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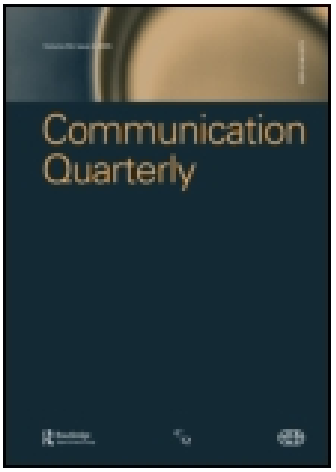

Communication Quarterly
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcqu20

Relational Listening Goals Influence How People Report Talking About Problems

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Published online: 17 Aug 2015.

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To cite this article: Shaughan A. Keaton, Graham D. Bodie & Robert V. Keteyian (2015) Relational Listening Goals Influence How People Report Talking About Problems, Communication Quarterly, 63:4, 480-494, DOI: 10.1080/01463373.2015.1062407

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2015.1062407

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Communication Quarterly
Vol. 63, No. 4, September–October 2015, pp. 480–494

Routledge
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Relational Listening Goals Influence How People Report Talking About Problems

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This study tested the extent that style of listening by message receivers and their subsequent responses affects communicative response styles of initial message senders in supportive contexts. A sample of 415 college students participated in an experiment. Each participant was asked to recall a recently upsetting event, to imagine that they disclosed to a close friend or family member who was attributed with each of four different listening goals, and to indicate how they were likely to respond. Results suggest that listening goals affect situational communicator responses when controlling for trait communicator styles. Relational goals increase the likelihood of interpersonal communicator responses but decrease the prospect of linguistic-styled disclosures. Analytical listener goals do not elicit linguistic or logical responses nor do critical listener goals influence linguistic or logical disclosures. Only relational listener goals influence communicator responses in these data, and only for interpersonal- (increased) and linguistic- (decreased) type responses. Listener effectiveness did not increase with a wider variety of listening skills; relational listening was the only goal that significantly affected response preference. This study moves work on supportive listening toward a model that theorizes the reciprocal nature of supportive encounters: Listening is interactive.

Keywords: Communicator Styles; Interpersonal; Linguistic; Listening Goals; Relational; Supportive Listening

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ISSN 0146-3373 print/1746-4102 online © 2015 Eastern Communication Association
DOI: 10.1080/01463373.2015.1062407

The ability to cope with negative life events and manage concomitant emotions is essential to well-being (Flett, Blankstein, Hicken, & Watson, 1995; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). Key among coping resources is the emotional support we receive from close others (Cunningham & Barbee, 2000). Over 30 years of research on supportive communication has shown that, for emotional support to be successful, it must validate support-seeker emotions in a non-judgmental way and ultimately contribute to a conversational dynamic in which disclosure can thrive (for reviews see Burleson, 2003; Goldsmith, 2004; MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson, 2011). According to Burleson and Goldsmith (1998), "comfort is not a substance given by one individual to another" but offers assistance to a "distressed other in developing new appraisals about the stressful situation" (p. 259). In other words, the role of a supportive listener is to help a stressed other disclose in ways that generate new methods of thinking and feeling about a problem. Similarly, expressive writing research has documented that mental and physical health is improved by writing or talking about stressful experiences in narrative form; telling a coherent story about a stressful event enables sense making (Lepore & Smyth, 2002). What these two lines of work suggest is that both the support provider's comforting attempts and the support seeker's manners of talking about a problem can influence the feeling better process.

While we know much about how certain characteristics of "supportive messages" are evaluated by individuals experiencing (Bodie, 2012b; Derlega, Barbee, & Winstead, 1994; Jones & Guerrero, 2001) or imagining the experience of stressful events (Bodie, 2013b; Burleson & Samter, 1985a, 1985b), we know less about the effects of different approaches to comfort on manners of talking about problematic events. How problems are thought about and shared can have profound impacts on health and well-being (Pennebaker & Chung, 2011; Rimé, Corsini, & Herbette, 2002; Smyth, Pennebaker, & Arigo, 2012). From a communication perspective, it is theoretically and practically important to discover which demeanors of listening and responding to another's distress allow for the most productive patterns of disclosure. Past research has not addressed whether specific means of listening and responding in a supportive context are causally related to how problems are disclosed. Consequently, this study seeks to provide initial evidence that how a support provider initially listens to and interprets the stressful event disclosure of the seeker is causally related to how he or she is likely to talk about the problem subsequently.

