# No Assistance Desired: How Perceptions of Others’ Self-Esteem Affect Support Seeking

# Online Supplementary Materials

In these online supplementary materials, we present additional information on our sample, as well as some additional analyses that clarify and support the claims we present in the main document. We also present non-redundant study materials that do not appear in the main document.

# Table of Contents

[Sample Information 2](#_Toc489447071)

[Sample Size Justification 2](#_Toc489447072)

[Sample Demographics 2](#_Toc489447073)

[Study 1A. 2](#_Toc489447074)

[Study 1B. 2](#_Toc489447075)

[Study 2. 2](#_Toc489447076)

[Study 3. 3](#_Toc489447077)

[Study 4. 3](#_Toc489447078)

[Alternative Explanations 3](#_Toc489447079)

[Table OSM1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures (Study 1A) 6](#_Toc489447080)

[Table OSM2. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures (Study 1B) 6](#_Toc489447081)

[Measures and Materials 7](#_Toc489447082)

[Study 1A Scenarios (Low Stress/High Stress) 7](#_Toc489447083)

[Study 1B Scenarios (Low Stress/High Stress) 8](#_Toc489447084)

[Studies 1A and 1B Dependent Measures 9](#_Toc489447085)

[Study 2 Manipulation 10](#_Toc489447086)

[Study 3 Perceived Self-Esteem Manipulation 10](#_Toc489447087)

[Studies 2 and 3 Dependent Measures 11](#_Toc489447088)

[Study 4 Dependent Measures 13](#_Toc489447089)

[References 14](#_Toc489447090)

# Sample Information

## Sample Size Justification

For all online studies, we determined that we would collect approximately 50 participants “per cell”, as suggested by Simmons, Nelson, and Simonsohn (2013). Studies 1A and 1B were intended initially to examine whether the intensity of the stressor moderated the influence of perceived partner self-esteem on support seeking (a de facto 2 X 2 design), whereas Studies 2 and 3 were two-cell experimental designs. In all cases, we ended up with slightly more or slightly fewer participants due to technical issues associated with online compensation through MTurk. For Study 4, we intended to collect approximately 100 couples, which we felt would give us sufficient power to detect small effects and was consistent with other dyadic studies of this nature. We collected data for this resource-intensive study across three academic terms and for expediency, decided to terminate data collection once we had recruited 87 couples and prior to examining the data.

## Sample Demographics

Study 1A. Participants consisted of 94 males and 104 females, as well as 1 person who chose not to indicate their gender (*Mage* = 26.43 years, *SD* = 7.06). Participants’ mean relationship length was 37.69 months (*SD* = 48.33). Participants reported dating their partner (72.3%), being married or common-law (20.6%), or engaged (7.0%).

Study 1B. Participants were 85 males and 109 females. Mean age was 26.39 years (*SD* = 7.79). Mean relationship length was 36.85 months (*SD* = 49.06) and participants reported dating their partner (75.8%), being married or common-law (18.6%), or being engaged to their partner (5.6%).

Study 2. Participants were 38 males and 57 females (*Mage* = 28.15, *SD* = 25.00).

Study 3. Participants were 48 males and 54 females (*Mage*= 28.83, *SD* = 9.82).

Study 4. Participants were 88 males and 86 females (*Mage* = 19.56, *SD* = 2.47). Eighty-four couples were in heterosexual relationships whereas 3 were in same-sex relationships. Mean relationship length was 16.94 months (*SD* = 17.14), and all participants were in dating relationships.

# Alternative Explanations

We predicted that perceiving support providers as having lower (vs. higher) self-esteem leads people to solicit less social support from them in times of need, and that this effect is mediated by perceptions of efficacy. However, it is possible that people’s reluctance to seek support from perceived low (vs. high) self-esteem partners stems from something other than beliefs about that person’s competence. While we address relationship quality as one of these possibilities in the main text, we acknowledge that there are other plausible alternative explanations that warrant consideration.

