

Individual Listening Values Moderate the Impact of Verbal Person Centeredness on Helper Evaluations: A Test of the Dual-Process Theory of Supportive Message Outcomes

Graham D. Bodie, Shaughan A. Keaton & Susanne M. Jones

To cite this article: Graham D. Bodie, Shaughan A. Keaton & Susanne M. Jones (2016): Individual Listening Values Moderate the Impact of Verbal Person Centeredness on Helper Evaluations: A Test of the Dual-Process Theory of Supportive Message Outcomes, International Journal of Listening, DOI: [10.1080/10904018.2016.1194207](https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2016.1194207)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2016.1194207>



Published online: 27 Jul 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Individual Listening Values Moderate the Impact of Verbal Person Centeredness on Helper Evaluations: A Test of the Dual-Process Theory of Supportive Message Outcomes

Graham D. Bodie

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Shaughan A. Keaton

Young Harris College

Susanne M. Jones

University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

This study is part of a larger program of research concerned with how people evaluate supportive behavior. Past work conducted in our lab found that helper evaluations of supportive listening vary as a function of specific listener behaviors, but the effects of these behaviors were small in magnitude. In this article, we explore one explanation for these small effects, namely, that the impact of listening behaviors on helper evaluations varies as a function of individual communication values. We draw from the dual-process theory of supportive message outcomes to propose that communication values operate to influence individual processing of supportive behavior. Using data from 383 participants asked to watch and evaluate a five-minute recorded comforting conversation, results provide support for the theory. People who place more value on listening as well as theoretically connected communication skills appear more responsive to the presence (or absence) of person-centered behavior.

Social relationships influence our health (Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010). One important contributor to whether social relationships are productive or caustic is the quality of the emotional support we receive when we face stressful life events (Albrecht & Goldsmith, 2003). While there are many different types of support, emotional support in particular assists people in coping with the deleterious consequences of upsetting events (Burleson, 1994). Two important communicative characteristics of emotional support are verbal person centeredness (VPC) and nonverbal immediacy (NVI) (MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011). VPC refers to supportive talk that explicitly attends to the discloser's

A previous version of this paper was awarded Top Conference Paper at the 2012 International Listening Association annual conference, Bremerton, WA.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Graham D. Bodie, Department of Communication Studies, 136 Coates Hall, LSU A&M, Baton Rouge, LA 70803. E-mail: gbodie@gmail.com
Color versions of one or more of the figures in the article can be found online at www.tandfonline.com/hijl.

feelings and emotions,¹ while NVI consists of behaviors such as forward lean and eye contact that signal psychological closeness and responsiveness. These two sets of comforting behaviors lead to favorable emotional, physiological, and mental health outcomes for recipients, contributing to our feelings that close others are supportive and caring when we need their assistance (Jones & Wirtz, 2006). These behaviors also hold implications for support providers. In particular, providers who enact high levels of VPC and NVI are judged as more competent, likeable, and attractive (Burleson, 1990; Jones, 2004).

The current project is part of a research program, the primary objective of which is to examine theoretical and practical connections between listening and comforting communication. In two prior studies, we provided empirical documentation that VPC and NVI are key behavioral markers of higher quality supportive listening. One study suggested that lay people view the terms “supportive people” and “supportive listener” as isomorphic: To be supportive means to engage in certain behaviors that are associated with higher quality listening (Bodie, Vickery, & Gearhart, 2013). Another study investigated whether evaluations of higher quality listening are linked to two principal supportive communication behaviors, VPC and NVI (Bodie & Jones, 2012). In that study, participants were asked to watch a five-minute conversation between two individuals, one of whom was trained to engage in different levels of NVI and VPC. Results showed that people rated supporters who engaged in high levels of VPC and NVI as significantly more active and empathic in their listening abilities than supporters enacting lower levels of these behaviors.

Although results supported a link between VPC/NVI and supportive listening evaluations (i.e., the tests were statistically significant), the effect sizes for these behaviors were small in magnitude. Several explanations might account for these small effects. The first is methodological: Participants were watching a conversation and were not interacting face-to-face with a supportive listener. Work conducted in other laboratories has found a distinction between overhearers and addressees (Bavelas & Gerwing, 2011); perhaps because our participants were overhearers and thus not fully engaged in the conversation, the impact of NVI and VPC was mitigated. Second, it is possible that VPC and NVI are not the most important predictors of evaluations of others’ active-empathic listening. Clearly, there are myriad other behaviors that contribute to listener evaluations (e.g., paraphrasing or asking questions to gather more information).

