The Impact of Emotional Distress on the Perceived Effectiveness of Person-Centered and Invisible Support

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Abstract

While our intentions to help people who are feeling sad, upset, or down are generally well-meant, they may often not provide the level of comfort a distressed person needs or wants in a given situation. Specifically, the comfort one desires may depend on other situational factors, such as the level of emotional upset that person is experiencing. This study examined whether, and to what extent, varying levels of emotional distress moderate people's evaluations of person-centered and invisible support comforting messages. Results of the study suggest that emotional upset does not significantly influence people's preference for the provision of invisible support or person-centered support. However, across all upset scenarios, messages high in person centeredness facilitated the largest gains in affect improvement, followed by moderate and low person-centered messages. Effectively measuring invisible support continues to be challenging; this study found that participants had difficulty evaluating invisible support comforting responses given the dialectical tension in this type of support.

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The Impact of Emotional Distress on the Perceived Effectiveness of Person-Centered and Invisible Support

Providing quality support to those who experience emotional upset, such as job stress or relationship break-ups, is challenging because of the potential negative effects our comforting responses may have. Well-meant but less sensitive support can be harmful to the already distressed person, or worse, intensify his or her negative upset (Maisel & Gable, 2009; Burleson, Samter et al., 2005; Bolger & Amarel, 2007). The dilemma of wanting to make the other person feel better, yet realizing that we may cause even more stress underscores the need for continued scholarship in comforting and emotional support. In this study I examine whether the degree of emotional distress moderates the perceived benefits of comforting responses, namely person-centered messages and invisible support. I evaluate the extent to which various levels of emotional upset moderate evaluations of invisible support or person-centered responses. Specifically, I examine whether emotional upset influences people's preference for the provision of invisible or person-centered support. I research this issue because communication scholars and social psychologists have postulated theoretically different answers regarding what is most beneficial when alleviating upsetting emotions.

Emotional support is a type of social support; it has been conceptualized as enacted support that contains expressions of care, concern, affection, and interest. Emotional support is particularly important and beneficial when people experience emotional distress that arises from everyday hurts and disappointments (Burleson, 1994; Goldsmith, 2004). One defining feature of emotional support is the intentional effort with

which the helper engages the distressed person with the decided goal to facilitate affective improvement (Burleson, 2003). Research has repeatedly found that quality emotional support is one of the most valued resources people seek in relationships. Skillful supporters are generally better liked and more successful in sustaining positive and long-term interpersonal relationships (Goldsmith, 2004). When it comes to relational maintenance, emotional support is one of the top behaviors that leads to relational satisfaction (Canary & Stafford, 1994). Moreover, people who report having emotional support from family, friends, and relational partners enjoy better physical and mental health than those with unsupportive networks (Ryff & Singer, 2001; Cohen & McKay, 1984).

An extensive set of research in the discipline of communication has shown that person-centered messages that elaborate, legitimize, and acknowledge the other person's feelings effectively help distressed people feel better (Burleson, 2003). One reason person-centered support is so beneficial is because this kind of emotional support encourages the distressed person to work through the problem and cognitively reappraise the situation. The helper's goal in facilitating this sense-making process is to encourage the person to see the situation in a new way which, in turn, is predicted to ameliorate emotional distress (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Jones & Guerrero, 2001). Actively engaging both verbally and nonverbally in an attempt to facilitate cognitive reappraisal may therefore be a critical factor in making the person feel better.

A small set of researchers in social psychology posit that the *mere perception* of support – the notion that support is available should one need it – elicits positive benefits

(Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990). In an attempt to understand the health benefits of perceived support, Bolger and colleagues (Bolger, Kessler, & Zuckerman, 2000; Shrout, Herman, & Bolger, 2006; Bolger & Amarel, 2007), as well as Howland and Simpson (2010) have explored what they label *invisible support*. Invisible support is comfort the provider codes as support but the receiver does not. It is support the receiver is unaware of receiving; yet it is this kind of support that has apparent positive benefits. When enacted skillfully, the partner is able to preserve the distressed person's efficacy without further causing emotional upset (Bolger & Amarel, 2007). Moreover, the provision of invisible support reinforces a global sense of support availability and thus leads to emotional improvement.

Interestingly, Bolger and colleagues (2000; 2006; 2007) and Howland and Simpson (2010) approach invisible support from two different conceptual vantage points. The research headed by Bolger assumes that invisible support can be embedded and expressed in a single message – specifically a message that emphasizes a person's efficacy. Efficacy encompasses a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation. Howland and Simpson (2010), on the other hand, view invisible support as a dyadic process, and thus invisible support cannot be measured in a single message instantiation. Rather, the transaction is truly invisible and must be observed and coded on a macro-level.

Bolger, Kessler, and Zuckerman (2000) initially examined invisible support with a diary study in which couples were asked to record supportive interactions during a five-week period leading up to an upcoming New York State bar exam. One member of the

couple was preparing for this exam, which served as the real-life stressor for the experiment. Supportive interactions that were coded as supportive by the provider but not by the receiver promoted better adjustment to this stressor. To measure support provision and reception in this study, supportive partners were simply asked to assess daily whether they had "listened to and comforted" the examinee within the previous 24 hours (Bolger et al., 2000, p. 955). In a subsequent study using the same data, Shrout, Herman, and Bolger (2006) examined the ways in which partner recognition of emotional and practical support provision influenced the bar examinee's reports of anxiety, depression, and anger. Regarding emotional support, they found such moods to worsen in the examinee when he or she recognized a partner's support provision. Shrout et al.'s (2006) results lend further support to Bolger et al.'s (2000) hypothesis that invisible support can be a helpful and beneficial pattern for support provision.

In an effort to improve the low generalizability of results from the diary method, Bolger and Amarel (2007) conducted a lab experiment in which participants experienced an acute stressor (i.e., they gave a speech in front of a confederate and an experimenter). After having a short time to practice for the speech, each participant received one of five support messages that varied in support visibility and efficacy (i.e., two visible support conditions, two invisible support conditions, and one no support condition). These messages were provided by a confederate who helped participants prepare for the speech. Recipient efficacy was manipulated in one visible and one invisible support message. Visible support was directed at the participant, whereas invisible support was directed at the experimenter. For example, when asked if they had any questions before beginning

the speech, the visible and inefficacious message provided by the confederate was, "Well, I can tell that you [the participant] could use some help. I think it's best to summarize what you're going to say at the beginning of a speech and to end with a definite conclusion." (Bolger & Amarel, 2007, p. 465)

In the invisible and efficacious support condition, the confederate directed the question at the experimenter rather than the participant (e.g., "Well, I don't think she needs any help, but I could use some help. Should I structure my essay in a certain way? Like to summarize what I'm going to say at the beginning, and to end with a definite conclusion?") (Bolger & Amarel, 2007, p. 465). Results suggested that participants in the invisible support conditions reported the least distress, whereas participants who received visible support experienced ineffective or even detrimental effects to adjustment (Bolger & Amarel, 2007). Moreover, protecting the support recipients' efficacy was an important component in yielding the positive benefits of invisible support. Bolger and Amarel (2007) thus posit that what makes invisible support effective is not sheer invisibility; rather, it is also, in part, avoiding communication that highlights a support receiver's inefficacy.

Howland and Simpson (2010) examined the ways in which invisible support operates in close interpersonal relationships. Rather than focusing on unique message exchanges, Howland and Simpson (2010) invited dating couples into the lab and asked them to discuss a topic they would like to change about themselves. During these spontaneous interactions, the disclosing partner was in the role of the support receiver and the responding partner was in the role of support provider. These interactions were

recorded and later coded for support visibility characteristics. Invisible support characteristics included: a) the provider deemphasizing the roles of supporter and supported, creating a more equal and conversation-like exchange; b) the provider using the self or a third person as an example and a way to provide support – drawing the focus away from the partner and his/her "problem"; c) support that is under the radar – support in disguise; d) support that is indirect, not readily recognizable as support; and e) support that draws focus away from the partner's limitations or how upsetting/stressful it is for the person (Howland & Simpson, 2010, p. 1881). Conversely, visible support characteristics included: a) the provider emphasizing the roles of supporter and supported and keeping these roles distinct; b) the provider focusing on the partner and his/her problem while drawing attention to the partner or the problem; c) the support given is overt; d) the support is direct and quickly recognizable as someone providing support to another person; and e) the supporter focuses on the partner's limitations and how upsetting or stressful the situation is (Howland & Simpson, 2010).

Following the couple's discussion, partners rated their support provision and receipt, mood, and self-efficacy. Findings support previous research in suggesting there are many positive benefits of invisible support exchanges. These benefits are particularly apparent when it comes to increases in the support partner's self-efficacy and decreases in his or her negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety. Howland and Simpson (2010) provide evidence suggesting that invisible support is a dyadic phenomenon in which both partners' perceptions and behavioral actions matter in order to achieve the positive benefits of invisible support.

Social psychology and communication approaches follow different routes to achieving the same goal of facilitating affective improvement. Communication researchers posit that using person-centered messages that actively encourage the distressed person to work through the problem and cognitively reappraise the situation is most helpful in improving emotional upset. Invisible support scholars, on the other hand, argue that one of the most effective ways to make someone feel better is to skillfully provide support that is undetected by the distressed person. The current study seeks to explore under what conditions person centeredness is beneficial and under what conditions invisible support is beneficial. One such condition that seems to make a difference is the level of emotional upset experienced by the person to be supported. I propose that the differences in emotional upset moderate the effectiveness of person-centered messages and invisible support responses.

