Responses to discrimination: Relationships between social support seeking, core self-evaluations, and withdrawal behaviors

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Abstract

Drawing from the theory of conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989), we examined

relationships between social support seeking as a response to perceived discrimination from

supervisors, core self-evaluations, and withdrawal behaviors. We further studied how the

relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors was moderated by core

self-evaluations. With two different samples, we found, as expected, that social support seeking

in response to discrimination from supervisors is positively related to employee withdrawal

behaviors, and core self-evaluations is negatively related to withdrawal behaviors. Across the

two samples, we also found evidence that the relationship between social support seeking and

withdrawal behaviors was weaker when core self-evaluations were high compared to low. We

discuss implications of our results in the context of past research.

Keywords: social support seeking as a response to perceived discrimination, withdrawal

behaviors, core self-evaluations

Responses to Discrimination: Relationships Between Social Support Seeking, Core Self-

Evaluations, and Withdrawal Behaviors

Social support, seeking and/or receiving support from other individuals to address a

problem, is a strategy used by people who experience discrimination at work (Knapp, Faley,

Ekeberg, & Dubois, 1997). Scholars have found that social support is one major response to

sexual harassment (Knapp et al., 1997), racial discrimination (Plummer & Slane, 1996),

disability discrimination (Colella, 1996), and sexual orientation discrimination (Wilson &

Yoshikawa, 2004), among other types of discrimination. The idea that social support is one

prevalent response to discriminatory treatment is well established in the literature.

However, what is not well established is whether social support seeking in response to

discrimination from supervisors relates to an individual's job outcomes. Generally, in the social

support literature, there has been more research on understanding social support received rather

than sought as well as on the relationship between social support received and employee health

outcomes. While scholars have shown that social support received is associated with both

positive and negative outcomes in various contexts (e.g., Beehr, Farmer, Glazer, Gudanowski, &

Nair, 2003; Fenlason & Beehr, 1994; Nahum-Shani, Bamberger, & Bacharach, 2011; Nahum-

Shani & Bamberger, 2011), similar advances have yet to be made in relation to seeking social

support as a response to perceived discrimination.

The limited research examining the association between social support as a response to

perceived discrimination and individual outcomes varies in its conclusions (e.g., Bingham &

Scherer, 1993; Livingston, 1982), suggesting the existence of boundary conditions. Moreover,

few studies have investigated social support seeking in response to perceptions of discrimination.

Examining the seeking of social support is based on the idea that helping relationships

"commonly begin when an individual seeks help" (Nadler, 1991: 290; see also Bamberger, 2009). Therefore, further research identifying the nature of the relationship between social support seeking as a response to perceived discrimination and individual outcomes is warranted. In this study, we address this need.

The objective of this study is twofold. First, we examine the relationship between social support seeking through coworkers as a response to perceived discrimination from the supervisor as well as withdrawal behaviors. We research social support seeking as a response to perceived discrimination from the supervisor for two reasons. First, the supervisor has been singled out as an important perpetrator in understanding responses to discrimination (Goldman, Paddock, & Cropanzano, 2004; Knapp et al., 1997; Wasti & Cortina, 2002). Second, supervisors have a direct influence on an employee's standing in the organization, including (but not limited to) performance evaluations, recommendations for pay raises, career progression, and job assignments. We also study coworkers as the source of social support seeking because coworkers are considered an important external resource (as opposed to one that is internal to the individual) in dealing with discrimination at work (White, Shepelak, & Jensen, 1988). In addition, many employees spend as much or more time with coworkers than with family members. We also research withdrawal behaviors, or neglecting one's job either psychologically or physically (Lehman & Simpson, 1992), because it is associated with turnover (Mitra, Jenkins, & Gupta, 1992), which is in turn linked to high organizational costs (Siebert & Zubanov, 2009).

The second goal of this study is to test whether the relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors is moderated by core self-evaluations, a broad dispositional trait that involves four specific traits: self-esteem, generalized self-efficacy, locus of control, and emotional stability (Judge & Bono, 2001). We research core self-evaluations because this

construct has been related to differences in perceptions of stressors, experiences of strain, and coping (Kammeyer-Mueller, Judge, & Scott, 2009).

Our study advances knowledge of social support seeking as it relates to perceived discrimination by drawing from the theory of conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989), which has not been applied in this context. Drawing from this theory, we study the relationship between social support seeking as it relates to perceived discrimination and withdrawal behaviors when the source of support (i.e., coworkers) is different from the source of the problem (i.e., the supervisor). Both social support seeking and core self-evaluations are among few key resources for coping and adapting to various challenges (Hobfoll & Lilly, 1993; Hobfoll, 2010). We also study the relationship between core self-evaluations both as an independent variable associated with withdrawal behaviors and as a moderator of the relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors. In the following pages, we develop our hypotheses, test them with two different samples, and discuss our findings in the context of research developed by other scholars.

