ARE EMOTIONAL AND INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORTIVE INTERACTIONS BENEFICIAL IN TIMES OF STRESS? THE IMPACT OF ATTACHMENT STYLE

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The present study investigates the contribution of individuals' attachment style to the effectiveness of social support in dealing with stress. Secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent persons were exposed to a stressful situation (handling a snake). Then, participants waited alone for the task or were assigned to either emotional or instrumental conversations with a partner, and their affective state before and after the social interactions were measured. Findings indicated that the affective state of securely attached participants was improved by either emotional or instrumental social interactions. The affective state of avoidant persons benefited from an instrumental conversation, but it was impaired by an emotionally-laden social interaction. Anxious-ambivalent persons were not affected by an emotional conversation, but showed an increase in negative affects after an instrumental conversation. Results were discussed in terms of attachment theory and research.

ARE EMOTIONAL AND INSTRUMENTAL SUPPORTIVE INTERACTIONS BENEFICIAL IN TIMES OF STRESS? THE IMPACT OF ATTACHMENT STYLE

One of the central issues of theory and research concerned with responses to stress is the identification of psychological and social factors that can reduce the adverse emotional impacts of exposure to stressful experiences (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). A review of the literature emphasizes the beneficial effects of social interactions and...
support on people's emotional response to stress exposure (e.g., Hobfoll, 1989) But despite a substantial accumulation of empirical data, we still lack a clear understanding of the mechanisms involved in social interactions that have an ameliorative effect on people's affective state. We attempt to further expand knowledge on the association between social interaction and responses to stress by examining what kind of person can make use of different kinds of provided support (emotional, instrumental).

Much research has been conducted on the relation between social support, stress endurance, and psychological well being (for reviews, see Leavy, 1983, Cohen and Wills, 1985, Hobfoll, 1989). In general, it has been found that the lack of adequacy of social support in stressful situations may increase the vulnerability of individuals to psychological distress, emotional and functioning problems, and somatic illnesses (e.g., Antonovsky, 1979, Cobb, 1976. Cohen, 1988, Kiecolt-Glasser & Glasser, 1986). However, there is accumulating evidence that raises doubts as to the utility of social interactions (e.g., Coyne & DeLongis, 1986, Minuchin, Roman, & Baker, 1978 Solomon & Rothblum, 1986). For example, Hobfoll and London (1986) found that the reported depression of Israeli women whose spouses actively participated in the 1982 Lebanon War was heightened by greater receipt of support during the War. Moreover, the possibility of talking with friends and neighbors during the crisis period and the self-reported intimacy level with friends were positively related to state anxiety.

This apparent empirical contradiction can be solved by taking into consideration the multidimensional nature of supportive social interactions (Sarason et al., 1987). The main research question is not only whether social interactions in times of stress are beneficial or detrimental to well-being, but also which personal and social factors may determine the effects of these interactions. Probably these effects depend on the nature of the stressful event, the goals of the interaction, the timing and components of support, and the identity of the supportive figure (e.g., Cohen, 1988, Cutrona, 1990).

A major explanatory factor in the association between supportive social interactions and stress responses is the kind of support provided in a specific interaction. Several investigators emphasize the importance of differentiating between two basic components of
support (e.g., Cutrona, 1990, Cutrona & Russell, 1987) emotional support (expression of comfort and caring, sharing feelings with others) and instrumental support (provision of services, resources, and problem solving means, and tangible aid) Though high correlations have been found between the various components (Brown, 1986, House, Kahn, McLeod, & Williams, 1985), recent studies demonstrated the independence of these components (Brookings & Bolton, 1988, Cutrona & Russell, 1987. Vaux, Riedel, & Stewart. 1987)