To investigate whether these two explanations could account for the small effects of VPC and NVI on evaluations, we designed a study (Bodie, Vickery, Cannava, & Jones, 2015) that asked participants to engage in a supportive conversation (to address the overhearer-addressee distinction); the videotapes of these conversations were then coded for behaviors deemed important to “active” listening (e.g., paraphrasing, asking questions, checking understanding)

¹ Compare, for instance, the following examples of low and highly person-centered comfort. While the low person-centered (LPC) message criticizes the emotional experiences of the recipient, the highly person-centered (HPC) message provides explicit recognition and validation of emotions.

LPC: You just can’t learn statistics because you did not try your best. You probably didn’t do the things you need to, so it’s really your own fault and nobody else’s.

HPC: I know this makes you mad. It’s really exasperating when you try and try, but don’t get anywhere. This kind of thing can make you crazy! I know you have never had trouble with anything like this in the past, but some things just don’t come so easy. You’re only human and not a super hero. Statistics is tough business. It took me forever to learn all those formulas and the rules, so I think I get how you feel.

to address whether effect sizes for other behaviors are comparable with those found for VPC and NVI. Results for the active listening behaviors replicated the small effects for VPC and NVI, suggesting other explanations may better account for why VPC and NVI do not influence ratings of supportive listening as strongly as one might expect. We test one alternate explanation in the study outlined below. In particular, we speculate that there exist conditions under which the effect of supportive behaviors explain more variance in helper evaluations and conditions under which behaviors have less effect. This explanation gains its theoretical traction from the dual-process theory of supportive message outcomes (Bodie & Burleson, 2008).

DUAL-PROCESS THEORY OF SUPPORTIVE MESSAGE OUTCOMES

The dual-process theory of supportive message outcomes is a social cognitive theory firmly rooted in the larger approach to human communication known as Constructivism. It shares with constructivism a focus on explaining “individual differences in the ability to communicate skillfully” (Burleson, 2007, p. 108) by concentrating on the “causes, origins, and outcomes” of message processing in the domain of supportive communication (Burleson & Rack, 2008, p. 52). The theory’s name comes from the larger dual-process framework developed in the field of psychology. The dual-process framework includes several “dual process models” (Moskowitz, Skurnik, & Galinsky, 1999) which posit, in line with constructivism, that “people’s actions (including their responses to messages) are a function of the ways in which they interpret or make sense of events” (Burleson, 2010, p. 166).

Communication scholars are probably most familiar with dual-process approaches to human information processing in the context of persuasion (Chaiken, 1980; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). These approaches were formally introduced in the early 1980s in an effort to resolve several problems in the persuasion and attitude change literatures. In particular, the dual-process framework offered testable explanations for such puzzling phenomena as the varied (and even contradictory) effects of message, source, receiver, and contextual factors on attitude change; the variable strength and persistence of the attitude change achieved through persuasion; and the variable extent to which attitude change predicted behavioral change. The dual-process theory of supportive message outcomes was born out of similar concerns.

Although many features of comforting messages have predictable effects on outcomes (High & Dillard, 2012; MacGeorge et al., 2011), these effects vary with the message source, recipient, and situation (Holmstrom et al., 2015). Several moderating variables have been identified as influencing the motivation and ability to think carefully about message content. Effortful message processing (i.e., careful reflection of and close attention to message content) is most likely to occur when recipients are motivated to attend to a message and possess the ability to consider its content thoughtfully. Both qualities of the individual and the situation influence the motivation and ability to carefully consider message content (for review see Bodie & MacGeorge, 2015). The current study focuses on individual differences in the value placed on listening, as well as other affectively-oriented communication skills (Burleson & Samter, 1990; Samter & Burleson, 1990).

TABLE 1
Communication values with definitions and sample scale items

Value	Definition	Sample Scale Item
Affectively oriented skills: relevant to the management of emotions		
Comforting	assisting others perceived as needing aid	Can help me work through my emotions when I'm feeling upset or depressed.
Conflict Management	effective problem solving	Shows me it's possible to resolve our disagreements in a way that won't hurt or embarrass each other.
Ego Support	boosting feeling of self-worth	Makes me feel like I'm a good person.
Regulatory	assistance in recognizing and remedying mistakes	Shows me that I have the ability to fix my own mistakes.
Expressiveness	ability to express emotions appropriately	Is open in expressing her/his thoughts and feelings to me.
Listening	ability to be attentive to others	Listens carefully when I am speaking.
Instrumentally-oriented skills: relevant to the management of behavior		
Referential	ability to provide information in clear and concise manners	Explains things clearly.
Conversation	ability to start and maintain a conversation	Is a good conversationalist.
Narrative	ability to tell stories in entertaining ways	Can get me laughing because he/she is so good at telling a joke or story.
Persuasion	ability to influence others and gain compliance	Makes me feel like I've made my own decision even though I do mostly what he/she wants.