Theoretical Framework

Listeners play vital roles in all types of conversations, ultimately co-narrating storytelling episodes by directing and shaping interaction through various verbal and nonverbal means (Bavelas & Gerwing, 2011). Listener facilitation influences myriad positive outcomes, from improved understanding to relational satisfaction and physical health (Bodie, 2012a). Not only do people consistently rate listening as an important component of social support (Bodie, Vickery, & Gearhart, 2013),

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but more attentive and responsive support providers elicit more detailed disclosures (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983). Moreover, good supportive listeners assist distressed others in telling their stories in manners that help reappraisal, that is, to view a problematic event more positively and to re-establish cognitive order (Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Clark, 1993; Jones, 2011). Helpers possessing adequate listening skills should be more effective helpers than those who do not, displaying clear reasoning for studying relations between listening and expressing in supportive situations.

Supportive listeners exhibit a range of specific attitudes and behaviors closely aligned to descriptions of supportive people who possess motivation and ability to acquire (a) knowledge about feelings and emotional states of others, (b) knowledge about dynamics of human emotion, and (c) knowledge of specific nonverbal, linguistic, and rhetorical resources through which supportive interactions are realized (Burleson & Kunkel, 1996). Supportive listeners are actively and non-judgmentally focused on concerns of others and are seen as generally likable (Bodie, Vickery et al., 2013). Supportive listeners exhibit optimism, truthfulness, attentiveness, and understanding through verbal and nonverbal immediacy (Bodie & Jones, 2012), and they engage in eye contact, ask questions, and respond appropriately (see Bodie, St.Cyr, Pence, Rold, & Honeycutt, 2012). In sum, good supportive listeners respond to emotional needs of distressed others. As an important "human action," supportive listening should reflect the "operation of underlying cognitive structures and processes through which aspects of the world are interpreted and given meaning" (Burleson, 1986, p. 63). One set of cognitive structures useful in explaining message production processes is the concept of goal: "future states of affairs that an individual is committed to maintaining or bringing about" (Dillard, Anderson, & Knobloch, 2001, p. 433).

Listening goals. The first conceptualization of listening-related goals was developed by Watson, Barker, and Weaver (1995), who proposed the construct of *listening style* as variability in how people attend to and process information. Watson et al. identified four listening orientations—people, action, content, and time—that individuals habitually orient towards, especially in novel situations (Imhof, 2004). Problems encountered in studies utilizing the Listening Styles Profile (LSP-16; see Bodie & Worthington, 2010) led Bodie, Worthington, and Gearhart (2013) to revise and frame this typology as representing four distinct "goals that listeners have when engaged in situations that call them to be a particular kind of listener" (p. 17). This reconceptualization suggests that pursuing specific listening goals has considerable implications for conversational flow.

A fundamental goal of listening involves connecting with others emotionally and attempting to understand how they feel. Similar to Watson et al.'s people orientation, the first listening-related goal in this new framework is labeled relational listening (RL), which describes concern with and awareness of others' feelings and emotions. RL is related to empathy (Weaver & Kirtley, 1995; Worthington, 2001) and a more relationally oriented communication style (Bodie & Villaume, 2003). People who

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report listening in this manner also report being more outgoing and sociable (Sargent, Fitch-Hauser, & Weaver, 1997; Villaume & Bodie, 2007).

Analytical listening (AL) reflects an orientation toward attending to the full message of a speaker before coming to judgment. AL captures a tendency to engage in systematic thinking, and AL was found to be strongly associated with the information processing constructs *perspective taking* and *systematic-analytic processing* (Bodie, Worthington et al., 2013). AL also correlated with RL, suggesting listening in analytically oriented ways exhibits sensitivity to what others are feeling.