Cutrona (1990) proposed that the differentiation between the emotional and instrumental components of support is important for evaluating the outcomes of supportive social interactions Whereas the provision of emotional support would be beneficial when the stressful events are uncontrollable and no instrumental response can change the course of events, the provision of instrumental support would be beneficial when the stressful event can be controlled by adequate problem solving responses (Cutrona, 1990) Similarly, Constanza, Derlega, and Winstead (1988) found that sharing one's feelings with a friend in anticipation of a controllable stressful event (guiding a tarantula through a maze) provided no advantage in psychological well-being over waiting alone In fact, only a problem-solving talk with a friend produced lower negative mood than waiting alone

A second major factor that may determine the utility of supportive social interactions is the personality characteristics of the recipient of support Our basic assumption is that people may differ in (a) their need for social support as a means for coping with stress (b) their ability to mobilize whatever supports are present in their social social surrounding, and (c) their ability to make use of provided support These individual differences may be reflected in the extent to which the provision of support would have positives, negative, or no effect on the person's well-being Furthermore since people may be guided by different goals in their social lives, they would also differ in the type of support (emotional, instrumental) that would be beneficial for them It may be that different components of support would have positives effects only when they fit the person's needs and negative effects when these needs are not fulfilled

The influence of the individual's personalities on the efficiency of
supportive social interaction has been documented by Lefcourt, Martin, and Saleh (1984) and Sandler and Lackey (1982). They found that the provision of social support was more effective in alleviating psychological distress among people with internal locus of control than among those with external locus of control. In another study, Kobasa and Puccetti (1983) found that although family support was beneficial for hardy individuals, it was related to poorer health among non-hardy persons.

In the present study, we employ the framework of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980) for examining the effects of personality characteristics on the effectiveness of social support in dealing with stress. This theoretical framework seems to be highly relevant for the understanding of the support-related configuration. The concept of a secure attachment relationship in childhood has been theoretically related to the sense support — a propensity to interpret behaviors of other people as supportive (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990). Bowlby defines secure relationships between infants and attachment figures as those interactions in which the parents are responsive to their infants' distress assist the infant in regulating arousal, and bring relief and comfort. The responsiveness of parents to their infants' attachment signals provide infants with a "secure base" on which to organize expectations about the world and to handle distress and hence foster the sense of a "good-supportive world".

Along this reasoning, individual differences in adult attachment styles, that reflect generalized expectations about social interactions and rules guiding responses to stress (Collins & Read, 1990, Hazan & Shaver, 1987, Mikulincer, Florian, & Tolmacz, 1990, Mikulincer & Florian, 1995), may be associated with the development and maintenance of the sense of social support. Securely attached people may believe that there are persons who will be available if needed, who will bring relief, and who will accept and love them (Kobak & Scerby, 1988, Collins & Read, 1990). In contrast, persons with an insecure style, either avoidant, who react with detachment and "compulsive self-reliance" to any sign of distress (Bowlby, 1973, Hazan & Shaver, 1987), or anxious-ambivalent, who react with anxiety and hypervigilance to stressful situations (Mikulincer, et al., 1990, Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993), may perceive attach-
ment figures as non-supportive and may have doubts about the extent to which the world can comfort them in time of distress.

The association between adult attachment style and social support has been confirmed in several studies. For example, Kobak and Sceery (1988) found that secure style persons reported having more available support from their families than avoidant style persons. Simpson, Rholes, and Nelligan (1992) found that securely attached woman were more likely to seek emotional support from their partners before undergoing an anxiety-provoking experience in the laboratory than avoidant woman. Accordingly, Mikulincer, Florian, and Weller (1993) found that Israeli secure adults reported having to seek more social support as a way of coping with the Iraqi Scud Missile attacks on Israeli cities than either avoidant or ambivalent adults. In a recent study, Florian, Mikulincer, and Bucholtz (1995) found that secure persons perceived higher levels of available emotional and instrumental support from their significant others and reported seeking more support than avoidant and ambivalent persons.