Goals of the Current Study

There are several theoretical, methodological, and pragmatic reasons to pursue this study. Pragmatically, effective emotional support has been linked to several health benefits. People with emotionally supportive networks experience, in general, better adjustment during times of distress and enjoy better physical and mental health than those with unsupportive networks (Ryff & Singer, 2001; Cohen & McKay, 1984). Effective emotional support also has important relational outcomes. People who can skillfully communicate emotional support are generally perceived as more competent; they are also better liked and can sustain long-term, positive interpersonal relationships (Canary & Stafford, 1994; Goldsmith, 2004).

Second, this study seeks to advance theory and method in both person-centered and invisible support traditions by exploring the moderating influences of emotional upset (e.g., low, moderate, or high upset) and context (e.g., break-up situation). Previous research in invisible support has used a diary method (Bolger et al., 2000; Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Gleason, Iida, Shrout, & Bolger, 2008) and a laboratory setting (Howland & Simpson, 2010). The proposed study relies on a hypothetical scenario design.

As I discussed above, person-centered and invisible support responses can be helpful when provided skillfully and competently (Jones & Wirtz, 2006; Howland & Simpson, 2010). Next, I would like to address how each approach is appropriate and effective given certain situational upset conditions (e.g., a break-up scenario).

Conceptualizing Support: Person-Centered and Invisible Support

Researchers of both person-centered and invisible support traditions assume that the goal of supportive interactions is to ameliorate the person's negative distress in such a way that it minimizes any emotional costs associated with the provision and reception of support.

Person-Centered (PC) Messages

Burleson (1987) defines person centeredness (PC) as the extent to which messages "reflect an awareness of and adaptation to the subjective, affective, and relational aspects of communicative contexts" (p. 305). Highly person-centered messages that elaborate, legitimize, and acknowledge the other person's feelings are perceived to be most effective in reducing negative affect (Burleson, 2003). When comforters use PC messages, they help the distressed person make sense of his or her situation by expressing

empathy and validating the other person's feelings. Such supportive expressions can be considered concrete displays of *visible* support and have been effectively measured in past research.

Burleson and Goldsmith's (1998) theory of conversationally induced reappraisal suggests that in order for distressed people to experience lasting emotional change, they must cognitively reappraise the situation. Comforters facilitate this process by helping the person make sense of the upsetting event. They do this in an effort to ultimately change the felt emotion. Jones and Wirtz (2006) empirically tested causal linkages implied by Burleson and Goldsmith's appraisal-based comforting model. They examined the ways in which person centeredness and nonverbal immediacy alleviate emotional distress. Their findings suggest that highly PC comfort encourages reappraisal through the "explicit elicitation of emotions and thoughts" (p. 236). Their findings provide evidence that PC comfort facilitates reappraisal through actual behavior and enacted support (e.g., the verbalization of thoughts and emotions), and this is true even in stranger interactions (Jones & Wirtz, 2006).

Extensive scholarship has demonstrated a link between highly PC messages and improvements in people's affect. In addition, there is a link between verbal person centeredness and people's positive perceptions of the message's benefit to recipients (e.g., the message's general effectiveness, sensitivity, helpfulness, and supportiveness) as well as to their perceptions of the message's quality (e.g., how well the message elaborates, legitimizes, and acknowledges their feelings). The following hypotheses replicate past research that has demonstrated the effectiveness of PC messages.

H1a: People report feeling better after having received highly person-centered messages, followed by moderately person-centered messages. Affective improvement ratings are lowest for low person-centered messages.

H1b: People report experiencing the most benefit after having received highly person-centered messages, followed by moderately person-centered messages. Perceived benefit ratings are lowest for low person-centered messages.

H1c: People favorably report on the message's quality after having received highly person-centered messages, followed by moderately person-centered messages. Message quality ratings are lowest for low person-centered messages.

Despite the effectiveness of PC messages in facilitating emotional change, however, there are situational factors that may moderate the effectiveness of support. For example, when people are very upset, they may be under such distress that they are not able to carefully process support messages. Thus, even the most sensitive messages may not be as effective when people experience extreme upset. Conversely, when people are only minimally upset, highly supportive messages may be overly sensitive and call additional attention to a problem that was not initially perceived to be upsetting. Contextual features of a supportive event, such as the cause of the upsetting event (break-up, failed test, bad day at work) or the emotional severity of the event (mildly or severely upsetting) may influence how recipients receive and respond to supportive efforts (Burleson, 2009). Thus, the degree of emotional upset may be an important moderator in determining a person's motivation and willingness to process highly PC messages.

In order to examine how contextual factors influence people's ability to process supportive messages that varied in person centeredness, Burleson and colleagues (2008; 2009; 2011) developed the dual process model of supportive communication. Their model posits two routes to emotional change based on the receiver's motivation and ability to process the helper's message. The two routes are based on a) supportive features of the message (e.g., the person centeredness of the messages) and b) other contextual cues, such as the sex of the helper. The effects of supportive messages are a function of both message quality and message processing: Messages that receive greater scrutiny from recipients should be of greater quality if they are to be effective. Conversely, when messages are not scrutinized, message quality has less of an effect on relevant outcomes. Rather, the outcome of the supportive interaction is more influenced by environmental and contextual cues (Burleson, 2009). In sum, if the quality of the message is to make a difference, receivers must demonstrate sufficient motivation and ability to process it (Bodie & Burleson, 2008). In studies testing their model, Burleson and colleagues have operationalized motivation as the degree of emotional upset and ability as cognitive complexity (Burleson, Bodie et al., 2007; Burleson, McCullough et al., 2008). Specifically, when people demonstrate higher levels of upset, they may be more motivated to cognitively process the supportive messages because they want to reduce their upset. At the same time, people must be able to process the message without situational distractions; those with higher levels of cognitive complexity and communication competence may have an advantage when it comes to being able to process the message.

These dual process dynamics may help us understand how or why emotional upset influences people's perceptions of PC messages. Burleson et al. (2007; 2008) argue that emotional upset influences the distressed person's motivation to process supportive messages because the more (or less) upset a person is, the more (or less) motivated he or she is to reduce those unpleasant feelings. In other words, people are more attentive to the quality of the comforting message under certain conditions. When emotional upset is mild, less PC support may help make people feel better because there is less motivation to scrutinize the message. Conversely, when emotional upset is *very* high, Burleson (2009) found that it interfered with a person's ability to process messages carefully. In instances of high upset, simple condolences may be more effective than highly PC messages because at extreme levels of upset, these messages may not even be heard at all. As Burleson (2009) found, even the most helpful PC messages can have "suboptimal outcomes" (p. 34) when the distressed person is experiencing extreme upset; all that matters in this case is to calm the person's extreme affective state.

Burleson et al.'s (2007; 2008) studies provide evidence suggesting that when people are experiencing relatively low levels of emotional upset, they demonstrate lower levels of cognitive processing and message scrutiny. The outcomes related to perceived message quality under both very high and low levels of emotional upset therefore suggest that PC messages may be less effective in situations where people are either severely emotionally upset or mildly emotionally upset. At moderate levels of upset, however, people would discriminate most sharply between low and high person-centered messages, and therefore would be most comforted by quality PC messages (Bodie et al., 2011).

Invisible Support

If highly person-centered messages do not facilitate emotional improvement in situations when people are either mildly or highly upset, what then would be the kind of emotional support that would lead to this desired outcome? Scholars who have examined invisible support suggest one solution; specifically they propose that support that is "under the radar" may be particularly effective (Howland & Simpson, 2010, p. 1878; Bolger et al., 2000). Bolger et al. (2000) posit that the most effective type of support is support that is provided invisibly because it minimizes the emotional costs of receiving support while maximizing its benefits.

According to Bolger and colleagues (2000), invisible support provisions can be understood in two ways. First, they include acts that occur *outside* of the recipients' awareness. These acts can be seen as having a protective buffering effect on the recipient. Second, invisible support can be seen as behavior that is provided so skillfully the provider codes it as support but the receiver does not. In this sense, the receiver is essentially unaware of the person's supportive act – that is what makes this kind of support invisible and ultimately so effective. Bolger et al. (2000) argue that invisible support is *actual* behavior, and can therefore be measured based on a single message or behavior instantiation, as was the case with their diary studies. More important, Bolger et al. (2000, 2007) suggest that invisible support can be effective without a dyadic interaction. Specifically, invisible support can be given without receiving confirming feedback from the partner. This is an important conflicting point with communication scholarship, which understands all communicative exchanges to be dyadic and

interdependent. That is, all interpersonal communication relies on verbal and nonverbal feedback from both the sender and receiver in order to make sense of the communication context and each other.

Howland and Simpson (2010), on the other hand, conceptualize invisible support as a dyadic process in which both the provider's skillful behavior and the receiver's unawareness are *necessary* conditions for effective invisible support. This dyadic exchange is important given the dynamic and power of interdependence in interpersonal relationships. When these two conditions are met, receivers experience the largest improvement in affect (Howland & Simpson, 2010). In the case of negative emotions like anxiety and anger, received support, as evaluated by participants, and observed emotional support (visible or invisible), as coded by observers, did not predict changes in these emotions when measured independently. Only when invisible support was examined dyadically did greater decreases in recipients' negative emotions become significant.

Conceptually then, support may be invisible when it occurs either "outside of the recipient's awareness", such as taking care of unexpected housework without telling the other person, or when the recipient is "aware of the act but does not code it as support" (Bolger et al., p. 954, 2000). In spontaneous interactions, Howland and Simpson (2010) define five characteristics of invisible support which are featured in Table 1.