Task-oriented listening (TOL) reflects concern with time spent in interaction but also represents a desire by listeners for speakers to stay focused and on-topic. These facets of TOL are evidenced through relationships with the original action- and time-oriented styles of the LSP-16 (rs 0.65 and 0.35, respectively; Bodie, Worthington et al., 2013). TOL is highly related to a tendency toward verbal aggressiveness, a lack of enjoyment for listening, and an inability to respond empathically (Bodie, Worthington et al., 2013; Study 2). Thus, TOL seems to map conceptually to what past research calls a socially callous listening style (Villaume & Bodie, 2007; Weaver, 1998).

Critical listening (CL) refers to tendencies to focus attention on accuracy and consistency. The items comprising the CL scale all tap a tendency to evaluate and critically assess messages, a key component of the original content-orientation of the LSP-16. People who report a high degree of CL also report a high need to think about issues and evaluate others' perspectives. This goal reflects individual needs to critically examine people and information in general (Bodie, Worthington et al., 2013; Study 2).

Research to date has focused on the degree to which listening style is associated with various communication traits of listeners. Because the reconceptualization offered by Bodie, Worthington et al. primarily emphasizes how listening goals affect conversations and outcomes, the primary focus of this study is test the degree to which habits of communicating are likely to change as a function of listeners' behavioral manifestation of listening goals (*H1*).

Habits of Communicating: Communication Styles

According to Keteyian (2011), individual differences in communication and listening are inextricably linked, a point with empirical support (Berger, 2011; Keaton, Keteyian, & Bodie, 2014; Villaume & Bodie, 2007). Keteyian (2011) proposed seven components to one's communication style, which fluctuate at individual levels and combine in myriad ways to make up an individual's style of communication (either in general or in particular situations). Keteyian proposed that by understanding these components and recognizing resulting styles, counselors (and presumably lay helpers as well) can become more tuned to distressed others' "natural language," thus making "interventions that are more individually focused" (p. 93).

The *auditory* component describes attention to tone, pitch, timbre, and rhythm in conversations, while *kinesthetic* communicators are grounded in experience and

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utilize physical gestures and postures while communicating. Emotional and physical connections play a large part in kinesthetic communication. Individuals who use words carefully to specifically define concepts have strong *linguistic* components to their communication styles, whereas those *logically* influenced to communicate prefer to explore possibilities and construct understanding of sequential events and their underlying causes. Others prefer to think in pictures, displaying a strong *visual-spatial* component to their conversational preference. It is easy for these individuals to picture events with visually oriented detail. The *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* constructs describe tendencies to prefer to communicate externally or internally, respectively. Those who have preferences for communicating interpersonally often think out loud and prefer to talk things through with conversational others. Those who think internally often think things through before and after acting, and often appear reserved and in need of time and space to process information.

In a recent study (Keaton et al., 2014), we found theoretically coherent relationships between Keteyian's set of communication components and the set of listening goals reviewed above. The patterns of variability in individual differences of listening goals and communicator components suggested two distinct listening profiles. The first centered on relational goals and interpersonal communicator preferences, suggesting that individuals with clear relational listening goals have an inclination for thinking out loud and talking things through with conversational others. This finding supports previous conceptualizations of RL as an important relational resource (Bodie, 2012a; Bodie, Vickery et al., 2013; Halone & Pecchioni, 2001; Pecchioni & Halone, 2000; Rhodes, 1993), and that RL is likely to manifest in the form of communication behaviors valuable in close relationships (e.g., relationship talk; Theiss & Solomon, 2008), especially when a close other is experiencing a demanding life event (MacGeorge et al., 2011). This investigation posits that when helpers utilize RL goals, there are situational effects on communicator responses; that is, we predict that RL goals elicit greater interpersonal conversational reactions (*H2*).

The second listening profile combined low RL with high CL and a moderate degree of AL. This profile suggests a multidimensional listening goal that focuses on listening closely to all sides of an issue, perhaps to identify inconsistencies and mistakes with less concern for emotions and feelings. This profile was related to a lack of interpersonal preference and an inclination towards linguistic and logical communicator preferences, both of which are detail-oriented communicator styles (Keteyian, 2011). It also indicates that in some situations, critical listening goals are supported by analytical goals (while deemphasizing relational goals), incorporating an attentive, multifaceted communicator approach that requires careful attention to word selection and comprehension of resultant events and potential causes. Thus we predict that since AL is typically associated with attention, understanding, perspective, analysis, and sensibility, it elicits greater linguistic (*H3*) and logical (*H4*) communicator responses, and because linguistic (*H5*) and logical (*H6*) preferences for communicating also involve detail orientation, they are compatible with CL, as the second profile indicates.