One such explanation for the association between perceived self-esteem and support seeking may be that perceiving lower self-esteem in a friend or romantic partner may lead people to be concerned about that person’s emotional well-being. These *other-focused* concerns may lead recipients to refrain from sharing potentially distressing problems with that person to avoid burdening or upsetting them (see Lemay & Dudley, 2011). Indeed, some of our prior and ongoing research (Marigold, Cavallo, Holmes, & Wood, 2014; Marigold, Cavallo, & Hirniak, 2017) suggests that people are reluctant to provide social support that validates low self-esteem people’s negative emotions, due partly to concerns about exacerbating recipients’ own self-doubts.

Alternatively, it may be that people are reluctant to solicit support from perceived low (vs. high) self-esteem others for fear that these people will interfere or impede (rather than help) their problem-solving. People are reluctant to disclose positive news to perceived low self-esteem others because they fear these people will dampen their own enthusiasm, or highlight the downsides of an otherwise positive event (MacGregor & Holmes, 2011). It is possible that these *self-focused* concerns may underlie decisions to seek support for negative events as well.

We examined these possibilities in a number of ways. In Studies 1A and 1B, we assessed other-focused concerns by asking participants to complete two items for each scenario tapping into their beliefs that their partner would experience emotional distress in each situation if they were to seek support (i.e., “My partner would be upset by this situation, My partner would experience emotional distress in this situation”; Study 1A *α* = .83, Study 1B *α* = .84). We assessed self-focused concerns by asking them to complete three items for each scenario assessing the extent they believed their partner would interfere or exacerbate the situation at hand (i.e., “My partner would likely make me more upset, My partner would make this problem more difficult for me, My partner would interfere with my ability to solve this problem”; Study 1A *α* = .93, Study 1B *α* = .94) (see Tables OSM1 and OSM2). All items were completed on 7-point scales.

We then conducted our main mediational analysis in both studies controlling for participants’ perceptions of their partner’s potential emotional distress and for their concerns about their partner’s potential interference. We did this first in separate analyses, and then again entering both variables simultaneously. As we expected, controlling for either of these variables did not substantially alter pathways A, B, or C reported in Figure 1 (all *b*s > .21, *p*s < .001). In all cases, the indirect effect of perceived self-esteem on support seeking through perceptions of efficacy remained significant and thus cannot be accounted for by self or other-focused concerns about low (vs. high) self-esteem partners.

In Studies 2 and 3, we were also able to further examine whether concerns about others’ well-being may account for people’s reluctance to solicit support from low (vs. high) self-esteem friends. Participants in both studies completed 5-items assessing the extent that they try to protect their friend from the emotional consequences of negative disclosures (i.e., “I keep all bad news from this friend, I avoid everything that could upset this friend, I show strength in this friend’s presence, I do not let this friend notice how bad or depressed I really feel, When with this friend, I pretend to be very strong although I do not feel that way”). This “Protective Buffering” scale was adapted from Schwarzer and Schultz (2013) and had adequate reliability in both studies (Study 2 *α* = .68, Study 3 *α* = .77).

We tested whether our manipulation of partner self-esteem affected people’s reports of protectively buffering their friends in support contexts and found that it did not. Results of Study 2 revealed that participants who thought of a low self-esteem friend (*M* = 4.09, *SD* = 1.13) and those who thought of a high self-esteem friend (*M* = 3.78, *SD* = 1.09) did not significantly differ in their self-reported protective buffering, *F*(1, 92) = 2.19, *p* = .142, *ηp*2 = .02. Similarly, results of Study 3 indicated that those in the low self-esteem condition (*M* = 4.14, *SD* = 1.14) did not significantly differ from those in the high self-esteem condition (*M* = 3.78, *SD* = 1.24) on this protective buffering measure, *F*(1, 100) = 2.32, *p* = .131, *ηp*2 = .02.

Taken together, these data suggest that our observed effects cannot be attributed to participants’ desire to protect or buffer their perceived lower self-esteem friends and partners from bad news, nor can they be fully explained by wanting to avoid interference from perceived low self-esteem providers. Rather, it appears that judgments of their partner’s efficacy are central in guiding support-seeking decisions.