Table 1

Howland and Simpson's (2010) Support Characteristics (p. 1881)

Invisible Support	Visible Support
Provider deemphasizes the roles of supporter and supported, creating a more equal and conversation-like exchange	Provider emphasizes the roles of supporter and supported and keeps these roles distinct
Provider uses the self or a third person as an example and a way to provide support – draws the focus away from the partner and his/her "problem"	Provider focuses on the partner and his/her problem while drawing attention to the partner or the problem
Support is under the radar – support in disguise	The support given is overt and feels very "supportive"
Support is indirect, not readily recognizable as support	Support is direct and quickly recognizable as someone providing support to another person
Support draws focus away from the partner's limitations or how upsetting/stressful it is for the person	The supporter focuses on the partner's limitations and how upsetting or stressful the situation is

The dual-process model for supportive communication discussed earlier conjures up an interesting connection; invisible support interactions should encourage limited message scrutiny by receivers. In the context of invisible support, message scrutiny is undesirable because the awareness of receiving support raises a host of "face" threats that can be detrimental to the distressed person's self-esteem and efficacy (Howland & Simpson, 2010; Bolger & Amarel, 2007). As results of dual-process model studies demonstrate, relatively low and high degrees of emotional upset hinder a person's motivation and ability to focus on message quality. When message quality is less critical, as is the case in times of low and high distress, invisible support might be most effective

in reducing emotional upset because the response is deliberately vague. Moreover, Howland and Simpson (2010) found that invisible support can be effective "at least when problems and stressors are not extreme" (p. 1884).

Lastly, it is important to recognize that dyadic invisible support is all about how and what support recipients *perceive*. This is noteworthy because invisible support is defined as a supporter's *implicit* behavior that aims to induce change in a receiver's emotional state. In this study I follow Bolger et al.'s (2000) approach. That is, I attempt to capture invisible support in single message instantiations. Operationalizing this perceptual element of a dyadic exchange with one single message instantiation may be challenging given that the dyadic exchange itself is by nature interdependent.

Taken together, I advance the following hypotheses:

H2: The degree of emotional upset moderates the effectiveness of support type on affect improvement, such that people experiencing high and low degrees of emotional upset will anticipate largest improvements in affect from invisible support responses and people experiencing moderate emotional upset will anticipate largest improvements in affect from person-centered responses.

H3: The degree of emotional upset moderates the effectiveness of support type on perceived message quality, such that people experiencing high and low degrees of emotional upset will perceive invisible support responses to be more effective and people experiencing moderate emotional upset will perceive person-centered responses to be more effective.

H4: The degree of emotional upset moderates the extent to which people discriminate between the helpfulness of LPC and HPC messages, such that people will discriminate most sharply when experiencing moderate levels of emotional upset and less sharply when experiencing high and low degrees of upset.

Method

Participants, Procedures, and Research Design

Participants for this study were recruited from introductory and upper division communication courses at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Students received extra credit course points for their participation. The survey design reflected a 3 x 4 (low, moderate, high emotional upset x low PC, moderate PC, high PC, invisible support) between-groups design.

Pilot Tests for Support Messages

With respect to person-centered support, I designed two messages for each PC level (i.e., low, moderate, high). The six PC messages I designed are listed in the pilot study in appendix A. As has been discussed earlier, person centeredness is the extent to which messages explicitly acknowledge, elaborate, and legitimize the feelings and perspectives of the distressed person (Burleson, 1994). Low PC messages deny the person's feelings and perspective by criticizing or challenging their legitimacy, or by telling the person how he or she should feel and act. Moderate PC messages offer an implicit recognition of the distressed person's feelings by attempting to distract his or her attention away from the troubling situation, offering expressions of sympathy and condolence, or presenting explanations of a situation that are intended to reduce distress. High PC messages explicitly recognize and legitimize the person's feelings by helping him or her to articulate those feelings, elaborate reasons why those feelings might be felt, and explore how those feelings fit in a broader context (Bodie et al., 2011).

With respect to invisible support, I designed six invisible support messages in line with Howland and Simpson's (2010) five characteristics of invisible support (see Table 1, p. 15). The six invisible support messages I designed are listed in the pilot study in appendix A.

I pilot-tested the six PC messages and the six invisible support messages. A total of 164 participants from undergraduate communication courses at the University of Minnesota (65 men; 99 women; $Mean_{Age}$ = 21 years; $Range_{age}$ = 18 to 46 years) completed a survey. The vast majority of students were white (63%), while 46 students identified other ethnicities; 25 participants did not record their ethnic make-up.

Participants evaluated each of the twelve support messages (six PC messages and six invisible support messages) on six 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*): Three of these items tapped PC characteristics and three items tapped invisible support characteristics. The three invisible support items were drawn from the set of eight invisible support items that were adapted from Howland and Simpson (2010; see Table 1, p. 15). The three PC items were drawn from a set of six PC items that have been used in previous research (Bodie, 2008). See appendix A for all invisible support and PC items used in the pilot test. To avoid order effects, the six items were randomized across the messages, such that each of the 12 support messages was evaluated with a different set of six invisible support and PC items.

Unfortunately, results for this pilot study revealed rather unsatisfactory reliabilities for all six invisible support messages; *alphas* ranged from .10 to .45 for invisible support means and .33 to .65 for person-centered means. Reliabilities for low

PC, moderate PC, and high PC messages fared somewhat better, featuring alphas = .71 for low PC and .73 for high PC. However, reliabilities for the invisibility means were relatively poor. They were also poor across all three PC levels, ranging from .40 to .56.

These results suggest that participants may have had a difficult time differentiating invisibility items and PC items for each support message, particularly the three messages that operationalized invisible support. For example, the invisible support message, "You know what we should do? We should go hit up a really good party tonight. I've heard of one where there will be lots of people. It ought to be a really good time and we should have lots of fun!" may have been evaluated as invisible support because it draws attention away from the person and his or her problem. However, it may also have been viewed as low in person centeredness because it does not acknowledge the other person's feelings. Thus, it may well be that PC ratings and invisible support ratings "bled into each other"; at the very least, participants did not evaluate invisible support messages as consistently as expected.

Given the low reliabilities for PC and invisible support ratings, I conducted a second pilot study. For this pilot study, I created four surveys. Two surveys featured the six invisible support messages that were evaluated on either invisible support measures or on PC measures. Similarly, two surveys featured the six PC messages that were also either evaluated on the invisible support measures or the PC measures. Each participant received only one of these four surveys. That is, participants either evaluated invisible support messages on a) invisible support items, or b) person-centered items; or participants evaluated person-centered messages on c) invisible support items, or d)

person-centered items. All four surveys featured the same invisible support and PC messages and scales I used for pilot study 1. Participants evaluated the six invisible support messages or six PC messages on six 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). All four surveys are included in Appendix B. Participant demographic information for the four surveys is featured below in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographic Information for Pilot Test 2

	Age (in Years)		Sex	
	Mean	*Range*	*Male*	*Female*
IS messages; IS items	22.5	18-25	8	31
IS messages; PC items	23	19-50	11	27
PC messages; IS items	21	18-30	19	47
PC messages; PC items	22	19-42	10	26

	Ethnicity				
	White	*African American*	*Asian, Asian American*	*Hispanic, Latino/a*	*Other*
IS messages; IS items	30	1	6	--	2
IS messages; PC items	24	4	6	--	4
PC messages; IS items	48	--	16	2	
PC messages; PC items	24	--	7	--	5

Curiously, results for the second pilot study revealed once more unsatisfactory reliabilities for all six invisible support messages; *alphas* ranged from .47 to .61 for invisible support means and .70 to .81 for PC means. People evaluated PC messages on invisible support items in fairly inconsistent ways: invisible support items in response to

low PC, moderate PC, and high PC messages were also low; *alphas* ranged from .52 to .71. PC items in response to low, moderate, and high PC messages, however, fared better; *alphas* ranged from .67 to .89. Results also demonstrate that participants differentiated low, moderate, and high PC messages in predicted ways, $F(2, 34) = 65.64$, $p = <.001$, $\eta^2 = .65$. Highly person-centered messages ($M = 5.70$, $SD = .79$) were viewed as far more person-centered than moderate ($M = 4.74$, $SD = .84$) and low person-centered messages ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.26$).

The results for invisible support suggest once again that participants had difficulty evaluating invisible support comforting responses. I already alluded to the challenges of operationalizing invisible support with single messages. I attempted to generate a survey measure for invisible support following Bolger's approach. Even though Bolger and Amarel (2007) successfully captured invisible support in the laboratory, perhaps their inclusion of efficacy played a more decisive role in support evaluations. Results of two fairly rigorous pilot tests showed that participants have difficulty capturing invisible support messages in consistent ways. My attempt to capture invisible support with one message may make salient the dialectical tension of this kind of support: Asking people to evaluate a message feature they are not supposed to be aware of or that is supposed to be "under the radar" seems paradoxical. In short, capturing an implicit behavior on paper rather than through participant observation may be next to impossible. These speculations aside, because the results for the second pilot study also revealed rather low reliabilities for invisible support messages, all invisible support messages were excluded from future analyses.

Main Study

The survey for the main study was divided into two parts: a recall section and a hypothetical scenario section. All participants always completed the recall section first followed by the scenario section. In the recall section of the survey, participants briefly described a break-up situation they had recently experienced and then indicated their emotional response to that incident (i.e., "How do you feel NOW that the break-up is on your mind?"). Participants responded to a series of items that tapped emotional upset (i.e., "I feel upset" or "I feel sad") using 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*).

Participants were then asked to select a comforting message that most closely resembled the kind of support they received from a friend or family member in response to the recalled break-up situation. Participants selected the comforting response from a list of three support messages that resembled low PC, moderate PC, or high PC support. All participants were given the same three messages, and the three messages were selected from among the six I pilot-tested. The majority of participants selected the moderate PC message (n = 164), followed by the low PC message (n = 86), and then the high PC message (n = 46). Once participants selected the response that most closely resembled the kind of support they actually received, they evaluated that message on five items that tapped affect improvement, four items that tapped perceived benefit, and four items that tapped message quality.

