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Preferred social support roles and methods of communication in college students when presented with potentially anxiety-inducing interpersonal situations

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**Preferred Social Support Roles and
Methods of Communication in College Students
When Presented with Potentially
Anxiety-Inducing Interpersonal Situations**

By

Alexander Nicholas Poh

Accepted in Partial Completion
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

Kathleen L. Kitto, PhD, Dean of the Graduate School

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Alexander Nicholas Poh
January 14, 2014

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When Presented with Potentially
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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of

Western Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science

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January 2014

Abstract

Person by situation, or interactional, psychology predicts that an individual's anxiety will vary across situations. Past studies noted that anxiety increased the likelihood that an individual sought others for social support. Anxiety also affected the method of communication used by individuals. According to the richness model of anxiety, higher anxiety scores are associated with indirect or low richness methods of communication and lower anxiety scores are associated with direct or high richness methods of communication. This study used a person by situation approach to examine both whom participants sought and the method of communication used when presented with potentially anxiety-inducing interpersonal situations. Participants took part in a survey that consisted of a revised Taylor's Manifest Anxiety Scale, Stimulus-Response Anxiety Inventory, and questions that required participants to report the role of the primary social support provider the participant would seek and the method of communication they would use to communicate with the primary social support provider. Anxiety scores associated with seeking primary social support providers were not significantly different within any situation nor did anxiety scores follow the richness model of anxiety. Regardless of the situation or anxiety, participants frequently sought friends and parents. Participants preferred high richness methods of communication regardless of situation or anxiety, which did not support the richness model of anxiety.

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Preferred Social Support Roles and Methods of Communication in College Students When Presented with Potentially Anxiety-Inducing Interpersonal Situations

In stressful situations, it is likely that an individual would feel some level of anxiety (e.g., Davis, DiStefano, & Schutz, 2008; Winstead, Derlega, Lewis, & Sanchez-Hucles, 1992). In order to reduce the stress associated with such situations, an individual will seek out social support (Gino, Brooks, & Schweitzer, 2012). Buss (2008) suggests that social support is a basic human need. If social support is essential, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears (2006) identified a serious problem regarding the status of social support in our society. Based on their research findings, they noted that individuals had fewer confidants with which stressors could be discussed than individuals had in the mid 1980's; they defined confidants as individuals who were regularly sought for both important and mundane issues. For participants in their study, confidants an individual had were unlikely to be sought when stressed. If social support is as important as Buss (2008) suggests, yet individuals do not seek social support when stressed, how do they resolve their anxiety? When anxious, do individuals truly not look for social support or has the current literature failed to identify whom those individuals sought?

Charles Dickens wrote in *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* "I admire machinery as much as any man, and am as thankful to it as any man can be for what it does for us. But, it will never be a substitute for the face of a man, with his soul in it, encouraging another man to be brave and true" (1856, p. 39-40). Regardless of whether our social networks are large and technologically mediated methods of communication are abundant (Barabasi, 2003) when stressed, face-to-face communication should be the most effective way to reduce the perceived anxiety. The purpose of this study was twofold: to understand how anxiety

affected who individuals sought when presented with an anxiety-inducing interpersonal situation and 2) how anxiety affected the method of communications that participants chose.

Social support is believed to be sought when individuals deem themselves unable to sufficiently cope with a situation (Lazarus & Launier, 1978; as cited in Cohen & Wills, 1985). Social support provides a buffer against stress (Cohen & Wills, 1985), anxiety (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Leon, Nouwen, Sheffield, Jaumdally, & Lip, 2010), depression (Cheung, Leung, & Cheung, 2011; Cohen & Wills 1985; Yeh, Ko, Wu, & Cheng, 2008) and protects against negative physiological problems such as heightened cardiovascular response to stress and increased blood pressure (e.g., Chaplin, Hong, Bergquist, & Sinha, 2008; Christenfeld, Gerin, Linden, & Sanders, 1997; Mezuk, Roux, & Seeman, 2010).

House (1981; as cited in Cooke, Rossmann, McCubbin, & Patterson, 1988), noted that there are several kinds of social support. Emotional support is associated with the availability of at least one supportive person with whom the stressed individual can confide in (Cohen, 2004) or be counted on to provide comfort and care (Cutrona, 1990 as cited in Florian, Mikulincer, & Bucholtz, 1995). Informational support is defined by the ability to communicate an idea to another who can reassure or console the individual in need of support (Robinson & Tian, 2009). Instrumental support is defined by the provision of services or abilities that can be used to resolve the threat felt by an individual (Cutrona, 1990 as cited in Florian et al., 1995). While these forms of social support are different, the forms are interrelated (Cooke et al., 1988; Florian et al., 1995). Because these forms of social support are related and often used in conjunction with each other, it is difficult to separate one form from another (Florian et al., 1995; Levy, 1989). Regardless of the type of support

given, in order for the support to be effective, it should counteract the stress or threat the stressed individual perceived to exist within the situation (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Situations that produce stress or threat vary. These situations often involve, but are not limited to, public speaking (e.g., Christenfeld et al., 1997; Kirschbaum, Klauer, Filipp, & Hellhammer, 1995; Slater, Pertaub, Baker, & Clark, 2006), loss of loved ones (e.g., Ha & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2011); illness (e.g., Helgeson & Cohen, 1996; Hughes, Tomlinson, Blumenthal, Davidson, Sketch, & Watkins, 2004; Mezuk et al., 2010; Robinson & Tian, 2009), disability (e.g., Lysaght, Fabrigar, Larmour-Trode, Stewart, Friesen, 2012), forced relocation (i.e. refugees; Stewart, Simich, Shizha, Makumbe, & Makwarimba, 2012), dating (e.g., Allen, Bourhis, Emmers-Sommer, & Sahlstein, 1998; La Greca & Mackey, 2007), uncertainty (e.g., Carleton, Sharpe, & Asmundson, 2007; Durlanto, Nishida, & Nakayama, 2005), test taking (Davis et al., 2008), driving (e.g., Taylor, Deane, & Podd, 2000), parent-child interaction (Hudson, Doyle, & Gar, 2009; Kalil, Gruber, Conley, & Sytniac, 1993; Tietjen & Bradley, 1985), crises (Kalafat, Gould, Munfakh, & Kleinman, 2007; Pina, Villalta, Ortiz, Gottschall, Costa, & Weems, 2008), and work-place related situations (e.g., Davis-Sacks, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1985).

An important aspect of many of these situations is the interaction between the situation, anxiety, and social support; specifically, the finding that increased social support is associated with lowered anxiety (Chaplin et al., 2008; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Ha & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2011; Helgeson & Cohen, 1996; Leon et al., 2010). This suggests that people who feel anxious will look for social support (Gino et al., 2012) and that receiving social support from another person is associated with a reduction in anxiety (Hughes, Tomlinson, Blumenthal, Davidson, Sketch, & Watkins, 2004; Kalafat et al., 2007; Kalil et al., 1993).