Literature Review on Social Support Seeking and Discrimination

Research on social support in a discriminatory context shows that social support may have both positive and negative outcomes for an individual. These outcomes are in part a function of how social support is measured (i.e., social support sought and social support received), the characteristics of the measure, and the group assessed. Hatzenbuehler, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Dovidio (2009) found that African Americans received greater social support than did lesbians, gays, and bisexuals subsequent to stigma-related stress. White et al. (1988) examined social support received following sex discrimination and found that workers who received coworker support were less likely to leave the organization during a grievance

negotiation than workers without that type of support. Krieger (1990) found that those who talk to others regarding discrimination have lower blood pressure than those who keep it to themselves. Hagey, Choudhry, Guruge, Turrittin, Collins, and Lee (2001) as well as Shorter-Gooden (2004) found that social support was instrumental in overcoming discriminatory treatment. These studies suggest that social support is associated with positive outcomes for the individual. However, a limitation for Krieger (1990), Hagey et al. (2001), and Shorter-Gooden (2004) is that it is not clear if the participants sought *and* received support or merely sought it.

There is also evidence that social support may not always be as beneficial as prior studies indicate. Bingham (1993) found that talking with family and friends led to less satisfaction with outcomes in a situation involving sexual harassment compared to not talking with family and friends. However, Livingston (1982) found that 66% of the participants in the study indicated that talking as a response to sexual harassment made no difference, whereas 32% of the participants reported that it made things better. Furthermore, talking with friends seemed to be more instrumental than talking with coworkers. In turn, talking with supervisors was more effective than talking with friends. However, in this study, it is also unclear if participants received or merely sought the support.

In summary, while research has been conducted on the relationship between social support as a response to perceived discrimination and individual outcomes, little is known about the role of social support through coworkers in response to discrimination when the perpetrator is the supervisor. Livingston (1982) indicates that coworkers may not be immediately responsive to complaints of this nature. Both theory and empirical evidence related to social support in general and the seeking of social support in particular in the context of understanding responses to perceived discrimination are needed. Additionally, because seeking social support represents an

investment of individual resources, we examine core self-evaluations as an individual resource that may help individuals cope with discriminatory encounters at work.

<center>Theory and Hypotheses</center>

According to the theory of conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals try to protect, retain, and build resources, and they feel threatened under the condition of potential or actual loss of resources. Hobfoll (1989) predicts that individuals will try to minimize the net loss of resources under conditions of stress. Hobfoll (2001: 339) defines resources as "those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources."

It can be inferred that social support seeking may lead to obtaining resources that individuals can draw from when experiencing discrimination (Hobfoll, 2001). Social support seeking may help in learning from an expert, gaining information otherwise impossible to obtain, improving task performance, and learning new skills to resolve a problem at hand (Bamberger, 2009; Lee, 2002). However, seeking support does not necessarily mean that the support will be granted. Furthermore, seeking social support carries many costs. It may deplete time and energy for the help seeker as well as significantly increase emotional and social costs by signaling to others one's low self-efficacy and low mastery in solving the problem at hand (Bamberger, 2009). Seeking social support can suggest inferiority, incompetence, and dependence, particularly to those from whom we seek help (Lee, 2002). These are unwanted consequences for any individual as they threaten individual resources (Bamberger, 2009; Nadler 1991). All else being equal, seeking social support demands individual resources and therefore reduces the amount of resources invested in pursuing organization goals (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll & Lilly,

1993). Therefore, a worker is likely to conserve resources by withdrawing resources from the workplace in order to preserve his or her own well-being.

Consistent with other research showing that individuals minimize their inputs when their outcomes are decreased (Adams, 1963, 1965), we also believe that individuals will minimize their net loss of resources invested in the organization while performing their tasks. There are many resources at work that employees can withhold in the face of threats to resources, including the time they invest in the organization or the knowledge, skills, and abilities they use in accomplishing their tasks (Riordan, Schaffer, & Stewart, 2005). There is no empirical evidence associated with the relationship between social support seeking as a response to perceived discrimination and withdrawal behaviors. However, Beehr, Jex, Stacy, and Murray (2000) found a direct and positive relationship between social support received in relation to negative communication and both depression and frustration. All in all, we predict that:

Hypothesis 1. Social support seeking as a response to perceived discrimination is

positively related to withdrawal behaviors.

Based on the theory of conservation of resources, we also reason that there are individual resources that help people overcome personal threats. One such resource is the personality trait of core self-evaluations. There is empirical evidence for considering core self-evaluations to be an individual (i.e., internal) resource. In a recent meta-analysis of core self-evaluations and coping, researchers found that core self-evaluations are associated with fewer reported stressors (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). Drawing from this research, we also examine whether core self-evaluations will be instrumental in increasing employee investments at work.

We argue that those equipped with resources such as high core self-evaluations will be less likely to reduce the amount of resources used by withdrawing from the organization.

Individuals high in core self-evaluations are positive, self-confident, and believe in their own efficacy (Judge, Erez, Bono, & Thoresen, 2003). Compared to those low in core self-evaluations, those high on this trait should have the resources needed to overcome problems related to mistreatment because they believe in themselves. Those high in core self-evaluations are better equipped to overcome problems and will be less likely to minimize the use of other resources at work, such as their time and knowledge.