In the second part of the survey participants were randomly assigned to one of three break-up scenarios that varied in degree of emotional upset (e.g., low, moderate,

high). The break-up scenario has been used frequently in emotional support research (e.g., Bodie et al., 2011). Therefore, I decided to not pilot-test the scenarios. After reading the hypothetical scenario, participants evaluated their feeling state on the same 7-point scales used in the recall section. They then evaluated all six PC messages on various dependent measures (see Appendix C for the full main survey).

Dependent variables. Participants evaluated each of the six PC messages on a) anticipated affect improvement, b) perceived benefit, and c) perceived message quality. All items were evaluated on 7-point scales that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Anticipated affect improvement was measured using four items adapted from Jones and Wirtz (2006). Items included: "What my friend said made me feel better about myself", "My friend made me feel more optimistic about my situation", "My friend helped to cheer me up", and "What my friend said made my situation seem more manageable". *Perceived benefit* tapped the effectiveness, sensitivity, helpfulness, and supportiveness of each support response (e.g., "My friend's response was *very helpful*"). Lastly, *perceived message quality* was evaluated with respect to the fundamental dimensions of verbal person centeredness. The four PC scale items included: "This response explicitly acknowledged my feelings", "This response offered expressions of sympathy and condolence", "This response suggested reasons why my feelings might be felt", and "This response provided explanations that are intended to reduce distress". Reliabilities for the three dependent measures were satisfactory and ranged from *alpha* = .74 to *alpha* = .95 across all PC levels and emotional upset scenarios. The three scales

were highly correlated with one another, with correlations ranging from $r = .79$ to $r = .90$, $p < .01$. I used a standardized version of the affective improvement scale in all main study analyses that involve this variable.

Independent variables. Emotional upset was captured in two ways. First, participants reported their emotional upset level after having described their most recent break-up. In the second part of the survey, participants assessed their feeling state after having read one hypothetical break-up scenario that varied in emotional upset (i.e., low, moderate, and high upset). After both the recall and hypothetical scenario sections participants evaluated their feeling state on five emotion items using 7-point scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*: "I feel upset, annoyed, content, sad, angry." Participants reported being fairly upset (Recall $M = 3.75$, $SD = 1.57$; Scenario $M = 5.78$, $SD = 1.12$), although the hypothetical scenario set-up seemed to have had a greater impact on people's upset levels than the recall set-up.

To check whether emotional upset levels significantly differed among the three scenarios, I conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with scenario (low, moderate, highly upsetting break-up) as the independent variable and ratings of emotional upset as the dependent variable. The ANOVA generated a significant effect, $F(2, 292) = 10.062$, $p < .001$. However, a follow-up Tukey test showed differences ($p < .05$) only between the low upset scenario ($M = 5.38$, $SD = .97$), and the moderate ($M = 5.96$, $SD = .87$) and high ($M = 6.00$, $SD = 1.35$) upset scenarios. Thus, it seems that there was relatively little variability in reported emotional upset levels in the hypothetical break-up scenarios.

As described above, person-centered (or visible) support was manipulated on three levels (i.e., low, moderate, high). I used the PC messages that I had previously tested in my pilot studies. Reliabilities for the low, moderate, and high PC messages were all satisfactory and featured *alphas* ranging from .74 to .92. In order to capture invisible support, I created a latent (implicit) invisible support variable. Recall that participants evaluated the quality of each PC message on PC dimensions (i.e., message quality). These message quality ratings are what I would call visible support. After all, people evaluated the quality of these messages using concrete features of tangible support (i.e., acknowledge feelings, offer sympathy, suggest reasons for stress, provide explanations intended to reduce stress). Participants also evaluated how supportive each of these messages was (i.e., perceived benefit). That is, participants evaluated how effective, sensitive, helpful, and supportive each of these messages was. Once supportiveness (i.e., perceived benefit) ratings are "pulled out" of these relatively tangible message quality ratings, what is left over could conceivably be called invisible support. Of course, what is left over does not *have* to be invisible support; it may well be *no* support at all. However, it could also be the case that it does include invisible support behaviors.

To generate the latent invisible support variable, I conducted a regression with the message quality (i.e., visible support) scale as the independent measure and the perceived benefit scale (i.e., supportiveness) as the dependent measure. The regression generated a standardized residual that I labeled invisible support. I used this latent variable in all subsequent analyses. As I suggest above, this residual may, of course, consist of other empirical features and future research will have to establish the content and construct

validity of this variable. But for now, I decided to use this residual term as my invisible support measure.

Because I used standardized residuals to “stand in” for my invisible support measure, I decided to also standardize all other variables and interaction terms that are involved my analyses (e.g., emotional upset, affective improvement). I then used these standardized variables in all of my analyses.

Results

H1a-c tested whether people evaluated person-centered messages differently based on various outcome measures, including affect improvement, the message's perceived benefit to the distressed person, and the overall message quality. Using the scenario data, I conducted three within-subjects ANOVAs testing a) affect improvement ratings, b) perceived benefit ratings, and c) message quality ratings for the three message levels (i.e., low PC, moderate PC, high PC). The three ANOVAs revealed significant differences, $Fs(2, 286) = 325.64, 416.63, 476.09$, $ps < .001$, $\eta s^2 = .53, .59, .62$. Linear contrasts ($ps < .001$) associated with all three dependent measures showed that the three PC levels were significantly different from one another.

As predicted, high PC messages that elaborate, legitimize, and acknowledge the distressed person and his or her feelings do a superior job of making the person feel better. Moderate PC messages and low PC messages do a correspondingly weaker job in facilitating affective improvement. Note also that each PC level predicted substantial variance in the dependent measure. Specifically, perceived message quality ratings predicted more than 62% of the variation in affect improvement at each PC level. Table 3 shows the means and standard deviations for affective improvement, perceived benefit, and message quality ratings at all three levels of person centeredness.

I then tested my dual-process hypotheses which predicted curvilinear interactions between emotional upset and supportive messages on a) affective improvement ratings, b) perceived benefit, and c) message quality, such that invisible support would be preferred for high and low upsetting conditions, whereas person-centered support would

be preferred for moderate conditions. Because perceived benefit and message quality ratings were used to generate my independent invisible support measure, I did not use these self-same scales as dependent measures in subsequent analyses. Therefore, I did not test H3 and H4. I first report results associated with the scenario data and then turn to the recall data.

Table 3

Means and Standard Deviations for Person-Centered Messages Evaluated on Outcome Measures

Outcome Measure	*Mean* (*SD*)		
	HPC	MPC	LPC
Affective Improvement	4.80 (1.03)	4.68 (1.07)	2.82 (1.34)
Perceived Benefit	5.03 (1.00)	4.58 (1.00)	2.69 (1.33)
Message Quality	5.09 (1.04)	4.42 (.98)	2.68 (1.18)

I tested my hypothetical scenario data with stepwise regressions. For these regressions I entered main effects on the first step, followed by the linear interaction on Step 2 and the squared interaction on Step 3. Main effects terms were retained in all models. All variables were standardized prior to the analyses.

To address H2 with the scenario data, I examined whether the level of emotional upset moderated the relationship between message quality (i.e., visible support) ratings and affective improvement. The regression revealed a significant main effect for message quality, $F(2, 286) = 239.27$, $p < .001$. As message quality ratings increased, affective improvement ratings also increased, $\beta = .78$, $p < .001$. Emotional upset, in this case

manipulated through a hypothetical scenario set-up, did not influence the effect message quality has on affect improvement. The linear and quadratic terms also did not account for additional shared variance beyond the main effect. The regression results for the effect of message quality and emotional upset on affective improvement ratings are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

Regression Results for Visible Support, Emotional Upset, and Affective Improvement (Scenario Data)

Independent Variables	Affect Improvement β
Step 1 R^2 Δ	.63*
Visible Support	.78*
Emotional Upset	-.05
Step 2 R^2 Δ	.00
Visible Support	.78*
Emotional Upset	-.04
Visible Support x Emotional Upset (linear)	.02
Step 3 R^2 Δ	.00
Visible Support	.78*
Emotional Upset	-.05
Visible Support x Emotional Upset (linear)	.02
Visible Support x Emotional Upset (quadratic)	-.03

Note. Values are βs. All variables and interaction terms are standardized.
* $p < .001$

To examine whether emotional upset moderates the relationship between invisible support and affect improvement in the scenario data, I conducted a second stepwise

regression. However, only the main effect for emotional upset was statistically significant, $F(2, 286) = 5.03$, $p < .01$. As emotional upset increases, affective improvement ratings decrease, $\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$. The regression results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5

Regression Results for Invisible Support, Emotional Upset, and Affective Improvement (Scenario Data)

Independent Variables	Affect Improvement β
Step 1 R^2 Δ	.03*
Invisible Support	.06
Emotional Upset	-.17*
Step 2 R^2 Δ	.00
Invisible Support	.06
Emotional Upset	-.18*
Invisible Support x Emotional Upset (linear)	-.03
Step 3 R^2 Δ	.00
Invisible Support	.06
Emotional Upset	-.18*
Invisible Support x Emotional Upset (linear)	-.03
Invisible Support x Emotional Upset (quadratic)	-.01

Note. Values are βs. All variables and interaction terms are standardized. * $p < .01$

Taken together, H2 was not supported with the hypothetical scenario data. That is, the degree of emotional upset did not have a significant moderating effect on the relationship between visible or invisible support and affect improvement when people responded to a hypothetical break-up they had experienced. One reason for these results could be that emotional upset was not adequately manipulated with this hypothetical

scenario set-up. People may not have been truly emotionally upset. Thus, it could be that I did not have enough variance in emotional upset ratings. Indeed, recall that the manipulation check for emotional upset was only marginally successful.

Next, I examined the recall data. To recap, in this part of the survey participants recalled and described their most recent break-up. They evaluated their feeling state (e.g., "How do you feel now?") on various emotional arousal dimensions and then selected a single comforting message that most closely represented the actual support they received. Participants chose from among three comforting messages that varied in low, moderate, and high person centeredness. All participants received the same three comforting messages, and evaluated the message they selected on affect improvement, perceived benefit, and message quality.