Communication Values

Just like different people possess value systems for health, religion, or education, they also possess values for certain communication functions in their close relationships. Communication values are associated with more and less skilled communication behavior and are examined along the lines of more *affectively oriented* values that are particularly important in supportive communication (e.g., comforting, listening), as well as *instrumental tasks* (e.g., negotiating, informing). Close relational partners can be more or less skilled at affectively oriented tasks, such as making us feel better about a problematic event (i.e., emotional support; Burleson, 2003) and helping us feel better about ourselves (i.e., esteem support; Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011). They also can be more or less skilled at instrumentally-oriented tasks, such as informing and persuading. Table 1 summarizes the communication skills most often studied.

The degree to which our relational partners' skills influence us is a function of how much (or little) we value those skills. For instance, if Laurence is not particularly skilled at listening, her ineptness will have a larger (negative) effect on a recipient who values listening in close relationships; for recipients who do not place much value on listening in a close relationship, the inability to enact appropriate listening behaviors will matter less. Likewise, if Brooks is particularly skilled at listening, her skill will have less of a (positive) impact on a recipient who does not place much value on listening in close relationships. Important for this study is work that has shown people who value affectively-oriented skills

(like listening) in close relationships also tend to discriminate more sharply among more or less beneficial supportive communication (Burleson, 2008, Study 1; Burleson & Mortenson, 2003). In dual-process language, people who place more value on affectively-oriented skills seem more motivated and/or able to process the underlying features of messages intended to provide comfort.

The general pattern of moderation for communication values on the relation between message features and outcomes has only been demonstrated in studies that ask participants to read messages (Holmstrom, 2009; Jones, 2005; Samter & Burleson, 1990, 2005); no work has established a pattern for live verbal behaviors, nor has any work examined whether values moderate the impact of nonverbal behaviors on outcomes. Similarly, prior work using the dual-process theory of supportive message outcomes has only derived predictions regarding how individual and situational variables moderate the impact of verbal behaviors on outcomes. If we find a similar moderating influence for verbal and nonverbal behaviors in this study, the dual-process framework might be applied to how people attend to and process not only verbal supportive behaviors (i.e., messages) but also nonverbal behaviors.

In this study, we speculate that those who place more value on listening in close relationships make more nuanced judgments of helpers as supportive listeners. Conversely, people who do not value listening in close relationships may not be sensitized to behaviors such as VPC and NVI that are linked to supportive listening ratings.

H1: Listening values exhibit a main effect on evaluations of helpers as supportive listeners.

H2: The impact of VPC and NVI on evaluations of helpers' supportive listening is moderated by the importance participants place on listening as a close relationship skill, such that the linear trend for VPC and NVI will be stronger for those who assign listening high import as compared to those who assign listening low import.

The value placed on listening may not uniquely moderate the impact of VPC and NVI on evaluations of the helper as a supportive listener. Indeed, other affectively-oriented skills may well act as equivalent moderators. For instance, in our study investigating the conceptual overlap between supportive listening and supportive people, participants listed a large degree of similar attributions and behaviors irrespective of the prompt (Bodie et al., 2013). To investigate this issue, we forward the following research questions:

RQ1: Do other affectively oriented skills exhibit a main effect on evaluations of helpers as supportive listeners?

RQ2: Do other affectively oriented skills moderate the impact of VPC and NVI on evaluations of helpers as supportive listeners?

The degree to which values placed on other affectively oriented skills act as relevant moderators will provide insight into what constitutes supportive listening and perhaps what makes listening a distinct communication behavior worthy of study. For instance, if listening values do not uniquely moderate the relationship between VPC/NVI and evaluations, any additional values that play a similar role will help to further define the conceptual similarities between supportive listening and other constructs.

METHOD

Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 383$) from Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College (LSU A&M) ($n = 305$; 192 women, 109 men; four did not report sex) and the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (UM) ($n = 78$; 48 women, 29; males; one participant not reporting sex) either completed the study as part of a research requirement or received a modest amount of extra credit. The mean age of the LSU A&M participants was 22.1 ($SD = 4.87$; $Range = 18$ to 49); the average age of the UM participants was comparable ($M = 20.5$; $SD = 3.01$; $Range = 18$ to 48). A majority of the LSU A&M ($n = 236$) and UM ($n = 64$) participants self-reported as Caucasian.