Empirically, Bowling, Wang, Tang, and Kennedy (2010) found that core self-evaluations were related to counterproductive behavior (a form of withdrawal) directed at both the individual and the organization. Hershcovis et al. (2007) found significant meta-analytic correlations between negative affectivity, a sub-dimension of core self-evaluations, and interpersonal aggression as well as between negative affectivity and organizational aggression. Wiesenfeld, Swann, Brockner, and Bartel (2007) found that self-esteem, another sub-dimension of core self-evaluations, moderated the relationship between procedural justice and absenteeism, a type of withdrawal behavior. In particular they found that absenteeism is lowest when procedural justice is high and self-esteem is high. However, they also found that when procedural justice is low, those with low self-esteem report lower absenteeism compared to those with high self-esteem. Although the evidence is not unanimous, most findings indicate that core self-evaluations are a resource that helps people overcome problems at work. All in all, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: Core self-evaluations are negatively related to withdrawal behaviors.

We further predict that the interaction of core self-evaluations and social support seeking will relate to withdrawal behaviors. Drawing from the theory of conservation of resources (Hobfoll, 1989), we predict that social support seeking about a mistreatment-related issue will be associated with taxing internal resources, thereby causing a reduction in resources invested at

work. However, the more internal resources an individual possesses, the lower the withdrawal

behaviors should be. The reason for this is that those high in core self-evaluations feel good

about themselves and should be less strongly influenced by others compared to those who feel

less confident about themselves (Judge et al., 2003). Instead of being burdened further with the

negative thoughts related to the discrimination-related discussion with the coworker, the

individual may have a more positive attitude. All in all, the relationship between social support

seeking and withdrawal behavior will be weaker when core self-evaluations are high compared

to low.

Empirically, Kammeyer-Mueller et al. (2009) found that core self-evaluations were

negatively related to perceived strain and that emotional stability, a sub-dimension of core self-

evaluations, moderated the relationship between stressors and strain such that this relationship

was attenuated for those high in emotional stability. Drawing from this evidence, coupled with

the theory of conservation of resources, we predict that:

Hypothesis 3. The positive relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal

behaviors will be moderated by core self-evaluations such that the relationship will be

weaker when core self-evaluations are high compared to when core self-evaluations are

low.

Method

Study 1

Sample and Procedure

We collected two samples from StudyResponse, a service with over 95,000 registered

individuals who agree to receive solicitations to answer scholarly research surveys on the

Internet in exchange for incentives. Research conducted by Stanton (1998) supports the validity

of data collected through the Internet. The first sample was collected in Summer 2006. The second (different) sample was collected in Summer 2008. Participants from these two samples were re-contacted during January 2009.

It is important to note that this study partially shares data with another study as it includes data that were collected as part of a larger research project that included samples collected in 2006, 2008, and 2009. The data collected in 2009 include our dependent variable and one control variable, and are unique to the present study. The data collected in 2006 are also unique to the present study. The overlap that exists between these two studies is associated with the sample collected in 2008. Approximately half of the participants from the 2008 sample, which was used for the other study, are included in the present study, and the overlap concerns the following three variables: social support seeking, core self-evaluations, and education.

A condition for participating in the data collection during Summer 2006 was that participants be currently working U.S. residents who were from ethnic minorities or females. We selected this sample in the hope of obtaining a high frequency of affirmative responses to our filter question (i.e., Have you ever been discriminated against at work by your most direct supervisor?), given that minorities are more likely to perceive discrimination than non-minorities (Stangor, Swim, Van Allen, & Sechrist, 2002).

Participants were told that the researchers' purpose was to examine how people respond when they are confronted with discrimination in the workplace. We further indicated that there were many ways of dealing with discrimination and that we wanted respondents to indicate what they generally did when they experienced discrimination. Immediately following these instructions, we asked participants if they had ever been discriminated against in the workplace by their direct supervisor. If participants answered "yes" to this question, they went on to answer

questions about what they did in response to the discrimination. Participants who said they had

not experienced discrimination from a direct supervisor were removed from the study.

A total of 3,260 individuals were invited to participate in the Summer 2006 data

collection, and 344 answered the survey, representing a response rate of 11%. This response rate

is similar to other data collections on the Internet (Nadler, 2005; Piccolo and Colquitt, 2006). Of

the 344 participants who answered the survey in Summer 2006, 129 reported that they had been

discriminated against at work by their most direct supervisor.

During Summer 2008, we contacted the second group of participants, also through

StudyResponse (the 129 participants indicated above were excluded). We asked the same filter

question that was asked in Summer 2006: "Have you ever been discriminated against at work by

your most direct supervisor?" A total of 9,739 employed U.S. residents were invited to

participate, of which 894 answered the survey, representing a 9.18% response rate. In this data

collection, we did not oversample ethnic minorities or females. Of the 894 participants, 164

answered our survey, declaring that they had been discriminated against by their supervisor and

were currently working.

During January 2009, we contacted the participants who had answered our surveys in

2006 and 2008 and asked them to answer a second Internet survey. We received 109 complete

responses, which represents our final sample. Females represented 65.1% of the sample. Whites

represented 78%, and the rest were from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. A total of 43% had an

associate degree or higher, and the average age was approximately 42 years.

Measures

The two independent variables (i.e., social support seeking and core self-evaluations) and

the control variables (i.e., sex, age, education, frequency of discrimination, and data collection

year) were collected both in Summer 2006 and Summer 2008. The dependent variable (i.e.,

withdrawal behaviors) and tenure in the organization were collected in January 2009. The

reliabilities are provided in Table 1.