First, I examined the effect of visible support on affect improvement using the individual comforting message participants selected. Because the three comforting messages were ordered along low, moderate, and high person centeredness, I treated this variable as a categorical measure and labeled it *comforting message type*. I conducted an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) with comforting message type as my independent measure and affective improvement as my dependent measure. Emotional upset served as a covariate. Results revealed a main effect for comforting message type, $F(2, 292) = 5.15$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .034$. Emotional upset did not significantly moderate this effect. Moderately PC messages were viewed as making people feel somewhat better ($M = 5.14$, $SD = 1.08$) than highly PC messages ($M = 5.05$, $SD = .96$), which is likely due to the fact that this message was selected as that support that most closely resembled the kind of support

people reported having received during their break-up (n = 164). Low PC messages were viewed as lowest in affective improvement (M = 4.65, SD = 1.34). It is curious that the means for low PC message still hovered above the midpoint; apparently these kinds of messages still have a positive effect on people's affective states.

In the second analysis, I evaluated whether emotional upset moderated the effectiveness of message quality (i.e., visible support) on affect improvement. The regression results are displayed in Table 6. Message quality had a significant impact on affective improvement $F(2, 286) = 11.26$, $p < .001$. As message quality ratings increased, affective improvement ratings increased as well, $\beta = .25$, $p < .001$.

The linear interaction term involving emotional upset added a significant amount of variance to the model, $F(3, 285) = 10.98$, $p < .001$), $\beta = .17$, $t = 3.12$, $p < .01$. I plotted this interaction for high and low person-centered message quality ratings (see Figure 1, p. 35). Differences in affective improvement ratings for more and less person-centered comforting messages occurred mainly in the high emotional upset case: The more person-centered the message, the better people felt. That is, when people reported being upset, they reported lowest levels of affective improvement in response to low person-centered (low visible) support and highest levels of affective improvement in response to high person-centered (visible) support. People reported similar levels of affective improvement in response to high and low person-centered comforting messages when they were only mildly upset. These results are not quite in line with H2.

Table 6

Regression Results for Visible Support, Emotional Upset, and Affective Improvement using Message Quality Ratings (Recall Data)

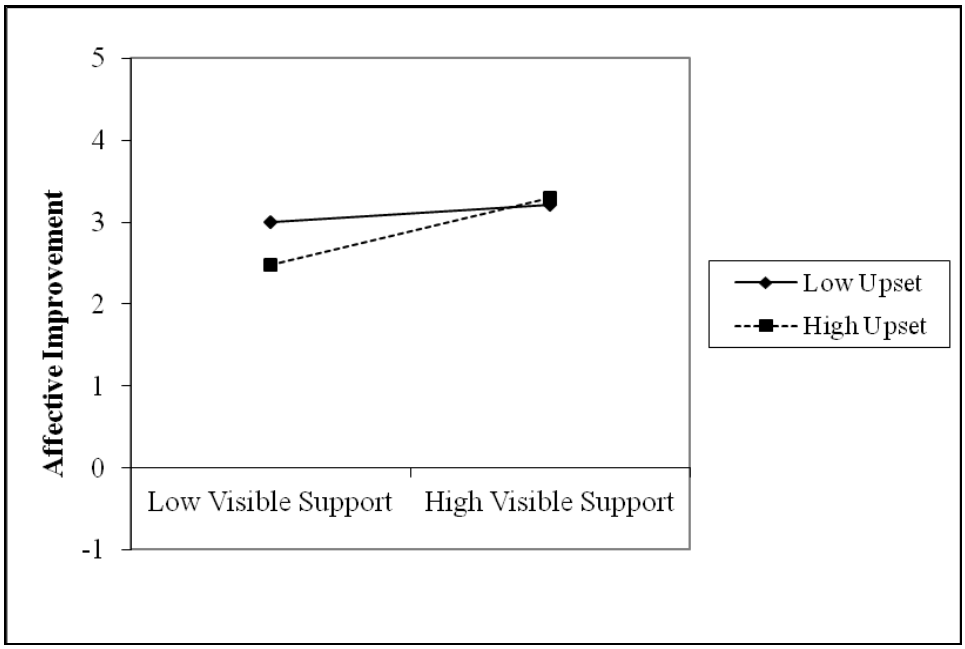
Independent Variables	Affect Improvement β
Step 1 R^2 Δ	.07***
Visible Support	.25***
Emotional Upset	-.10
Step 2 R^2 Δ	.03**
Visible Support	.26***
Emotional Upset	-.11*
Visible Support x Emotional Upset (linear)	.17**
Step 3 R^2 Δ	.001
Visible Support	.25***
Emotional Upset	-.11**
Visible Support x Emotional Upset (linear)	.19**
Visible Support x Emotional Upset (quadratic)	-.04

Note. Values are βs. All variables and interaction terms are standardized. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Lastly, I analyzed whether emotional upset moderated the relationship between invisible support and affective improvement. I conducted another stepwise regression. The main effect for invisible support was significant, $F(2, 293) = 4.10$, $p < .05$, as was the model that included the squared interaction term for invisible support and emotional upset, $F(4, 291) = 3.16$, $p < .05$. Regression results are displayed in Table 7.

Figure 1

Linear Interaction for High and Low PC Visible Support by Emotional Upset on Affective Improvement Ratings



I plotted this quadratic interaction and Figure 2 (p. 37) shows curvilinear relationships between affective improvement ratings of invisible support for low and high emotional upset conditions. When people reported being not at all or only very mildly upset, they reported feeling better after having received low and high levels of invisible support. Interestingly, the quadratic function was inverted for high emotional upset: When people reported being somewhat upset, they reported least affective improvement in response to low and high levels of invisible support. These results partially support H2: People experiencing low degrees of upset reported feeling better from invisible support, but not those experiencing high levels of emotional upset. These results are not quite in line with the dual process logic I advanced earlier, which predicted that people would feel

better in response to invisible support when they are either not at all or very upset. This moderating effect should be interpreted cautiously for several reasons. First, emotional upset levels were rather mild in this data set (M = 3.75, SD = 1.57). Second, the invisible support measure was a residual. Third, the moderating effect (quadratic term) was rather small.

Table 7

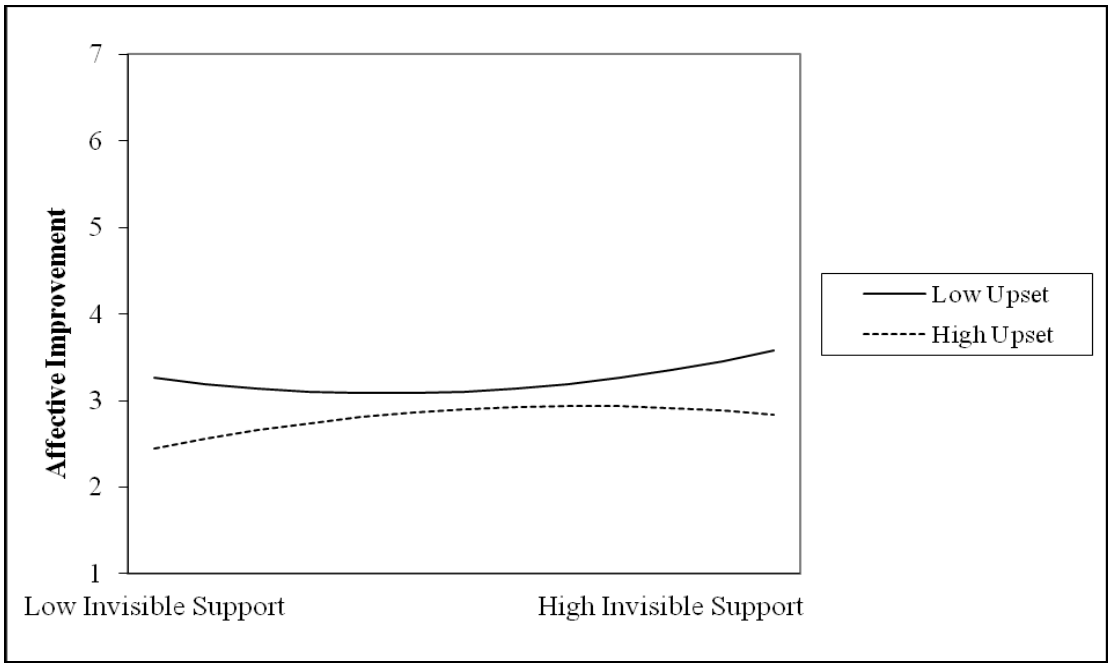
Regression Results for Invisible Support, Emotional Upset, and Affective Improvement (Recall Data)

Independent Variables	Affect Improvement β
Step 1 R^2 Δ	.03*
Invisible Support	.14*
Emotional Upset	-.10
Step 2 R^2 Δ	.00
Invisible Support	.14*
Emotional Upset	-.09
Invisible Support x Emotional Upset (linear)	-.04
Step 3 R^2 Δ	.01*
Invisible Support	.12*
Emotional Upset	-.10
Invisible Support x Emotional Upset (linear)	.01
Invisible Support x Emotional Upset (quadratic)	-.13*

Note. Values are βs. All variables and interaction terms are standardized. * $p < .05$

Figure 2

Quadratic Interaction for High and Low Invisible Support by Emotional Upset on Affective Improvement



H3 and H4 predicted changes in perceived message quality as a result of emotional upset. Because the dependent variable in these hypotheses served as a component of invisible support, my independent variable, I did not test these hypotheses. Recall that invisible support was captured latently and operationalized as the effect not attributed to message quality as a function of variations in supportiveness.