However, the roles many potential sources of social support play in the lives of an anxious individual have been understudied (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Robinson & Tian, 2009). Although there is evidence that an anxious individual will seek specific individuals for support (e.g., Christenfeld et al., 1997; Yeh et al., 2008), it is not often examined in terms of anxiety (Cooke et al., 1988; Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Florian et al., 1995; van Daalen, Sanders, & Willemsen, 2005). Determining whether individuals seek a social support provider for social support when presented with potentially anxiety inducing situations will allow a better understanding of how social support varies across situations and whether certain types of individuals are likely to be sought in those situations. In the current study, participants were permitted to choose any source of social support they wished. This allowed a freedom of choice not found in studies that force participants to choose from potentially vague (Cheung et al., 2011; Pina et al., 2008) or pre-defined (Cheung et al., 2011; Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Ha & Ingersoll-Dayton, 2011; Mezuk et al., 2010; Pina et al., 2008 van Daalen et al., 2005) sources of social support.

Whom do Individuals Seek for Social Support?

When presented with a situation that warrants social support, regardless of whether it was anxiety inducing, there are several different sources of social support that individuals have been allowed to choose. Often, researchers experimentally manipulate which types of individuals were available to be chosen to provide social support. In many cases, this meant providing either a friend or a confederate (e.g., Christenfeld et al., 1997; Kirschbaum et al., 1995; Matsuzaki, Kojo, & Tanaka, 1993). Researchers using this methodology often reported that participants found that friends provided more support than confederates did.

Researchers that allowed participants more freedom to determine who they sought for social support determined that there are several common sources. Aside from friends, romantic partners (Cooke et al., 1988; Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Florian et al., 1995; Kalil et al., 1993; Tietjen & Bradley, 1985), parents (Florian et al., 1995), children (Cooke et al., 1998), relatives (Cheung et al., 2011; Cooke et al., 1998; Florian et al., 1995), co-workers (Cooke et al., 1998; Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Florian et al., 1995; Lysaght et al., 2012), supervisors (Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Florian et al., 1995; Lysaght et al., 2012), religious groups (Cheung et al., 2011; Cooke et al., 1998), community groups (Cooke et al., 1998), those in professional helping careers (Cheung et al., 2011; Cooke et al., 1998; Levy, 1989; Kalafat, Gould, Munfakh, & Kleinman, 2007), and media outlets (TV, radio, etc.; Cooke et al., 1998; Levy, 1989) are all sources of social support that have been studied. Note that while these sources have been studied to some degree, there are likely to be other sources of support that have not been well studied concerning anxiety.

When Anxious, Whom do Individuals Seek for Social Support?

Studies that examine social support and anxiety have noted that there are differences in which individuals are sought compared to the studies that did not specifically examine anxiety-inducing situations. The difference between an anxiety-inducing situation and a non-anxiety-inducing situation is subjective. In order for social support to be sought, the individual in need of support must perceive that he or she cannot cope with the situation on his or her own (Lazarus & Launier, 1978; as cited in Cohen & Wills, 1985). Additionally, as anxiety varies between individuals (Endler et al., 1962), it is difficult to determine what factors make a situation anxiety inducing. As few studies have directly addressed which social support roles are sought in a situation, the known sources of social support for anxiety

inducing situations are limited. There is evidence to suggest that an individual may seek out specific sources of social support when presented with anxiety-inducing situations.

Friends. Within the social support literature, a friend is someone who has been found to be a reliable source of social support when an individual is presented with an anxiety-inducing situation (Cheung et al., 2011; Ha et al., 2011; Matsuzaki et al., 1993; Rose, Carlson, & Waller, 2007). When asked to complete potentially anxiety-inducing tasks such as word puzzles in front of cameras (Matsuzaki et al., 1993) or giving a speech in front of an audience (Christenfeld et al., 1997), participants who had a supportive friend present during the task were less anxious than participants accompanied by either a supportive or neutral stranger. Friends were also sources of social support that individuals were likely to seek when dealing with mental or physical health issues (Cheung et al., 2011), seemingly serious social problems (Rose et al., 2007), a crisis (Pina et al., 2008), the loss of a spouse (Ha et al., 2011), or a disability (Lysaght et al., 2012).

Friends are likely to be sought when an individual is anxious because friends share similar interests and are often in close proximity to each other (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001). The fact that friends share similar interests is no coincidence. Researchers examining homophily note that individuals that are similar in one or more ways, and/or live in close proximity to each other, group together (McPherson et al., 2001). As those that are similar are likely to share common beliefs and economic standing, their experiences in life will often be similar. It is likely that while similar, the specific experiences of one individual will vary and thus, one individual will be able to advise the other should the other individual be presented with a similar situation. Additionally, because the individuals are often in close proximity to one another, it is likely that the sought individual would be relatively easy to

seek when the stressed individual is in need of support. Because of the similarity and proximity between friends and because support from friends reduces anxiety, friends should be sought when anxious.

Parents. Like friends, family members are important sources of social support when an individual is presented with an anxiety-inducing situation. However, due to the use of terms such as *extrafamilial* (Pina et al., 2008) and *relatives* (Cheung et al., 2008), it is often difficult to determine the individual or individuals who were sought for assistance.

Regardless, family members are sources of support when dealing with mental and physical health issues (Cheung et al., 2011), coping with crises (Pina et al., 2008), and work related disabilities (Lysaght et al., 2012). While it is not clear which family members are most likely to be sought, the existing research in social support and communication points toward two sources of social support that an individual would seek for social support when presented with an anxiety-inducing situation: an individual's parents.

Mothers. Mothers are likely to be chosen by an individual who has been presented with an anxiety-inducing situation. Anxious individuals were likely to interact with their mother when they were anxious (Hudson et al., 2009). Mothers also act as a secure base for their children (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970), behave consistently over time (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972), and are noted as being able to predict the needs of their children (Winnicott, 1975). In addition, there is evidence that securely attached individuals seek emotional and instrumental social support from their mother (Florian et al., 1995). Based upon such findings, if mothers can be consistently relied upon to be available to support their children and reduce their children's anxiety, then when an individual is anxious, an individual will be likely to seek their mother.

Fathers. Researchers have not closely examined whether fathers would be likely to be sought for social support in an anxiety-inducing situation. Fathers appear to be less responsive and emotionally available for their children compared to mothers (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1991) and are one of the last figures to be sought for social support (Florian et al., 1995). Fathers often interact with their children in a more spontaneous or “in the moment” style (Ashbourne, Daly, & Brown, 2011) compared to mothers who behave in a consistent manner (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972). However, if an individual needs to know how to accomplish a task, fathers are sought for social support (Florian et al., 1995). Additionally, a secure attachment with a father is associated with a better relationship than a non-secure relationship (Brown, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, 2012). Thus, if fathers are less emotionally available, behave irregularly, and sought after mothers, it is likely that a father would not be a commonly chosen source of social support.