Procedures

Identical procedures, each approved by appropriate institutional review boards, were used at both institutions. Participants completed all procedures in groups of 2–10. A research assistant unaffiliated with the project and unaware of the study hypotheses greeted participants and then asked them to view one, recorded, randomly selected five-minute conversation. Once participants watched the conversation, they completed a computer-based survey.

Stimulus Conversations

Each of the collected conversations ($N = 264$) featured a confederate and participant. Upon entering the lab, participants were seemingly randomly assigned to discuss an emotionally upsetting event with the confederate, who was randomly assigned to exhibit more or less person-centered and nonverbally immediate support. All confederates were trained to enact each of nine combinations VPC and NVI (high, moderate, and low within each behavior was crossed). To assure a reasonably representative stratified sample, we randomly selected eight conversations from each condition, resulting in a sample of 72 conversations from the original 264; confederate sex, VPC, and NVI were the three strata. As a manipulation check, trained judges rated each videotape for level of VPC and NVI (all reliability coefficients $> .90$) using five, 7-point semantic differential scales identifying fundamental features of person centeredness (e.g., invalidates vs. validates, disregards vs. acknowledges; $\alpha = .98$). The manipulation of NVI was checked using 11 items (7-point scale; $\alpha = .91$) from Andersen, Andersen, and Jensen's (1979) nonverbal immediacy instrument. Manipulation checks showed that VPC and NVI were manipulated in line with extant theory: LPC ($M = 1.50$, $SD = .32$), MPC ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .80$), HPC ($M = 6.65$, $SD = .23$); LNVI ($M = 1.28$, $SD = .83$), MNVI ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .18$), HNVI ($M = 6.36$, $SD = 1.11$).

Supportive Listening Measurements

To test replication across operationalizations of the dependent variable, we used two measures of helper supportive listening (see Table 1 for scale statistics): First, we used the 11-item other-report version of the *Active Empathic Listening Scale* (AELS-OR; Bodie, 2011, Study 2). Each

item (e.g., “X is sensitive to what others are not saying,” “X assures others that s/he is receptive to their ideas”) was measured on a scale ranging from 1 (*never or almost never true*) to 7 (*always or almost always true*). The latent variable model fit these data well, $\chi^2(41) = 103.51$, SRMR = .03, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .06 (.04, .07), suggesting an internally consistent set of scores (see Table 1).

The second scale used to operationalize supportive listening was the 14-item Active Listening Observation Scale (ALOS; Fassaert et al., 2007) (e.g., “used inviting body language”; 5-point Likert scale). After removing three items ($\lambda_s < .40$), model fit was adequate, $\chi^2(51) = 157.67$, SRMR = .05, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .07 (.06, .09).

We chose these scales because they measure supportive listening on different behavioral levels of abstraction. While the AELS measures macro-level listening characteristics (e.g., “X understood how the other person felt”), the ALOS taps micro-level behaviors (e.g., “X expanded verbally upon the other person’s feelings and emotions”). Because the measurement level for skills and competencies can affect results, we considered it appropriate to measure supportive listening at both levels (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2002). Although the scales were highly correlated, we treated both scales independently precisely because these scales tap different analytical levels of listening ($r = .77$, $p < .001$).

Communication Values

The value that participants place on communication skills in close relationships was assessed with the 30-item Communication Functions Questionnaire (CFQ) (Burlinson & Samter, 1990). Each of the 10 skills is measured with three items, scaled along five points and bounded by *somewhat important* (1) to *very important* (5). The hypothesized measurement model included two second-order skill sets (affective, instrumental), each possessing several first-order skills (e.g., listening, persuasion). This model fit these data well, $\chi^2(394) = 797.60$, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .05 (.04, .06).

RESULTS

Because we have reported the main effects for NVI and VPC elsewhere (Bodie & Jones, 2012), our focus here is on the main effects for communication values (H1, RQ1) and interaction effects representing how values moderate the VPC/NVI-evaluation relationship (H2, RQ2). Zero-order correlations are displayed in Table 2.

H1 predicted that listening values exhibit a main effect on evaluations of helper supportive listening, and H2 predicted that listening values interact with VPC and NVI to explain variability in ratings of helper supportive listening. Specifically, we predicted that the linear trend for VPC and NVI on evaluations of helper supportive listening would be stronger for those ascribing high importance to listening compared with those ascribing low importance to listening. To test these hypotheses, we conducted two hierarchical regression analyses, one for each listening scale (AELS and ALOS). For each analysis, VPC, NVI, and the centered CFQ-Listening score were entered in the first step, followed by the two-way interaction terms in the second step.

