

PSYC 325: Discussion Questions

Week 8

Relationships in Context / Relationship Support & Capitalization

Relationships in Context

1. The paper by Griskevicius and colleagues examines the influence of sex ratios from an evolutionary perspective. How might sex ratio be hypothesized to impact relationship commitment from an interdependence perspective?
2. How can the discussion of mating and other behaviors linked to sex ratio (Griskevicius et al. 2012) be applied to the Bi-Co community with its much higher population of females?
3. Griskevicius et al. (2012) focused primarily on effects of sex ratio on male behavior, but they did find that women's' expectations for how much men should spend on gifts for them changed in response to sex ratio. What other effects might sex ratio have on female behavior?
4. If Morse & Neuberg (2004) had analyzed the data they collected about participants' attitudes toward Valentine's Day, do you predict that they would have found that couples are able to avoid the negative effects of the holiday by avoiding it (i.e. not exchanging gifts or otherwise participating)?
5. Based on the processes described by Morse & Neuberg (2004), do you think that the same effects could result from couple-specific holidays (particularly anniversaries) or that the effects of Valentine's Day are significantly impacted by the public social nature of the holiday?
6. Research by Strachman and Schimel shows that people have the tendency to distance themselves from their partners in the presence of mortality salience when worldview differences between them and their partners are primed. Strachman and Schimel also cite other research, such as that by Mikulincer and colleagues, that provides support for the TMT perspective that intimacy in close relationships increases with mortality salience because the increased self-esteem that these relationships provide serves as an anxiety buffer. Do these two findings, in combination, suggest that worldview confirmation is more influential in buffering anxiety in the threat of mortality than is an increase in self-esteem provided by simple partner attachment?
7. Based on Terror Management Theory (TMT) as described in Strachman & Schimel (2006), it seems logical that some degree of perceived similarity must exist between partners in a successful long-term committed relationship. When partners come from objectively very different backgrounds, how would you predict that successful couples deal with this problem?

Relationship Support & Capitalization

1. Bolger and colleagues provide evidence that invisible support helps to alleviate depression but not anxiety. They posit that this lack of anxiety decrease in their study is due to the fact that the bar examination is highly stressful, and so it is unlikely that partners can do anything to help alleviate this anxiety. Is this too simple an explanation? Are there any alternative explanations as to why invisible support may be beneficial in decreasing depression but not anxiety?
2. What differences might you predict if the Bolger et al. (2000) study were conducted with measures of instrumental support instead of emotional support?
3. How could the nature of self-reported support receipt in Bolger et al. (2000) create the reported negative effects of support receipt? For example, is it possible that participants are only likely to report receiving support when they are aware of the increased magnitude of their distress (as opposed to receipt itself causing increased distress)?
4. Although the first four studies in Lambert et al. (2012) rigorously demonstrated the association between sharing positive events and increased positive affect and life satisfaction, their exploration of the impact of partner response characteristics was more limited. How could they explore the connection between partner response characteristics and the effect of sharing positive events either in the lab or in a more naturalistic design?
5. Based on the findings of Lambert et al. (2012), what would you predict to be the effect of sharing negative events with a partner? How would you predict their response style (e.g. "active constructive," "passive constructive," etc.) to impact this effect?
6. Does the finding in McConnell et al. (2011) that perceived support and needs fulfillment from pets was correlated with perceived support and needs fulfillment from close human others (i.e. parents, best friend, siblings) indicate that (self-reported) receipt of support is largely determined by characteristic of the receiver?
7. If not associated with loneliness, what other explanations could exist for the finding in McConnell et al. (2011 – study 1) that those who anthropomorphized their pets more were more depressed and less happy?
8. McConnell et al. (2011) did not find relationships between individual differences in personality or attachment style and type of pet that a participant owned. What could explain this contradiction of the common-sense idea of "cat people" and "dog people"? What differences between these types might you have expected in terms of the personality characteristics they measured?