While it may appear that mothers would be more likely to be sought in an anxiety-inducing situation than fathers would, there is evidence that the gender of the parent may be irrelevant. Securely attached individuals are equally likely to turn to mothers or fathers after an emotionally strenuous event (Sheldon, Thompson, & Earl, 1985). This suggests that the term *parent* was sufficient when asking a participant who an individual would seek when presented with an anxiety-inducing situation. Based on the preceding evidence, it was expected that an individual’s parents would be likely sources of social support.

Romantic partners. In addition to an individual’s parents, romantic partners or spouses are likely sources of social support to be sought in an anxiety-inducing situation. After discussing stressful events with their husbands, wives reported reduced anxiety compared to women who did not discuss the situation (Kalil et al., 1993; Tietjen & Bradley,

1985). As wives reported lower anxiety after interacting with their husbands, when presented with an anxiety-inducing situation, wives are likely to seek their husband for support.

While there is evidence that a wife would seek her husband, there is less evidence to suggest that a husband would speak with his wife in regards to an anxiety-inducing situation. There is evidence that individuals want to talk with their spouse about emotional or stressful events (Cooke et al., 1988; Davis-Sacks et al., 1985) and that discussing these events reduced stress (Freeman, Carlson, & Sperry, 1993). Perrin et al. (2011) found that men were as capable in providing relationship support as women, substantiating studies that described women going to their husbands to discuss stressful events. It also implied that both husbands and wives received support, suggesting that husbands were likely to go to their wives for support. This was supported by the finding that an individual's romantic partner was perceived to be the person who would be the most available to obtain social support (Florian et al., 1995). With this in mind, it was likely that an individual would seek their spouse because discussing stressful events with him or her is associated with a reduction in anxiety. This implies that a husband would seek his wife similar to the way a wife seeks her husband when stressed.

One reason it is not clear whether husbands would seek their wives may be due to differences in how the support was sought. Gau (2011) noted that husbands expect that their wives will anticipate their needs, similar to the way their mother may have anticipated their needs as a child (Winnicott, 1975). If husbands expect their wives to anticipate their needs, this means that husbands are less likely to discuss a situation, unless their wives initiate the conversation.

Professional helpers. Professional helpers represent a variety of different social support roles that may be sought when presented with an anxiety-inducing situation. While the type of help is not always specified (e.g., Pina et al., 2008), individuals will seek these kinds of social support roles when anxious. When depressed, a condition strongly associated with anxiety (e.g., Clark & Watson, 1991; Hughes, Heimberg, Coles, Gibb, Liebowitz, & Schneier, 2006), individuals have been found to seek help from crisis hotline operators (Kalafat et al., 2007).

Work related figures. Those an individual works with or attends school with are potential sources of social support that can be sought when anxious. However, there are some potential sources of social support that are less likely to be chosen than others. Davis-Sacks et al. (1985) examined social support in the workplace and noted that workers were more likely to discuss stressful work-related situations with their co-workers than their supervisors. This finding was extended in Løvseth and Aasland (2010) which noted that co-workers would seek each other out in order to discuss work-related stressors. In non-anxiety-inducing situations, both co-workers and supervisors were likely to be sought for social support (van Daalen et al., 2005). Additionally, like friends, co-workers are likely to share similar experiences. Because they share some similarities and could provide advice on work-related stressors, the likelihood that co-workers will be sought increases. Thus, co-workers will be sought because they share similarities in experience yet may only be sought in situations that relate to the workplace.

Strangers and acquaintances. Studies that examined the effect of friends on an individual's anxiety level, noted that when presented with an anxiety-inducing situation and supported by a stranger, anxiety was significantly higher than when supported by a friend

(Matsuzaki et al., 1993). This effect was also found with acquaintances. Richmond (1978) found that relationships with acquaintances were associated with high levels of communication apprehension, which has been associated with increased anxiety (e.g., Klopf & Cambra, 1979).

While friends, parents, spouses, professional helpers, co-workers, supervisors, and strangers are all sources of social support that could be sought when presented with an anxiety-inducing situation, it is not meant to be a comprehensive list of all the sources of social support that an individual could seek. Researchers have noted that the relationships that exist between an individual and those they seek for social support have not been thoroughly examined (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Robinson & Tian, 2009). It is possible that there are sources of social support that have not been included in studies, yet are still effective sources of social support. In order to attempt to incorporate potentially understudied sources of social support, participants in the current study were free to choose any person they would like rather than selecting from pre-defined groups of social support roles. This allowed sources of social support to be chosen that might not be chosen due to broadly worded social support terms (Cheung et al., 2008; Pina et al., 2008), or due to being forced to choose only from a pre-defined set of figures (Cheung et al., 2011; Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Pina et al., 2008 van Daalen et al., 2005).

How do Individuals Communicate their Anxiety?

While there is limited evidence regarding whom an individual would seek when presented with an anxiety-inducing situation, researchers have examined the methods of communication that anxious individuals used to contact others when faced with various situations. These methods of communication differed in their level of “richness”, or the

ability for information to be perceived in a variety of ways (Daft & Lengel, 1986; Hertel, Schroer, Batinic, & Naumann, 2008). The richness of a method of communication is based upon the number of *channels* that facilitate comprehension of the communication. Methods of communication that are high in richness are methods that include multiple channels with which a message can be understood (e.g., listening to a conversation partner and viewing associated body language). Methods of communication that represent low levels of richness will utilize fewer cues that can be used to understand a message (e.g., only listening to a conversation partner). Researchers have found that individuals are likely to use different methods of communication depending upon their anxiety level.

Hertel et al. (2008) examined whether personality and self-efficacy determined an individual's communication preferences. Extraversion and neuroticism were examined because extraversion was believed to be a predictor of good social skills while neuroticism was believed to be a predictor of social anxiety. The researchers found that personality affected participants' preferred method of communication. Individuals low in extraversion and high in neuroticism were likely to prefer to communicate via email, whereas individuals high in extraversion and low in neuroticism were likely to prefer to communicate via face-to-face conversations. For participants with low extraversion and high neuroticism, social anxiety, which was used to represent low self-efficacy, mediated their decision to choose to communicate using a low richness method of communication. Additionally, only those high in extraversion and low in neuroticism preferred situations involving stressful situations, whereas those low in extraversion and high in neuroticism tended to avoid stressful situations. Thus, individuals who were anxious preferred email as their method of communication, a low richness method of communication, and preferred to not involve

themselves in anxiety inducing situations whereas those with less anxiety preferred face-to-face communication, a high richness method of communication.