TABLE 2
Zero-order correlations for all manipulated and measured variables

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. VPC	—	—												
2. NVI	—	-.02	—											
3. AELS	4.57 (1.29)	.10*	.20	.93										
4. ALOS	3.34 (.83)	.06	.09	.77***	.91									
5. Listening	4.40 (.68)	-.12*	-.05	.13**	.09	.82								
6. Comforting	4.24 (.83)	-.12*	-.003	.04	.04	.61***	.85							
7. Conflict	4.22 (.75)	-.05	-.09	.08	.03	.58***	.59***	.70						
8. Ego	4.18 (.79)	-.11*	-.04	.08	.05	.62***	.64***	.52***	.75					
9. Regulative	3.94 (.89)	-.12*	-.06	.11*	.08	.45***	.54***	.58***	.51***	.83				
10. Express	4.25 (.72)	-.13**	-.08	.12*	.06	.62***	.60***	.63***	.37***	.60***	.77			
11. Inform	3.93 (.84)	.01	-.06	.14**	.09	.43***	.34***	.42***	.37***	.47***	.41***	.81		
12. Narrative	4.05 (.81)	-.01	-.03	.11*	.07	.48***	.36***	.36***	.49***	.46***	.41***	.56***	.73	
13. Persuasion	2.18 (.96)	-.03	.14*	.04	.07	-.05	.03	-.02	.11*	.23***	.03	.19***	.18***	.69

Note. Diagonal values are Cronbach's alpha. VPC = Verbal Person Centeredness; NVI = Nonverbal Immediacy; AELS = Active-Empathic Listening Scale; ALOS = Active Listening Observation Scale; Listening – Persuasion = Communication Functions Questionnaire subscales. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

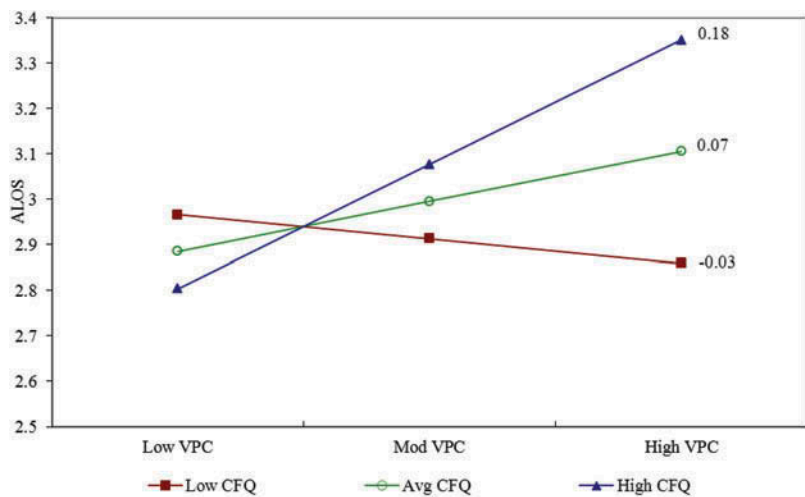


FIGURE 1 Regression of active listening observation scale on VPC as moderated by CFQ-listening.

For the model predicting evaluations of supportive listening as measured by the AELS, the main effects model was statistically significant, $F(3, 379) = 4.17, p = .006, R^2 = .03$, and CFQ-Listening, $t = 2.87, p = .004, \beta = .15$, contributed to this effect. The linear trend for CFQ-Listening suggests, in line with H1, that individuals who ascribe more importance to listening in close relationships perceived confederate support providers as demonstrating a higher degree of active-empathic listening. Adding the interaction terms to the model did not significantly increase model predictability, $\Delta F(2, 377) = 2.11, p = .12$, providing no support for H2.

For the model predicting evaluations of supportive listening as measured by the ALOS, the main effects model was statistically significant, $F(3, 379) = 3.08, p = .027, R^2 = .024$, with CFQ-Listening, $t = 2.11, p = .036, \beta = .11$, contributing to this effect. The linear trend for CFQ-Listening suggests, in line with H1, that individuals who ascribe more import to listening in close relationships also observed higher levels of listening activity in the conversations. Adding the interaction terms to the model provided an increase in model predictability at the 90% level of confidence, $\Delta F(2, 377) = 2.32, p = .10, \Delta R^2 = .01$, with the interaction between VPC and CFQ-Listening mainly contributing to this effect, $t = 1.99, p = .047, \beta = .30$. This interaction was decomposed by plotting the linear trend for VPC at three exemplary CFQ-Listening scores; the mean, as well as one standard deviation above and below the mean. Those results are presented in Figure 1 and suggest that the linear trend for VPC is greater for individuals who ascribe higher import to listening in close relationships. The linear trend of VPC is statistically equivalent to zero for individuals one standard deviation below the mean of CFQ-Listening and individuals at the mean; for those one standard deviation above the mean, the slope is positive and moderately strong. Thus, H2 was supported for ALOS ratings. These data suggest, in line with the dual-process theory, that VPC influences ratings of supportive listening only for those with relatively strong listening values.