In our terms, individuals' attachment styles may also contribute to the effectiveness of the provision of support in alleviating their own distress. We hypothesize that the provision of emotional and instrumental support in a stressful encounter will have differential effects on the affective state of support recipients according to their attachment style. Secure persons, who were found to habitually seek all kinds of support in times of need, to positively interpret other's actions, and to mobilize available sources of support (Feeney & Noiler 1990; Florian, Mikulincer & Bucholtz, 1995, Hazan & Shaver, 1987), would benefit from either emotional or instrumental supportive interactions. In contrast, ambivalent persons, who were found to be extremely anxious about the possibility of being socially rejected, to mistrust other's intentions and negatively misinterpret their responses, and to believe that they do not possess the appropriate competence for mobilizing available sources of support (e.g. Hazan, & Shaver, 1987. Collins & Read, 1990), would display difficulties in taking advantage of either emotional or instrumental interactions.

With regard to avoidant persons, we hypothesize a more complex pattern of responses. These persons, who were found to regulate...
distress by inhibiting the acknowledgment and display of negative emotions, emphasizing autonomy and self-reliance, and focusing mainly on strictly structured tasks (e.g., Hazan & Shaver, 1987, Mikulincer et al., 1990, Mikulincer et al., 1993), would benefit from an instrumental supportive interaction and would negatively react to an emotionally-laden interaction. Whereas the instrumental interaction fits the avoidant persons' needs, the emotional interaction may counteract their basic goals and coping strategies.

In order to examine the contribution of attachment style to the effectiveness of supportive interactions in times of stress, we designed a laboratory study. Previously classified secure, avoidant, and anxious-ambivalent persons were exposed to a stressful situation, which involved the anticipation of handling a snake. Then, participants were randomly divided into three conditions, according to how they spent their time before they actually handled the snake. Participant's in the first group were instructed to conduct an emotional interaction with a partner (talking about their feelings related to the snake). The second group included subjects who were instructed to conduct an instrumental interaction with a partner (talking about how to handle the snake task). The third group (control group), included participants who waited alone. Self-report data of participants' affective state were collected before and after the exposure to the above interactions.

We predicted that participants' affective responses to the manipulated interactions will be a function of their own attachments style. The affective state of secure participants will be more positive after an emotional or instrumental interaction than after waiting alone. The affective state of ambivalent participants will be similar in the three experimental conditions. The affective state of avoidant persons will be more positive after an instrumental interaction and more negative after an emotional interaction than after waiting alone.

**METHOD**

**Subjects**

One-hundred and thirty-five undergraduate students (76 females and 59 males ranging in age from 21 to 32) from the Psychology
department at Bar-Ilan University participated in the study as part of the requirements for their first year of study.

**Materials and Procedure**

This laboratory study consisted of two sessions. In the first session, carried out during regular class time, participants completed attachment style scales. Attachment styles were assessed via two instruments based on Hazan and Shaver's (1987) descriptions of how people typically feel in close relationships. Those instruments were previously used by Mikulincer et al. (1990). First, we presented to participants the three Hazan and Shaver descriptions of feelings and cognitions regarding attachment styles, and asked them to endorse the description that best described their own feelings (forced-choice of attachment style). Second, participants received 15 statements (5 items per attachment style), that were constructed by separating the items of Hazan and Shaver's descriptions (for more details, see Mikulincer et al., 1990). Participants were asked to state on a 7-point bipolar scale, ranging from “not at all” (1) to “very much” (7), the extent to which each statement applied to them.