A similar finding was reported when examining whether individuals preferred to send text messages or talk on the phone. Reid and Reid (2007) asked participants to respond to a survey that determined their social anxiety, loneliness, and both their usage of text messaging and their preference for text messaging or talking on a cell phone. Those participants who were more anxious were likely to prefer to communicate via text messages, whereas those that were less anxious were less likely to prefer text messages. If viewed in regard to communication richness, text messaging is less rich than talking on a cell phone which provides both syntactic information and emotional valences.

To be clear, the individuals who sought social interaction were also likely to use text messaging, but preferred to communicate verbally over the phone. For those who were anxious, increases in anxiety were associated with a decreased likelihood to contact anyone. Reid and Reid (2007) noted that their results might have been affected by a preponderance of female participants, suggesting that the findings may not extend to males. At the time this paper was written, no study had attempted to replicate these findings with male participants. Additionally, participants gave their own estimates rather than utilizing a more objective measure of their communication preference.

Facebook was commonly used by anxious individuals according to Sheldon (2008) who examined unwillingness to communicate and the motives that individuals had when expressing themselves on Facebook. Specifically, Sheldon created a survey to assess one's willingness to communicate and how Facebook was used for that purpose. The study did not find that anxious individuals were more likely to use Facebook than non-anxious individuals.

Rather, it appeared that anxious individuals used Facebook because they felt anxious when engaging in face-to-face conversations. The study did not note whether Facebook was perceived as an anxiety neutral method of communication or whether Facebook use was simply less anxiety inducing than interacting with others in face-to-face conversations.

Thus, an individual's preferred method of communication appeared to be affected by anxiety, with high anxiety associated with preferences for low richness methods of communication and low anxiety associated with preferences for high richness methods of communication. Specifically, individuals who are more anxious preferred e-mail, text messages, and Facebook more than those who were less anxious, who preferred face-to-face and phone conversations. It should be noted that studies that examined anxiety and methods of communication, have assessed trait-level anxiety, not state-level anxiety, the construct of interest in the current study. One question this study intended to answer was whether the trait-level findings could be replicated when participants were presented with a variety of potentially anxiety inducing situations, which assessed a state-level of anxiety.

An Interactional Approach to Role Seeking and Preferred Methods of Communication

The interaction between situations and anxious behavior is the focus of study in interactional psychology. Without a situation or stimulus to provoke a behaviorally anxious response, there is little reason to believe that anxious behavior should present itself. Interactional, or person by situation psychology, examines how individuals' behavior varies across situations (Endler, 1975; Endler & Magnusson, 1976). Researchers in this field assume that individuals react differently when presented with the same situation. This behavioral variation between an individual and a situation is the essence of interactional psychology.

As one of the focuses of interactional psychology is based on an individual's personality, and because anxiety is a well-studied facet of an individual's personality, it is no wonder that anxiety has been studied using an interactional approach. Endler, Hunt, and Rosenstein (1962) created the Stimulus Response Anxiety Inventory (SRAI), a measure specifically designed to examine anxiety in a variety of situations using questions referring to physiological responses commonly found when an individual was anxious. An interactional approach examining an individual's behavior (i.e., anxiety) in a variety of situations was important to this study. Using the SRAI, this study was able to examine participants' anxiety in a variety of situations and simultaneously determine which social support roles and which methods of communication were sought in each situation.

Hypotheses

1) The first part of this study explores whether SRAI anxiety scores vary among individuals who identify different primary sources of social support (e.g., friend versus parent versus romantic partner). No specific hypotheses are made.

2) Participants who rate an interpersonal situation as inducing a higher amount of anxiety will be more likely to prefer low richness methods of communication (text messages, emails, and Facebook), whereas participants who rate an interpersonal situation as inducing a lower amount of anxiety will be more likely to prefer high richness methods of communication (face-to-face conversations and cell phone calls).

Method

Participants

Western Washington University psychology 101 students ($n = 199$) completed an online survey. Most participants were female ($n = 143$) and white ($n = 151$). Surveys were

accessible to students at Western Washington University who had registered on the Service-Oriented Network Architecture research website (<http://western.sona-systems.com/Default.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f>) and were completed in order to fulfill a research requirement.

Measures

Manifest anxiety scale. A variant of Taylor's Manifest Anxiety Scale (MAS; Taylor, 1953) was used to assess participants' baseline (trait-level) of anxiety. The MAS consisted of 50 true or false statements such as *I do not tire quickly* and *I worry over money and business*. All statements in this measure reflected physiological responses to anxiety. Hoyt and Magoon (1954) noted that of the 50 statements, 30 statements were not valid predictors of anxiety. Bendig (1956) suggested that the measure should be revised to include only the 20 valid true or false statements. The revision to the MAS is a reliable ($\alpha = .76$) and valid measure of anxiety (Bendig, 1956). Anxiety scores were calculated by the number of statements that were answered that signified anxiety. For example, if a participant chose *true* when presented with the statement *I do not tire quickly*, this signified a low level of anxiety and their overall anxiety score would not increase. However, if a participant chose *true* when presented with the statement *I worry over money and business*, this signified anxiety and the participant's overall anxiety score would increase by one point. Higher scores on this measure represented higher anxiety. Possible scores ranged from zero (low anxiety) to 20 (high anxiety).

Stimulus response anxiety inventory. The Stimulus Response Anxiety Inventory (SRAI; Endler, Hunt, & Rosenstein, 1962) assessed anxiety via potentially anxiety-inducing situations. The SRAI is a highly reliable ($\alpha = .97$; Endler et al., 1962) and valid measure of

anxiety (Endler & Okada, 1975). Situations in this measure have been factor analyzed into four types of situations: ambiguous situations, situations emphasizing fear of the unknown, situations containing environmental or inanimate stimuli, and interpersonal situations.

Of these four types of situations examined in the SRAI (Endler et al., 1962), this study utilized only the interpersonal situations. The current study was limited to interpersonal situations due to the common usage of interpersonal situations in social support research (e.g., Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Matsuzaki et al., 1993; Pina et al., 2008). Interpersonal situations in the SRAI (Endler et al., 1962; Endler & Okada, 1975) consisted of situations assessing anxiety in a dating situation (*You are about to go out on a first date*), anxiety in a competition situation (*You are about to begin a competition in front of spectators*), anxiety in a speech situation (*You are getting up to give a speech before a large group*), anxiety in a test situation (*You are about to begin the final examination for an important course*), and anxiety in an innocuous situation (*You are going about your daily routine*). The innocuous situation served as a control with which to compare the other situations.

Each situation in the SRAI was followed by nine questions used to assess physiological responses associated with feelings of anxiety. Examples of these questions include: *Have an uneasy feeling* and *Feel tense*. Of the nine questions, three assessed excitement or enjoyment of the situations (i.e., *Seek experiences like this* and *Enjoy these situations*) and were reverse coded. All situations were scored on a 5-point Likert scale with a score of 1 indicating strong disagreement with the statement, and a score of 5 indicating strong agreement with the statement. After reverse coding where appropriate, the possible scores of the SRAI ranged from nine (low anxiety) to 45 (high anxiety).