# Table OSM1. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures (Study 1A)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Mean* | *SD* | *Zero-order correlations* | | | | | | |
|  | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *6* | *7* |
| 1. Own Self-Esteem | 5.00 | 1.23 | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Perceived Partner Self-Esteem | 5.13 | 1.14 | .54\*\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Likelihood of Disclosure | 5.52 | 1.11 | .39\*\* | .42\*\* | - |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Likelihood of Support Seeking | 5.38 | 1.21 | .26\*\* | .33\*\* | .74\*\* | - |  |  |  |
| 5. Perceived Partner Efficacy | 5.20 | 1.05 | .33\*\* | .41\*\* | .56\*\* | .73\*\* | - |  |  |
| 6. Perceived Relationship Quality | 5.72 | 1.19 | .35\*\* | .42\*\* | .50\*\* | .63\*\* | .61\*\* | - |  |
| 7. Perceived Partner Distress | 3.93 | 1.23 | -.05 | -.20\*\* | -.05 | .18\* | .03 | .10 |  |
| 8. Perceived Partner Interference | 2.73 | 1.37 | -.45\*\* | -.45\*\* | -.64\*\* | -.43\*\* | -.47\*\* | -.45\*\* | -.38\*\* |

# Table OSM2. Descriptive statistics and correlations for all measures (Study 1B)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *Mean* | *SD* | *Zero-order correlations* | | | | | | |
|  | *1* | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *6* | *7* |
| 1. Own Self-Esteem | 4.98 | 1.29 | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 2. Perceived Partner Self-Esteem | 5.07 | 1.27 | .41\*\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |
| 3. Likelihood of Disclosure | 5.59 | 1.21 | .37\*\* | .36\*\* | - |  |  |  |  |
| 4. Likelihood of Support Seeking | 5.24 | 1.30 | .29\*\* | .38\*\* | .74\*\* | - |  |  |  |
| 5. Perceived Partner Efficacy | 4.95 | 1.19 | .23\*\* | .50\*\* | .63\*\* | .62\*\* | - |  |  |
| 6. Perceived Relationship Quality | 5.61 | 1.17 | .36\*\* | .51\*\* | .51\*\* | .44\*\* | .55\*\* | - |  |
| 7. Perceived Partner Distress | 3.97 | 1.35 | -.08 | -.14† | -.02 | .10 | -.02 | .01 | - |
| 8. Perceived Partner Interference | 2.79 | 1.47 | -.41\*\* | -.49\*\* | -.56\*\* | -.42\*\* | -.42\*\* | -.55\*\* | -.34\*\* |

# Measures and Materials

## Study 1A Scenarios (Low Stress/High Stress)

In this section, you will be asked to imagine three situations and each situation will be presented on a separate page. Please read the instructions carefully, and do your best to envision yourself in the situation.  After each situation you will be asked some questions about the situation. Please use the scale provided to respond, and be as honest as you can (there are no right or wrong ways to answer the questions).

#### Achievement Stressor

Imagine that you finally got the job that you have really wanted, and so far you have been excelling. For an upcoming project, you have been assigned as team leader. You are supervising a team of people, and you all agree that each person will work independently until the day before the deadline your boss has given you. At that time, acting in your role as team leader, you will prepare a presentation based on everyone’s work and give it the following day. You are working right until the deadline, and you believe the other team members are on schedule to complete their work. The day before the presentation, you receive an email from two of your team members indicating that they will not be able to complete their portion of the work. This project is (*not very/extremely*) important to your boss (and also to your career) but you will still have to give the presentation for which you are now unprepared.

#### Social Stressor

Imagine that one of your closest friends invited you over for a special dinner. They have been taking cooking lessons and are going to prepare a six-course meal. A week before the dinner, you check your calendar and realize that you made a mistake – the dinner party is actually tomorrow. You suddenly realize that you also promised a close relative that you would help them move that same day! They have rented a truck and are really counting on you. The move is going to take all day and there’s no way you can do both things. You are going to have to call and give your friend who is hosting the dinner party the bad news and they are (*unlikely/likely*) going to be upset since they (*probably haven’t started to prepare/have already bought and prepared*) some of the food and (*can easily/cannot*) reschedule.