Discussion

Helping people feel better is difficult; while our supportive intentions may be well-meaning, less-skilled and less sensitive support can be harmful to a person already experiencing distress (Maisel & Gable, 2009, Bolger et al., 2000). This study examined whether, and to what extent, varying levels of emotional distress moderate people's evaluations of person-centered and invisible support comforting messages. I examined the conditions under which these support messages most effectively facilitated affective improvement.

Communication scholars and social psychologists have suggested theoretically different answers to what is most beneficial when it comes to making someone feel better. Communication scholars posit that person-centered messages – messages that elaborate, legitimize, and acknowledge the distressed person's feelings – do a superior job in making someone feel better (Burleson, 2003). A subset of social psychologists argue that invisible support – comfort the provider codes as support but the receiver does not – yields positive benefits and emotional improvement. Skillfully enacted invisible support preserves the other person's efficacy and further reinforces his or her global sense of support availability.

In order to examine whether emotional upset influences people's preference for person-centered or invisible support, I used a survey design with two parts: a recall section and a hypothetical scenario section. In the first part of the survey, participants were asked to recall their most recent break-up and then select a PC comforting message that most closely resembles the comfort they actually received. Lastly, they evaluated that

message on outcome measures including affect improvement, perceived benefit, and message quality. In the second part of the survey, participants were randomly assigned to one of the three break-up scenarios that varied in degree of emotional upset (i.e., low, moderate, high). They then evaluated low, moderate, and high PC messages on the same outcome measures used in the recall section.

Results of this study lead to four main conclusions. First, the curvilinear relationship between affective improvement and invisible support (see Figure 2, p. 37), suggests that invisible support likely works best in moderately upsetting situations. This study, as well as those done by Howland and Simpson (2010) and Bolger and colleagues (2000; 2006; 2007) support this assertion. Under highly upsetting conditions, people are not concerned about preserving their efficacy; rather, addressing the problem is foremost on their mind. Following the invisible support logic, high PC messages would actually be considered most effective in reducing negative affect under highly upsetting conditions. This line of thinking leads me to question some of the dual process logic. Burleson (2009) asserts that when people are extremely upset, they must first come down from their extreme emotional state before they can clearly evaluate comforting messages. Even so, he maintains that highly upset people are unable to carefully process messages and therefore high PC messages may not be most effective in reducing negative affect. When considering these factors of emotional upset and invisible support logic, such dual process thinking may need to be reconceptualized in order to reconcile these theoretical differences.

Second, results of this study highlight the difficulties in operationalizing invisible support in comforting messages that people have to evaluate on paper. I meticulously applied Howland and Simpson's (2010) invisible support characteristics to comforting messages, but the results of two pilot studies showed that people were not quite able to discern invisible support in these comforting messages In short, I was unable to reliably measure the invisible support construct. While Bolger and colleagues (2000, 2006, 2007) as well as Howland and Simpson (2010) have evaluated invisible support in the lab setting and with diary studies, the construct has yet to be evaluated with a survey measure. Asking participants to evaluate something that is "invisible" may be difficult to do, at least on paper.

Third, the results of my study contribute to the well-established body of research on person centeredness. Each PC level predicted considerable variance in all three outcome measures: affect improvement (53%), perceived benefit (59%), and message quality (62%). Such large effect sizes for this sample add evidence to this growing body of research and suggest that there are significant differences in the helpfulness of low, moderate, and high PC comfort messages.

Fourth, and most central to my hypotheses, is that emotional upset was not found to have a moderating effect on people's preference for invisible support or low, moderate, or high PC support. Of course, that is not to say emotional upset does not matter. In this study, emotional upset levels were not sufficiently manipulated across all three scenarios, The manipulation may not have worked for a variety of reasons. For one, I asked participants to recall a past break-up. Given the nature of this task, emotions were likely

not as vivid as they were when the break-up actually happened. Second, reading a short description of a hypothetical scenario may also not have been sufficient to induce true emotional upset. Despite asking participants to evaluate their emotional arousal levels, they may have selected how they *think* they would have felt, rather than assessing how they truly felt in the moment. Future studies will need to more thoroughly manipulate emotional distress in order to test for dual process effects on comforting behavior.

Limitations and Future Directions

As is the case with all empirical research, my study has several limitations. As previously mentioned, I was not able to effectively capture invisible support in a survey measure. I captured it latently by conducting a regression analysis, in which I "pulled out" perceived benefit ratings from visible support messages (i.e., message quality ratings). Future research will need to test the validity of this construct, as well as develop a more reliable measure of invisible support. An important feature of invisible support that both Bolger and Amarel (2007), and Howland and Simpson (2010) examined is the role of efficacy in support interactions. Future research should attempt to more thoroughly integrate efficacy features into support messages. These features should also be included in future survey measures for invisible support. Particularly important is for scholars to continue evaluating interpersonal exchanges dyadically in order to account for the dynamic interdependence present in all interpersonal relationships.

In addition, my study did not effectively manipulate emotional upset in participants. As discussed, given the hypothetical design of this study, participants may not have experienced true emotional distress. An experimental design that manipulates

upset in the laboratory would be more conducive to this line of study. Also important to remember is that emotional upset cannot be conceived along categorical lines. Individual differences in the way people respond to and handle daily distractions and upsetting life events contribute to the ways they evaluate comforting attempts, whether those attempts are visible or invisible. When it comes to this study specifically, emotional upset was operationalized along a narrow range with the mean upset level for the hypothetical scenario being 5.78 on a 7-point scale. For the recall data, the mean was 3.75 on a 7-point scale. Therefore, low levels of frustration and very mild upset were not captured. Given that invisible support should theoretically work best under these mild and slightly negatively valenced emotional states, it will be important for future research to think through how best to capture such low levels of frustration and negatively valenced emotions.

Conclusion

This study sought to advance our understanding of person-centered and invisible support using a hypothetical scenario survey design. These two theoretically different approaches to comfort and support offer unique ways of understanding human behavior and interpersonal relationships. They also, however, leave us with many questions about the nature of emotional support, and more specifically how and where the construct of invisible support fits in with established research and our thinking about support, relationships, and human behavior more broadly.

First and foremost, effective invisible support relies on perception only. This begs the question: how does invisible support differ from perceived social support? Certainly

one's perceptions of being supported and having a supportive network are, in part, a function of relational behaviors that compound over time. But what, happens during single dyadic exchanges or within single message instantiations that differentiate invisible support from perceived social support? What are the tangible behaviors, words, or expressions of invisible support provision and how can we reliably evaluate them?

Moreover, how do invisible support behaviors differ from relational maintenance behaviors in close relationships? Maintenance strategies such as expressions of positivity, openness, assurances, and sharing tasks all conceivably include, and may in fact be, tangible enactments of implicit support. For example, if a partner does the dishes before they become a stressor for the other partner, this could be classified as relational maintenance behavior (Canary & Stafford, 1994). On the other hand, taking care of household chores is also characteristic of invisible support (Bolger et al., 2000; Howland & Simpson, 2010). Thus, what does invisible support add to our conceptual and theoretical understanding of emotional support and interpersonal relationships given the well-established literature on perceived social support and relational maintenance?

Arguably, invisible support *does* contribute to the ways in which we explain and predict human behavior, particularly when we consider in the importance of this kind of support for people's self efficacy. Skillfully enacted invisible support messages that pay careful attention to preserving a person's efficacy indeed make people feel better (Bolger & Amarel, 2007). What differentiates invisible support from perceived social support in this case is the helper's intention to save the distressed person's face. While person-centered support also includes a helper's intentional effort to alleviate distress, it takes a

decidedly different approach to crafting comfort messages. Efficacy preservation remains important, but the support provision is overt and encourages elaboration on the problem. The conceptual differences between these two constructs are clear, but what remains unclear is how they best operate together in interpersonal relationships.

These similarities, differences, and unanswered questions about invisible support leave much for future research. The pragmatic implications to continue this line of study are certainly many. As has been repeatedly found, emotional support contributes to a person's overall health, well-being, and relational satisfaction. Given such numerous benefits, it is critical for us to better understand the conditions under which invisible support and person-centered support are most beneficial in alleviating distress. We must especially seek to more fully understand invisible support, for if it is as helpful of a skill as research has found it to be, we should be able to offer concrete ways to help people develop and improve this skill. Importantly, we must also be able to suggest when it is most effective and appropriate to use these skills.

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Appendix A

Pilot Test I for Person-Centered and Invisible Support Messages

Instructions: In this part of the questionnaire, we are interested in learning how you perceive different comforting strategies – messages that people use with someone who is feeling sad, upset, or down about something. The following pages contain a series of hypothetical response that a person might use when comforting a friend who just got dumped by his or her partner. When you're reading the messages, think specifically about how well each response would help a friend who just experience a break-up cope.

After reading the message carefully, rate each response in terms of how well you think it fulfills the subsequent criteria.

(Low VPC Messages)

1. "Hey, you gotta just forget about it. It's not worth worrying about things like this. I mean, it's crazy to be so upset over something you can't control."

2. "Look, let me be honest with you: You're acting like this is the end of the world, not the end of a relationship. Nobody is worth what you are putting yourself through. Remember, a lot worse things can happen in life. It's crazy to act like this over something you can't control."

(Moderate VPC Messages)

3. "I'm sorry things didn't work out for you. Sometimes people go through stages, and sometimes they're just not ready for a real relationship. You've just got to remember that everything happens for a reason. But it's definitely not your fault, that's for sure."

4. "It's happened to me, so it happens to the best of us! Anyway, deep down you know that this is better for you, so you shouldn't let it get to you so much. You're going to be better off—I know that. Remember, there are a lot of fish in the sea, especially around here!"