To answer the two research questions, the remaining CFQ variables were modeled in two separate hierarchical regression models, one for each listening scale. No additional communication values contributed to the prediction of AELS scores, and no values interacted with either VPC or NVI in the prediction of AELS scores. For the ALOS data, no main effects emerged for the values variables, but the following significant interaction terms emerged: VPC-Comforting, $\beta = .464$, $t = 2.09$, $p = .04$, and VPC-Ego support, $\beta = .66$, $t = 2.95$, $p = .003$; the pattern found in Figure 1 remained similar.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to test a theoretically driven explanation for the small effects for VPC and NVI on evaluations of helpers as supportive listeners. We grounded our study in the dual-process theory of supportive message outcomes, speculating that elements of supportive conversations are more likely to influence outcomes under conditions of heightened motivation to process. For both outcome measures, listening values exhibited a positive main effect; that is, individuals who more highly value listening as a form of support also are more prone to rate helper listening more positively. Perhaps this value acts to heighten rater awareness of particular behaviors enacted by listeners and, thus, contributes to a more discerning evaluative palette. Alternatively, listening values may act as a partial bias predisposing some people to rate others' listening more positively.

This second speculation seems a bit less warranted when interpreted in light of results relevant to H2. In particular, listening values moderated the impact of VPC on ratings of helpers as supportive listeners, but only for the ALOS and only at the 90% confidence level; results were not mirrored for the AELS. Interestingly, the AELS measures general perceptions of what constitutes supportive listening (e.g., "was aware of what the other person implied but did not say"), whereas the ALOS taps concrete behavioral operationalizations of listening (e.g., "used exploring questions") often associated with an active conversational presence. When it comes to evaluating the behaviors of a supportive listener, listening values seem to predispose some individuals to attend more closely to verbal behaviors of the support provider and, in turn, discriminate more sharply between better and worse forms of support. Thus, listening values seem to act in line with a central tenet of Bodie and Burleson's (2008) dual-process theory of supportive message outcomes. As these authors stated,

It seems reasonable to assume that people who prioritize emotional support skills will be more motivated to process supportive messages, and . . . discriminate more sharply between better and worse forms of these messages than people who value emotional support skills to a lesser extent. (p. 373)

In addition to the value people placed on listening, comforting and ego-support values also moderated the impact of VPC on ratings of helpers on the ALOS. Thus, it seems reasonable to suggest that individuals' perceptions of listening, ego-support, and comforting are integrally connected. To many, being a good listener also means being able to aid distressed others in having better perceptions of their own accomplishments, abilities and character (see Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011), hence a possible reason for the connection with ego-support values. Individuals also expect the listening process to alleviate the extent

to which powerful emotions affect them when they are upset, sad, depressed, or hurt (Jones, 2011), perhaps a reason for the connection with comforting. In general, it appears that being a good listener means being a good problem-solver by helping others work through complex emotions and feelings during stressful situations while simultaneously enabling positive views of self.

Interestingly, the current study did not detect any significant results for nonverbal immediacy. Listening values did not moderate the impact of NVI on ratings of helpers as supportive listeners on either dependent measure. Concretely, people's listening values are most directly associated with verbal person-centered comforting behaviors rather than nonverbal immediacy behaviors. This is curious because past research clearly points to the importance of nonverbal behavior in general, and in the comforting context in particular (Jones & Guerrero, 2001). Reasons for these null-findings associated with nonverbal immediacy may lie in the fact that the stimulus conversations we used in the current study reflected stranger interactions. Strangers lack concrete behavioral scripts about the nuanced nonverbal behaviors of their conversational partner and tend to base their judgments on what constitutes normatively appropriate and effective behavior; many of these scripts reflect verbal behaviors, a concern we address in more detail in the next section. Our results may also indicate that the processing of nonverbal behavior operates differently than processing message content. As a result, the dual-process theory of supportive *message* outcomes may be aptly named.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Our study has several limitations, foremost the limitation that our study relied on participants not engaged in the supportive interaction and observing a conversation among strangers. Although the methodological choice of our study was informed by similar research asking participants to read a conversation between two individuals and evaluate their behavior (see e.g., Burleson, Holmstrom, & Gilstrap, 2005; Feng, 2009; Holmstrom, Burleson, & Jones, 2005), it is nevertheless a limitation that should be addressed in future work concerned with how elements of a supportive interaction as well as individual differences influence impressions of helpers as supportive listeners. For instance, future research ought to examine how the various communication values of interlocutors act and interact together to influence impressions of helpers as (un)supportive listeners. Overall, and regardless of the particulars of future research, listening should be afforded more attention, perhaps even posited as the primary process influencing supportive communication outcomes (Jones, 2011).

