Do You Read Me?
Investigating Support Elicitation Strategies and Relationship-Schematic Processing
Among Couples Facing Breast Cancer

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Abstract

JASMINE KELLY: Do You Read Me? Investigating Support Elicitation Strategies and Relationship-Schematic Processing Among Couples Facing Breast Cancer
(Under the direction of Donald H. Baucom)

Women in distress turn to their partners for support, regardless of relationship satisfaction. Despite this, there has been little research on couples’ elicitation of social support. As part of a larger treatment outcome study, 50 couples facing early stage breast cancer completed a 7-minute support exchange, coded for elicitation styles and relational processing to determine: 1) effects of men’s ability to attend to cues for support on women’s satisfaction with support, and 2) effects of elicitation strategies women employed on support satisfaction. This investigation involved creation of the Couple Elicitation Coding System, CSECS, and the adaptation of the Relationship Schematic Processing (RSP) coding system. Women’s satisfaction with support from men was associated with higher quality RSP ratings for men. Women primarily used indirect elicitation and this was associated with higher support satisfaction.
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Introduction

Women generally have larger support networks outside of their marriages than men; however, in the most difficult times, even women who are less than satisfied in their marriages tend to turn to their husbands for support (Coyne & Anderson, 1999). Understanding how spouses help each other contend with personal difficulties is an important domain for understanding marital success (Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). There is an inherent suggestion in marriage that when in need, a spouse will be there to provide support. Support from one’s partner during difficult times builds trust in the relationship and justifies the belief that one’s partner is genuinely concerned and available to provide care as needed (Cutrona, 1996). Lack of spousal support has been identified as a major reason for marital dissatisfaction and dissolution (Baxter, 1986). Additionally, when faced with life stressors, the presence of social support in the marriage can improve not only the relationship, but also the individual’s ability to cope with the stressor (Cutrona, 1996). The presence of social support from one’s spouse can also aid in the recovery from many serious life stressors, such as debilitating illness (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Whereas the benefit of social support has been established, to date the mechanisms are less well understood.

It is evident how important clarity is around the mechanisms of social support when considering that even the most caring spouses may not know how to support their partners in times of extreme stress. Thus, stressful life events can disturb the relationship functioning of even the happiest couples (Cutrona, 1996). Whereas there is research touting the benefits of social support for those experiencing stressors, there is also evidence that social support interactions can be a disappointment, and this in turn may be detrimental to the individual’s well
being (Rook, 1984). Given the importance of social support in marriage and the
treacherous navigation of coping with stress, it is important to understand the mechanisms of
social support seeking and provision in the context of severe stress. In this way, information
about social support interactions can be used to enhance programs aimed at helping couples cope
with stressful experiences.

To date, the majority of research on social support and marriage has focused on the
provision of support. Information has been gained about the various types of social support given
to a partner, and the difference between received (what is actually given) and perceived (what is
experienced) social support. The provision of social support has been linked to various positive
outcomes for the relationship and for the individual (for a more comprehensive review of such
literature see Burlson, Albrecht & Sarason, 1994; Cutrona, 1996). Given that social support
occurs in interaction between two people, it seems of equal importance to investigate the nature
of seeking support, and what impact the mechanisms of seeking, or eliciting support may have
on this process and its outcomes. In order for a partner to provide support, it is necessary that the
person realize that support is needed. Indicating the need for support is the first step in
determining the course of the support interaction. Understanding how individuals go about
seeking support will contribute to a better overall understanding of couple support
communication processes. Currently, there is a dearth of research in social support elicitation in
couples; therefore, in order to provide a framework for this aspect of social support, research on
elicitation processes between other, non-couple individuals is addressed in this review.
Background

Understanding the Transactional Model

Social support interactions are best understood as transactional in nature, meaning there is a dynamic between the person seeking the support and the person acting as the support provider. In order to study the mechanisms of social support elicitation from the person seeking support, one must be able to understand the process of exchange between two people. This dynamic can be broken down into three stages for a given social support interaction (Pearlin & McCall, 1990). Before any further step in the support process can proceed, the individual who is undergoing stress must in some fashion indicate the need for support. This is the first stage of the interaction, called the elicitation stage, which is the focus of the current investigation. Once support has been elicited in some fashion, the potential support provider, having been alerted to the need for support, must recognize this request and choose whether and how to respond. This second stage is called the provision stage, where most of the research on social support has focused thus far. The third and final stage of the social support interaction involves both the support seeker and the support provider reflecting on the relative success of the transaction. The support seeker evaluates the benefit of the support received, and the provider evaluates the effect of what was delivered; this is the evaluation stage. This last stage may or may not occur, and many times it will occur implicitly. It can, however, have powerful implications for the future of support exchanges between two people.
Support Elicitation

The elicitation of social support is any communication about a problem or a difficult situation that is aimed at garnering any given form of support, including advice, assistance, or comfort (Gourash, 1978). The role of the support seeker is to indicate the need for social support in a given area of life, or around a specific problem or feeling. This indication may be verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, and may occur in a positive or negative way (Jensen, 2001).

Understanding this step in the support process is important in obtaining a full picture of how support exchanges take place, and how the various roles of the individuals affect that process.

For instance, some strategies for seeking support may be more effective than others at garnering the desired support from the provider.

At present, there is a dearth of research on social support elicitation in couples. Therefore, the literature on the elicitation of social support between various individuals is reviewed here, along with the limited research on social support elicitation and couples, to provide a basis and a rationale for the further investigation of support-seeking mechanisms. It appears that there are two reasons why someone might seek support. First, an individual might seek support when help is necessary, meaning the individual is facing a problem he or she cannot solve alone. Another reason someone might seek support is that, even though the individual may be able to solve the problem alone given enough time and energy, obtaining aid is more convenient or preferable (Gross & McMullen, 1982). Gross and McMullen (1983) suggested that the individual goes through three stages of deciding to seek support: (a) perceiving the problem, (b) deciding to ask for help, and (c) selecting where to get help from, given the available resources. In addition, according to Keith-Lucas (1994), there are several conditions that must be met for a person to proceed with support elicitation. The individual must on some level conclude
that a problem requires the involvement of another. He or she must also possess a willingness to reveal the problem, and must also be willing to allow the helper to help, at times relinquishing some control over the situation.

Findings indicate that those who seek help are, indeed, more likely to receive it (Conn & Peterson, 1989). This demonstrates the importance of seeking support in the first place. Conn and Peterson (1989) also investigated who elicits social support and found that those who are psychologically well adjusted and those who seek support actively are more likely to receive support. Additionally, individuals who provide support more often were more likely to ask for it in return (Collins & Pancoast, 1976). In addition, females tend to seek support more than males (Belle, 1987), and those who are younger, more highly educated, and are Caucasian all tend to seek support at a higher rate than others (Cohen, Guttman & Lazar, 1998; Eckenrode, 1983; O’Neil, Lancee, & Freeman, 1984).

Factors that may inhibit social support elicitation include: a need to appear competent; a high need for autonomy, privacy, or control; and/or the perception that one cannot effectively garner the necessary support, or that the costs of doing so outweigh the benefits of the possible support received (Abdullah, 1992; Ball, 1983; Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Harrison & Neufeld, 1997). The above factors might also relate to cultural factors valuing self-reliance and privacy (Ball, 1983; Cohen et al., 1998).

Findings also indicate that when elicitation does occur, the strategy used to elicit support likely affects the nature and extent of the social support received from others (Gottlieb, 1981). More specifically, it appears that successful elicitation is dependent on important social information processing skills that allow one to assess the situation and the other person, including an understanding of the time and the place to request support, as well as the person to
whom to disclose. Basically, knowing what to say and how to say it is important in an effective elicitation. Generally expressing that one is in distress has been associated with receiving more social support (Milne & Netherwood, 1997). However, there also appears to be a need for clarity in communicating the need for support. Veiled, unclear or ambiguous requests, or request strategies that incite negativity in the partner, are not likely to yield the desired support (Barbee, Druen, Gulley, Yankeelov, & Cunningham, 1992). Although self-disclosure in general has been linked to greater intimacy and more supportiveness in romantic relationships, there are limitations to the type of self-disclosures made. That is, when opening up to one’s partner in a positive way, indicating a desire to share one’s thoughts and feelings, the result is usually reciprocal positivity. On the other hand, expressions of negativity towards one’s partner have been associated with receiving more negativity or withdrawal from one’s partner, the opposite of support (Barbee et al., 1992); thus, criticizing or complaining about one’s partner is likely to be an unsuccessful support elicitation strategy.

There is evidence that missing an opportunity to provide support to one’s partner is extremely detrimental (Barbee et al., 1992). In other words, if one partner is not adept at reading and correctly interpreting the other person’s elicitation cues, then they may not understand what is requested of them and, therefore, will not deliver the support being sought from them. This phenomenon elucidates the way in which couples who mean to be loving and supportive can end up having serious relationship difficulties stemming from hardship. Therefore, how skilled the partners are at reading one another’s cues is a factor for consideration when investigating what makes a support interaction successful. The type of elicitation strategy being used may also affect the degree to which the support provider accurately perceives the request. If the support seeker is using direct elicitation strategies, the request for support may be harder to miss than
when indirect strategies are being used. When indirect support elicitation cues are being employed, more skill might be needed on the part of the provider to interpret these cues and respond to them appropriately.

Some partners may use indirect strategies as a way to test the intimacy level of their relationship (Jordon & Roloff, 1990); that is, indirect requests with appropriate responses can be seen as an index of how well the provider understands and is attuned to the other person. When support is provided appropriately in such a situation, it has the advantage of being relationship-building; however, when this opportunity to gauge a partner’s needs accurately is missed repeatedly or on major occasions, this can be so detrimental that the support seeker questions the relationship (Barbee et al., 1992).