Social Support Seeking. The four items for this measure were: "I ask my coworkers why

my supervisor treats me that way," "I complain about the mistreatment with my intimate friends

at work," "I talk about my supervisor's mistreatment of me with my coworkers," and "I speak

with other coworkers that have received the same mistreatment." Drawing from Carver, Scheier,

& Weintraub (1989), the response options were: 1 (I usually don't do this at all), 2 (I usually do

this a little bit), 3 (I usually do this a medium amount), and 4 (I usually do this a lot). Our

measure reflects informational aspects of seeking social support (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997).

Core self-evaluations. We measured core self-evaluations using Judge et al.'s (2003) 12-

item scale. A sample item is: "When I try, I generally succeed." Anchors were in a Likert-type

format from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Withdrawal behaviors. We used Lehman and Simpson's (1992) 12-item scale of

psychological and physical withdrawal behavior from work. An example of an item is: "In the

past six months, how often have you put less effort into your job than you should have?"

Response options were on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 7 (very often).

Control variables. We controlled for sex, age, and racial/ethnic background because they

relate to withdrawal (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). Sex was coded 1 if female and 0 if male.

Age was measured in years. Racial/ethnic background was coded 1 if White and 0 if Other. We

also controlled for education, tenure in the organization, and frequency of discrimination (Cotton

& Tuttle, 1986; Dipboye & Colella, 2005). Education was measured as 1 (bachelor or graduate

studies) and 0 (other). Tenure was measured in years. Frequency of discrimination was measured

with one item asking participants to indicate how often they had been discriminated against at work. Response options were from rarely (at least one time) to very often (more than eight times). Finally, we controlled for data collection year (Summer 2008 = 1; Summer 2006 = 0).

<div align="center">Results</div>

Before testing the hypotheses, we evaluated the validity of our two main predictors (i.e., social support seeking and core self-evaluations) because they were both collected at the same time. For validity purposes, we first ran a two-factor confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for social support seeking and core self-evaluations. We compared this two-factor model with a one-factor model. To run the CFA, we parceled the measure of core self-evaluations because the number of parameters to be estimated required a greater sample size than the one obtained, using the guideline of having a minimum of five data points per parameter (Bentler & Chou, 1987). The two-factor model had a better fit [X^2 (19) = 28.88, $p \geq .05$; CFI = 0.97; SRMR $\leq .06$; RMSEA $\leq .07$] than a one-factor model [X^2 (20) = 119.74, $p \leq .001$; CFI = 0.69; SRMR $\leq .17$; RMSEA $\leq .23$]. In addition, the change in X^2 was significantly different, $\Delta X^2 = 90.86$, $p \leq .05$.

The means, standard deviations, and correlations are shown in Table 1. These correlations provide preliminary evidence in support of our hypotheses. The correlation between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors was positive, $r = .31$, $p \leq .001$, whereas the correlation between core self-evaluations and withdrawal behaviors was negative, $r = -.39$, $p \leq .001$, as predicted.

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INSERT TABLES 1 and 2, and FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE
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We conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis to test the hypotheses. The variables in the interaction terms were centered to test for moderation (Cohen, Cohen, West, &

Aiken, 2003). In Model 1 of the regression analysis, we included all the control variables. This model was statistically significant, $F(7, 101) = 2.48$, $p \leq .05$, with an $R^2 = .15$ (see Table 2). In Model 2 we included social support seeking. The model was also significant, $F\Delta(1, 100) = 11.32$, $p \leq .001$, $R^2 = .23$. As predicted, social support seeking was positively related to withdrawal behaviors, providing support for Hypothesis 1. In Model 3 we added core self-evaluations. As predicted, this trait was negatively related to withdrawal behaviors, supporting Hypothesis 2, $F\Delta(1, 99) = 9.39$, $p \leq .01$, $R^2 = .30$. In Model 4, we included the interaction term of social support seeking and core self-evaluations. Results were significant, $F\Delta(1, 98) = 5.82$, $p \leq .05$, with an $R^2 = .34$, and the difference in withdrawal behaviors between high and low core self-evaluations at high values of social support seeking was also significant, $t = 3.96$, $p < .01$. As shown in Figure 1, the relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal behavior was lower when core self-evaluations were high as opposed to low, supporting Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

In this study we found that the relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors was positive and the relationship between core self-evaluations and withdrawal behaviors was negative. The relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors is moderated by core self-evaluations. However, the study has two notable limitations. First, results may be confounded because the time gap in the data collection between Time 1 and Time 2 varied between six months and two years. Second, there are alternative explanations for the results, such as the existence of organizational policies against discrimination, social support received, participants' job dissatisfaction, participants' performance, and the type of discrimination experienced. In Study 2, we take these limitations into account when testing the hypotheses.

Study 2

Sample and Procedure

An additional sample was collected with undergraduate and graduate students from a

university in the Southwestern United States. We followed the same procedure and provided the

same instructions to participants as those provided in Study 1. A total of 678 individuals

participated in the study during the summer and fall of 2012. In exchange, they received extra

credit. Of the 678 participants, 122 reported that they had been discriminated against at work by

their most direct supervisor. Of these, 42.6% were female and the average age was 32 years. A

total of 77.9% were Hispanic, and the rest were from other racial/ethnic backgrounds. All

participants had work experience. At the time of the study, 32.8% worked full-time, 45.9% part-

time, and 21.3% were not currently working. A total of 24.6% worked in business services,

48.4% worked at "Other" industries, and 7.4% worked in the financial service industry. The rest

of the participants worked in various industries such as retail, defense, health care,

manufacturing, and education.