Cronbach alphas for items of each attachment style were acceptable (from 68 to 79). On this basis, we computed three continuous scores of attachment styles (secure, avoidant, ambivalent) by averaging items corresponding to each style. Pearson correlations yielded that secure and avoidant styles were inversely related (−43). Then we compared the values of these scores and assigned each participant to the attachment style that had the maximal value of the three alternatives. Only 8 classification mismatches were found between the results of this technique and the participants' forced-choice self-classification and no clear pattern was detected in these mismatches. In order to avoid classification ambiguities we dropped these cases from statistical analyses. The frequencies of the attachment styles in the current sample were similar to those found in previous studies with American and Israeli populations (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer et al., 1990; Mikulincer & Erev, 1991; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991). Fifty-six percent (N = 71) classified themselves as secure, 25% (N = 32) as avoidant, and 19% (N = 24) as ambivalent.
For the second session, all participants were contacted by telephone and invited to take part in a study on learning and personality. Rejection rate was negligible. Participants were also told that they would interact during the experiment with a same-sex partner that they did not know previously. The partners were also students at Bar-Ilan University, filled out the attachment style questionnaire in a previous date, and were blind to the participants' attachment style. The distribution of the partners' attachment style was similar to that of the participant sample (59% of partners were secure, 26% were classified as avoidant, and 15% were anxious-ambivalent). Partners received instructions that the experiment for them consisted of a single task, to maintain a conversation with another individual or to wait for him/her before he/she would handle a snake. With the exception of the degree of familiarity between participants their partners, the second session was a conceptual replication of Constanza et al.'s (1988) procedure.

When participants reported for the experiment, the experimenter (a male blind to participant's attachment styles) described the study in which the participants would be participating. They were told that they would be asked to guide a poisonous snake through a maze after watching a model (the experimenter) do it. They were shown the equipment and the snake that would be used for the task. The experimenter handled the snake and presented the task in threatening terms. They were also told that people have different reactions to working with a snake, and hence they would be asked to describe their feelings during the experiment. Participants were then asked whether they agreed to participate in the study. The rejection rate was zero. In this phase, the snake was in a tank and could be seen by them.

After the explanation of the task, participants completed the 36-item version of the Nowlis Mood adjective checklist (MACL. Nowlis, 1965). The MACL was original developed from a list of 120 mood adjectives, and the 36 items that best represented positive and negative mood were selected (Stone, 1981). In the current sample, participants were presented with the 36 adjectives and asked to rate on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much), the extent to which each adjective describes the way they feel "right now." For each participant, we averaged the adjectives corresponding to the negative mood factor and the adjectives corresponding to
the positive mood factor (Cronbach Alpha coefficients of 74 and 81, respectively). At this point, participants completed a 7-point single item assessing their fear of snakes (how afraid of the snake they were right now) Higher scores reflect greater fear of snake.

Upon completing the above questionnaires, participants were randomly divided into three experimental conditions: emotional conversation, instrumental conversation, and no social interaction (waiting alone). In each of the two conversation conditions (either emotional or instrumental), participants were placed together with the partners in another room (without the snake present) for a 5-min period to give them an opportunity to talk together while the experimenter was checking to see if everything was ready for working with the snake. In the no interaction condition, participants waited alone for a 5-min period in another room (without the snake) for the next phase of the study.

In the emotional conversation condition, participants were instructed to talk with their partners only about their feelings concerning the task with the snake. Participants were given a hypothetical example of going to a physician for an injection and discussing how they felt about getting the injection. In the instrumental conversation condition, participants were instructed to talk with their partners only about how they expected to handle the snake approach task and which problem-solving strategies they would use. Participants were given the example of going to a physician for an injection and discussing how to act with the physician or how to deal with the injection itself.

There were audiotape recorders placed in the rooms where participants waited for the start of the snake approach task. The participants in the two conversation conditions were told that their conversations would be tape recorded to ensure that they followed instructions about what to talk about. A microphone was placed on a table between them. A microphone was also visible in the rooms for those in the no interaction condition. We analyzed the content of a sample of 20 conversations, and found that in all the cases participants properly followed instructions.

Table I presents the distribution of attachment styles in the three experimental conditions. A Chi Square test revealed that the distribution of attachment styles was similar across experimental condi-
tion The analyses also revealed that there was no systematic bias according to attachment style in the matching of participants and partners participating in each of the experimental conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure</th>
<th>Avoidant</th>
<th>Anxious</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental support</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the 5-min period, the experimenter returned and asked individuals to fill out again the MACL and the fear of snake scale to provide a current measure of affect after the support treatment. After each completing the scales, they were debriefed about the purpose of the study and were told that they would not be demanded to approach the snake. No one reported suspicions or prior knowledge about the study’s purpose.