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Methods

Participants and Procedures

After removing 21 observations containing incomplete data, a total of 415 (253 females, 162 males) students attending Louisiana State University A&M constituted the convenience sample for this study. Students ranged from 18 to 51 years of age ($M = 20.14$, $SD = 2.73$) and represented the freshman ($n = 69$), sophomore ($n = 155$), junior ($n = 110$) and senior ($n = 78$) ranks; two respondents indicated graduate student status, and one indicated *other*. Although recruited through communication studies (CMST) courses, only 72 self-identified as CMST majors or minors; 343 individuals listed CMST is neither their major nor their minor. The self-identified ethnic composition of the sample was: White or Caucasian ($n = 333$); Black or African-American ($n = 45$); Hispanic or Latino ($n = 14$); Asian-American or of Asian descent ($n = 11$); Native American ($n = 2$); and one Asian Indian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander each; and, Other ($n = 6$).

Through an online scheduling system, students were able to select this study from a variety of opportunities to fulfill a required research participation requirement. This study contributed 1.5% to their course grade. All data collected were confidential, all students provided informed consent, and the appropriate Institutional Review Board approved all procedures. Students who chose to participate were directed to an external and secure universal resource locator where they were asked to recall a recently upsetting event, "something that has recently happened and which you have not talked much about with others." After they typed a brief description, participants were asked to imagine they disclosed to a close friend or family member who was attributed with each of four listening goals; these vignettes appeared in different, random orders for each participant (the vignettes are available from the researchers on request). After each vignette, participants indicated how they were likely to respond using items modified from the Communication Components Inventory (CCI; see the following).

Listening goals. The four scenarios reflecting the listening goal of the putative conversational helper were adapted from each of the corresponding factors of the Revised-Listening Styles Profile (LSP-R; Bodie, Worthington et al., 2013). The vignettes were created by referring to scale items and expanding them into supportive contexts: Relational Listening (RL; e.g., "When listening to others, it is important to understand the feelings of the speaker"), Analytical Listening (AL; e.g., "I wait until all the facts are presented before forming judgments and opinions"), Task-Oriented Listening (TOL; e.g., "I am impatient with people who ramble on during conversations"), and Critical Listening (CL; e.g., "When listening to others, I focus on any inconsistencies and/or errors in what's being said"). To verify the validity of these vignettes, individuals familiar with the listening literature were provided with conceptual and operational definitions of the four listening goals and asked to match each vignette using a forced-choice response format. All nine "experts" correctly identified the RL and TOL vignettes. One person mis-identified the analytical

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as critical and vice-versa. With 100% agreement on two of the four goals and 89% agreement on the remaining two, along with the face validity of the vignettes (which are provided in the appendix), we are convinced of the validity of our experimental conditions (see O'Keefe, 2003, for an extended discussion of manipulation checks).

Communicator responses. After each vignette, participants were asked to indicate how they would react to the supportive listener's response from a list of seven descriptions, each one representing a different communicator preference as measured by the CCI-R. Examples for each, along with psychometric properties providing evidence of reliability and validity, are provided in Table 1.

Trait communicator preferences. To control for the possiblity that individuals' general communicator preferences influence their responses on the same scale after exposure to particular listening goals, we included a measure of trait communicator preferences (CCI-R; Keaton & Bodie, 2012). The internal consistency estimates for the subscales relevant to the current study are as follows: Linguistic (e.g., "I like explaining, teaching, or persuading other"; $\alpha = 0.76$), Logical (e.g., "I reason things through step-by-step when thinking and talking"; $\alpha = 0.76$), Interpersonal (e.g., "It