Jordon and Roloff (1990) conducted an investigation comparing intimate partners with non-intimates, and the results suggested that those in intimate relationships potentially garner less support from their partner, because they are expecting their partner to support them without directly being requested to do so. The person in an intimate relationship may assume that it is unnecessary to ask directly for help because the support seeker expects the partner to be capable of interpreting less direct indications of needed support. In this study, the partner was not always able to make these interpretations accurately, and being direct garnered more verbal compliance with requests for support. Of note, the participants in this study were all undergraduates who were not necessarily undergoing extreme stress. Also, they were explicitly indicating a need for tangible assistance with something, rather than requesting emotional or esteem support. Consequently, there are limitations to what degree these findings can be generalized to married couples needing emotional support. In addition, intimate partners’ abilities to read indirect
requests for support varied, perhaps as a function of how well they understand and process interpersonal interactions.

**Relationship-Schematic Processing**

One way of conceptualizing the skill of being able to read one’s partner is to use our understanding of how people view the world differently from one another. Some people view the world through the lens of their relationships, whereas others do not. This has been called the degree to which one engages in Relationship-Schematic Processing (RSP; Sullivan & Baucom, 2004). The best way to describe this construct is by example. Alice and Evan are married. Alice is someone who plans ahead, and Evan is more “laid back and tends to go with the flow.” Alice also is someone we would consider to be relationship-schematic. When she plans, she plans with her and Evan’s relationship in mind. She attends to his schedule, giving equal weight and consideration to his life as she does to her own, because she sees them as a couple. Evan, on the other hand, may make plans without consulting Alice, or often will forget where she is or what she is doing, even when she has told him. In the beginning of their relationship, Alice interpreted this behavior as a sign that Evan did not care about their relationship as much as she did. She processed his behavior in terms of their relationship, rather than as an indication that Evan’s personal style was different from her own. Because Alice had good communication skills and wanted to process information about their relationship accurately, she sat down with Evan and asked him about this behavior. He explained that he was just not accustomed to considering someone else’s activities and was used to thinking of his own needs when he made plans. He explained to her that he in no way meant for this to be any indication that he did not value the relationship and said that he enjoyed that she did so much planning for him.
This example encompasses several important aspects of relationship-schematic processing. For one, it illustrates how two people could process the same events in different ways. Additionally, as is the case in the example, research has shown that women tend to be more relationship-schematic than men (Sullivan & Baucom, 2005). This is not surprising given the literature on women as “gatekeepers” of relationships (Sullivan & Baucom, 2004). Furthermore, research indicates that it may be more important for women to be relationship-schematic; men are more satisfied when women are higher on RSP, and women are satisfied when men exhibit even a moderate amount of RSP. Generally, RSP is shown to be associated with relationship satisfaction (Sullivan & Baucom, 2005). The quantity of one’s processing in terms of the relationship is relevant, as well as the quality of this processing. The quality of RSP can be seen in the above example. Alice could have become very upset and manipulative as a result of her interpretation of Evan’s behavior. Speaking with him to clarify how these behaviors were related to their relationship was a skillful way of using her RSP, which led to both of them learning more about the other person and making some decisions about how to address issues in the future.

Given that processing in terms of one’s relationship and, thereby, being skilled at reading one’s partner, is associated with relationship satisfaction, it seems that partners high on RSP would be better able to provide support to their partners, even when partners are using indirect strategies. That is, persons high on RSP should be better able to perceive and appropriately interpret indirect cues for support. Because social support is such a foundational aspect of a solid relationship, partners may appreciate support more when they do not have to ask for it explicitly most of the time. This issue is particularly salient when looking at social support among committed couples, rather than help seeking behavior between less intimate partners, because
there is a certain amount of understanding that is expected in an intimate relationship. For instance, most people would agree that it is less satisfying to hear, “I love you” if one had to ask for it. The expectation between two people in an intimate relationship is that caring and support often occur voluntarily, and perhaps spontaneously, without direct requests.

Findings also indicate that support recipients are more satisfied when the type of support provided is “in sync” with the type of support needed (Cutrona & Russell, 1990). In order for partners to provide the desired support to their support-seeking partners, they must not only recognize the elicitation cue, but also recognize the type of support needed. Given that RSP is thought to be a reasonable indicator of how well partners can read one another, it is likely that those who are high on RSP would be better able to determine and deliver the specific type of support needed.

Assessing Elicitation of Social Support during Interpersonal Interactions

Given this framework for understanding the elicitation of social support within the transactional model, researchers need a way to understand and measure this elicitation more distinctly. Most of the research on social support elicitation thus far has been conducted utilizing self-report questionnaires on samples of non-coupled individuals. Findings from couple research indicate that one particularly valuable way to capture data on couples is to use observational coding methods (Kerig & Baucom, 2004). This technique is generally carried out by asking couples to participate in brief videotaped conversations, which are then systematically coded in order to extract the relevant information. This procedure allows researchers to observe the behavior between two people directly, and thereby gain insight into both the individual and couple-level phenomena. Most of the observational research on social support in couples has focused on the provision of social support. There have been some limited attempts to code the
elicitation of social support from interactions, and these efforts provide the groundwork for the current investigation. These previous studies were valuable pioneer efforts into a complex area; however, given the relative lack of findings, as well as some problematic conceptual issues discussed below, the coding of social support elicitation requires further refinement.

The Social Support Elicitation Coding system (SSEC; Jensen, 2001) was developed to code social support elicitation specifically within couples. This coding system evolved as an expansion and revision of prior work on coding and categorizing the elicitation of social support, begun by Cutrona and colleagues (1990). Examining the literature on social support, Cutrona and colleagues attempted to operationalize those behaviors by recruiting married couples to fill out questionnaires that asked them to imagine themselves in a variety of stressful situations. The couples were then asked to record what they thought they were likely to do to get support from their partner in such a situation, as well as what they were likely to do next if the first attempt failed. Additionally they asked couples to recall and describe an actual stressful event, what they wanted their spouse to do at the time, and what they did to try to elicit this behavior from their spouse (Cutrona, Suhr & MacFarlane, 1990). The result was a list of seventeen behaviors that people used to elicit social support. This list was never fully developed into a coding system, as it was found to have several liabilities, including vague or overlapping behaviors; a preliminary test of attempts to code such elicitation behavior revealed difficulty in obtaining reliability for certain items (Jensen, 2001). However, this process of identifying what people do to obtain support from their partners was a valuable starting point for subsequent investigation. Jensen (2001) revised and expanded Cutrona’s list of behaviors for the SSEC system, resulting in twenty individual support elicitation behaviors. Jensen’s coding system was also based on the work of Barbee and colleagues (1992), who provided a two by two framework for categorizing
elicitation behaviors. This framework laid out the elicitation of social support as occurring either directly or indirectly, and either verbally or nonverbally. For example, direct verbal support elicitation could involve asking someone for help with studying for an exam. A direct nonverbal indication of a need for support would be an unambiguous non-verbal display of emotion, such as crying when upset. An example of an indirect verbal elicitation strategy would be hinting about a problem without directly asking for any support, and a nonverbal indirection elicitation strategy would involve sighing when one is frustrated or dejected (Barbee, 1990, 1991; Barbee et. al, 1992).

Jensen (2001) applied the SSEC to a sample of 66 married individuals, who had been married for 3-5 years. Each couple participated in two, 10-minute videotaped conversations in which each partner had a turn being the “discloser” and the “listener.” Jensen utilized Barbee’s (1992) conceptual framework of differentiating between direct and indirect strategies. The findings indicated that the more direct one’s request for support, the more likely one was to receive support (particularly advice and tangible aid), and the less direct one’s requests were for support, the warmer and more responsive the provider was. While these findings may seem contradictory, the results might relate to findings by Schwartz (1977) that among individuals inclined to provide help, increasing pressure on that person to provide support decreased compliance from the individual. It could also be that couples who have been together for some time expect to understand one another and that being more direct and explicit feels insulting to the couple’s subtle ability to please one another without direct instructions. Thus Jensen’s findings might indicate that when asked directly for support, the person might behaviorally provide some support but also indicate displeasure in doing so.
Additional findings from Jensen’s (2001) study indicated that indirect strategies for seeking support were not significantly related with any support behavior. Whereas differentiating between indirect and direct elicitation strategies might be valuable, the lack of distinction between constructive and destructive strategies may have limited the ability to demonstrate how elicitation strategies are related to the provision of social support by provided by the partner. Indirect strategies in the SSEC included a range of behaviors that could be considered constructive ways of eliciting support from one’s partner (e.g., sharing thoughts and feelings around a particular situation, appreciating one’s partner) or destructive ways of eliciting support from one’s partner (e.g. complaining about a lack of support from the partner, being manipulative). It seems likely that whether a given strategy was constructive or destructive would have an effect on how the support provider chose to respond. In fact, support providers do not respond well when the support elicitor generally behaves negatively or harshly towards the provider (Barbee et al., 1992). Additionally, the couples’ literature on general communication demonstrates that there are generally constructive, positive ways to communicate with one’s partner, and that these communication styles have an impact on overall relationship satisfaction and subsequent behavior between partners (Epstein & Baucom, 2002).

With regards to the lack of findings around the indirect elicitation of support, Jensen (2001) suggested that support providers were unsure of what to do when elicitors did not directly state what they wanted. Taking constructiveness or destructiveness of the strategy into account, together with the RSP of the partner (which assumes that partners vary in their ability to comprehend and evaluate these elicitation cues), might provide a clearer picture of the transactional process. Additionally, given that the individual codes in the SSEC were unrelated to any support provision behavior, further revision of an elicitation behavior code that operates
within a framework consistent with the existing literature on social support elicitation and couples communication is necessary.

