

# Depression Among College Students: Social Support, Self-Esteem and Loneliness

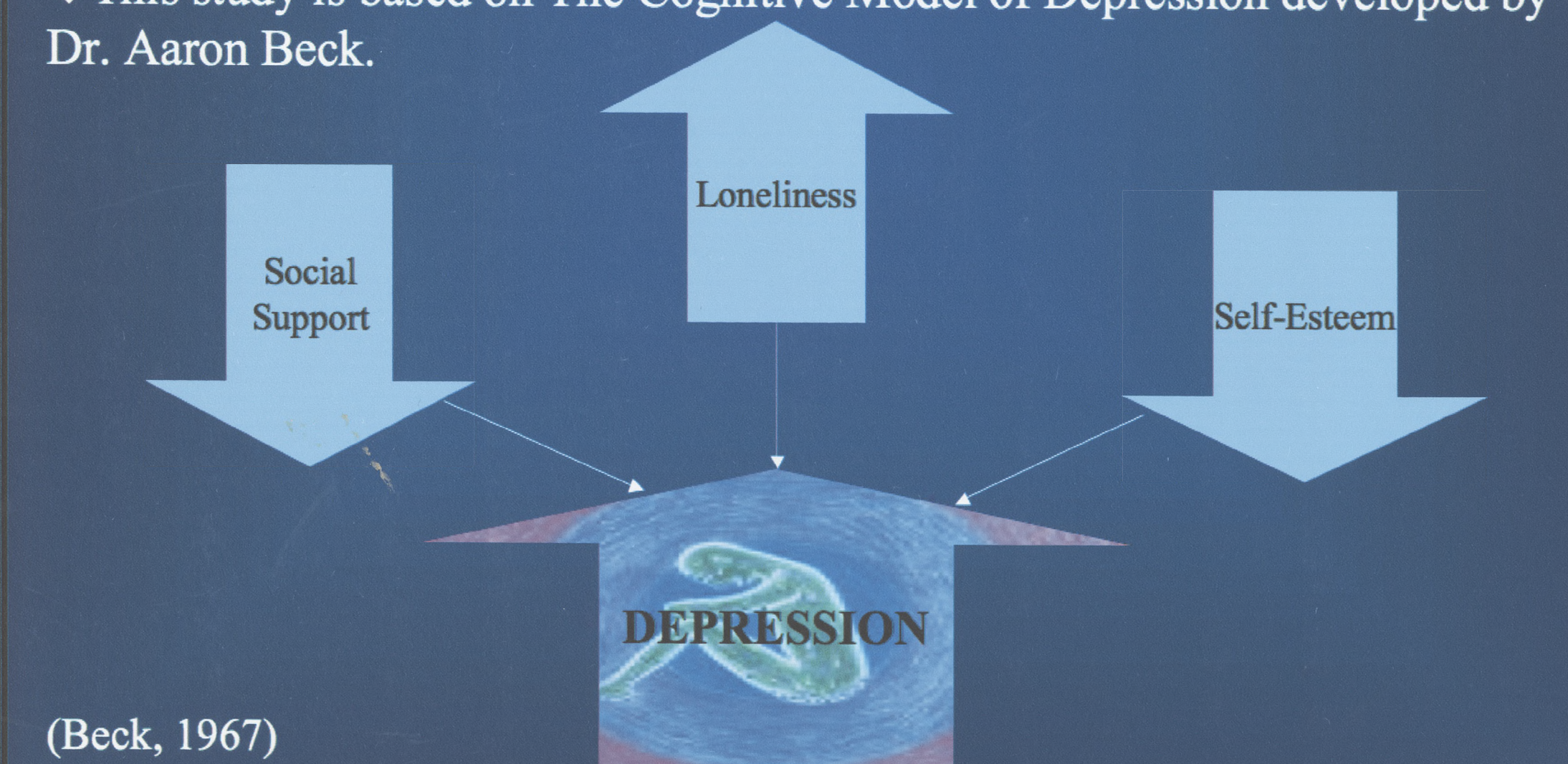
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## Background

