses to the items used in the calculation of these values were recording using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = "Not at all" to 4 = "Extremely.

⇒ rawY1other = rawA1other - rawunA1other

→ rawA1other = 0.414*(PA1other + (0.707*(BC1other + NO1other)))

• PA1other = mean(Sit1other1, Sit1other12, Sit1other23)
  
  - Sit1other1: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to appear confident.
  
  - Sit1other12: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you acknowledge when he/she is right.
  
  - Sit1other23: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you avoid telling him/her what to do.

• BC1other = mean(Sit1other4, Sit1other6, Sit1other18)
  
  - Sit1other4: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to appear forceful.
  
  - Sit1other6: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to ensure that you mind your own business.
  
  - Sit1other18: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to be the one in charge.

• NO1other = mean(Sit1other5, Sit1other17, Sit1other21)
  
  - Sit1other5: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you respect what he/she has to say.
  
  - Sit1other17: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you listen to what he/she has to say.
Sit1other21: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to have an impact on you.

→ rawunA1other = 0.414*(HI1other + (0.707*(JK1other + FG1other)))

- HI1other = mean(Sit1other2, Sit1other26, Sit1other28)
  - Sit1other2: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to do what you want him/her to do.
  - Sit1other26: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to go along with what you want to do.
  - Sit1other28: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to live up to your expectations.

- JK1other = mean(Sit1other14, Sit1other19, Sit1other9)
  - Sit1other14: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you do not reject him/her.
  - Sit1other19: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to feel that you approve of him/her.
  - Sit1other9: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to get along with you.

- FG1other = mean(Sit1other7, Sit1other15, Sit1other24)
  - Sit1other7: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to avoid saying something stupid.
  - Sit1other15: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to keep his/her feelings to him/herself.
  - Sit1other24: It would be important for your best friend/co-worker to avoid exposing himself/herself to the possibility of rejection.