_Social Support and Illness_

Given an appropriate conceptual framework and method of assessing elicitation of social support, it also is important to study elicitation in a domain of life where it is particularly salient. One important domain of life in which social support is important for couples is illness. Most couples at some point in their lives will have to address the significant stress of illness for one or both partners. Experiencing a debilitating or chronic illness often places individuals in uncharted territory emotionally, mentally, and physically. The fear that results from physical illness and the lack of familiarity with medical procedures and hospital routines, and new demands placed on loved ones also means that these individuals’ intimate relationships are usually affected as well. Without a map to navigate this new land, a relationship that has been consistently loving and supportive under normal circumstances may become stressed as the couple adapts to these new demands. This may be a time when it is particularly valuable to have a partner who wants to be supportive and is relationship-schematic-- capable of attending to and responding to one’s implicit requests for support.

_Social support and breast cancer_

Breast cancer patients experience a number of debilitating physical and emotional side effects, both from the illness itself and from the treatments, including early menopause for young women, lymphedema, pain, and sexual difficulties (Baucom, Porter, Kirby, Gremore, & Keefe, 2006). Psychological effects of breast cancer and its treatment include depression, anxiety, concerns about body image, and fear of recurrence (Bloom, 2002; Gallagher, Parle, & Cairns, 2002). Additionally, most women diagnosed with breast cancer experience reduced energy, and
decreases in physical, social, and role functioning (Bloom, 2002). Because much of the disease experience affects body image and sexuality, this illness can be seen as more closely associated with relationship factors than many other illnesses. In addition to the effects experienced by the female patient, the male partner can also be deeply affected by this experience, often confronting sexual difficulties, depression or anxiety, and the negative consequences of time away from work (Baider, Ever-Hadani, & Goldzweig, 2003; Northouse, Cracchjiolo-Caraway, & Pappas-Appel, 1991). In addition to the effect on the individuals, a breast cancer diagnosis also can negatively impact the interaction between the partners, leading to new maladaptive patterns in the relationship, which affect both the patient and overall relationship functioning (Pistrang & Barker, 1995).

The importance of social support during breast cancer has been widely demonstrated (Dunkel-Schetter, 1984; Moyer & Salovey, 1999; Tatelman, 1999). Women most often turn to their husbands for support during this time, and the absence of support from the male partner generally cannot be compensated for by anyone outside of the relationship (Pistrang & Barker, 1995). Because support from one’s partner is so important when facing breast cancer, and because individuals expect their partners to be there for them in times of extreme stress, it will be appropriate to investigate the mechanism of social support in this context.

Summary

In summary, the study of social support in couples dealing with extreme stressors is vital. It is important to study social support in a relevant sample, such as couples confronting breast cancer; an experience around which a great deal of social support is needed. Social support provides a variety of benefits to both the individual and the couple. Given the dearth of research on the elicitation of social support, further research has the potential to fill some gaps in
our knowledge of this transactional process. It is important to use the most efficacious methods to assess the support exchanges of couples, and observational coding systems provide the ability to observe the behavior of couples directly. It is equally important that these coding systems not ignore robust findings from the couples’ literature, thus contributing to the refinement of an elicitation coding system necessary for further investigation. Additionally, assessing how adept partners are at reading elicitation cues, by taking a global rating of their RSP, will further refine our understanding of how couples can most effectively navigate supporting one another in times of stress.
The Current Investigation

The current study investigates support elicitation strategies and how they are related to perceived support among women undergoing treatment for early stage breast cancer. Before discussing the specific hypotheses, it is important to understand the observational coding system that was designed for this investigation: the Couples Support Elicitation Coding System (CSECS). A significant goal of this study was to develop and implement this new system. The coding system was designed to assess behaviors displayed in a conversation between two partners when one is designated as the “elicitor” and one as the “supporter.” In this investigation, the woman with breast cancer was the elicitor, and the concern that she discusses was related to her diagnosis and treatment of early stage breast cancer. In much of the research to date, the assumption was inherent that the person seeking support was motivated to do so, that he or she was seeking help. However, at times partners may behave in ways that elicit support from the partner without the explicit intent of garnering aid. Given that social support is inherently valuable to couple relationships, the support interaction process likely occurs at times without either partner necessarily realizing the transactional process is occurring or explicitly focusing on the desire for support. Therefore, support elicitation codes included in the current system are not assumed to be behaviors that are motivated to receive support; assessing such motivation in an observational coding system is not possible.

The CSECS consists of three codes measuring three factors: (a) whether the strategy is constructive or destructive (this is a measure of how well or appropriately the partner communicates a need for support to the partner, based on findings from the couple literature); (b)
whether the strategy is indirect or direct (meaning whether the partner directly asks for what he or she needs, or whether the indication is more subtle); and (c) whether the substantive content of the strategy is focused on the support partner or not (whether the elicitor is talking about the partner specifically, or about another person or situation).

**Hypotheses**

One broad thesis of this study is that the effectiveness of women’s elicitation strategies in garnering support around their breast cancer experience from their male partners will, in part, depend on the ability of the male partners to read those strategies. The following hypotheses take into account both the male partner’s amount of relationship-schematic processing and the strategies the female partner used to elicit support. The hypotheses fall into three categories: (a) the effect of the male partner; (b) the way in which the female communicates support needs; and (c) the interaction between the two factors noted above. The first four hypotheses are focal to understanding these elements in relation to how supported the women feel. The final hypothesis is secondary and posits that the same general associations of the main effects being investigated in relation to perceived support in the first three hypotheses will also hold true for women’s relationship-satisfaction and overall well being.

**Hypothesis 1**

It is expected that women will report greater received support when their male partners are rated highly on global measures of *quantity* and *quality* of Relationship-Schematic Processing, holding effects of *pull* constant. Those higher on RSP are expected to be adept at the additional information processing skill required for reading the elicitation strategies used by their female partners. Additionally, given past research on RSP, it is reasonable to expect that having a
male partner who views the world through the lens of his relationship will generally result in a more supportive relationship overall.

**Hypothesis 2**

It is predicted that women’s *perceived support* will be higher when the women employ elicitation strategies in a *constructive* fashion compared to destructive elicitation strategies. The couple literature provides strong evidence of reciprocity in which a constructive communication from one person is likely to be reciprocated by a constructive behavior from the other partner. This pattern is hypothesized to exist in the support exchange as well, such that a constructive request for support is more likely to yield support from the partner. It is important to note that constructive communication is not the same thing as being positive, or nice, towards one’s partner. Constructive elicitation strategies comprise the appropriateness and helpfulness of the style of communication, such that it is possible and useful to be able to discuss difficult subject matter in a constructive manner.

**Hypothesis 3**

It is predicted that the benefit of utilizing direct versus indirect strategies will interact with how relationship-schematic the male partners are, given that indirect strategies require more information processing skill on the part of the support provider than direct strategies. Specifically, it is expected that when the male partners are higher on RSP, indirect strategies will yield higher perceived support for the women than the use of direct strategies. It is expected that the support provided in response to use of indirect strategies will lead to women feeling more understood and cared for than if they directly requested support from their male partners. This is based on the notion that there is more satisfaction derived from feeling that one’s partner knows what is needed and is voluntarily attending to those needs. Past research found that support
providers responded less warmly to direct requests, and this in turn may lead to less perceived support by the women. These indirect requests are likely to be rewarding to women, however, only if the men are able to read these indirect requests, a skill that men higher on RSP are anticipated to have.

However, when the male partners are lower on RSP, direct strategies will yield higher perceived support for the women than indirect strategies. Direct strategies require less information processing skill on the part of the support provider. Male partners who are not as high on RSP may not be able to understand what their female partners need and specifically what to do to help without being explicitly told. However, if men are presented with these direct requests, they may be able to provide support reasonably well. Additionally, given that men who do not process in relationship terms need explicit information about how to be supportive, they may not respond less warmly to direct elicitation strategies and, in fact, may be grateful for them.

Hypothesis 4

It is expected that in terms of women’s perceived support, the effect of focusing on the male partner during the support elicitation will be moderated by whether this elicitation is presented in a constructive or destructive way. More specifically, focusing on the male partner when eliciting support will lead to higher levels of perceived support if the support is requested in a constructive manner. That is, saying positive things about the support provider is likely to encourage that person to provide support. However, focusing on the support provider in a destructive manner (i.e., using criticism and hostility) is likely to diminish support from that person. There is expected to be a stronger relationship between the constructiveness of the elicitation strategies and the perceived support when the content of the talk turn is focused on the partner. When the content is not focused on the partner, there is still expected to be higher
perceived support when constructive strategies are used, and lower perceived support when more
destructive strategies are used; however, this relationship will be less striking than when focusing
on the partner. This is best illustrated by example: If a woman comes home from work
complaining to her husband about her boss, she is more likely to receive support from her
husband than if she comes home from work complaining about her husband. Likewise, if she
comes home praising her boss, she is less likely to receive quite as much support as if she comes
home and praises her husband.

Hypothesis 5

It is also expected that in addition to reporting higher levels of perceived support, women
who are using constructive, indirect strategies and have male partners who are high on RSP will
also report the overall highest level of relationship satisfaction and will also report the higher
levels of overall well-being compared to other women.

All of the above hypotheses assume that women can typically recognize when support is
provided to them, although there is some evidence that a support provider at times can provide
support that the elicitor does not perceive and yet affects the support elicitor. This phenomenon,
termed invisible support is not well understood. It may occur when provision of support is subtle,
or can occur for a certain subset of women who fail to recognize support provision, for instance,
those high on neuroticism. Generally in this case the elicitor does report being satisfied in the
relationship, but does not specifically or accurately report receiving support from the partner
(Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000). The concept of invisible support is mentioned here for
the possibility that a subset of women may not be able to recognize the specific support
behaviors provided by their male partners and, thus, provide findings contrary to the proposed
hypotheses. Given that in the current study there is not an objective measure of support provided
by the male partners, the measure of support the women report will be their own perceptions of support.
Method

Participants

Couples were recruited from two major medical centers in the context of a larger treatment outcome study for couples facing early stage breast cancer (see Baucom et al., 2006 for details). Initial eligibility is determined by reviewing medical records to identify women who meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) recently diagnosed with DCIS, Stage I, II, or IIIA breast cancer, have no history of other breast cancer and no history of cancer within the last five years (certain types of skin cancer excluded); (b) currently married or living together with a male partner in a committed relationship for at least one year; (c) both partners willing to participate and able to speak English. Eligible women are sent letters describing the study and stating that a recruiter will contact them to discuss their possible participation in the study.