Table 1 Psychometrics for State Communicator Preferences

Item	RL	AL	TOL	CL
Interpersonal α	0.56	0.60	0.53	0.42
Others seek me out for counsel or advice.				
It is important for me to get my thoughts and feelings out in the open.				
I am intrigued by emotional dynamics in interpersonal relationships.				
Intrapersonal α	0.49	0.50	0.43	0.42
Learning about myself is central to my understanding of others.				
To achieve clarity, I first need to be aware of my feelings, intentions, motivations, and goals.				
I have a good sense of self-direction and think independently.				
Linguistic α	0.62	0.61	0.59	0.68
I like to use words.				
I pay careful attention to the meaning of words.				
I like explaining, teaching, or persuading others.				
Logical α	0.57	0.48	0.52	0.32
I reason things through step-by-step when thinking and talking.				
I prefer to follow a train of thought through to its logical conclusion without interruption.				
I like to find rational explanations for almost everything.				
χ^2(df)	46.33(21)	50.83(21)	55.73(21)	84.08(21)
P	0.001	0.0003	0.0001	0.001
CFI	0.96	0.96	0.94	0.90
RMSEA	0.05 [0.03, 0.07]	0.05 [0.04, 0.07]	0.06 [0.04, 0.08]	0.07 [0.06, 0.10]

Note. RL = relational listening; AL = analytical listening; TOL = task-oriented listening; CL = critical listening; CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation. Internal consistency was estimated using Cronbach's α, and values are shown for each communicator preference in regards to each vignette. Values from confirmatory factor analysis are listed to estimate model fit and provide evidence of structural validity.

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is important for me to get my thoughts and feelings out in the open"; $\alpha = 0.73$), and Intrapersonal (e.g., "Learning about myself is central to my understanding of others"; $\alpha = 0.66$). The model representing four latent factors allowed to freely covary was adequate, χ^2 (21) = 15.58, $p < 0.0004$, CFI = 0.98, SRMR = 0.02, RMSEA = 0.06 (CI90% = 0.04, 0.10).

Results

Prior to running primary analyses, data were inspected for violations of multivariate assumptions (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007); none were found. With $N = 415$ and alpha set to 0.05, statistical power was 0.65 to detect small effects ($r = 0.10$) and exceeded 0.99 for medium ($r = 0.30$) and large ($r = 0.50$) effects.

To assess the degree to which listening goals influence reports of likely discloser (*H1*), a within subjects multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) model was estimated; a linear combination of state communicator response preferences was the dependent variable, listening goals were independent variables, and trait communicator preferences were covariates. The differential impact of listening goals on communicator response preference was significant, F (12, 3,976) = 10.63, $p < 0.000$; Wilk's $\lambda = 0.92$, multivariate $\eta^2 = 0.03$, controlling for trait communicator preferences. In support of *H1*, after parceling out variance accounted for by trait communicator styles (12.2%), listening goals affect communicator responses.

Table 2 Coefficients, Standard Errors, Slopes, and Probability Values for Multivariate Regression Estimates

Variables	*b*	SE	*t*	*P*
		Intrapersonal		
RL	−0.08	0.09	−1.00	0.16
AL	0.06	0.09	0.64	0.26
CL	−0.01	0.09	−0.11	0.46
		Interpersonal		
RL	0.65*	0.09*	7.26*	0.001*
AL	0.10	0.09	1.15	0.13
CL	0.02	0.09	0.24	0.41
		Linguistic		
RL	−0.36*	0.09*	−4.26*	0.001*
AL	0.04	0.09	0.42	0.34
CL	0.05	0.09	0.55	0.29
		Logical		
RL	0.14*	0.08*	1.80*	0.04*
AL	0.09	0.08	1.11	0.14
CL	0.01	0.08	0.13	0.45

Note. An asterisk designates one-tailed statistical significance at the $p < 0.05$ level.

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To evaluate *H2–6*, a multivariate regression model was estimated by dummy coding the categorical independent variable to examine listener goals' effects on communicator response styles. All regression estimates can be viewed in Table 2. Listener goals accounted for significant variance in interpersonal, $R^2 = 0.04$; $F = 23.56$; $p < 0.001$, and linguistic, $R^2 = 0.02$; $F = 10.62$; $p < 0.001$, responses but not intrapersonal or logical. *H2* asserted that when helpers use RL goals, there are situational effects on communicator responses, in particular on interpersonal disclosures. Results support *H2*, in that RL goals increase likelihood of interpersonal communicator responses but decrease the prospect of linguistic-styled disclosures. None of the other hypotheses were supported by these data: AL does not elicit linguistic (*H3*) or logical (*H4*) responses, nor does CL influence linguistic (*H5*) or logical (*H6*) disclosures. In summary, only RL influences communicator responses in these data and only for interpersonal (increased) and linguistic (decreased) type responses.