Pre-testing. After feedback on the SRAI situations, several psychology graduate students noted that the wording of the situations was difficult to understand. In order to reduce potential misunderstandings regarding the content of the survey, the SRAI was adapted to fit a contemporary context. The adapted versions of the interpersonal situations retained the same situations and meaning using slightly altered phrasing. Additionally, several students noted that the physiological questions were vague and often confusing. Based on these comments, the questions within the SRAI were clarified by incorporating the phrase into a short sentence and by directing the question at the participant. The only significant change to the situations was to replace *You are going about your daily routine* with *You are reading for recreational purposes*. This allowed the control situation to be a concrete example rather than potentially vague or ambiguous. The situation *You are about to begin the final examination for an important course* was changed to *You are about to give an oral presentation in front of a professor* in order for it to better fit the interpersonal theme of the other situations. The reliability statistics of the modified situations were calculated to verify their utility.

Procedure

The questions of interest were incorporated into a Survey Analysis Package (SNAP) survey (Johnson, Handsaker, Pulit, Nizzari, O'Donnell, & de Bakker, 2008) and uploaded onto the internet. Due to limitations on the part of SNAP, two surveys were created. Both surveys contained the same information, one survey presented participants with the MAS immediately after the demographics and the other survey presented participants with the MAS after the final anxiety-inducing situation has been completed.

Before beginning the survey, participants were given a brief description of the purpose of the study, a description of the survey's layout, and an estimate of the time it would take to complete the study. After reading the description of the study, participants were asked to read a consent form and check a box at the bottom of the page signifying that they understood the purpose of the study and agreed to take part in it. Next, participants were asked to answer a brief demographic portion of the survey where they were asked to report their gender and ethnicity.

After completing the demographic information, participants were presented with instructions explaining what they would be asked to do in the study. It was made clear that the study's purpose was not to measure the speed in which they completed the study nor would responses be deemed "right" or "wrong."

Participants were then presented with the revised version of Taylor's Manifest Anxiety Scale (MAS) in order to assess their baseline level of anxiety. To counterbalance and control for the potential effect of the MAS, half of the participants were presented with the MAS only at the beginning of the study and half were presented with the MAS only at the end of the study.

Participants were only able to view one situation at a time and were not able to return to a previous situation or questions concerning a previous situation. The situation was always presented at the top of the screen in order to ensure that participants could re-read it if necessary. Each situation included two parts. The first portion was a measure of anxiety in a situation measured via the SRAI (Endler & Okada, 1975). The second part was an assessment examining whom the participant would want to discuss the situation with first and the method of communication the participant would choose to contact the social support

provider the participant selected. After listing the social support role they would seek for social support, they were asked to specify the person's gender and select the method that they would use to contact the individual they listed. After completing both portions of the survey for the situation, participants were presented with another randomly chosen situation. This process repeated until all five situations were completed. After completing all portions of the survey, the participant was thanked and given research credit.

In order to analyze the primary social support provider and method of communication data, categories were created. Primary social support provider data was grouped into friend, romantic partner, parent, helping professional, sibling, and roommate categories, with any category sought less than 10 times represented as missing data. Method of communication data was grouped into high (face-to-face and phone call) and low (text message, e-mail, and Facebook) richness categories, with no contact and other methods of communication coded as missing data.

Results

Manipulation Checks

Participants reported significantly different levels of anxiety in different situations, $F(4, 792) = 382.25, p = .01$. Tukey HSD post-hoc testing revealed that anxiety scores in both the dating situation ($M = 27.16, SD = 6.76$) and competition situation ($M = 28.49, SD = 5.65$) were significantly lower than anxiety scores in the presentation situation ($M = 33.41, SD = 6.13$) and the speech situation ($M = 34.37, SD = 6.49$). Anxiety scores in the reading situation ($M = 16.21, SD = 4.65$) were significantly lower than all other situations. The scores of the competition and dating situations were not statistically different. The scores of the presentation and the speech situations were not statistically different.

A measure of covariation between the baseline measure of anxiety (MAS) and the measure of anxiety in the innocuous reading situation was necessary in order to determine if the two measures were correlated (Howell, 2010) and to determine whether the reading situation was an effective baseline measure of anxiety. A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between the MAS and reading situation, as both the MAS and the reading situation were meant to serve as baseline measures of anxiety (Endler & Okada, 1975; Taylor, 1952). No statistically significant relationship existed between anxiety scores found in the MAS and the anxiety scores in the reading situation, $r(197) = .07, p = .34$.

Randomization Check

An independent t-test revealed that there was no significant difference in anxiety scores when the MAS was presented at the beginning of the study or when the MAS was presented at the end of the study, $t(197) = .86, p = .39$.

Reliability Measures

The Cronbach's alpha of the revised, twenty-question, version of the MAS (Bendig, 1956) was 0.66. This was lower than the reliability of the original, fifty-question version of the MAS (Taylor, 1953; $\alpha = 0.76$). The current Cronbach's alpha of the SRAI scores varied across situations. Overall, the reliability of the competition situation ($\alpha = 0.84$), dating situation ($\alpha = 0.77$), presentation situation ($\alpha = 0.85$), reading situation ($\alpha = 0.67$), and speech situation ($\alpha = 0.87$) were lower yet still reliable when compared to the original reliability measure ($\alpha = 0.97$; Endler et al., 1962).

The Effect of Anxiety on Social Support Roles Sought

The social support providers that were sought by participants were divided into six social support provider categories: friends, romantic partners, parents, helping professionals, siblings, and roommates. While some participants reported providers that did not fit into one of the previously mentioned categories, no other potential category of social support provider was consistently sought more than 10 times. Rather than creating many small categories, social support providers sought less than 10 times in a situation were coded as missing data in order to allow the analyses to retain power. See Table 1 for the frequencies and percentages of each of the categorized social support providers in each situation.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted in each situation to test whether there were significant differences between the SRAI scores of those who sought a friend, romantic partner, parent, helping professional, sibling, or roommate. For descriptive data of the social support categories' anxiety scores in each situation, see Table 2.

Competition situation. The anxiety scores of those who sought friends, romantic partners, parents, helping professionals, and roommates when presented with a competition situation were compared. Due to low sample size of those who sought a sibling in the competition situation ($n = 7$), those who sought a sibling were not included in the ANOVA. Anxiety scores for those individuals who sought friends, romantic partners, parents, helping professionals, and roommates in the competition situation were not significantly different, $F(4,182) = 2.26, p = .06$.

Date situation. The anxiety scores of those who sought friends, parents, siblings, and roommates when presented with a date situation were compared. In the date situation, no participant sought helping professionals. Due to the low sample size of those who sought a

romantic partner in the date situation ($n = 7$), those who sought a romantic partner were not included in the ANOVA. Anxiety scores for those who sought friends, parents, siblings, and roommates in the date situation were not significantly different, $F(3,183) = 1.86, p = .14$.