Measures

Daily Diary

A number of daily measures were included as part of a daily diary phone task completed by the women. Women were asked to complete the daily diary every day for 30 days, beginning at the completion of the couple’s initial assessment; women were included in the analyses if they completed at least 20 diaries. Women were instructed to choose a time between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m. during which they called the daily diary telephone system. When women called into the system, they were asked to enter an ID number. A recorded voice walked them through instructions for navigating the phone system and then proceeded to the actual items. Each item
was read aloud and after each item, the participants were asked to rate that item on a specified scale by pressing the telephone key corresponding to their rating.

Data collection for the daily diary task was completed using the VoiceGuide Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. This system automatically entered the data into a computerized database. This database was monitored by the daily diary coordinator to make sure women were adhering to the protocol correctly. The coordinator responded to deviations from the protocol with phone call reminders. For the purposes of the current study, the measure of specific social support is the only measure employed, and it is described below.

*Source Specific Social Provisions Scale.* To assess perceived partner support, participants completed the Source Specific Social Provisions Scale (SPS; Cutrona, 1989) adapted for use on a daily basis. These items measure social support in terms of how much partners help with routine chores or tasks (instrumental support), how much partners provide emotional support, how much partners help with decision making (instrumental support), and how satisfied the women were with each type of support. These support items are rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (“not at all”) to 5 (“a great deal”). Ratings are summed to create two subscales: amount of support (3 items) and satisfaction with support (3 items). For the purposes of the current study, the subscale measuring satisfaction with support will be used as the indication of perceived support.

Given that this was an adaptation of the Source Specific SPS for daily use, no reliability or validity statistics exist; however, Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for individual subscales in the original SPS range from .64 to .76 (Cutrona & Russell, 1987).

In addition to the daily diary, both partners completed a number of self-report measures, most of which are not the focus of the current investigation. Two self-report measures completed by the women and included in the current investigation are well-established measures
with excellent psychometric properties and were completed by both male and female participants. A brief description of each measure is provided below.

**Abbreviated Dyadic Adjustment Scale (ADAS; Sharpley & Rogers, 1984)**

The abbreviated DAS is a 7-item measure of global relationship adjustment adapted from the scale’s original 32-item version and correlates highly with the original scale. The ADAS has demonstrated adequate validity, as ADAS scores have been shown to discriminate between married, living together, separated, and divorced couples. The ADAS also has been shown to have good internal consistency with an alpha coefficient of .76. The abbreviated DAS is used as a measure of global relationship satisfaction in the current investigation.

**Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988)**

The PANAS consists of two 10-item mood scales that assess positive affect and negative affect. Participants are asked to rate on a 5-point scale (1=very slightly or not at all to 5 = extremely) the extent to which they experienced each mood state during a specified time frame. High scores reflect greater affect experience of either positive or negative mood. Seven time frames have been investigated (i.e., right now, today, during the past few days, during the past week, during the past few weeks, during the past year, and on average). Alpha coefficients for the PA and NA scales have been calculated for each time frame and range from .84 to .90. The measure’s discriminant validity has been reflected by the correlation between the PA and the NA ranging from -.12 to -.23. In the current study, participants were asked to rate the extent to which they experienced each mood state within the past week. The PANAS was employed as the index of overall well being in this investigation.

**Couples Support Elicitation Coding System (CSECS; Kelly & Baucom, 2007)**
The principal investigator developed this system for the purposes of the current investigation. This is a micro-analytic coding system. One person is assigned to be the support “elicitor,” or person requesting support; the other person is the support “provider,” or individual who gives support. The elicitor is the person who is coded using this coding system; in the current study, the elicitor was the woman with early stage breast cancer. The couple was instructed to participate in a communication interaction task for 7-minutes, to which the coding system was applied. The “elicitor” was instructed to choose a topic related to the breast cancer experience that is of particular personal concern, and to share this with her partner. The male partner was instructed to respond as he normally would when his partner is sharing something with him.

The unit of analysis is the elicitor’s individual talk turns, with three scores given per talk turn. Each talk turn is rated on Constructiveness (this is measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale with the low end being most Destructive, the midpoint being Neutral, and the high end being most Constructive); Indirect or Direct (a binary measure); and Focus on partner or Focus on non-partner (a binary measure). Talk turns can also be coded as off-task. Talk turns are begun when the elicitor starts talking and end when she stops, or when she is interrupted. Non-substantive back-channeling responses such as “uh huh” or “yeah” are not coded as individual talk turns; however, brief responses carrying more substantive meaning, such as a strong agreement or disagreement would be coded.

Coding Examples:

1. Measure of Constructive/Destructive:

   a. Constructive:

   “I have been very concerned about you and the kids. It has been so hard for me to realize I
cannot take care of everyone the same way I did before the diagnosis.”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of indirect and focus on partner)

b. Neutral:

“I called my Aunt about that, but she wasn’t home”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of indirect and focus on non-partner)

c. Destructive:

“You are just worthless in terms of keeping up the house, and I really don’t need that right now!”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of indirect and focus on partner)

2. Indirect/Direct:

a. Indirect:

“I feel very tired a lot lately; I think it is a side effect of the chemotherapy. I feel like sleeping for much of the day these days.”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of constructive and focus on non-partner)

b. Direct:

“Do you think you could take the kids out to the park or something in the afternoon on the weekends? I think it would really help if I had that time alone just to nap and not be disturbed.”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of constructive and focus on partner)

3. Focus on Partner/Focus on non-partner:
a. Focus on Partner:

“You have been so wonderful through all of this – it really meant a lot to me that you took
time off work to come to the doctor’s visits with me”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of constructive and indirect)

“You think I am ugly now - you never even try to kiss me anymore!”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of destructive and indirect)

b. Focus on non-partner:

“Wow, your boss is such a big jerk for not letting you have more time off right now, who
does he think he is?”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of destructive and indirect)

“It really made me happy that my sister came down to help us out with the kids”

(Note: this example would also receive codes of constructive and indirect)

4. Off-task: comments made that are completely unrelated to the task at hand.

“Where do you want to go to lunch after we are finished here?”

(Note: off-task comments cannot receive any other codes, and are not included in the final
proportion calculations).

For the final scores, proportions are created by dividing the sum of the scores given for each
talk turn by the total number of talk turns (excluding off-task, which are not evaluated on the
three factors), so that each female participant receives one score for the conversation on each of
the three factors.
Coding system reliability. The 7-minute support interaction that couples completed for the baseline assessment were coded individually by one of four undergraduate students involved in independent study in the psychology department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, for course credit. A second trained coder coded twenty percent of the interactions in order to assess reliability. All coders were undergraduate research assistants who were uninformed of the study design and hypotheses. They were trained over the course of one semester by the investigator. Weekly meetings were held with the coders and the principal investigator. For the first portion of the training, coding exercises were conducted as a group to ensure the coders were able to comprehend the constructs. For the second portion of the training, group coding exercises were conducted to obtain adequate reliability. A portion of interactions from the larger study was used in these training sessions, having been consensus coded by the investigator and the co-author of the coding system.

Reliability was calculated by conducting an intra-class correlation using a two-way mixed effects model where raters are random and measure effects are fixed. The intra-class correlation coefficients were as follows: Constructiveness = .79, Indirectness = .77, and Focus = .99, indicating acceptable levels of inter-rater reliability on all three subscales (Shrout & Fleiss, 1979). Because this is the first time this observational coding system has been used, these reliability results provide an idea of how consistent the coders were in their ratings. However, this coding system has not been validated against other elicitation measures, and internal consistency of the coding system has not been established and was not the intent of the current investigation. A Pearson correlation was calculated across the three items comprising the system in order to determine whether they were measuring three distinct constructs. Results indicated that the only significant correlation was between Indirect and Focus ($r = -.309, p < .05$), meaning
that for the most part these three items are distinct measures. However, when someone is not focusing the content of her support elicitation on her partner, she is also more likely to be using the indirect elicitation style.

_Global Ratings of Relationship Schematic Processing coding system_ (Pukay-Martin, Kelly & Baucom, 2007)

This coding system was developed for the current investigation and is based on the established, micro-analytic Relationship-Schematic Processing coding system (RSP; Sullivan & Baucom, 2004). For the current study, the coding system was used to rate the Relationship-Schematic Processing of the male partners in the same communication interaction task used to code the female partners on the CSECS, described above. For this task, the male partners were coded in the “support” role for their level of relationship-schematic processing.

The current coding system is a macro-analytic coding system. Each entire interaction or conversation is viewed and coded for global ratings of the (a) _quantity_, (b) _quality_, and (c) _pull_ for Relationship-Schematic Processing. The quantity score is a measure of how much of the conversation the male partner engaged in this type of processing. The quantity is measured on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not at all”, 3 being “somewhat” and 5 being “most of the time”. To receive a 1 on quantity the partner has to have engaged in RSP to a negligible degree. To receive a 3, the midpoint of RSP, the partner has to have engaged in this processing for approximately 50% of the conversation. To receive a 5, and thus to be considered having a high level of RSP, the partner fundamentally must have been engaging in RSP throughout the conversation.

The _quality_ of RSP is a measure of how skillfully the relationship processing was when it was provided. The quality is measured on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “very poorly”, 3
being “somewhat skillfully” and 5 being “extremely skillfully”.

To receive a 1 the partner must be exhibiting some of the following:

- Interpret relationship events in a superficial manner, with no depth of processing on a relationship level; over interprets cues to be relationship relevant, or distorts relationship cognitions:

  “You came home late from work and, therefore, you don’t love me”

- Uses relationship processing in a destructive or manipulative manner:

  “If you really cared about our relationship, you would do this for us”.