Discussion

This article presents a study that takes an initial step in a line of work that supports the position that supportive encounters, like all communicative acts, are transactional in nature (for review see Jones & Bodie, 2014); that is, the focus of supportive communication should be on the mutually constituted and interactive coping behaviors of co-contributing interlocutors. Thus, we are interested in the dynamics of speaking and listening that occur in supportive interactions and how the behaviors of both interlocutors are intimately related and help to mutually construct the supportive episode as well as the feeling better process (Bodie, Cannava, Vickery, & Jones, in press; Goldsmith, 2004; Jones, 2011).

Consequently, the goal of this study was to investigate one slice of the transactional listening/responding process, namely by observing situational effects of listening goals on communicator responses in hypothetical supportive conversations. By doing so, it moves work on supportive listening toward a model that theorizes the reciprocal, transactional nature of supportive encounters and considers listening as interactive. This study also aims to advise practice, providing suggestions for how one should approach a demanding situation as a listener. Professional helpers may be interested in these results because they apprise us about the nature of influence in a conversational venue.

It is apparent that the effect of listening goals on situational communicator responses is present, albeit small in magnitude. These results were generally supportive of our theoretical model in that listening behaviors do affect disclosure styles to an extent. The MANCOVA model estimates indicate that after accounting for trait communicator preferences, this situational effect is present. When helpers use RL goals, the likelihood of an interpersonal disclosure increases, and the likelihood of a linguistic-styled response decreases. However, neither AL nor CL had hypothesized effects on linguistic and logical disclosure response styles.

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These results contribute toward answering the overall question advanced by this study: To what extent do listening goals affect communicator response in supportive contexts? Attentiveness and responsiveness are important in many types of supportive contexts including parent-child (Duncan, Coatsworth, & Greenberg, 2009), marital (Pasupathi, Carstensen, Levenson, & Gottman, 1999), healthcare provider-recipient (Watanuki, Tracy, & Lindquist, 1984), and counselor-counseled (Hutchby, 2005). Professional and lay helpers possessing a variety of listening skills should be more effective than those who do not.

In this study, listener effectiveness (as measured by listening goals' impact on communicator responses) did not increase with a wider variety of listening skills. Instead, relational-oriented listening was the only listening goal that significantly affected communicator response preferences. The only responses reliably induced were interpersonal (increased) and linguistic (decreased). This conclusion supports the notion that effective listeners in the context of supportive conversations actively focus on the concerns of the other (Bodie, Vickery, et al., 2013), exhibit attentiveness and understanding through being verbally and nonverbally immediate (Bodie & Jones, 2012), and respond appropriately (see Bodie et al., 2012) rather than focusing on detailed and intricate word meaning. It is also no surprise then that relational listening induces a similarly interpersonal response.

Bodie, Worthington et al. (2013) framed the LSP-R typology as representing four distinct "goals that listeners have when engaged in situations that call them to be a particular kind of listener" (p. 17). Their conceptual notion suggests listening styles are adaptable and that pursuing a specific listening goal has implications for conversational flow. This proposition is true of supportive scenarios, but this study also suggests that if listeners want to have an impact on responses of others who chose to confide in them, that they adopt relational stances. Furthermore, it seems as if the communicator will be influenced to react in a more interpersonal, less linguistic and detail-oriented style. Task-oriented, analytical, or critical listening did not influence the response to the communication components items.

In addition to providing further speculative theoretical guidance, this study continues the program of research on listening goals. First, this investigation provides additional evidence for the validity of a newer measure of listening goals, one not marred by substantial measurement error (Bodie & Worthington, 2010). Future research should continue to explore patterns of variability in the implementation of listening goals.