**RESULTS**

Before examining the influence of the manipulation of emotional and instrumental conversation on the affective state of secure, avoidant, and ambivalent persons, we examined the affective state of the three attachment style groups before the manipulation of conversation condition. Positive affect, negative affect, and fear of snake before the manipulation of social interaction were analyzed by two-way multivariate and univariate ANOVAs for the person’s attachment style.
(secure, avoidant, ambivalent) and conversation condition (no, emotional, instrumental)

Although statistical analyses could be performed also on the three attachment continuous scores, we preferred to employ the tripartite attachment typology in examining our predictions. Three reasons guided this decision. First, the rationale of the study and its basic hypotheses and predictions were formulated in terms of the tripartite attachment typology. Second, most of the research on adult attachment relies on the classification according to individual attachment style rather than on continuous attachment scores. Third, in our case, the use of the attachment typology simplifies the statistical analysis of the interaction effect of attachment style and kind of social support and facilitates its interpretation.

The two-way multivariate ANOVA (MANOVA) yielded a significant main effect for individuals' attachment style \(F(6, 232) = 3.42, p < .05\). The main effects of conversation condition and the two-way interaction were not significant. Univariate ANOVAs revealed that the main effect for individuals' attachment style reached significance only in reference to positive mood \(F(2, 118) = 5.12, p < .01\). Duncan post hoc tests indicated that secure and ambivalent individuals reported more positive mood after having received instructions on the snake approach task (\(M = 4.37, M = 4.27\)) than avoidant subjects (\(M = 3.71\)). The main effect for attachment style approached statistical significance in reference to negative mood \(F(2, 118) = 2.74, p = .06\), with avoidant individuals reporting stronger negative mood (\(M = 2.70\)) than either secure (\(M = 2.32\)) or ambivalent persons (\(M = 2.40\)). No significant effects were found with regard to the reported fear of snake.

Variations in positive mood, negative mood, and fear of snake after the manipulation of social interaction were also analyzed by two-way MANOVA and ANOVAs for the person's attachment style and conversation condition. The ANOVAs included the correspondent affective measure before the treatment as a covariate (positive mood, negative mood, or fear of snake). This statistical procedure allows us to separate the effect of social interaction on each of the three affective measures from individual differences in the correspondent affective measure pre-existing before the treatment. Table II presents least square means and standard deviations of positive
TABLE II  Means and SD of affective reactions after social interaction according to attachment styles and type of interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Secure Mean</th>
<th>Secure SD</th>
<th>Avoidant Mean</th>
<th>Avoidant SD</th>
<th>Anxious Mean</th>
<th>Anxious SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive affect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental support</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative affect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>0.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental support</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>2.45</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>2.32</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear of snake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional support</td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental support</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>5.71</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alone</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

mood, negative mood, and fear of snake after treatment (controlling for the correspondent affective measure before treatment) pertinent to these analyses.

The two-way MANOVA yielded a significant two-way interaction \((F(12,344) = 3.28, p < .01)\) The main effects of conversation condition and the person's attachment style were not significant Univariate ANOVAs revealed that the two-way interaction (after controlling for the affective state before treatment) was significant for negative mood \((F(4,117) = 7.79, p < .01)\) and fear of snake \((F(4,117) = 2.78, p < .05)\) No significant effects were found for positive mood after the treatment beyond and above those effects revealed before the treatment.

Tests for Simple Main Effects (Winer, 1971) revealed the pattern of effects of conversation condition in each attachment group This pattern was similar for both negative mood and fear of snake Secure individuals reported less negative affect and less fear of snake after participating in either emotional or instrumental conversations than after waiting alone for working with the snake That is either emotional or instrumental social interactions had beneficial effects.
on secure persons’ affective state. Avoidant individuals reported less negative mood and less fear of snake after participating in an instrumental conversation than after waiting alone for working with the snake. However, they reported more negative mood and more fear of snake after participating in an emotional conversation than after waiting alone. Although an instrumental social interaction was beneficial for avoidant persons, an emotional social interaction had detrimental effects on their affective state. Ambivalent persons reported more negative mood and more fear of snake after participating in an instrumental conversation than after waiting alone for working with the snake. No significant difference between the emotional conversation condition and the waiting alone procedure was found in the affective state of ambivalent persons. Although an instrumental social interaction was detrimental for ambivalent persons, an emotional interaction had no significant effect on their emotions.