- Individual does not display nonverbal cues that are consistent with relationship processing (does not make eye contact with partner, sits with arms crossed over chest, turns away from partner, rolls eyes when partner is speaking).

To receive a 3 on quality, the midpoint for quality, the partner must exhibit some of the following types of processing:

- Partner places topics in a relationship framework, but the attempt to do is brief.

- Relationship processing is present but lacks clarity.

- Individual speaks in terms of the couple as a unit, but it is not clear whether this is indicative of relationship processing:

  “Let’s see what the doctors have to say, and then we can decide how to proceed”.

- Interpretation involved in relationship processing appears free of cognitive distortions, and involves *some* depth of processing:
“When you come home late and don’t call, it upsets me because I’ve told you it is important to me.”

To receive a 5 on RSP the partner must exhibit the following type of processing:

- Individual is able to use the relationship processing to highlight appreciation for one’s partner, to express concerns and to explain how the partner’s actions have affected him or her.

- Relationship processing occurs with a great deal of depth and complexity; processing seemingly occurs with a great deal of accuracy and does not apply distorted cognitions:

  “I know you have been busy at work lately, and that I have a tendency to worry, so when you come home late from work without calling first, it makes me feel nervous”

- Relationship processing occurs in a healthy, constructive manner: “When you asked me to come with you to your doctor’s appointment, it made me feel really good, like you wanted me there for support and that even though this is an extremely difficult situation, we are in it together”

- Partner skillfully places relationship framework on a topic that is not directly relationship focused:

  “I think the reason I get upset when I am cleaning and you are watching television is that I don’t feel the division of the chores is working out to be very even, and then I feel somewhat unappreciated”.

The pull for RSP is a measure or how much the conversation topic and the partner’s
processing would likely elicit RSP from a male partner. The pull is measured on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being “not at all”, 3 being “somewhat” and 5 being “very much”.

To receive a 1 on pull, the topic of the conversation is not relationship-focused; the general impressions of the non-coded partner (in the current study, the female partner) are that she is not using RSP. Receiving a 1 on pull indicates that the conversation and the other partner were not providing an environment that called for the person being coded to use RSP. Therefore, if the partner does use RSP, it is all the more notable. If the partner was not creating the atmosphere for conversing in a relational framework, and the other person still manages to respond in a relational manner, this likely has a differential effect on the impact of that partner’s RSP.

To receive a 3, the midpoint on pull, the topic of the conversation is somewhat relationship focused, but may be superficially so, and the non-coded partner uses some RSP. In other words, there was a moderate amount of pull from the conversation and the female partner for the man to use RSP.

To receive a 5 on pull, the topic of conversation must be extremely relationship focused; the female partner is clearly relationally schematic and is sharing her thoughts and feelings in an open and inviting manner. In other words, the conversation and female partner so clearly indicated a pull for RSP from the man, that if he did not engage in RSP in this conversation, it is notable. The partner’s role in creating an environmental context for RSP within the conversation is based on the principle of reciprocity in relationships. Given this opportunity to reciprocate a relationship-schematic manner of interacting, and then not to respond to that opportunity is likely more detrimental than if the pull had not been present.

*Coding system reliability.* Ratings for quality of RSP were obtained from the global RSP coding system, adapted for this study from a micro-analytic scale measuring the same constructs.
Reliability for the previous version had been assessed using the Rater Agreement Index (RAI; Burry-Stock, Shaw, Laurie & Chissom, 1996). RAIs for the Relationship Schematic Coding System ranged from .63 to 1, with the average of the RAIs for all items being .86 (Sullivan & Baucom, 2004). In the current investigation, one rater, an upper level doctoral student, coded all of the interactions, and the first author also coded 20% of the interactions in order to establish reliability. Prior to coding the interactions used in the current sample, training occurred over one semester and included coding and reaching consensus together with the third author of the global coding system. RAI (rater agreement index) was calculated on the portion of interactions rated by both coders and used in the current investigation. Results revealed the coders agreed 87.5% of the time in terms of the exact quality score given, and when they did not agree, they differed an average of 0.5 points on a scale of 1-5 possible points. This indicates a high percentage of agreement between the two coders.

Procedure

Each site’s medical center institutional review board approved this study. The data for this investigation involves the pretest data for couples who volunteered for a couple-based intervention for early stage breast cancer (see Baucom et al., 2005 for more details regarding this investigation). Eligible couples completed an initial assessment with a research staff member, during which time informed consent was obtained, and several questionnaires and communication interaction exercises were completed. Each couple received a total of $40 for completing this assessment.

After the consent forms were signed, the assessor left the couple to complete the questionnaire packets, which consisted of questions about the couples’ history, relationship, overall well-being, support around the cancer, sexual relationship, and the women answered
questions about her body image and physical symptoms. The men and women completed the questionnaires independently of one another and were told not to compare answers, in order to encourage honesty of responses. For the current investigation, only selected self-report data were used, as indicated in the Measures section.

For the communication interaction task, the assessor lead the couple to a room equipped for audio and video recording. The couple was instructed to have three seven-minute conversations. The order of the conversations was randomized throughout the study. One was a problem solving/decision making conversation, in which the couple was instructed to choose a topic related to the breast cancer experience about which a decision needed to be made. This conversation was not coded for the current investigation. There were also two support interactions, one in which the male partner was instructed to choose a topic of personal concern to him related to the breast cancer, and to share his thoughts and feelings on the topic with his female partner. The female partner was instructed to listen and respond as she normally would when her male partner shared something with her. For the remaining conversation, the female partner chose a topic of personal concern related to the breast cancer, and shared her thoughts and feelings on the topic with her male partner, who was instructed to respond to her as he normally would. It is this last conversation that is pertinent to the current investigation. The support interactions with the female partner as the “elicitor” and the male partner as the “supporter” were coded using the Couples Support Elicitation Coding system, in order to assess the elicitation strategies used by the women. These same conversations were coded separately for the global rating of Relationship-Schematic Processing for the male partners.

Women also completed the daily phone diary measure for 30 days following the initial assessment. Usually the diary period began the day after the assessment. Women were instructed
to choose a fifteen-minute time slot between 5 p.m. and 10 p.m., during which they called the daily diary telephone system. In order to encourage daily diary completion, participants were mailed a $20 check upon completing the daily diary period.
Results

Demographics

Extensive demographic information was collected for the 50 couples included in this investigation. The women averaged 54 years in age, ranging from 34 to 74; the men averaged 55, ranging from 32 to 77. The majority of the female participants identified as White (84%), 10% identified as Black, 4% Hispanic and 2% Asian or Pacific Islander. The majority of the male participants identified as White (84%), 10% identified as Black, 2% Hispanic, 2% Asian or Pacific Islander and 2% identified as Other/More than one race. Couples were married for an average of 24 years, with a wide range from 1 to 52 years. For 58% of women, this was their first marriage, and for 32% the second marriage. The remaining 10% of women had been married more than twice before. For 66% of men this was their first marriage, and for 29% the second marriage. About 4% of men had been married more than twice before. The majority of the couples reported having children; 12% of the sample had one child, 33% had two children, 24% had three children, and the remaining 18% reported 4 or more children. Couples reported joint yearly income, with 4% of the sample reporting $10,000-15,000, 4% of the sample generating between $25,000-50,000, 35% of the sample reported making between $50,000-100,000 and 51% of the sample reported an income of over $100,000. Levels of education reported in this sample were similarly elevated as compared with the general population, with all of the participants reporting at least high school level education, and over 40% of the sample obtained degrees beyond the bachelor’s level. The majority of the female participants reported Protestant religious affiliation (60%), 15% identified as Catholic, 2% Jewish, 4% New Age/Metaphysical,
12% identified as Agnostic or Other, and 6% reported no religious affiliation. The majority of the men also reported Protestant affiliation (53%), 14% identified as Catholic, 2% Muslim, 10% other, and a higher percentage of the men than women reported no religious affiliation (20%).

Descriptive Statistics

The predictor variables used in the subsequent analyses included ratings from two observational coding systems: (a) support elicitation strategies of the women, which were coded using the CSCES observational coding system specifically designed for the current study, and (b) aspects of Relationship Schematic Processing for men, rated from a global observational coding system adapted for the current investigation. The three dependent variables used in the subsequent analyses are all related to the women’s functioning: (a) women’s satisfaction with support, (b) women’s relationship satisfaction, and (c) women’s overall well-being as measured by level of positive and negative affect. Means and standard deviations for these variables are provided in Table 1. Correlations among all variables are presented in Table 2.

Support Elicitation Strategies

As shown in Table 1, women overwhelmingly favored using indirect strategies when talking to their male partners about a personal concern related to the cancer experience; the average score reflects a proportion between 0 and 1, with 0 representing direct strategies and 1 meaning indirect strategies. Thus, on average over 90% \((M = .92)\) of strategies used were indirect. Given that little research has been conducted to assess how women request support at times of extreme stress, one of the primary purposes of this study was to understand how women request help at such times. The findings are clear that women in this study were almost never direct when seeking support from their partners.
Women were rated as being moderately constructive during these conversations, with the possible range of scores being -3 to 3 ($M = .87$), with -3 being the most destructive communication rating possible, 0 representing the midpoint, or neutral, and 3 representing the most constructive communication rating possible. Because this coding system was developed for the purposes of this study, there are no norms for what might be considered an average level of constructiveness. However, the mean score for women in this study falls slightly above the midpoint of possible scores, which on an absolute level means that the raters viewed them as being slightly more constructive in their comments than neutral or destructive during the conversation of interest.

Finally, women were rated as focusing the content of the conversation on their partners slightly less than half the time during the conversation. With a possibility of obtaining a proportion between 0 and 1, $M = .41$, meaning they focused on the partner 41% of the time in their requests for support, and the remainder of their comments were focused on other subjects.