Measures

Social support seeking, core self-evaluations, and withdrawal behaviors. We measured

these variables as in Study 1. The reliabilities for these variables are shown in Table 3.

Control variables. We measured the same control variables and in the same manner as in

Study 1, except for year of data collection because all variables were collected at the same time.

In addition, to rule out alternative explanations for our results, we controlled for intensity of

discrimination (measured with 1 item, from 1 "not intense at all" to 4 "very intense"), the

location in which discrimination occurred (coded as 1 if discrimination occurred at the current

organization with current supervisor and 0 otherwise), the presence of organizational policies

against discrimination (coded 1 if yes and 0 if no), and the type of discrimination experienced

(tenure, job function, disability, skin color, religion, nationality, sex, age, racial, and sexual

orientation). We coded 1 if the type of discrimination was present, 0 if not. We also controlled

for participants' job dissatisfaction with two items from Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh

(1979) on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). We controlled for participants'

job performance with four items from Welbourne, Johnson, and Erez (1998) on a scale from 1

(needs much improvement) to 5 (excellent). Finally, we controlled for social support received

with three items adapted from Beehr et al. (2000) and Beehr, Bowling, and Bennett (2010) on a

scale from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very much). Reliabilities for the variables are shown in Table 3.

Results

We followed the same procedure for analyzing the data as in Study 1. We examined the

validity of the measures by conducting a six-factor CFA (social support seeking, core self-

evaluations, social support received, job dissatisfaction, job performance, and withdrawal

behaviors) and compared it with a one-, a two-, a three-, a four- and a five-factor model. To run

the CFA, we parceled the measures of core self-evaluations and withdrawal behavior. The six-

factor model had a better fit [X^2 (137) = 177.61, $p > .05$; CFI = 0.97; SRMR < .05; RMSEA <

.05] than any of the other models, and the change in X^2 was significantly different for all

comparisons.

The means, standard deviations, and correlations are shown in Table 3. The correlation

between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors was positive, $r = .23, p \leq .01$, while the

correlation between core self-evaluations and withdrawal behaviors was negative, $r = -.31, p \leq$

.001, as predicted.

INSERT TABLES 3 & 4 & FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

As in Study 1, we conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis and centered the variables in the interaction term. In Model 1 of the regression analysis, we included all of the control variables, $F(22, 99) = 3.35$, $p \leq .001$, with an $R^2 = .43$ (see Table 4). In Model 2, we included social support seeking, $F\Delta(1, 98) = 5.13$, $p \leq .05$, $R^2 = .46$. As predicted, social support seeking was positively related to withdrawal behaviors, providing support for Hypothesis 1. In Model 3, we added core self-evaluations, which was negatively related to withdrawal behaviors, supporting Hypothesis 2, $F\Delta(1, 97) = 6.56$, $p \leq .01$, $R^2 = .49$. In Model, 4 we included the interaction term of social support seeking and core self-evaluations, $F\Delta(1, 96) = 4.08$, $p \leq .05$, $R^2 = .51$, and the difference in withdrawal behaviors between high and low core self-evaluations at high values of social support seeking was also significant, $t = 3.29$, $p < .01$. As shown in Figure 2, the relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors was lower when core self-evaluations are high compared to low, which supports Hypothesis 3.

Discussion

Results for Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were replicated with a different sample and with a different method of data collection, demonstrating the robustness of our results.

General Discussion

Contributions and Implications

We contribute to theory by researching social support seeking as a response to perceived discrimination at work. While the theory of conservation of resources has not been examined within the context of social support seeking as a response to perceived discrimination, our results suggest that the theory holds in this context. The theory argues that individuals try to protect their resources and minimize their loss of resources under conditions of stress (Hobfoll, 1989).

We draw from this theory to predict that social support seeking is positively associated with withdrawal behaviors. Across two different studies, this prediction holds because social support seeking in response to perceived discriminatory treatment is positively related to withdrawal behaviors, which suggests that when people feel assured enough about their disadvantageous treatment to speak with sympathetic others about it, they also withdraw energies and resources from their work. Our findings also extend the theory of conservation of resources. In particular, the use of a personal resource, such as core self-evaluations, is important in understanding the relationship between social support seeking in response to perceived discrimination and withdrawal behaviors. This suggests that traits that provide personal resources with which to overcome adversity also play an important part in predicting employee behaviors in response to disadvantageous treatment.

Methodologically, we contribute to the literature by measuring social support sought as it relates to perceived discrimination. A limitation of prior studies that examine social support and discrimination is that it is unclear whether the social support measure is tapping social support received or merely social support sought. In our study, we measured social support sought and found a negative relation with withdrawal behaviors. This finding is important for employees given that social support is frequently used as a response to discrimination in organizational contexts (Malamut & Offermann, 2001).