#### Health Stressor

Imagine you wake up one morning feeling under the weather.  You have a severe headache and try taking some pain medication. When it doesn’t seem to work, you decide to take a shower to try and relieve your discomfort. Your feel nauseous, and start breathing heavily. Your heart rate seems to elevate quickly. After a few minutes, things pass and you start feeling normal again (for now). You do not know what is causing these symptoms, but you (*you did eat some greasy food the night before/have a history of heart disease in your family*).

## Study 1B Scenarios (Low Stress/High Stress)

In this section, you will be asked to imagine three situations and each situation will be presented on a separate page. Please read the instructions carefully, and do your best to envision yourself in the situation.  After each situation you will be asked some questions about the situation. Please use the scale provided to respond, and be as honest as you can (there are no right or wrong ways to answer the questions).

#### Achievement Stressor

Please take a moment to imagine a (*low stress/stressful*) event in your work or academic life you might experience that would be (*mildly/very*) distressing for you. This stress cannot involve/be caused by your relationship partner. For example, you might accidently delete a file that you had spent over (*an hour/50 hours*) to create, or you might receive (*mild criticism/negative feedback*) from your supervisor or your professor. Please take a minute to envision this scenario and describe it in the space below.

#### Social Stressor

Please take a moment to imagine a (*low stress/stressful*) event in your social life you might experience that would be (*mildly/very*) distressing for you. This stress cannot involve/be caused by your relationship partner. An example of a highly stressful social scenario could be having to tell your best friend that his/her partner has (*said something rude about them/been unfaithful*), or give your parents some (*disappointing/terrible*) news. Please take a minute to envision this scenario and describe it in the space below.

#### Health Stressor

Please take a moment to imagine a (*low stress/stressful*) health-related event you might experience that would be (*mildly/very*) distressing for you. This stress cannot involve/be caused by your relationship partner. For example, you might experience sharp pain in your chest and shoulder and (*know you get chest wall inflammation when you have a cold/think you are having a heart attack*), or you might discover that you have a (*cyst/form of cancer*). Please take a minute to envision this scenario and describe it in the space below.

## Studies 1A and 1B Dependent Measures

#### Likelihood of Disclosure

It is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that I would share this problem with my partner.

It is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that I would not share this problem with my partner *(R)*.

It is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that I would share this problem with my partner if they asked me about it.

#### Likelihood of Support Seeking

It is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that in this situation I would turn to my partner for emotional support in this situation (for example: to be reassured and/or comforted).

It is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ that in this situation I would turn to my partner for practical support in this situation (for example: to get ideas about what to do next).

#### Perceived Partner Efficacy

In this situation, my partner could probably think of a solution.

Thanks to my partner’s resourcefulness, they would know how to handle this situation.

My partner could remain calm in this situation because they could rely on their coping abilities.

#### Perceived Partner Distress

If you were to share this situation with your partner, how likely is each statement below to be true:

My partner would be upset by this situation.

My partner would experience emotional distress in this situation.

#### Perceived Partner Interference

My partner would likely make me more upset.

My partner would make this problem more difficult for me.

My partner would interfere with my ability to solve this problem.

## Study 2 Manipulation

#### Low Self-Esteem Friend Prompt

Please think of a friend that you believe to have low self-esteem. That is, think of a person that you know who seems to doubt him/herself often, seems insecure at times, and holds a somewhat negative opinion of him/herself.

What are the initials of this friend's name? \_\_\_\_

Please describe below why you think this friend has low self-esteem. That is, give an example of one way you feel this friend is insecure about his/her self-worth.

#### High Self-Esteem Friend Prompt

Please think of a friend that you believe to have high self-esteem. That is, think of a person that you know who seems confident and secure about his/her traits and abilities, and holds a positive opinion of him/herself.

What are the initials of this friend's name? \_\_\_\_

Please describe below why you think this friend has high self-esteem. That is, give an example of one way you feel this friend is very secure about his/her self-worth.

## Study 3 Perceived Self-Esteem Manipulation

#### Low Self-Esteem Prompt

Please indicate the answer that best represents how your friend feels. Using the 7-point scale provided below enter the appropriate number beside the question.