**Relationship Schematic Processing**

The RSP quality and quantity scores were correlated to determine whether a single score could be used as an adequate measure of RSP or whether these scores would need to be utilized as representing separate constructs. Results indicated that these two variables are highly correlated ($r = .840$). Given that (a) previous research has demonstrated that for men, quality of RSP is more important than frequency of RSP in predicting their female partners’ relationship satisfaction, and (b) that quality and quantity are highly correlated in the current investigation, quality scores were employed as the index of RSP in subsequent analyses. In addition, the analyses described below were replicated using a summary score of quality and quality; the findings were identical to those obtained when using quality alone as the index of RSP.
Results indicate that men in this study were moderate to low on their quality of RSP \((M = 2.4)\), with a possible range of 1-5, indicating that men in this sample are exhibiting a quality of RSP that on average falls between fairly poor and adequate. This means that when men are processing in terms of their romantic relationship, they are doing a reasonable job of interpreting relationship events accurately; however, they may not be doing so with much depth and sometimes may be lacking in clarity, or at times making misinterpretations. Again, because these variables were measured using a global observational coding system that was adapted for the purposes of this study, there are no norms for this measure; however, the average in the current sample falls just below the mid point in the range of possible scores.

**Women’s Perceived Support**

Women in this investigation completed an average of 26 of the 30 daily diary questionnaires, which corresponds to a compliance rate of 87%. There are no norms for the daily diary measure of support satisfaction; however, the scale is comprised of three, 5-point items, so the range of possible scores is from 3-15. The average score obtained in this sample \((M = 11.4, \ SD = 2.7)\) indicates that women, on average, are scoring above the midpoint on the items, where higher scores indicate more satisfaction with support received from their male partners. The mean for this sample is similar to scores considered moderately high by other researchers (Pukay-Martin, 2007). There are also no published norms for the abbreviated DAS, used in this investigation to measure women’s relationship satisfaction; however, based on various studies using this measure (see Funk and Rogge, 2006 for example), the average score obtained in this sample \((M = 25.73, \ SD = 5.3)\) is considered to reflect average relationship satisfaction. The highest possible score on the scale is 36, indicating highest reportable relationship satisfaction, while the lowest possible score is zero, indicating lowest reportable relationship satisfaction.
Overall the women also seem to be experiencing a high level of both positive affect ($M = 32.1$, $SD = 7.3$) and negative affect ($M = 21.5$, $SD = 7.4$), based on norms provided for the PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1998).

*Predicting Women’s Satisfaction with Social Support*

Based on past research in the area of relationship schematic processing, it was expected that women with male partners who are able to process events in terms of the romantic relationship would enjoy a variety of benefits in the relationship. It was predicted that women with these relationship schematic partners would experience more satisfaction with social support provided by their male partners because the male partners would be attending to cues in the relationship indicating need for this support. However, if a man is noting cues for support from a woman and misinterpreting them (i.e., using poor quality processing), he is unlikely to give support that will result in her feeling satisfied. The amount of direct versus indirect support seeking was also considered. It was hypothesized that if women employed more use of indirect strategies, they would also report higher levels of satisfaction with the support from their male partners because they would be receiving the support they needed without having to ask for it directly. Additionally, it was expected that the utility of indirect elicitation strategies would be greater when the men were high on levels of RSP, because these men would be considered more adept at picking up on indirect cues.

In order to evaluate these hypotheses, a multiple linear regression was conducted predicting women’s satisfaction with perceived support from women’s usage of indirect elicitation, men’s quality of RSP (controlling for the pull for RSP) in the conversation, and the interaction of these two predictors. Pull, as described in the section on the Global Coding System for RSP, is an indication of how much the content of the conversation and the behavior of the
female partner necessitate the use of RSP by the male. Controlling for Pull provides a more accurate assessment of the quality of RSP being displayed by the men. Variables were centered in order to create the interaction variable measuring usage of women’s indirect elicitation by men’s quality of RSP. The overall model was marginally significant ($F (4, 45) = 2.57, p = .050, R^2 = .186$). Results shown in Table 3 indicate that ratings of men’s relationship schematic processing approached significance, illustrating a positive association between RSP and perceived social support such that when men are processing through the lens of their romantic relationship at a higher level of quality, women are more satisfied with the support they perceived from the men. Also seen in Table 3, ratings of women’s use of indirect elicitation strategies were significant, indicating that the more often women used an indirect strategy, the more satisfied they reported being with the support they perceived from the men. There was no significant interaction effect of women’s indirect elicitation by men’s quality of RSP. It is possible that the sample size was not large enough to demonstrate this effect; however, as shown in Table 3, the results are not indicative of a particular trend for this interaction, so it is unlikely that more power would yield significant results. The theory supporting this hypothesis was that women would be compensating for a male partner who was operating with low quality RSP by being direct in order that he would still be able to deliver the support she needed, even when he was not able to correctly interpret her more subtle support cues.

Another possibility for the lack of significant interaction results here is that there were not pairings in this sample of women who were direct and men who were low on RSP. In order to determine whether this lack of results was due to an unusual distribution of couples in the sample, a Chi Square test was conducted with men’s quality of RSP dichotomized as High (above 2.5) and Low (below 2.5) and women’s use of direct and indirect elicitation dichotomized
as High (above .99) and Low (below .99). Results of the Chi Square test were not significant $\chi^2(1, n = 50) = .12, p = .726$, indicating that there is a random distribution of pairings in the sample; therefore, no pattern exists to indicate that Low RSP males and Direct Females are absent from this sample. It should be noted that because women were almost always using indirect elicitation in this sample, dichotomizing this variable meant that even the low group are very high on usage of indirect elicitation, which could be another explanation for why there was no interaction found.

In keeping with the notion that a woman’s style of elicitation strategy also plays a part in how satisfied she will be with the support she receives, it was expected that if the woman is communicating her support needs to the man in a destructive or degrading way, he is unlikely to be as willing or able to provide her with satisfying support. It was also expected that the content of the elicitation could be related to how satisfied women would feel with support received. Specifically, it was expected that if women were focusing on or talking about their male partners during the interaction task and were also using constructive elicitation strategies, they would report higher satisfaction with the support received from the men because men would respond well to such talk from the women.

In order to test whether the constructive quality and the focus of the content of women’s elicitation cues would have an effect on her resulting satisfaction with support from her male partner, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted predicting women’s perceived support from women’s level of constructiveness in eliciting support and from the focus of the content of the women’s elicitations and from the interaction of the two. Results from this analysis revealed no significant results ($F(3,46) = 1.41, p = .25, R^2 = .084$). Thus, as shown in Table 4, women do not seem to be more satisfied with the support they receive when they
request the support in more constructive ways; furthermore, whether the focus of the content of the elicitations is on the partner or not does not appear to affect the women’s perceived support.

Predicting Women’s Affective Well-Being and Relationship Satisfaction

It also was hypothesized that when women were using constructive and indirect elicitation strategies, and when they had partners who were high in RSP, women would not only report higher levels of satisfaction with support from their male partners, but women also would experience more satisfied relationships and higher overall individual well being. To evaluate the hypothesis concerning women’s relationship satisfaction, a multiple linear regression predicting women’s relationship satisfaction from the main effects of men’s quality of RSP (again controlling for Pull) and women’s use of indirectness and level of constructiveness was conducted. The model was significant ($F(4, 45) = 3.24, p = .020, R^2 = .224$). As expected and as has been shown in previous research, women with male partners who were higher in RSP did report significantly higher relationship satisfaction (See Table 5). Additionally, women who were more constructive and more often indirect tended towards higher scores of relationship satisfaction, although neither of these accounted for a significant portion of the variance in relationship satisfaction. This pattern of results indicates that for women to be satisfied with their relationships, it is more important that they be with a partner who can process in terms of the relationship at a high quality than it was to use particular elicitation strategies.

To evaluate the hypothesis concerning women’s mood as an index of well-being, two multiple linear regressions were conducted in order to predict: (a) women’s positive affect from men’s quality of RSP and women’s use of indirectness and level of constructiveness, and (b) women’s negative affect from men’s quality of RSP and women’s use of indirectness and level of constructiveness, controlling for RSP Pull in both analyses. The construct of “well-being” was
differentiated into positive and negative affect because the PANAS is comprised of these two subscales that typically are somewhat independent of each other (in the current sample, $r = - .174$). In other words, a woman could have both high positive affect and high negative affect, or be low on both, thus, necessitating analyses that took both subscales into account. The model predicting positive affect was significant ($F (4, 45) = 3.94, p = .008, R^2 = .259$), as was the model predicting negative affect ($F (4, 45) = 4.02, p = .007, R^2 = .263$). Unexpectedly, when the pull for RSP was higher, women also reported experiencing lower positive mood (see Table 6) and more negative mood (see Table 7), indicating these women with worse mood had a higher need for the men to respond with RSP. When women reported better mood, this was associated with conversations rated lower on RSP Pull. In other words, the women with better mood had conversations that did not indicate as much pull for the men to employ RSP. Type of elicitation strategies used did not have an effect on the women’s positive or negative mood.

**Summary of Findings**

Altogether, it appears that women who are married to a relationally schematic male have several additional indices of positive functioning as well: they are (a) more satisfied with the support they receive from the male, (b) more satisfied in the relationship overall, and (c) experience more positive mood and less negative mood. It is also clear that women primarily use indirect elicitation strategies in seeking support from their male partners, and the more they use indirect elicitation strategies, the more satisfied they are with the support they receive. However, (a) the focus of the conversations (at least as defined in this investigation) and (b) how constructive the women were in eliciting support had no bearing on women’s satisfaction with support received from their partners. Additionally, while having a male partner who is relationally schematic did predict higher satisfaction in the relationship overall and better mood
for women, the elicitation styles women used did not predict their relationship satisfaction or their positive and negative affect; it only had an effect on their satisfaction with the support they received from their male partners.
Discussion

To date, there has been little research investigating the influence of support seeking style on support interactions. Based on past research on Relationship Schematic Processing (Sullivan & Baucom, 2005), it was proposed that RSP could serve as an adequate measure of men’s sensitivity to indirect cues for support. A broad aim of this study was to understand whether having a male partner who has the capacity to read subtle cues for support would impact such interactions. Results from the current investigation do not indicate that having a male partner who exhibits Relationship Schematic Processing during a support interaction relates to how direct or indirect a woman will be in her bids for support during that same interaction. It is clear, however, that having a male partner who is attending to and processing in terms of the relationship is associated with women being more satisfied with the support they are receiving from their partners. In addition, they are also more satisfied in the relationship overall and have more positive mood than women whose male partners are attending to and processing in terms of the relationship to a lesser extent.