Practical Implications

Establishing initial rapport is key for a listener in a helping role. For instance, researchers found that beginning counselors rated their supervisors (i.e., individuals functioning in helper roles) as more effective when a personal and agreeable supervisor-supervisee relationship was present (Noesner & Webster, 1997). This type of attentiveness and responsiveness forms a secure foundation in relational listening and is essential for relationships where one needs to establish trust. In families,

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emotional intimacy is an important characteristic of success; for instance, there is a positive relation between intimacy and marital satisfaction (Greeff & Malherbe, 2001), where self-disclosure is an important factor (Waring & Chelune, 1983). Relational listening goals encourage disclosure behaviors because of the comfort they offer, where acceptance and lack of judgment guide the listener and encourage future willingness to engage.

Similarly for helping professionals (medical and mental health practitioners), relational listening—which encourages self-disclosure necessary to the helping process—creates an environment where more information is likely to be forthcoming. For instance, when eating and weight concerns are disclosed to clinicians and educational professionals (as well as to family and peers), it has been found that these individuals are more likely to seek treatment afterwards (Becker, Thomas, Franko, & Herzog, 2005). A helper can encourage these disclosures by using an appropriate relational listening goal. When patients and clients are encouraged to disclose by these listening goals rather than questioned or coaxed, the acceptance they experience can foster an environment where more information becomes available. There is benefit to both listener/helper and discloser by a natural flow of information, as rapport deepens and more sensitive material comes to light.

By first developing personal or professional listening stances grounded in relational listening, it does not preclude the option to use other styles at a later time. For example, a counselor could begin with a relational listening goal to establish the working relationship where the client experiences comfort, acceptance, understanding, and no judgments. Such a conclusion is perhaps the more suitable to make given we asked participants to focus on a problem they had not discussed previously. Assuming this tactic results in greater trust, the counselor might incorporate other (e.g., AL) styles strategically to help the client look at the situation from a different point of view. This strategy can offer the counselor more flexibility and a range of interventions. Future research should explore how different sets of listening goals influence patterns of disclosure as a function of, for instance, different stages of the helping process (Hill, 2009) as well as whether results are compatible across different types of relationships (e.g., lay helpers versus formal helping relationships) (see Bodie, Vickery, Cannava, & Jones, 2015).

Limitations

The experimental design used in this study engaged participants with hypothetical situations; hence, we only know what they say they will do, not what they actually will do (Bodie, 2013a). More work is needed that observes actual supportive interactions between various relational types. In addition, we used a within-subjects design in which perceptual contrast may have been operating. Participants could have been comparing the scenarios when responding to them; however, they were randomly ordered for each participant so this concern is at least partially mitigated. It is also important to note that this investigation is only one piece of a larger theoretical model that needs to be tested more fully. Furthermore, many of the subscales for

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the CCI-R exhibited estimates of internal consistency that are below commonly accepted values (i.e., <0.70); correlations reported in the results section may underestimate true relationships.

Finally, effect sizes discovered in this experiment were marginal. It is possible that the robust sample and its power to detect small effects (0.65) might have detected model wide effects that were only artifacts of this particular sample. Future research should do conceptual and identical replication (see Stroebe & Strack, 2014) and meta-analytic follow up to test whether the marginal effect is further supported.

Conclusions

The results of this investigation support the notion that listening goals affect situational communicator responses. Relational goals intensify the probability of interpersonal communicator responses but decrease the prospect of linguistic-styled disclosures. Analytical listener goals do not elicit linguistic or logical responses, nor do critical listener goals influence linguistic or logical disclosures. Only relational listener goals influence communicator responses, and only for interpersonal (more likely) and linguistic (less likely) responses. It is noteworthy that listener effectiveness does not increase with a wider variety of listening skills and that relational listening is the only goal that significantly affects response predilection. This study takes an initial step toward taking seriously the position that supportive encounters, like all communicative acts, are transactional in nature; that is, the focus of supportive communication should be on the mutually constituted and interactive coping behaviors of co-contributing interlocutors. As scholars of supportive communication and listening, we should be interested in the dynamics of speaking and listening that occur in supportive interactions and how the behaviors of both interlocutors are intimately related and help to mutually construct the supportive episode as well as the feeling better process. We hope that future work exhibits a similar interest.

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Funding

This research was funded by the Synergist Award, awarded to all three authors by the International Listening Association.

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