1. There is at least one aspect of my friend's personality that they have a negative attitude toward

2. There is never a moment when my friend is not satisfied with themselves.

3. There have been times in my friend's life when they felt they have failed at something

4. My friend feels that they can do virtually anything as well or better than other people

5. My friend feels proud of every aspect of their personality

6. My friend often feels that they are a more worthy person than others

7. There has been a time in my friend's life when they have felt that they are no good at all.

8. There has never been a moment when my friend felt discouraged.

9. My friend feels that they have an extremely high number of good qualities.

10. There are times in my friend’s life when they feel useless or discouraged.

##### Feedback:

According to your friend’s score they fall in the low self-esteem range. While your friend may not feel insecure all the time, they generally have a negative self-view and doubt their self-worth.

#### High Self-Esteem Prompt

1. There is at least one aspect of my friend’s personality that they have a positive attitude toward.

2. There is at least one thing about my friend that they are satisfied with.

3. My friend has always considered themselves as a failure.

4. My friend believes there is at least one thing that they are able to do as well or better than most other people.

5. My friend constantly feels that they do not have much to be proud of.

6. My friend feels that they are a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.

7. Almost all the time my friend thinks they are no good at all.

8. One of my friend's main goals in life is to have more respect for themselves.

9. My friend feels that they have at least one good quality.

10. My friend feels useless much of the time.

##### Feedback:

According to your friend’s score they fall in the high self-esteem range. While your friend may not feel everything is perfect, they generally take a positive self-view and are confident in their self-worth.

## Studies 2 and 3 Dependent Measures

#### Support Seeking

In critical situations, I prefer to ask this friend for their advice.

Whenever I am down, I look for this friend to cheer me up again.

When I am worried, I reach out to this friend to talk to.

If I do not know how to handle a situation, I ask this friend what they would do.

Whenever I need help, I ask for it from this person.

#### Protective Buffering

I keep all bad news from this friend.

I avoid everything that could upset this friend.

I show strength in this friend's presence.

I do not let this friend notice how bad or depressed I really feel.

When with this friend, I pretend to be very strong, although I do not feel that way.

#### Perceived Efficacy

My friend can always manage to solve difficult problems if they try hard enough.

If someone opposes my friend, my friend can find the means and the way to get what they want.

It is easy for my friend to stick to their aims and accomplish their goals.

My friend is confident that they can deal efficiently with unexpected events.

Thanks to my friend’s resourcefulness, they know how to handle unforeseen situations.

My friend can solve most problems if they invest the necessary effort.

My friend can remain calm when facing difficulties because they can rely on their coping abilities.

When my friend is confronted with a problem, they can usually find several solutions.

If my friend is in trouble, they can usually think of a solution.

My friend can usually handle whatever comes their way.

#### Relationship Satisfaction (Study 2)

How well does your friend meet your needs?

In general, how satisfied are you with your friendship?

How good is your friendship compared to most?

How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this friendship?

To what extent has your friendship met your original expectations?

How much do you care about your friend?

How many problems are there in your friendship?

#### Relationship Quality (Study 3)

How satisfied are you with your relationship?

How content are you with your relationship?

How happy are you with your relationship?

How committed are you to your relationship?

How dedicated are you to your relationship?

How devoted are you to your relationship?

How intimate is your relationship?

How close is your relationship?

How connected are you to your friend?

How much do you trust your friend?

How much can you count on your friend?

How dependable is your friend?

How passionate is your relationship?

How much do you love your friend?

How much do you adore your friend?

How much do you cherish your friend?

## Study 4 Dependent Measures

#### Support Seeking (Recipient Self-Report)

I asked my partner to help me prepare for my speech.

I tried to get emotional support [i.e., reassurance/comfort] from my partner.

I tried to get instrumental support [i.e., advice, information] from my partner.

#### Support Seeking (Coder Ratings)

How much do they seem like they want emotional support?

How much do they seem like they want instrumental support?

How comfortable are they with physical contact?

How much do they want physical contact?

To what extent are they clingy?

How much do they want to be left alone? *(R)*

How difficult do they make it for their partner to provide them with emotional support? *(R)*

How difficult do they make it for their partner to provide them with instrumental support? *(R)*

How often do they reject their partner’s emotional support attempt(s)? *(R)*

How often do they reject their partner’s instrumental support attempt(s)? *(R)*

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