This is consistent with past research in the area of Relationship-Schematic Processing (Sullivan & Baucom, 2002), indicating that women are generally happier in the relationship when their male partners are able to process in this manner. Prior research indicates that women tend to process events in terms of their relationships with more frequency and with higher quality than men do, which is consistent with the notion that women are the gatekeepers of relationships (Acitelli, 1992). That is, women are more often and more able to understand events in relation to their partner and can interpret and, subsequently, act in a manner intended to benefit the
relationship. Previous findings demonstrate that women are happier when men can process information relationally with reasonable skill, even if not with great frequency, whereas men rely on women to process information relationally with skill and frequency (Sullivan & Baucom, 2002). The current findings are consistent with the notion that men who are able to perform this type of relationship processing enable their wives to feel supported. The men in this sample who score highly on quality of RSP are likely noticing that undergoing treatment for breast cancer affects not only the women, but themselves and their relationship as a couple as well. Thus, they are likely to attend to the associated events and conversations about the cancer with this relationally oriented perspective guiding their behavior. It is likely that women in relationships with such men feel that the two of them are approaching cancer as a team and, therefore, feels supported and less alone. In other words, although she is the patient, the couple is experiencing breast cancer together.

Having a partner who processes well at the relational level was associated with increased support satisfaction among women, and also with women’s overall relationship satisfaction and positive and negative affect. As noted above, previous research has shown that relationship satisfaction is higher when men are rated as being higher on quality of RSP, so this finding replicates what has been demonstrated previously in the field and, thus, increases the credibility of this finding. The unexpected finding in this area was that the Pull for RSP, the index of how much the content of the conversation and the communication of the women called for RSP, was related to women’s moods. When women were exhibiting more negative affect, the Pull for RSP from the male was rated as higher. This might be understandable given the context of the interactions. Women are distressed when discussing their thoughts and concerns about breast cancer, and the more distressed they are, the greater
the need for men to be processing in a relationally schematic style to comprehend cues for support. The converse was also true: when there was less negative affect and more positive affect, the Pull for relational processing was lower; this could indicate that when there is less distress, men do not need to be as vigilant to relationship phenomena.

In addition to investigating whether women’s satisfaction with support would be affected by men’s processing styles, it was expected that if women were less direct when requesting support from their male partners, this would necessitate men being able to process in terms of the relationship. Otherwise the men would likely miss their cue to support the women. However, in the present investigation, no interaction was found between elicitation styles of women and the processing styles of men. In considering this result, we glean some important information about support exchanges during times of duress. Even when women are undergoing breast cancer, a time during which one would expect an extremely high need for social support from the male partner, women are still overwhelmingly indirect in their bids for support. In other words, they ask for very little directly from their partners. It seems that while women are less satisfied with a male partner who is low on RSP, this does not change her strategy for garnering support from him. Perhaps the situation of dealing with breast cancer itself calls so clearly for support that women do not feel the need to ask directly.

Aside from dealing with a stressful situation such as breast cancer, there may be several benefits of not asking directly for support in the context of a romantic relationship more generally. One benefit is related to expectations in romantic relationships that the other person will be there to support you when you are going through difficult circumstances. If the partner can respond to distress and provide support without having been asked directly for
such support, this may provide fulfillment of those expectations. In other words, support may be more gratifying when it comes from one’s romantic partner voluntarily. This was anticipated and supported by results of the current study: more support satisfaction was associated with less direct requests for support.

These findings differ from previous results in the support seeking literature which indicated that using a direct elicitation style garnered more social support (e.g., Jordon & Roloff, 1990). This difference in findings is likely due to context, as many studies to date investigating support seeking were conducted with non-couple samples, and some samples of individuals who were not in extremely stressful circumstances. Dyads in those studies were often strangers, friends, or student-teacher dyads. In such contexts, if someone is not as intimately involved in the relationship, they may not know what the other person needs or when to provide support without explicit directions. It would seem that if one does not intimately know the person s/he is asking for support from and perhaps does not have a relationship built on particular expectations, being direct may be vital to getting the support desired. However, if one is seeking support in the context of a long-term committed relationship, there is more experience in the relationship and an underlying expectation that a partner will be there to provide support without be asked. Thus, it is understandable that not having to ask for support directly could result in more satisfaction with the support received, particularly during times of extreme stress such as facing breast cancer. However, these results are not necessarily causal in nature, and it could also be the case that when one is in a relationship where support is consistently being provided by a partner, the woman realizes that she does not need to be direct to receive support.
In addition to the possibility that the woman would prefer voluntary support, this scenario potentially benefits the male partner providing the support as well. If the male provider is able to satisfy the woman without having been given specific instructions, the support provider might feel more competent and helpful in the relationship. Jensen’s research (2001) showed that when the support receiver praised the provider for support, it was given more frequently. The support provider may feel particularly good about being praised for support given spontaneously or from subtle indications of need, rather than from explicit directives or requests. On the other hand, it could be frustrating for a husband or partner to find out that his wife was not satisfied with the support he was giving her, yet she had not said anything indicating what it was that she needed. It would be important to know whether the current results regarding indirect style and satisfaction with support would be reproduced in circumstances that were less stressful than breast cancer. For instance, would women in non-stressful situations also be more satisfied when using more indirect elicitation? We know that women turn to their partners in times of stress (Coyne & Anderson, 1999), and findings from the current study indicate that women turn to their partners in times of stress using indirect strategies to elicit support. Results from the current study also indicate that women are more satisfied with support, the more they use these indirect strategies. Whether women would use indirect strategies when they are not dealing with a significant life stressor and whether they would be more satisfied with the support they receive as a result is as yet unknown. The answer could have implications for understanding the lack of findings regarding the interaction between relationship schematic processing and indirect style. Perhaps the use of indirect versus direct elicitation strategies is more context-specific, more related to the current stressor and less directly related to whether one’s partner has the ability
to read and interpret cues that support is needed. In other words, perhaps women are not using direct versus indirect elicitation strategies dependent upon the processing skills of their partners; instead, they may be employing indirect strategies based on the situation of being in a long-term relationship at a time of high stress.

Coding elicitation styles of women not currently experiencing an extreme life stressor would also provide information about whether women predominantly have an indirect style, independent of the partners’ processing style or the context of dealing with a stressor. Within a long-term committed relationship, indirect elicitation may well be the manner in which women generally seek support. Knowing more about what women do to seek support in a variety of contexts would provide a baseline of information for future research. Knowing such information could also shed some light on the lack of interaction effects between women’s elicitation and men’s processing style.

Overall, these findings regarding the use of indirect elicitation strategies have potential implications for therapeutic interventions with couples. The current milieu in the area of couples and communication seems to place a high value on being direct. Indeed, encouraging couples to be direct and open can encourage tenderness and intimacy by bringing out thoughts and feelings that had not been expressed, and can counter passive aggressiveness, manipulation, deceit, and other destructive behaviors by exposing issues that may exist below the surface of communication. However, it appears that at least in the context of facing breast cancer as a couple, it may also be beneficial to operate on a more subtle level in line with partners’ expectations of one another. Clinicians may be inclined to abide by “ask and you shall receive”; however, results from this investigation indicate this may not be the most beneficial strategy, at least for couples facing a stressful event reporting
as moderately satisfied in their marriages. Additionally, past research indicates that personal disclosures about distress garner support. Results from the current investigation corroborate these findings; when women indirectly request support which discussing their distress, they also report greater satisfaction with support received. Thus, clinicians could focus on emotional disclosures as a technique to enhance satisfaction with support as well.

Context is important in understanding the importance of direct/indirect requests for support, as there may be situations where being direct is preferable. For example, housework may be one domain where indirect requests for instrumental support could be seen as passive aggressive, and expectations may not be as clear as they are with respect to comforting and emotionally supporting someone during a severe illness. Additionally, it is unclear what this type of interaction looks like in couples who are experiencing general relationship distress and not major life stressors. Couples in the current sample were relatively happy in their relationship, facing a life stressor; thus, findings from this study cannot be generalized to these other circumstances. Overall, context, type of support being sought, and baseline level of relationship satisfaction are all factors that could greatly effect whether it is better to be direct or indirect in seeking support.

There are also clinical implications regarding men’s processing styles in relation to women’s satisfaction. As women were more satisfied when men were high on quality of RSP, coaching men to consider events in relationship terms would facilitate these support interactions as well. Sullivan and Baucom (2002) demonstrated that Cognitive Behavioral Couple Therapy (CBCT) is effective in increasing quantity and quality of RSP among men. They found that when men’s RSP increased in response to therapy, women’s satisfaction with the relationship also improved. They also found that women are less negative in their
communication when their partners are high on relationship schematic processing. In the
current study, women’s constructiveness was significantly positively correlated with men’s
quality of RSP; replicating past findings and providing further evidence that higher quality
RSP may benefit the relationship in a variety of respects.