Presentation situation. The anxiety scores of those who sought friends, romantic partners, parents, helping professionals, siblings, and roommates when presented with a presentation situation were compared. Anxiety scores for those who sought friends, romantic partners, parents, helping professionals, siblings, and roommates in the presentation situation were not significantly different, $F(5,186) = .93, p = .46$.

Reading situation. The anxiety scores of those who sought friends, romantic partners, parents, and roommates when presented with a reading situation were compared. Due to low sample sizes of those who sought a helping professional ($n = 4$) or a sibling in the reading situation ($n = 7$), those who sought a helping professional or a sibling were not included in the ANOVA. Anxiety scores for those who sought friends, romantic partners, parents, and roommates in the reading situation were not significantly different, $F(3,160) = 1.22, p = .30$.

Speech situation. The anxiety scores of those who sought friends, romantic partners, parents, helping professionals, siblings, and roommates when presented with a speech situation were compared. Anxiety scores for those who sought friends, romantic partners, parents, helping professionals, siblings, and roommates in the speech situation were not significantly different, $F(5,185) = .25, p = .94$.

The Effect of Anxiety on the Preferred Method of Communication

The methods of communication preferred by participants were categorized as either high-richness or low-richness. Face-to-face and phone call methods of communication were

combined into the high-richness methods of communication category. Text message, e-mail, and Facebook methods of communication were combined into the low-richness method of communication. In order to examine the richness theory of communication, those who reported that they would not communicate or would use another, unspecified method of communication, were coded as missing data. See Table 3 for the frequencies and percentages of the high and low richness methods of communication in each situation.

An independent t-test was conducted in each situation to test whether there was a significant difference in SRAI scores between those who preferred high-richness methods of communication and those who preferred low-richness methods of communication. For descriptive data of each of the different richness methods of communication's anxiety scores in each situation, see Table 4. Homogeneity of variance was not violated in any situation.

Competition situation. There was no significant difference in the SRAI scores of participants preferring high versus low richness methods of communication when presented with the competition situation, $t(192) = .36, p = .72$.

Date situation. There was no significant difference in the SRAI scores of participants preferring high versus low richness methods of communication when presented with the date situation, $t(193) = 1.28, p = .20$.

Presentation situation. There was no significant difference in the SRAI scores of participants preferring high versus low richness methods of communication when presented with the presentation situation, $t(186) = .07, p = .94$.

Reading situation. There was no significant difference in the SRAI scores of participants preferring high versus low richness methods of communication when presented with the reading situation, $t(161) = 1.47, p = .15$. A large number of participants chose no

communication or other method of communication ($n = 36$) in the reading situation compared to the other situations. A one-way ANOVA comparing the SRAI scores of high richness, low richness, and a third communication category consisting of those who preferred to not communicate or to use another method of communication, revealed no significant difference, $F(2, 196) = 1.20, p = .30$.

Speech situation. There was no significant difference in the SRAI scores of participants preferring high versus low richness methods of communication when presented with the speech situation, $t(191) = 1.20, p = .23$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to examine whom participants sought for social support when presented with a variety of potentially anxiety-inducing interpersonal situations and 2) to examine whether anxiety affected the richness of the method of communication chosen by participants when presented with a variety of potentially anxiety-inducing interpersonal situations. The situations presented in this study varied significantly in the induced level of anxiety. However, anxiety scores in each situation did not predict participants' choice of primary social support provider or their preferred method of communication.

The Effect of Anxiety on Social Support Provider

Anxiety scores associated with the presentation of a variety of potentially anxiety-inducing interpersonal situations did not predict participants' choice of primary social support provider in any situation, and thus hypothesis 1 was rejected. Researchers interested in support-seeking behavior found evidence that participants sought friends (e.g., Cheung et al., 2011; Christenfeld et al., 1997; Matsuzaki et al., 1993; Rose et al., 2007), parents (e.g.,

Cheung et al., 2011; Florian et al., 1995; Hudson et al., 2009; Pina et al., 2008), romantic partners (e.g., Cooke et al., 1988; Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Florian et al., 1995; Kalil et al., 1993; Tietjen & Bradley, 1985), professional helpers (e.g., Kalafat et al., 2007; Pina et al., 2008), and co-workers (e.g., Davis-Sacks et al., 1985; Løvseth & Aasland, 2010) in individual potentially anxiety-inducing situations. However, few studies have statistically examined the association between anxiety and social support provider and no previous study has statistically examined whether anxiety could predict the social support provider in the situations presented in the current study. Pina et al. (2008) examined the correlation between anxiety scores and several pre-defined social support providers and found anxiety to be negatively, but not significantly, correlated with receiving support from family members, unspecified extrafamilial sources, and professional helpers. Davis-Sacks et al., (1985) found anxiety to be significantly lower when participants sought support from a romantic partner. Thus, anxiety scores were lower in previous studies when family, unspecified extrafamilial sources of social support, romantic partners, and professional helpers were sought, a finding not replicated in the current study. Although anxiety did not predict seeking any social support provider in the current study, it is worth noting that friends and parents were the most frequently sought social support provider categories.

The prevalence of friend and parent seeking behavior may be related to the university sample. Due to the ease with which a participant has access to friends in a university setting, it would be reasonable to seek friends out when stressed as proximity between individuals increases their likelihood to interact (McPherson et al., 2001). However, this study did not assess whether the friends sought by participants were friends that lived in or near the university, meaning there was no way to know whether the friends that were sought also

attended the same university or whether they were friends from home or another location. It is likely that because friends reduce anxiety (e.g., Matsuzaki et al., 1993), when presented with potentially anxiety-inducing situations, participants sought friends because those friends reduced their anxiety in the past. Although the rationale for seeking a friend was not able to be determined in the current study, it is likely that both the ease with which a friend could be sought and experiences with friends could explain why friends were frequently sought.

Concerning parent-seeking behavior, it is likely that because most of the participants were freshman, most had just left home for the first time and were still emotionally attached to their parents. If children sought their parents for social support during early childhood (e.g., Sheldon et al., 1985), there was little reason to believe that college students would completely stop seeking parents as a potential social support provider; in fact, there is evidence that students continue to seek out parents for support during college (Kenny, 1987).

Studies that provided evidence for friend or parent-seeking behaviors (Christenfeld et al., 1997; Matsuzaki et al., 1993; Sheldon, Thompson, & Earl, 1985), examined anxiety after social support was received. No social support was ever received in the current study; participants were only asked to think of and report the social support provider that they would want to talk with about a specified situation. The difference between actually receiving social support and hypothetically receiving social support from those providers has not been studied yet may be one reason for the statistical differences in social support seeking behavior in this study compared to previous studies.