This study has two theoretical implications. First, drawing from the theory of conservation of resources, social support seeking may be related not only to withdrawal behaviors but also to other individual behaviors such as lack of organizational citizenship. Individuals will reduce or even discontinue the overall amount of resources invested in the organization, particularly organizational citizenship behaviors, which are likely to be the first to

be withdrawn as a means of conserving resources (Lee & Allen, 2002). Future research may

examine the association between social support seeking and organizational citizenship behaviors.

Second, social support seeking does not seem to be associated with positive job-related

outcomes when social support seeking occurs in response to perceived discrimination.

Furthermore, social support seeking may have a multiplicative effect of negative perceptions

related to mistreatment as it involves talking with sympathetic others about this disadvantageous

treatment. Future research may examine whether and how social support seeking may spill over

to other coworkers.

Our study also has practical implications. Our findings related to core self-evaluations are

relevant for management practice because, unlike social support seeking, hiring individuals high

on core self-evaluations is under managerial control. Managers will benefit from hiring

individuals with high core self-evaluations because beyond increasing individuals' sales volume,

task performance, rated performance, service quality orientation, and service climate (Erez &

Judge, 2001; Salvaggio et al. 2007), these individuals are less likely to withdraw from the

organization when social support seeking is a major response to perceived discrimination.

Another implication for practice is that social support seeking in response to perceived

discrimination does not seem to be instrumental because it is positively related to employee

withdrawal. This is problematic for organizations because there is evidence that social support is

frequently used as a response to perceived discrimination compared with other possible

responses (Malamut & Offermann, 2001). It may also be problematic for employees because

results suggest that seeking support in response to supervisor discrimination may exacerbate

rather than attenuate the problem. Practically, our results imply that those who perceive

supervisor discrimination may be better off not seeking support from coworkers. Social support

seeking may be helpful if it helps employees vent frustrations, but it may also be harmful to them and the organization if it encourages withdrawal behaviors.

Limitations and Future Research

Our samples were not representative of the broader population. This limits the conclusions that may be drawn from this research. However, organizations are very rarely willing to grant access to researchers who are studying topics as sensitive as discrimination. In this regard, non-representative samples provide information that can later be checked against other studies reporting similar types of research. Therefore, the results of this research remain critical for advancing our understanding of the consequences of social support seeking at work (Goldman, Gutek, Stein, & Lewis, 2006). Future research may examine this topic with a representative sample of working employees who have experienced discrimination in the workplace.

Another limitation of our research is that we only focus on coworkers as the source of social support. Future research may examine if there are differences in withdrawal behaviors as a function of different sources of social support, such as between coworkers and family members.

In addition, in Study 1 there was a substantial drop-out of participants from Time 1 ($N = 293$) to Time 2 ($N = 109$). This attrition is common in studies that collect data over time, particularly when there is a lag of over two years. Unfortunately, when we reestablished contact with participants, some of them were no longer in the database, precluding us from having access to them. An additional limitation is that we only collected the dependent variable (i.e., withdrawal behaviors) at Time 2. Had we collected withdrawal behaviors at Time 1, we could have assessed the stability of the construct. Therefore, causal interpretations are limited. In future

research, withdrawal behaviors could be collected at both points in time to examine the causal linkages between social support sought and withdrawal behaviors (Singleton & Straits, 2010).

The goal of Study 2 was to collect all variables at the same time to eliminate issues related to attrition and the stability of the constructs. However, this methodology also has limitations related to common method bias, given that the responses to both the dependent and independent variables were answered by the same participant (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). However, it is important to mention that there is no theoretical reason to expect an interaction from common method variance. According to Evans (1985) and Schmitt (1994), correlated error cannot create spurious interactions; instead, it can attenuate true interactions, which reduces the potential to reach significant results. Another limitation relates to influences of unmeasured variables. For example, if stress in family life causes an individual to perceive the supervisor's treatment as discriminatory, ultimately increasing withdrawal behaviors, then stress in family life may provide an alternative explanation for the relationship under investigation in the current study. Future research may further validate the results of this study, controlling for other variables that may influence withdrawal behaviors.

Conclusion

In summary, across two studies, results reveal that withdrawal behaviors relate to both social support seeking and core self-evaluations. Across the two studies, we also found that core self-evaluations moderate the relationship between social support seeking in response to discrimination and withdrawal behaviors such that when core self-evaluations are high, this relationship is weaker than when core self-evaluations are low. Researchers and managers should continue to examine ways of reducing the problems associated with responses to apparent or actual discrimination in the workplace.

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Table 1

Study 1 - Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Withdrawal behaviors	2.32	.96	*.89*									
2. Sex[a]	.65	.48	-.16	--								
3. Age	41.58	10.43	-.29**	.15	--							
4. Racial/ethnic background	.78	.42	-.13	.22*	.07	--						
5. Education	.43	.50	.12	-.10	-.10	-.12	--					
6. Tenure	7.25	7.26	.08	.05	.27**	.07	-.14	--				
7. Frequency of discrimination	1.96	.79	-.02	.11	.19*	-.11	-.01	.11	--			
8. Data collection year	.83	.37	-.08	-.17	-.03	.24*	.14	-.08	-.21*	--		
9. Core self-evaluations	4.03	.77	-.39***	.05	.14	.09	-.07	-.10	.02	-.05	*.85*	
10. Social support seeking	2.18	.77	.31***	-.04	-.10	-.05	-.07	-.06	.16	-.01	-.25**	*.74*

N = 109. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are given in italics on the diagonals.