In addition, the Simple Main Effects tests delineated the differences among attachment groups in each one of the conversation conditions. In the control condition, no significant difference was found among the three attachment groups in both negative affect and fear of snake. In the instrumental conversation condition, secure and avoidant individuals reported less negative affect and less fear of snake than ambivalent persons. In the emotional conversation condition, secure and ambivalent persons reported less negative affect than avoidant persons. However, only the secure persons reported less fear of snake when compared to the two insecure groups.

Although the Chi-Square test reported in the method section did not reveal evidence of significant confounding between participants’ and partners’ attachment styles across the entire design, it is still possible that partners’ attachment style might have somewhat coloured the effects of the participants’ attachment on their affective state after instrumental and emotional conversations. In order to examine this possibility, we conducted the same two-way ANOVAs reported above, but this time we included as covariates either (a) two dummy variables reflecting partners’ own forced-choice of attachment style, or (b) the three continuous partners’ attachment scores (secure, avoidant, ambivalent). These new analyses revealed the same significant effects as those found in the original ANOVAs. This
implies that the effects of the participants' attachment style in the
different experimental conditions were independent of partners' 
attachment style

DISCUSSION

The contribution of social interaction to individuals' emotional state 
in times of stress seems to be a result of a complex configuration of 
situational and personality factors. The findings indicate that this 
contribution may be beneficial or detrimental to people's well-being 
depending on the kind of support involved and their personality 
characteristics. Specifically, the differentiation of instrumental and 
emotional kinds of support and the classification of participants 
according to attachment style were found to be important 
moderators of the effects of social interactions in times of stress.

As hypothesized, secure attached persons benefited from either 
emotional instrumental social interactions in a stressful situation. 
Our findings show that secure persons' negative feelings in the snake 
experiment were lower after talking with another person about the 
problem at hand or about their feelings than after no conversation 
took place. Secure persons may habitually rely on others in times 
of need and may seek the company of others in order to talk about 
their problems and feelings (Hazan & Shaver, 1987, Mikulincer & 
Nachtshon, 1991). This habitual tendency may reflect their sense of 
security in their partners' intentions and responses as well as a history 
of successful distress regulation after supportive encounters. This 
habitual reliance on social support may also prepare the person to 
efficiently use and to take advantage of social interactions. It may be 
that the frequent use of social support further contributes to the 
development of cognitive and behavioral strategies designed to max-
imize the effectiveness of supportive encounters.

The pattern of affective responses shown by avoidant attached 
persons was also in line with our predictions. These persons benefited 
from a problem-solving conversation, but showed an increase in 
negative feelings following an emotionally-laden conversation. This 
pattern of reactions may reflect the strategy avoidant persons adopt 
for dealing with their insecurity in close relationships. Avoidant
persons tend to regulate negative feelings by restricting the acknowledgment of distress and adopting a "compulsive self-reliance" strategy (Bowlby, 1973). In our study, this strategy was manifested in avoidant persons' positive reactions to problem-solving conversation and negative reactions to emotional conversation. The former does not demand any close, emotionally-laden interaction but rather allows the exhibition of the avoidant person's autonomy and problem-solving skills. The latter, in contrast, counteracts avoidant people's goals as it demands the display of negative affect.