Whereas many participants sought a friend or a parent, few participants reported seeking social support from a romantic partner. Less than two percent of the sample reported being married and there was no option to report being in a romantic relationship outside of

marriage. As the sample was mostly young, with a mean age of 18.84, it may have been that participants in romantic relationships were in the early stages of the relationship and did not feel comfortable discussing stressors with their significant other or that most participants did not have a romantic partner. However, in the case that a participant did have a romantic partner, self-disclosure between romantic partners is expected (e.g., Kito, 2010). Regardless of the rationale, it appeared that the situations presented in this study were not as conducive to seeking a romantic partner as they were for seeking a friend or parent.

Helping professionals (i.e., teachers, professors, counselors, etc.), like romantic partners, were sought frequently enough to be included as a separate social support provider category yet comparatively few sought helping professionals compared to friends and parents. As the situations in this study were mostly academic in nature, and several participants reported that they would seek a teacher or professor as a social support provider, it was surprising that helping professionals were not sought more often. Participants may not have been fully aware of the academic resources (i.e., faculty, counselors, etc.) available to them, which would explain why so few reported seeking a helping professional.

Alternatively, seeking help from helping professionals may have been anxiety inducing as these figures can represent authority and thus induce authority-related anxiety (Zi, 2007).

Finally, two categories of social support providers were mentioned which have not been thoroughly examined in previous studies: roommates and siblings. While roommates and siblings were not as frequently sought as friends and parents, they were sought frequently enough to garner their own social support provider categories for statistical analyses. It is possible that the role of roommate could have been merged with the friend

category and sibling with the parent category yet there are likely important, currently unknown, differences between seeking a roommate or a friend and a sibling or a parent.

Concerning roommates and friends, two categorization options existed: first, it may have been that roommates were also friends, in which case roommate could have been merged with friend. The second option was that the proximity of the roommate made them an easy person to seek (McPherson et al., 2001), in which case roommate should be a separate category from friend as the roommate was not necessarily a friend. The first possibility should not have been the case as the directions in the study were to report the specific role of the primary social support provider that the participant wished to seek; a friend would be a more specific role than a roommate would if the participant's roommate was also his or her friend. If the second explanation was true, and ease and proximity were important, then seeking a roommate would make sense and designating roommate as a separate category would be reasonable. As one purpose of this study was to determine whether participants sought less studied sources of social support, and roommates are not well studied, roommate was categorized separately from friend.

The difference between a sibling and a parent is less clear than the difference between a roommate and a friend. Although both social support providers are familial, a sibling is unlikely to have the same effect on a participant that a parent has on a participant. For example, siblings are often similar in age and thus may experience the world in a similar fashion. Due to discrepancies in age, it is unlikely that the worldviews expressed during the parents' childhood were as similar as the worldviews shared between siblings (Sulloway, 1996). Such differences may make a sibling a more appropriate social support provider in one situation and a parent a more appropriate provider in a different situation. For the current

study, the ability to be able to differentiate between different familial social support providers would have been useful to be able to distinguish between sibling and parental roles had anxiety scores differed significantly and thus siblings and parents were separated rather than creating a more general, family social support category.

The Effect of Anxiety on Method of Communication

Anxiety did not differ between participants' preference for high or low richness methods of communication. Researchers previously found that high richness methods of communication such as face-to-face communication and phone calls were associated with low anxiety, whereas low richness methods of communication such as texting, emails, and Facebook posts were associated with high anxiety (Hertel et al., 2008; Reid & Reid, 2007; Sheldon et al., 2008). Because anxiety scores did not differ between high or low richness methods of communication, hypothesis 2 was rejected.

It is important to point out that participants were asked to report the method of communication that they would *prefer* to use, rather than those that they normally use. This distinction is important and based on the current study's findings suggest, when providing a variety of methods of communication, participants preferred to seek high richness methods of communication regardless of anxiety score (see Table 3). Both high richness methods of communication, face-to-face communication and phone call, involved auditory channels whereas all of the low richness methods of communication involved only text. The finding that participants preferred high richness methods of communication suggested that hearing the voice of the social support provider was important. This preference implied that the participants in this study had a preference to hear the social support provider they sought over simply reading something that their social support provider wrote. If studies were to

increase the ecological validity of the research by presenting the situations and allowing specific social support providers to be contacted using the participant's preferred method of communication, anxiety may more effectively predict preferences for methods of communication that were in line with the richness model of communication.

Implications

Within each situation, anxiety did not greatly affect the participants' choice of social support provider (see Table 2) or preferred method of communication (see Table 4). Anxiety only differed across situations. This finding fits well with the interactional perspective, as one of its basic tenets assumes that an individual's behavior varies across situations.

Participants wanted to talk with friends and parents more frequently than with the other social support providers (see Table 1) regardless of the situation or the associated level of anxiety induced by the situation. This finding hints at a need that goes beyond the interactional perspective. Due to the number of times that friends and parents were sought in this study, friends and parents appear to have qualities that make them valuable social support providers, regardless of the situations that participants found themselves presented with or the anxiety that may have been associated with the situations.

Finally, this study provided support for the use of the SRAI, which had not been frequently used for several decades (see Prachankis & Goldfried, 2006 for the recent exception). While the situations used in this study were adapted from Endler et al. (1962), additional studies should be conducted using this measure in situations other than the original competition, date, presentation, and speech situations.

Limitations

This study broadly examined the social support roles that were sought in a variety of interpersonal situations rather than specifying one social support role in one situation. Due to the broad nature of the study, the ability to examine the social support providers or situations was limited.

The methodology used in this study impaired the ability to determine why a specific social support provider was sought. It will be important to determine what factors into the decision to seek one social support provider over another, as it may prove invaluable for counselors and researchers. Determining which personality variables make a social support provider attractive to someone in need of support could help counselors make changes to their personality. Such changes could help counselors' clients feel more comfortable and increase the likelihood that clients will return for future counseling in order to work through situation-based anxieties.

It is likely that the situations in this study affected whom participants sought. As the majority of the potentially anxiety-inducing situations were academic in nature, this may have reduced the number of categories of social support providers that participants sought. Because the sample in this study consisted of university students, academic situations may not have been as anxiety inducing to the students as the situations might have been to someone who was not as familiar with academic situations.

The demographics were also a limiting factor. Most participants in this study were white and female. In addition, only two percent of the participants in the sample were married which may partially explain why a romantic partner was not frequently sought. It should be noted that other than asking if participants were married, participants were not

asked if they were in a romantic relationship, thus there was no way to examine whether the romantic partners that were reported by participants were real or whether they were hypothetical romantic partners that the participant wished he or she had, given the situation.

Due to the limited demographic data, little can be said as to which sources of social support would be sought or which methods of communication would be preferred by non-white or male participants. As there are important differences in the ways men and women cope with anxiety (e.g., Cleary, 2012) potential gender effects of preferred social support roles should be more closely examined. Socio-cultural differences may also predict different preferences for social support (e.g., Rodriguez, 2004).