[a] Sex was coded 1 if female and 0 if male. Racial/ethnic background was coded 1 if White and 0 if Other. Data collection was coded 1 if 2008 and 0 if 2006.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. Two-tailed tests.

Table 2

Study 1 - Hierarchical Regression of Withdrawal Behaviors on Social Support Seeking and Core Self-evaluations

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Sex[a]	-.11[b]	-.10	-.11	-.13
Age	-.30**	-.27**	-.23**	-.22**
Racial/ethnic background	-.07	-.06	-.03	-.02
Education	.11	.13	.11	.10
Tenure	.18	.19*	.14	.12
Frequency of discrimination	.00	-.06	-.05	-.05
Data collection	-.09	-.10	-.12	-.15
Social support seeking		.30***	.23**	.22*
Core self-evaluations			-.27**	-.23**
Social support seeking x Core self-evaluations				-.21*
R^2	.15	.23	.30	.34
ΔR^2		.08	.07	.04
ΔF	2.48*	11.32***	9.39**	5.82*

N = 109.

[a] Sex was coded 1 if female and 0 if male. Racial/ethnic background was coded 1 if White and 0 if Other. Education was coded 1 if bachelor or graduate degree and 0 otherwise. [b] Standardized beta coefficients are provided.

* $p \le .05$, ** $p \le .01$, *** $p \le .001$. Two-tailed tests.

Table 3

Study 2 - Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Withdrawal behaviors	2.62	1.08	.87													
2. Sex[a]	.57	.50	.08	--												
3. Age	31.49	9.08	.27**	.03	--											
4. Race/ethnicity	.78	.42	-.05	-.02	-.03	--										
5. Education	.22	.42	-.04	-.06	.13	-.00	--									
6. Tenure	3.38	1.59	-.01	.02	.31***	.06	.11	--								
7. Frequency of discrimination	1.94	.857	.02	.00	.13	-.22*	-.03	-.03	--							
8. Intensity of discrimination	1.98	1.49	-.11	-.15	.39**	-.14	.09	.11	.37**	--						
9. Job dissatisfaction	3.16	1.49	.41**	.07	-.16	-.12	-.09	-.01	.14	.08	.74					
10. Performance	4.17	.85	-.39**	.09	.18*	.06	.05	.18*	-.11	-.06	-.20*	.93				
11. Social support received	2.72	.84	-.08	.01	-.03	.03	-.04	-.11	.02	-.14	.19*	.04	.85			
12. Location	.28	.45	.29***	.06	-.18*	-.15	.07	.04	-.00	.04	-.06	-.02	-.05	--		
13. Organizational policy	.85	.37	.10	.09	.12	-.08	.02	.20*	.06	.15	.09	-.01	-.11	.07	--	
14. Tenure discrimination	.20	.40	-.02	.05	.15	-.08	-.02	.04	-.04	.09	.02	.04	-.11	-.08	-.02	--

N = 122. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are given in italics on the diagonals. Sex was coded 1 if female and 0 if male. Racial/ethnic background was coded 1 if Hispanic and 0 if Other. Location was coded 1 if discrimination occurred at current organization with current supervisor and 0 if not. Tenure, job function, disability, skin color, religion, nationality, sex, age, racial, and sexual orientation discrimination were coded 1 if discrimination existed for that type of discrimination and 0 if not. *$p \le .05$, ** $p \le .01$, *** $p \le .001$. Two-tailed tests.

Table 3

Study 2 - Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations (Continued)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15. Job function discrimination	.19	.39	-.02	-.01	.03	-.10	-.16	.08	.16	.12	.01	.09	.05	-.07	-.09	.24**
16. Disability discrimination	.03	.18	.31***	.07	-.02	-.12	.01	-.04	.17	-.06	-.40***	-.19*	-.01	.19*	-.05	-.09
17. Skin color discrimination	.16	.36	-.03	.19*	.16	-.21*	-.01	-.14	.06	.01	-.10	-.12	.14	-.17	.07	-.04
18. Religion discrimination	.11	.31	-.04	-.03	-.13	-.14	-.12	-.13	-.04	-.03	.01	.12	.04	-.16	.07	.10
19. Nationality discrimination	.21	.41	-.06	-.04	.01	-.11	-.18*	.05	.11	.11	.02	-.11	-.01	-.01	.01	-.11
20. Sex discrimination	.36	.48	.12	-.35***	-.03	-.05	.09	.11	.01	.13	-.02	.01	-.10	.10	.13	.01
21. Age discrimination	.43	.50	.06	-.13	-.18*	-.10	-.02	.09	.16	-.05	.01	-.08	.05	-.09	-.04	.03
22. Racial discrimination	.58	.50	-.04	.04	.13	-.05	.05	.12	-.02	.03	.06	.10	.10	-.10	-.04	-.08
23. Sexual orientation discrimination	.02	.16	.21*	-.08	-.09	.09	.04	-.04	.07	.07	-.14	-.10	-.11	-.10	.07	-.08
24. Social support seeking	2.32	.91	.23**	.03	.01	.07	-.24**	.09	.23**	-.09	-.13	-.16	.31**	.01	.07	.02
25. Core self-evaluations	4.49	.79	-.31***	.08	.00	.03	-.05	.04	-.02	.02	.38	.31***	.22**	-.07	.04	.05

N = 122. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are given in italics on the diagonals. Sex was coded 1 if female and 0 if male. Racial/ethnic background was coded 1 if Hispanic and 0 if Other. Location was coded 1 if discrimination occurred at current organization with current supervisor and 0 if other. Tenure, job function, disability, skin color, religion, nationality, sex, age, racial, and sexual orientation discrimination were coded 1 if discrimination existed for that type of discrimination and 0 if other. *p ≤ .05, ** p ≤ .01, *** p ≤ .001. Two-tailed tests.