(High VPC Messages)

5. "I'm really sorry. One minute you think everything is going great, and the next minute you get dumped. It can make you feel really stupid for not seeing it coming, and that can make it hurt even more. You might even be asking yourself, 'What did I do that was so wrong?' I know you pretty well, and I think you have a lot to give in a relationship, but it probably doesn't feel that way right now. You

sound pretty hurt and disappointed. I want you to know that I'm here to listen to you anytime."

6. "It must be so frustrating to have your partner just end things so suddenly—especially if you thought things were going well. It can make you feel like you didn't really know what was going on, or like you did something wrong. But you've got a lot going for you, and this isn't your fault. This probably doesn't count for much right now, but I've been where you are and think I understand how awful you must be feeling. I'm here whenever you want to talk."

(Invisible Support Responses)

IS.1. "You know what we should do? We should go hit up a really good party tonight. I've heard of one where there will be lots of people. It ought to be a really good time and we should have lots of fun!"

IS. 2. "Relationships… ugh. I mean, we keep putting ourselves out there and going on dates and stuff, but sometimes I ask myself, "What's the point?" Let's just forget about it for a while. Wanna grab a coffee?"

IS. 3. "Bummer about the break-up. When that happened to me I felt really hurt because I thought we were having a really good time together. It was kind of a blow to my self-confidence, you know? Thinking things were going well made it suck even more. But, I tried to remain optimistic and that was really helpful."

IS. 4. "I'm sorry. My sister's in the same boat, but since the breakup she's been spending a lot more time with her friends and even joined an intramural volleyball team. She's having a blast! Hey -- what would you think of joining me and some of my friends for cosmic bowling tonight?"

IS. 5. "Hey - you know what we should do? We should scratch cooking and get out for once. I heard there's a new Thai place in Uptown. Maybe we could see what movies are playing too?"

IS. 6. "I'm sorry things didn't work out for you. When my brother found out that his girlfriend had cheated on him, he felt like the world was ending and had no motivation to even get out of bed in the morning. Fortunately he saw that life will go on, and eventually he even started dating again. I think for him it was just helpful to know that there's light at the end of the tunnel."

(*The following items were randomized across all IS and PC messages)*

	Strongly Disagree	Dis-agree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
IS 1. This response deemphasizes the role of supporter and supported.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 2. This response is very conversation-like.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 3. The responder is providing indirect/disguised support.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 4. This response draws the focus away from the person's limitations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 5. This response focuses on how upsetting/stressful it is for the person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 6. Support is not readily recognizable in this response.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 7. In this response, the person is drawing the focus away from the partner and his/her "problem".	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 8. The responder uses him/herself or a third person as an example and a way to provide support.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 1. This response explicitly acknowledges the feelings of the distressed person.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 2. This response challenges the legitimacy of the other person's feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

PC 3. The responder tells the other person how he or she should feel and act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 4. The responder offers expressions of sympathy and condolence.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 5. The message suggests reasons why the person's feelings might be felt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 6. The message provides explanations of the situation intended to reduce distress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

II. Open-ended Response Instructions: Suppose your friend just told you that he/she got dumped. What other things would you *say* or *do* to make your friend feel better? Think specifically about how you might deflect attention away from his or her problem and distress, provide support in disguise, or do some activity to draw the focus away from the person and his/her "problem".

Part III:

Demographics

1. What is your age (in digits)? _____

2. Are you…? ○ Male ○ Female

3. How would you describe your ethnic background? _____
   - ○ White
   - ○ African American
   - ○ Asian, Asian American
   - ○ Pacific Islander, Alaskan, Puerto Rican
   - ○ Hispanic, Latino/a
   - ○ Native American
   - ○ Other

Appendix B

Pilot Test 2 for Person-Centered and Invisible Support Messages

Instructions: We are interested in learning how you view some comforting messages friends and other people in your life may use to make you feel better when you are sad or down.

One example of an event we'd like to focus on is a break-up.

So before we present some comforting responses, we would like for you to recall your most recent break-up. We know it may be a bit unpleasant for you, but please take some time now and really put yourself back in that moment.

- Think about what happened and how it made you feel.
- Think about the events leading up to the break-up.
- What caused the break-up?
- How did you feel after the break-up?

Briefly describe the break-up situation (3-4 sentences).

With your last break-up in mind, we would like for you to now evaluate some comforting responses you might have received from friends or other persons.

Please carefully read each of the following hypothetical comforting responses a friend or other person may have used to comfort you after your break-up.

Then evaluate each comforting response with respect to the statements below each response.

Survey 1: Invisible Support Messages; Invisible Support Items

(Invisible Support Messages)

IS.1. “You know what we should do? We should go hit up a really good party tonight. I’ve heard of one where there will be lots of people. It ought to be a really good time and we should have lots of fun!”

IS. 2. “Relationships… ugh. I mean, we keep putting ourselves out there and going on dates and stuff, but sometimes I ask myself, “What’s the point?” Let’s just forget about it for a while. Wanna grab a coffee?”

IS. 3. “Bummer about the break-up. When that happened to me I felt really hurt because I thought we were having a really good time together. It was kind of a blow to my self-confidence, you know? Thinking things were going well made it suck even more. But, I tried to remain optimistic and that was really helpful.”

IS. 4. “I’m sorry. My sister’s in the same boat, but since the break-up she’s been spending a lot more time with her friends and even joined an intramural volleyball team. She’s having a blast! Hey -- what would you think of joining me and some of my friends for cosmic bowling tonight?”

IS. 5. “Hey - you know what we should do? We should scratch cooking and get out for once. I heard there’s a new Thai place in Uptown. Maybe we could see what movies are playing too?”

IS. 6. “I’m sorry things didn’t work out for you. When my brother and his girlfriend broke up, he felt like the world was ending and had no motivation to even get out of bed in the morning. Fortunately he saw that life will go on, and eventually he even started dating again. I think for him it was just helpful to know that there’s light at the end of the tunnel.”

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
IS 1. This response minimizes or deemphasizes the role of the supporter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 2. The supporter is providing indirect support.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 3. This response draws the focus away from my limitations.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 4. Support is not readily recognizable in this response.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 5. In this response, the supporter is drawing the focus away from me and my “problem(s)”.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

IS 6. The supporter either uses him/herself or another person as a way to provide support.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 7. The supporter is providing support that's "in disguise".	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 8. The response minimizes or deemphasizes my role in the break-up.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Survey 2: Invisible Support Messages; Person-Centered Items

(Invisible Support Messages)

IS.1. "You know what we should do? We should go hit up a really good party tonight. I've heard of one where there will be lots of people. It ought to be a really good time and we should have lots of fun!"

IS. 2. "Relationships… ugh. I mean, we keep putting ourselves out there and going on dates and stuff, but sometimes I ask myself, "What's the point?" Let's just forget about it for a while. Wanna grab a coffee?"

IS. 3. "Bummer about the break-up. When that happened to me I felt really hurt because I thought we were having a really good time together. It was kind of a blow to my self-confidence, you know? Thinking things were going well made it suck even more. But, I tried to remain optimistic and that was really helpful."

IS. 4. "I'm sorry. My sister's in the same boat, but since the break-up she's been spending a lot more time with her friends and even joined an intramural volleyball team. She's having a blast! Hey -- what would you think of joining me and some of my friends for cosmic bowling tonight?"

IS. 5. "Hey - you know what we should do? We should scratch cooking and get out for once. I heard there's a new Thai place in Uptown. Maybe we could see what movies are playing too?"

IS. 6. "I'm sorry things didn't work out for you. When my brother and his girlfriend broke up, he felt like the world was ending and had no motivation to even get out of bed in the morning. Fortunately he saw that life will go on, and eventually he even started dating again. I think for him it was just helpful to know that there's light at the end of the tunnel."

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
PC 1. This response explicitly acknowledges my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 2. This response challenges the legitimacy of my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 3. The supporter tells me how I should feel and act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 4. The supporter offers expressions of sympathy and condolence.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 5. The message suggests reasons why my feelings might be felt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 6. The message provides explanations that are intended to reduce distress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Survey 3: Person-Centered Messages; Invisible Support Items

(Low VPC Messages)

1. "Hey, you gotta just forget about it. It's not worth worrying about things like this. I mean, it's crazy to be so upset over something you can't control."

2. "Look, let me be honest with you: You're acting like this is the end of the world, not the end of a relationship. Nobody is worth what you are putting yourself through. Remember, a lot worse things can happen in life. It's crazy to act like this over something you can't control."

(Moderate VPC Messages)

3. "I'm sorry things didn't work out for you. Sometimes people go through stages, and sometimes they're just not ready for a real relationship. You've just got to remember that everything happens for a reason. But it's definitely not your fault, that's for sure."

4. "It's happened to me, so it happens to the best of us! Anyway, deep down you know that this is better for you, so you shouldn't let it get to you so much. You're going to be better off—I know that. Remember, there are a lot of fish in the sea, especially around here!"

(High VPC Messages)

5. "I'm really sorry. One minute you think everything is going great, and the next minute you get dumped. It can make you feel really stupid for not seeing it coming, and that can make it hurt even more. You might even be asking yourself, 'What did I do that was so wrong?' I know you pretty well, and I think you have a lot to give in a relationship, but it probably doesn't feel that way right now. You sound pretty hurt and disappointed. I want you to know that I'm here to listen to you anytime. Do you feel like talking about it?"

6. "It must be so frustrating to have your partner just end things so suddenly—especially if you thought things were going well. It can make you feel like you didn't really know what was going on, or like you did something wrong. But you've got a lot going for you, and this isn't your fault. This probably doesn't count for much right now, but I've been where you are and think I understand how awful you must be feeling. I'm here whenever you want to talk. How are you feeling?"