Finally, lower reliability statistics of the SRAI and MAS were a minor limitation in this study. While the reliabilities of the SRAI were lower than the original study (Endler et al., 1962), this is likely due to several factors. First, modifications were made to the interpersonal situations in order for them to be more easily understood by current participants. Second, the current study only included the interpersonal situations rather than incorporating the ambiguous and inanimate situations found in the original study. As both of these differences were important distinctions that differentiate the original SRAI from the version used in the current study, it is reasonable that the reliability scores are not the same.

The MAS reliability score was also lower than expected. This discrepancy is likely due to the smaller, revised version used in this study rather than the full 50-question version used by Taylor (1953). Researchers should further examine whether this shortened version is reliable enough to be used in its current state. However, it was important to utilize the MAS in this study as both the MAS and the SRAI included physiological responses associated with anxiety.

Areas for Future Research

This study was the first to specifically examine which kinds of social support providers and methods of communication were sought in a variety of potentially anxiety-inducing interpersonal situations. As such, there are several avenues of research that should be examined to better understand the social support roles that participants sought and the methods of communication that participants preferred.

Researchers should compare the effect of a hypothetical potentially anxiety-inducing situation and a real potentially anxiety-inducing situation while still allowing participants to choose from a variety of different social support providers and methods of communication. While the implementation of such a study would be cumbersome, it would allow researchers to determine whether the hypothetical nature of the current study influenced the social support providers who were sought and the methods of communication that were preferred. It will be important to conduct studies that assess how, or if, the social support providers and methods of communication differ between real and hypothetical potentially anxiety-inducing situations. It may be that who participants seek and the methods of communication that are preferred differ significantly when participants are presented with a real situation compared to a hypothetical situation. If there are significant differences in social support seeking behaviors and communication preferences, they need to be recognized. In order for the findings of studies such as these to be useful, the hypothetical situations' findings should not be statistically different from the real situations. If this were not the case, then the use of hypothetical situations would not be of value.

Further studies should examine less well-known social support providers such as roommates and siblings in order to understand how social support from such providers

affects anxiety. Currently, anxiety scores did not differ from participants who sought friends or parents, yet the effect of receiving support from roommates and siblings should be examined and compared to well-studied social support providers like friends and parents. It may also be useful to examine complex social support roles. For example, it is possible that when a participant reported that he or she would seek a roommate, that roommate was also their friend. Researchers should address such complex relationships in order to determine if complex social roles are more or less likely to be sought when a participant is anxious.

Finally, future research will benefit from using an open-ended interview format rather than relying solely on surveys or other standard psychological measures to determine the reasons why a particular social support provider is sought or is ignored as interviews allow for greater flexibility in responses. Interdisciplinary studies that combine a social-psychological approach with a cross-cultural, a clinical, or a sociological perspective may be of value. Understanding why we seek social support in a situation, from a variety of scientific perspectives, will allow for a more complete understanding of the interaction between behavior and situation.

Conclusion

When given the freedom to choose any source of social support, even after the social support providers were categorized, participants frequently chose friends and parents regardless of their anxiety or the situation. While the finding that individuals seek friends and parents is not novel, it is important because previous studies limited the potential social support providers that were available to participants. Giving participants the freedom to seek social support from whomever they wished allowed this study to benefit from increased external validity. Outside the psychological laboratory, people are rarely restricted to seek

support from only a few types of individuals. Even though some of the roles that were sought were not sought frequently, this study provides a basis for future studies to examine understudied social support roles such as siblings and roommates.

In terms of methods of communication, it is important to note that while there was not a clear connection between anxiety and the methods of communication, participants in this study preferred to engage in high richness methods of communication (see Table 3). This emphasized that while we live in a world with increasingly complicated and indirect methods of communication, hearing the voice, a channel available in both face-to-face and phone call methods of communication, appeared to be what most people preferred, regardless of anxiety or situation.

Little can be said regarding how anxiety interacted within the situations, the roles that were sought, or the methods of communication that were preferred. Individuals appeared to seek a variety of social support providers when presented with several potentially anxiety-inducing situations and preferred to use high richness methods of communication with those they sought regardless of the anxiety induced by the situation or the situation itself. While it will be important to determine whom individuals seek and how those individuals seek those social support providers, it will be more important to understand the reason why certain social support providers and methods of communication are sought over others.

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Table 1

Frequency of Social Support Categories Sought per Situation

Situation	Social Support Role											
	Friend		Romantic Partner		Parent		Helping Professional		Sibling		Roommate	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Competition	50	25	32	16	77	39	17	9	7	4	11	6
Date	107	54	7	4	37	19	0	0	19	10	24	12
Presentation	52	26	32	16	72	36	10	5	10	5	16	8
Reading	57	29	30	15	54	27	4	2	6	3	23	12
Speech	43	22	33	17	76	38	14	7	10	5	15	8

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics - Social Support Categories Sought per Situation

Situation	Social Support Role											
	Romantic				Helping				Other			
	Friend		Partner		Parent		Professional		Sibling		Roommate	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Competition	28.10	6.54	27.44	5.98	29.92	7.33	25.24	4.84	ID	ID	30.00	6.84
Date	27.20	5.33	ID	ID	28.95	4.82	NA	NA	26.68	6.55	25.83	5.28
Presentation	33.90	5.20	31.78	7.21	34.19	6.09	34.30	4.92	32.60	6.45	32.56	5.37
Reading	16.79	4.85	15.47	4.12	16.22	4.47	ID	ID	ID	ID	14.91	3.60
Speech	33.56	6.41	34.36	7.73	34.68	6.52	34.79	5.16	35.50	5.52	33.87	6.20

Note. NA = No participants sought this social support role in the designated situation. ID = Insufficient data ($n < 10$) to include meaningful descriptive statistics for the specified social support provider category in the designated situation.

Table 3

Frequency of Preferred Method of Communication per Situation

Situation	Method of Communication			
	Low Richness		High Richness	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Competition	25	13	169	85
Date	32	16	163	82
Presentation	18	9	170	85
Reading	40	20	123	62
Speech	25	13	168	84

Note. Low Richness = Text Message, E-mail, & Facebook. High Richness = Face-to-face & Phone Call.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics – Preferred Method of Communication per Situation

Situation	Method of Communication			
	Low Richness		High Richness	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Competition	29.08	5.87	28.56	6.89
Date	26.06	5.44	27.44	5.57
Presentation	33.61	5.69	33.72	6.07
Reading	17.08	5.42	15.83	4.40
Speech	32.96	5.91	34.64	6.63

Note. Low Richness = Text Message, E-mail, & Facebook. High Richness = Face-to-face & Phone Call. Homogeneity of Variance (Levene's Test) was not violated in any situation.