Table 3

Study 2 - Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations (Continued)

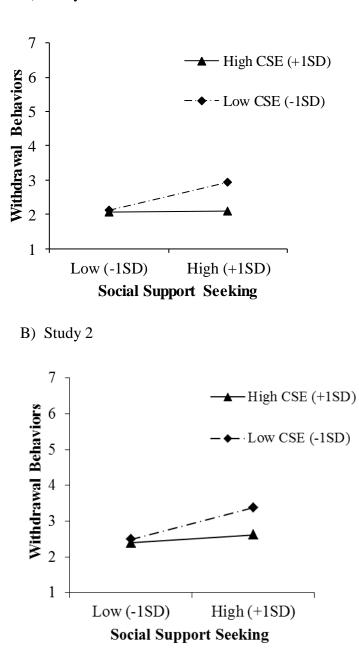| Variables	Mean	SD	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
15. Job function discrimination	.19	.39	--										
16. Disability discrimination	.03	.18	.02	--									
17. Skin color discrimination	.16	.36	-.09	-.08	--								
18. Religion discrimination	.11	.31	.11	.09	.15	--							
19. Nationality discrimination	.21	.41	.11	.02	.05	-.12	--						
20. Sex discrimination	.36	.48	-.10	.05	-.09	.07	-.14	--					
21. Age discrimination	.43	.50	.18	.03	.04	-.03	.16	.08	--				
22. Racial discrimination	.58	.50	.11	-.12	.27**	.08	.28**	-.09	.03	--			
23. Sexual orientation discrimination	.02	.16	-.08	-.03	-.07	-.06	-.08	.10	.08	-.*19**	--		
24. Social support seeking	2.32	.91	.05	.05	.01	-.11	-.09	-.03	-.08	-.09	.05	*.84*	
25. Core self-evaluations	4.49	.79	.12	-.21*	.09	.06	-.06	-.06	.05	.19*	-.17	.08	*.87*

N = 122. Cronbach's alpha reliabilities are given in italics on the diagonals. Sex was coded 1 if female and 0 if male. Racial/ethnic background was coded 1 if Hispanic and 0 if Other. Location was coded 1 if discrimination occurred at current organization with current supervisor and 0 if other. Tenure, job function, disability, skin color, religion, nationality, sex, age, racial, and sexual orientation discrimination were coded 1 if discrimination existed for that type of discrimination and 0 if other. *$p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$. Two-tailed tests.

Table 4

Study 2 - Hierarchical Regression of Withdrawal Behaviors on Social Support Seeking and Core Self-evaluations

Variable	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Sex[a]	.06	.07	.07	.09
Age	-.16*	-.15	-.19	-.18*
Racial/ethnic background	.03	.01	.02	.02
Education	-.01	.04	.03	.04
Tenure	.05	.01	.00	-.03
Frequency of discrimination	-.06	-.11	-.11	-.13
Intensity of discrimination	-.09	-.08	-.04	-.03
Job dissatisfaction	.28**	.29***	.27**	.27***
Performance	-.25**	-.20*	-.12	-.12
Social support received	.06	-.03	-.02	.01
Location	.15	.15	.14	.13
Organizational policy	.14	.11	.12	.14
Tenure discrimination	.05	.03	.04	.05
Job function discrimination	.05	.05	.07	.06
Disability discrimination	.21*	.22*	.22*	.24**
Skin color discrimination	.03	.03	.05	.04
Religion discrimination	-.07	-.04	-.05	-.07
Nationality discrimination	-.04	-.01	-.05	-.05
Sex discrimination	.07	.07	.07	.05
Age discrimination	.02	.06	.07	.06
Racial discrimination	.09	.11	.15	.14
Sexual orientation discrimination	.16	.15	.13	.10
Social support seeking		.21*	.23**	.24**
Core self-evaluations			-.22**	-.21*
Social support seeking x Core self-evaluations				-.16*
R^2	.43	.46	.49	.51
ΔR^2	--	.03	.04	.02
ΔF	3.35***	5.13*	6.56**	4.08*

N = 122.

[a] Sex was coded 1 if female and 0 if male. Racial/ethnic background was coded 1 if Hispanic and 0 if Other. Location was coded 1 if discrimination occurred at current organization with current supervisor and 0 if not. Tenure, job function, disability, skin color, religion, nationality, sex, age, racial, and sexual orientation discrimination were coded 1 if discrimination existed for that type of discrimination and 0 if not.[b] Standardized beta coefficients are provided. * $p \le .05$, ** $p \le .01$, *** $p \le .001$. Two-tailed tests.

Figure 1. Moderating effects of core self-evaluations in the relationship between social support seeking and withdrawal behaviors.

A) Study 1

B) Study 2