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
IS 1. This response minimizes/de-emphasizes the role of the supporter.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 2. The supporter is providing indirect support.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 3. This response draws the focus away from my	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

limitations.							
IS 4. Support is not readily recognizable in this response.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 5. In this response, the supporter is drawing the focus away from me and my "problem(s)".	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 6. The supporter either uses him/herself or another person as a way to provide support.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 7. The supporter is providing support that's "in disguise".	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
IS 8. The response minimizes or deemphasizes my role in the break-up.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Survey 4: Person-Centered Messages; Person-Centered Items

(Low VPC Messages)

1. "Hey, you gotta just forget about it. It's not worth worrying about things like this. I mean, it's crazy to be so upset over something you can't control."

2. "Look, let me be honest with you: You're acting like this is the end of the world, not the end of a relationship. Nobody is worth what you are putting yourself through. Remember, a lot worse things can happen in life. It's crazy to act like this over something you can't control."

(Moderate VPC Messages)

3. "I'm sorry things didn't work out for you. Sometimes people go through stages, and sometimes they're just not ready for a real relationship. You've just got to remember that everything happens for a reason. But it's definitely not your fault, that's for sure."

4. "It's happened to me, so it happens to the best of us! Anyway, deep down you know that this is better for you, so you shouldn't let it get to you so much. You're going to be better off—I know that. Remember, there are a lot of fish in the sea, especially around here!"

(High VPC Messages)

5. "I'm really sorry. One minute you think everything is going great, and the next minute you get dumped. It can make you feel really stupid for not seeing it coming, and that can make it hurt even more. You might even be asking yourself, 'What did I do that was so wrong?' I know you pretty well, and I think you have a lot to give in a relationship, but it probably doesn't feel that way right now. You sound pretty hurt and disappointed. I want you to know that I'm here to listen to you anytime. Do you feel like talking about it?"

6. "It must be so frustrating to have your partner just end things so suddenly—especially if you thought things were going well. It can make you feel like you didn't really know what was going on, or like you did something wrong. But you've got a lot going for you, and this isn't your fault. This probably doesn't count for much right now, but I've been where you are and think I understand how awful you must be feeling. I'm here whenever you want to talk. How are you feeling?"

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Some-what Disagree**	**Neither Disagree nor Agree**	**Some-what Agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
PC 1. This response explicitly acknowledges my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 2. This response challenges the legitimacy of my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 3. The supporter tells me how I should feel and act.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

PC 4. The supporter offers expressions of sympathy and condolence.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 5. The message suggests reasons why my feelings might be felt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
PC 6. The message provides explanations that are intended to reduce distress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part II:

Demographics

1. What is your age (in digits)? _____

2. Are you…? ○ Male ○ Female

3. How would you describe your ethnic background?
   _____

   ○ White
   ○ African American
   ○ Asian, Asian American
   ○ Pacific Islander, Alaskan, Puerto Rican
   ○ Hispanic, Latino/a
   ○ Native American
   ○ Other

Appendix C

Emotional Distress & Comforting Main Survey

Part I: Recall

Instructions:

In the first part of the survey, we are interested in learning about your experiences dealing with relationships and break-ups. We want to know how you felt during and after your break-up. We also want to know how friends, family, and other people comforted you.

Before we show you some comforting responses that you may have received, we would like for you to recall your most recent break-up. We know it's probably unpleasant for you to think back to that event, but please take some time now and put yourself back into that moment when you and a person you were dating broke up.

- Think about what happened and the kinds of feelings you had during the break-up.
- Think about the events leading up to the break-up. What caused the break-up?
- How did you feel after the break-up?

Briefly describe the break-up situation.

How do you feel NOW that the break-up is on your mind? Please carefully read the emotion statements below and tell us how you feel right now, in this moment.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I feel upset.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I feel annoyed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I feel content.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I feel sad.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I feel angry.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Below is a series of possible comforting responses one of your closest friends or family members may have used to cheer you up and make you feel better during and after the break-up you described above.

Carefully read each of these potential responses. Thinking back still, please select the one response that most closely represents how your close friend or family member actually comforted you.

4. "Hey, you gotta just forget about it. It's not worth worrying about things like this. I mean, it's crazy to be so upset over something you can't control."

5. "I'm really sorry. One minute you think everything is going great, and the next minute you get dumped. It can make you feel really stupid for not seeing it coming, and that can make it hurt even more. You might even be asking yourself, 'What did I do that was so wrong?' I know you pretty well, and I think you have a lot to give in a relationship, but it probably doesn't feel that way right now. You sound pretty hurt and disappointed. I want you to know that I'm here to listen to you anytime. Do you feel like talking about it?"

6. "I'm sorry things didn't work out for you. Sometimes people go through stages, and sometimes they're just not ready for a real relationship. You've just got to remember that everything happens for a reason. But it's definitely not your fault, that's for sure."

Please indicate below whom you have in mind. In other words, who provided that kind of support to you?

Think about the comforting response you just selected. How did that response make you feel?

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Some-what Disagree**	**Neither Disagree nor Agree**	**Some-what Agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. After listening to my friend, I felt better about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

2. My friend helped me to feel more optimistic about my situation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My friend helped to cheer me up.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. After listening to my friend, my situation seemed more manageable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. After listening to my friend, I felt depressed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thinking still about the comforting response you selected above, how would you evaluate that comforting message in particular with respect to your break-up? My friend's (or family member's) response was:

6. very effective.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. very sensitive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. very helpful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. very supportive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Lastly, we would like to know how you evaluate that statement in general.

10. This response explicitly acknowledged my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. The responder offered expressions of sympathy and condolence.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. The message suggested reasons why my feelings might be felt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. The message provided explanations that are intended to reduce distress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part II: Hypothetical Support Situation

Instructions:

In this part of this survey we are interested in how you evaluate comforting messages that friends and family have used to make us feel better when we're sad, upset, or down.

Below is a hypothetical situation. Because we all have likely experienced it, we selected a break-up situation.

Please carefully read the break-up scenario and put yourself in that situation. Picture how this scenario would make *you feel* – what emotions would you experience?

Then read the comforting responses and evaluate each of these responses on the scales that are listed.

Here's the scenario (LOW):

A couple of weeks ago you started going on some occasional dates with this really great person you just met. You were feeling good about the way things had been going and felt like you were starting to hit it off really well! Last night, however, this person decided to end things with you. Now you're feeling hurt and confused by the situation. You thought things were going so well, and you can't quite shake your disappointment in ending the relationship.

Here's the scenario (MODERATE):

Your partner, whom you've been dating for quite a while now, just dumped you. You feel like you've been blind-sided because you thought things were going really well. You seemed to share a lot of the same interests, goals, and values, and you did not see the break up coming. You feel really hurt and upset about the situation. You don't know where to turn. You are left confused, sad, and disappointed.

Here's the scenario (HIGH):

You just found out that your partner, whom you've been dating for a couple of years, has been cheating on you. You are irate and don't understand how you didn't know it was happening. You are extremely depressed about the situation and have quit going to school and work. You feel really confused and don't know how you will ever move on. You feel like you've hit your lowest of lows.

Imagine yourself in this situation and tell us how you feel right this minute:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I feel upset.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. I feel annoyed.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. I feel content.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. I feel sad.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. I feel angry.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

After hearing about your break-up situation, your closest friend comforts you. Below are several comforting responses that your friend may have said to you.

Please evaluate each of these comforting responses on the scales below:

Comforting Response 1 (HPC):
"I'm really sorry. One minute you think everything is going great, and the next minute you get dumped. It can make you feel really stupid for not seeing it coming, and that can make it hurt even more. You might even be asking yourself, 'What did I do that was so wrong?' I know you pretty well, and I think you have a lot to give in a relationship, but it probably doesn't feel that way right now. You sound pretty hurt and disappointed. I want you to know that I'm here to listen to you anytime. Do you feel like talking about it?"

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. What my friend said made me feel better about myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. My friend made me feel more optimistic about my situation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. My friend helped cheer me up.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. What my friend said made my situation seem more manageable.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. What my friend said depressed me.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

My friend's response was:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. very effective.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. very sensitive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. very helpful.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. very supportive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

This response:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Some-what Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Some-what Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
10. explicitly acknowledged my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. offered expressions of sympathy and condolence.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. suggested reasons why my feelings might be felt.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. provided explanations that are intended to reduce distress.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Comforting Response 2 (LPC):
"Hey, you gotta just forget about it. It's not worth worrying about things like this. I mean, it's crazy to be so upset over something you can't control."

Comforting Response 3 (MPC):
"I'm sorry things didn't work out for you. Sometimes people go through stages, and sometimes they're just not ready for a real relationship. You've just got to remember that everything happens for a reason. But it's definitely not your fault, that's for sure."

Comforting Response 4 (MPC):
"It's happened to me, so it happens to the best of us! Anyway, deep down you know that this is better for you, so you shouldn't let it get to you so much. You're going to be better off—I know that. Remember, there are a lot of fish in the sea, especially around here!"

Comforting Response 5 (HPC):
"It must be so frustrating to have your date just end things so suddenly—especially if you thought things were going well. It can make you feel like you didn't really know what was going on, or like you did something wrong. But you've got a lot going for you, and this isn't your fault. This probably doesn't count for much right now, but I've been where you are and think I understand how awful you must be feeling. I'm here whenever you want to talk. How are you feeling?"

Comforting Response 6 (LPC):
"Look, let me be honest with you: You're acting like this is the end of the world, not the end of a relationship. Nobody is worth what you are putting yourself through. Remember, a lot worse things can happen in life. It's crazy to act like this over something you can't control."

Part III:

Demographics

1. What is your age (in digits)? _____

2. Are you…? ○ Male ○ Female

3. How would you describe your ethnic background? _____

   ○ White
   ○ African American
   ○ Asian, Asian American
   ○ Pacific Islander, Alaskan, Puerto Rican
   ○ Hispanic, Latino/a
   ○ Native American
   ○ Other