With regard to the affective responses of anxious-ambivalent persons, the findings only partially support our predictions. As predicted, the ventilation of feelings have no positive or negative effect on their affective state. However, unexpectedly, anxious-ambivalent persons showed an increase of negative feelings after a problem-solving conversation. This negative reaction may reflect the difficulties that anxious-ambivalent persons have with regard to the organization and implementation of problem-solving plans. For anxious-ambivalent persons, who may suffer from low self-esteem and believe that they do not possess the appropriate competence and skills for solving life problems (e.g., Shaver & Hazan, 1988), a problem-solving conversation may act as a mirror that reflects their weaknesses, may exacerbate their negative self-evaluation, and may raise self-related worries and feelings. In addition, they may feel that the partner in a problem-solving conversation would easily discover their weaknesses and would reject them. These self-presentation concerns would compound ambivalent individuals' basic self-efficacy doubts and fear of rejection (Mikulincer, et al., 1990) and probably exacerbate their negative mood. For anxious-ambivalent persons, a problem-solving conversation seems to be a source of distress rather than comfort.

Another important implication of the findings deals with the effectiveness of the two components of social support. As presented in the introduction section, one cannot infer which kind of support is more effective in times of stress without taking into consideration the individual's personality characteristics. Emotional support seems to be beneficial to secure attached persons, whereas instrumental support seems to be more beneficial to avoidant persons and detrimental to ambivalent persons. This pattern is in accord with Cutrona's (1990) analysis emphasizing the importance of the fitness between
the persons' needs and the kind of support provided in understanding the effects of social support.

An additional interesting although unexpected finding deals with the differential contribution of the person's attachment styles to negative mood and positive mood. Whereas the people's own attachment style contributed to the alleviation of negative affect, it had no significant contribution to the enhancement of positive mood. Although this finding is difficult to explain, we can speculate that in times of stress the person's characteristics might be a major resource in alleviating inner distress and tension, while probably being irrelevant for improving positive mood. This may be true not only with regard to attachment style, but it may be also applicable to other individual differences factors. For example, Florian, Mikulincer, and Taubman (1995) found that the personality construct of hardness (Kobasa & Puccetti, 1983) had a positive effect on individuals' level of inner distress during a stressful real-life situation, but that it was irrelevant for explaining variations on their positive well-being. This pattern of findings provides further support to the hypotheses that positive mood and negative mood are independent constructs (e.g., Diener & Emmons, 1984) and that situational and personality factors leading to a decrease in negative mood in times of stress should not necessarily lead to an increase in positive mood. Only further research could advance our knowledge on this issue.

It should be noted that several possible limitations may impede the theoretical generalizability of our findings. First of all, although our findings showed that the effects of the people's attachment style on affective measures did not depend on their participants' attachment style, it is still plausible to assume that partners' attachment style may interact with individuals' attachment style in determining the effectiveness of social interactions in times of stress. In the current study, we assessed partners' attachment style, but the differential distribution of the three attachment styles did not allow us to properly analyze the interaction between participants' and partners' styles. This problem is particularly due to the small number of anxious-ambivalent attached persons. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies should sample in advance enough participants to cover all the nine combinations of the three attachment styles in a dyadic interaction and should make use of a Social Relation model as
a means of determining the effect of the specific interdependent relationship between two individuals.

Second, the study’s gains in internal validity (experimental design and control of social interaction) were offset by some losses related to external validity. For example, the interaction was very brief (only 5 minutes), the stressor was idiosyncratic, and the forced interaction styles (emotional, instrumental) both reduced personal control and may be incompatible with preferred social coping styles for either or both the subject and the partner. In fact, we did not examine differences among attachment groups in actual behaviors of mobilizing and seeking support in real-life situations and in their responses to the support received. It is recommended to replicate the current study in more naturalistic settings, trying to enhance the external validity of the nature of the stressor and social interaction with a minimal loss of the internal validity of a controlled experiment. Moreover, the study should be replicated employing supportive interactions between subjects and their significant others (friends, family members) and analyzing the content of these particular interactions. Despite the above possible limitations, it seems to us that the current findings could be viewed as a further contribution to the understanding of the association between social interactions and the individual’s well-being in times of stress.

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