In terms of the absolute level of constructiveness women used in requesting support,
the findings indicated that they were slightly above neutral, tending toward positive.
However, this finding cannot be generalized beyond this sample and raises the issue of
context again. Are women’s communication styles different when they are under extreme
stress? When experiencing such concern about one’s own health and often with significant
physical distress, are women less thoughtful and careful about how they request
support? What we do know is that in the present study, these moderate scores on constructiveness
were not related to women’s satisfaction with support, satisfaction with their relationship, or
related to their positive or negative affect. This raises the issue of construct validity for the
coding system, which is discussed further below. However, if this system is accurately
measuring how constructive women’s communication is in seeking support, one would
expect this to have an effect on the support she receives and, therefore, on her satisfaction
with that support. It is unclear why these variables are not related in this sample. The logic
behind this hypothesis was that if women were asking for support in a destructive manner,
they would not receive the support desired because it will be difficult for the male partner to
respond to such elicitations in a supportive manner. Women in this sample were moderately
high on satisfaction with support and somewhat constructive as well; therefore, it could be
that the anticipated effect would be found in a sample of women who were using more
destructive styles and were more dissatisfied with the support they received from their male partners.

The lack of significant findings for predicting women’s support satisfaction from the interaction of constructiveness and focus may be understood similarly. The logic behind this hypothesis was that if women were being destructive about their partners, it would be more difficult for the partners to hear and respond to such messages supportively. If women focus on another person or topic destructively, it might be less difficult for the men to respond supportively because of the lack of personal threat. For example, “That nurse was such a jerk today” may be easier to hear than “You were a real jerk today”. It could be that using sample of women who were destructive communicators in less satisfied relationships would prove a more effective test of this hypothesis.

There are several potential refinements in methodology that could aid our understanding of the effects of elicitation strategies. First, it could be helpful to directly assess women’s perception of support during the interaction. The current study assessed women’s satisfaction with perceived support from the men over the month following the interaction task. Assessing women’s perceived support during the same conversation in which the elicitation cues were measured could provide more specific information regarding the nature of support exchanges. Second, employing the Couple Elicitation Coding System along with a coding system measuring support provision would enable analysis of the relationship between elicitation strategies and the subsequent support provided. In other words, coding elicitation and provision at the talk turn level would provide information about the effects of the women’s talk turns on the men’s responses. A third possibility is to investigate the effect of overall relationship satisfaction as rated by both partners, on the
support interactions. Previous findings indicate that men rate their satisfaction with an interaction based on a more global assessment of the state of the relationship and less on specific communications during the interaction (Carels & Baucom, 1999). Perhaps men will not respond more positively or neutrally to women’s destructive cues for support focusing on the men if the men are highly satisfied in the relationship overall. That is, highly satisfied men could be forgiving of their wives’ use of destructive elicitation styles when the women are experiencing treatment for breast cancer.

Another primary aim of this study was to understand more about measuring the support seeking process itself. Because there has been little research in this area with regard to couples, the development of this new coding system was an important focus of the current investigation. First, gathering information about how women go about seeking support when facing difficult times is important for moving forward with work on social support and couples. In the future, it will also be important to apply such observational coding to men’s elicitation styles to understand how men seek support and how this might differ from what is observed in women. Knowing the effect seeking support has on the process could not only guide clinical work on how to help couples elicit support in a successful fashion, but also has implications for understanding support provision as well. Most treatment focusing on social support has emphasized changing the behavior of the support provider, without consideration for the strategies employed to request support. The manner in which one is asked for support could well effect the provision of support. This broad notion served as the impetus for this investigation, and the lack of an appropriate scale for observationally measuring social support elicitation guided the creation of the Couple Support Elicitation Coding System. This is the first investigation using this scale, which will require future work to revise and
improve. Because this coding system was only used on a small sample of women with early stage breast cancer, there is no information about how this scale would perform on other samples or with other groups of coders. Training coders on the system’s current constructs and applying the system to the couple’s interactions proved feasible and successful, as coders were able to comprehend the concepts and obtained adequate inter-rater reliability.

Results from a correlation analysis of the three subscales indicate that indirectness is significantly negatively correlated with focus (i.e., talking about the partner versus others). The scale might be improved by ensuring that the constructs of interest are not highly intercorrelated. It is understandable that these two subscales would be somewhat correlated because making a direct request often entails focusing on the partner. For example, the direct request, “Could you take off work to come to my appointments with me?” is necessarily focusing on the partner. However, psychometrically it is optimal for the various dimensions on the scale to be relatively distinct and not highly correlated in order to provide maximal information about elicitation strategies from the various subscales. The three subscales were developed from a theoretical basis, and more empirical investigation might increase the validity or utility of the system. One possible method for refining the subscales is to conduct a factor analysis of the various indices or subscales. For instance, elements of constructiveness taken into account by coders include: being specific, clear, and sensitive to the support provider. However, prior work has not determined how well these items converge to create the subscale constructiveness. Expanding the subscales to include these additional descriptions also has implications for the anchors and instructions given to the coders. Describing constructs such as constructiveness may be prone to misunderstanding by the coders and providing more detail might lead to improved construct validity as well as
improved coder reliability. For instance, in the early training of the coders for the current investigation, it was determined that differentiating between being constructive and being generally positive was important as these two constructs were easily confused. Ensuring that coders could grasp difficult emotions being expressed in a constructive manner, or positive emotions being expressed in a superficial manner, was vital to the validity of the coding system. In addition to addressing the internal validity of the scale, tests of external validity are warranted. For example, repeated use of the scale on larger and more diverse samples in order to develop norms is necessary.

While this study provided valuable information on the support interactions of relatively satisfied couples facing breast cancer, the limited ability to generalize from these results should be noted. The sample was small ($N=50$ couples) and largely homogenous with regards to demographic features such as ethnicity, religious affiliation, education, and income. This study was also limited to heterosexual couples. It could be that couples from other cultural backgrounds and same-sex couples have a different experience of relational processing and support elicitation. More research is needed in a variety of contexts, including distressed couples, couples facing different life stressors, and multicultural samples, in order to determine how the interaction patterns differ and what implications that may have for treatment and further research. Additionally, results should be interpreted with caution, given that all of the data were cross-sectional and correlational in nature, and no cause and effect relationships can be assumed. It would be beneficial to conduct a similar study investigating both women’s satisfaction with perceived support as well as actual support provided by the male partners in order to better understand how women’s elicitation strategies affect the behavior of the men providing support.
Results of this study facilitate better understanding of women’s support elicitation strategies, how they interact with the support provider’s relationship processing, and how this relates to women in a variety of domains. An additional achievement of this investigation was the preliminary development of an observational coding system for measuring support elicitation. With continued development, this system can pave the way for future research in defining and understanding support seeking behaviors. We know that social support has countless benefits in times of stress, and we know that, in general, women turn to their partners in times of personal difficulty before turning to anyone else, regardless of overall relationship satisfaction. Thus, it is of paramount importance that the field of couple research and couple therapy keeps a keen eye turned towards the area of social support, and, in particular, a focus on support elicitation. Support elicitation is likely to be of central importance to satisfactory relationship functioning, yet we are still in the early stages of investigation and understanding this process in intimate relationships.
### Statistical Tables

#### Table 1

**Means and Standard Deviations for RSP Variables, Perceived Support Satisfaction, Relationship Satisfaction, Positive and Negative Affect, and Elicitation Variables, Grouped by Patient and Partner**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Patients (N = 50)</th>
<th>Partners (N = 50)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Schematic Processing (RSP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pull</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Support</td>
<td>11.40</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>25.73</td>
<td>5.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Affect</td>
<td>32.10</td>
<td>7.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Affect</td>
<td>21.46</td>
<td>7.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Elicitation:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructiveness</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectness</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Correlations Among All Variables (N = 50)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women’s Relationship Satisfaction</th>
<th>Women’s Positive Affect</th>
<th>Women’s Negative Affect</th>
<th>Women’s Satisfaction with Support</th>
<th>Women’s Proportion for Constructive</th>
<th>Women’s Proportion for Indirect</th>
<th>Women’s Proportion for Focus</th>
<th>Men’s Quality of RSP</th>
<th>Pull for RSP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>.109</td>
<td>-.421**</td>
<td>.513**</td>
<td>-.800</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>-.280*</td>
<td>.335*</td>
<td>.120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Positive Affect</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>.195</td>
<td>-.219</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>-.461**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Negative Affect</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.413**</td>
<td>-.084</td>
<td>-.091</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>-.300*</td>
<td>.294*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Satisfaction with Support</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.329*</td>
<td>-.289*</td>
<td>.243</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Proportion for Constructive</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>-.264</td>
<td>-.391**</td>
<td>.236</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Proportion for Indirect</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.309*</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>-.185</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Proportion for Focus</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>-.379**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men’s Quality of RSP</td>
<td>_</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.328*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < 0.01 (2-tailed)
*p < 0.05 level (2-tailed)**
Table 3

Results for Regression Analysis Predicting Women’s Satisfaction with Perceived Support from Men’s Relationship Schematic Processing, Women’s Indirectness and the Interaction, Controlling for RSP Pull

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSP Pull</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP Quality</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectness</td>
<td>7.92</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP Quality by Indirectness</td>
<td>-1.18</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All predictor variables were centered

*p < .05
Table 4

Results for Regression Analysis Predicting Women’s Perceived Support from Elicitation Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constructiveness</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>-2.68</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>-0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructiveness by Focus</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All predictor variables were centered
*p < .05
### Table 5

Results from the Analysis Predicting Women’s Relationship Satisfaction from Elicitation Strategies and Men’s Relationship Schematic Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSP Pull</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP Quality</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>0.47*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructiveness</td>
<td>-2.74</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectness</td>
<td>11.12</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: All predictor variables were centered

*p < .05*
Table 6

Results for Regression Analysis Predicting Women’s Positive Affect from Women’s Elicitation Strategies and Men’s Relationship Schematic Processing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>β</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RSP Pull</td>
<td>-3.60</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-0.50*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSP Quality</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructiveness</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirectness</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>8.58</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All predictor variables are centered

*p < .05
Table 7

*Results for Regression Analysis Predicting Women’s Negative Affect from Women’s Elicitation Strategies and Men’s Relationship Schematic Processing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>$\beta$</th>
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<td>0.44*</td>
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<td>-0.44*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8.62</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
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</tbody>
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*Note: All predictor variables are centered*

*p < .05*
References