REFERENCES

- Albrecht, T. L., & Goldsmith, D. J. (2003). Social support, social networks, and health. In T. L. Thompson, A. M. Dorsey, K. I. Miller, & R. Parrott (Eds.), *Handbook of health communication* (pp. 263–284). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Andersen, J. F., Andersen, P. A., & Jensen, A. D. (1979). The measurement of nonverbal immediacy. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 7, 153–180. doi:10.1080/00909887909365204
- Bavelas, J. B., & Gerwing, J. (2011). The listener as addressee in face-to-face dialogue. *International Journal of Listening*, 25, 178–198. doi:10.1080/10904018.2010.508675
- Bodie, G. D. (2011). The Active-Empathic Listening Scale (AELS): Conceptualization and evidence of validity within the interpersonal domain. *Communication Quarterly*, 59, 277–295. doi:10.1080/01463373.2011.583495

- Bodie, G. D., & Burleson, B. R. (2008). Explaining variations in the effects of supportive messages: A dual-process framework. *Communication Yearbook*, 32, 355–398.
- Bodie, G. D., & Jones, S. M. (2012). The nature of supportive listening II: The role of verbal person centeredness and nonverbal immediacy. *Western Journal of Communication*, 76, 250–269. doi:[10.1080/10570314.2011.651255](https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2011.651255)
- Bodie, G. D., & MacGeorge, E. L. (2014). Supportive Communication Theories: Dual-Process Theory of Supportive Message Outcomes and Advice Response Theory. In D. O. Braithwaite & P. Shrodt (Eds.), *Engaging Theories of Interpersonal Communication* (2nd ed., pp. 129–141). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bodie, G. D., Vickery, A. J., Cannava, K., & Jones, S. M. (2015). The role of “active listening” in informal helping conversations: Impact on perceptions of listener helpfulness, sensitivity, and supportiveness and discloser emotional improvement. *Western Journal of Communication*, 79, 151–173. doi:[10.1080/10570314.2014.943429](https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2014.943429)
- Bodie, G. D., Vickery, A. J., & Gearhart, C. C. (2013). The nature of supportive listening I: Exploring the relation between supportive listeners and supportive people. *International Journal of Listening*, 27, 39–49. doi:[10.1080/10904018.2013.732408](https://doi.org/10.1080/10904018.2013.732408)
- Burleson, B. R. (1990). Comforting as everyday social support: Relational consequences of supportive behaviors. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Personal relationships and social support* (pp. 66–82). London, England: Sage.
- Burleson, B. R. (1994). Comforting messages: Features, functions, and outcomes. In J. A. Daly & J. M. Wiemann (Eds.), *Strategic interpersonal communication* (pp. 135–161). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Burleson, B. R. (2003). Emotional support skills. In J. O. Greene & B. R. Burleson (Eds.), *Handbook of communication and social interaction skills* (pp. 551–594). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Burleson, B. R. (2007). Constructivism: A general theory of communication skill. In B. B. Whaley & W. Samter (Eds.), *Explaining communication: Contemporary theories and exemplars* (pp. 105–128). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Burleson, B. R. (2008). What counts as effective emotional support? Explorations of individual and situation differences. In M. T. Motley (Ed.), *Studies in applied interpersonal communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Burleson, B. R. (2010). Explaining recipient responses to supportive messages: Development and tests of a dual-process theory. In S. W. Smith & S. R. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication* (pp. 159–179). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Burleson, B. R., Holmstrom, A. J., & Gilstrap, C. M. (2005). “Guys can’t say *that* to guys”: Four experiments assessing the normative motivation account for deficiencies in the emotional support provided by men. *Communication Monographs*, 72, 468–501. doi:[10.1080/03637750500322636](https://doi.org/10.1080/03637750500322636)
- Burleson, B. R., & Mortenson, S. R. (2003). Explaining cultural differences in evaluations of emotional support behaviors: Exploring the mediating influences of value systems and interaction goals. *Communication Research*, 30, 113–146. doi:[10.1177/0093650202250873](https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650202250873)
- Burleson, B. R., & Rack, J. J. (2008). Constructivism: Explaining individual differences in communication skill. In L. A. Baxter & D. O. Braithwaite (Eds.), *Engaging theories in interpersonal communication* (pp. 51–63). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Burleson, B. R., & Samter, W. (1990). Effects of cognitive complexity on the perceived importance of communication skills in friends. *Communication Research*, 17, 165–182. doi:[10.1177/009365090017002002](https://doi.org/10.1177/009365090017002002)
- Chaiken, S. (1980). Heuristic versus systematic information processing and the use of source versus message cues in persuasion. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 39, 752–766. doi:[10.1037/0022-3514.39.5.752](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.39.5.752)
- Fassaert, T., van Dulmen, S., Schellevis, F., & Bensing, J. (2007). Active listening in medical consultations: Development of the Active Listening Observation Scale. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 68, 258–264. doi:[10.1016/j.pec.2007.06.011](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2007.06.011)
- Feng, B. (2009). Testing an integrated model of advice-giving in supportive interactions. *Human Communication Research*, 35, 115–129. doi:[10.1111/j.1468-2958.2008.01340.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2008.01340.x)
- High, A. C., & Dillard, J. P. (2012). A review and meta-analysis of person-centered messages and social support outcomes. *Communication Studies*, 63, 99–118. doi:[10.7080/10510974.2011.598208](https://doi.org/10.7080/10510974.2011.598208)
- Holmstrom, A. J. (2009). Sex and gender similarities and differences in communication values in same-sex and cross-sex friendships. *Communication Quarterly*, 57, 224–238. doi:[10.1080/01463370902889455](https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370902889455)
- Holmstrom, A. J., Bodie, G. D., Burleson, B. R., McCullough, J. D., Rack, J. J., Hanasono, L. K., & Rosier, J. G. (2015). Testing a dual-process theory of supportive communication outcomes: How multiple factors influence outcomes in support situations. *Communication Research*, 42, 526–546. doi:[10.1177/0093650213476293](https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650213476293)
- Holmstrom, A. J., & Burleson, B. R. (2011). An initial test of a cognitive-emotional theory of esteem support messages. *Communication Research*, 38, 326–355. doi:[10.1177/0093650210376191](https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650210376191)

