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Abstract:

The current study hypothesized that sex differences in evaluations of comforting messages could be accounted for in terms of the extent to which people indicated they would pursue affectively oriented *versus* instrumentally oriented goals in support situations. Participants ($N = 292$; 165 men and 127 women) completed (a) an interaction goals task that assessed the pursuit of affectively oriented and instrumentally oriented goals in emotional support situations, and (b) a message evaluation task that assessed perceptions of the sensitivity and effectiveness of 27 comforting messages that varied in level of "person centeredness." Consistent with expectations, females evaluated the comforting messages in a manner significantly more consistent with Applegate's (1980) theoretical hierarchical ordering of person centeredness than did males. More important, the likelihood of pursuing affectively oriented goals mediated the connection between sex and perceptions of message sensitivity and effectiveness.