- Holmstrom, A. J., Burleson, B. R., & Jones, S. M. (2005). Some consequences for helpers who deliver "cold comfort": Why it's worse for women than men to be inept when providing emotional support. *Sex Roles*, 53, 153–172. doi:10.1007/s11199-005-5676-4
- Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., & Layton, B. (2010). Social relationships and mortality: A meta-analysis. *PLoS Medicine*, 7, 1–20. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316
- Jones, S. M. (2004). Putting the person into person-centered and immediate emotional support: Emotional change and perceived helper competence as outcomes of comforting in helping situations. *Communication Research*, 32, 338–360. doi:10.1177/0093650204263436
- Jones, S. M. (2005). Attachment style differences and similarities in evaluations of affective communication skills and person-centered comforting messages. *Western Journal of Communication*, 69, 233–249.
- Jones, S. M. (2011). Supportive listening. *International Journal of Listening*, 25, 85–103. doi:10.1080/10904018.2011.536475
- Jones, S. M., & Guerrero, L. K. (2001). Nonverbal immediacy and verbal person-centeredness in the emotional support process. *Human Communication Research*, 4, 567–596. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2001.tb00793.x
- Jones, S. M., & Wirtz, J. (2006). How does the comforting process work?: An empirical test of an appraisal-based model of comforting. *Human Communication Research*, 32, 217–243. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.2006.00274.x
- MacGeorge, E. L., Feng, B., & Burleson, B. R. (2011). Supportive communication. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (4th ed., pp. 317–354). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moskowitz, G. B., Skurnik, I., & Galinsky, A. D. (1999). The history of dual-process notions, and the future of preconscious control. In S. Chaiken & Y. Trope (Eds.), *Dual-process theories in social psychology* (pp. 12–36). New York, NY: Guilford.
- Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *Advances in Experimental Psychology*, 19, 123–205.
- Samter, W., & Burleson, B. R. (1990). Evaluations of communication skills as predictors of peer acceptance in a group living situation. *Communication Studies*, 41, 311–326.
- Samter, W., & Burleson, B. R. (2005). The role of communication in same-sex friendships: A comparison among African Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans. *Communication Quarterly*, 53, 265–283. doi:10.1080/01463370500100982
- Spitzberg, B., & Cupach, W. R. (2002). Interpersonal skills. In M. L. Knapp & J. A. Daly (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (3rd ed., pp. 564–612). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.