- Between 1988 and 2001, the number of college students diagnosed with depressive symptoms who sought counseling doubled (McCarthy & Salotti, 2006).
- Both the onset and outcome of depression have been associated with low levels of social support (Billings & Moos, 1984).
- Previous research shows that many students have reported experiencing loneliness and that loneliness among students has been linked to rates of dropping out of college, suicide and suicidal ideation, and alcoholism (Cutrona, 1982; Medora & Woodward, 1986).
- Clinical literature has suggested that self-esteem plays a primary role in etiology, maintenance, and recovery from depressive symptoms (Beck, 1967; Bibring, 1953; Blass & Shichman, 1983).
- Clearly there is a need for studies that attempt to identify factors associated with and test models explicating depression in college students.

## Hypothesis & Procedures

- We hypothesized that low levels of social support, low levels of self-esteem, and high levels of loneliness are associated with high levels of Depression.
- Study was IRB approved
- Campus-wide recruitment of students at a college campus using fliers and class announcements
- Participants provided written consent
- Students received academic credit for participation
- Data collection using QDS software
- Data analyzed using SPSS 15 software
- This study is based on The Cognitive Model of Depression developed by Dr. Aaron Beck.



## Sample Demographics (n=316)

**Age**  
Range – 18-56  
Mean – 21.10  
SD – 4.96

**Sexual Orientation**  
Heterosexual – 94%  
Homosexual – 1.3%  
Bisexual – 4.7%

**Relationship Status**  
Married - .3%  
Single – 96.2%  
In a Relationship – 3.5%

**Currently Seeking a Mental Health Professional**  
Yes – 6.3%  
No – 93.7%

**Ethnicity**  
European American – 58.5%  
African American – 19.6%  
Asian American – 7%  
Latino/a – 9.5%  
Other – 5.4%

**76% Female**

## Measures

### UCLA Social Support Inventory

(Dunkel-Schetter, Feinstein, Call, 1986)

Chronbach's  $\alpha = .84$

- 4 Subscales (each with 9 likert-type items):
  - Information and Advice
  - Aid or Assistance
  - Emotional Support
  - Support for the Stress in Relationships
- Responses: 1-5  
1 = Never, 5= Very Often
- "How often did your friend provide minor assistance within the past 3 months?"

### UCLA Loneliness Scale

(Russell, 1996)

Chronbach's  $\alpha = .89-.94$

- 10 likert-type items
- Responses: 1-4  
1=Often, 4=Never
- "How often do you feel completely alone?"



### Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale

(Radloff, 1977)

Chronbach's  $\alpha = .85$

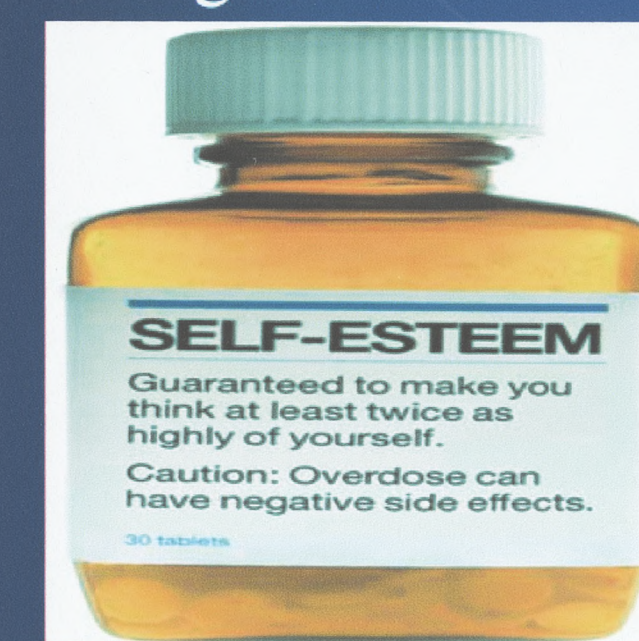
- 20 likert-type items
- Responses: 1-4  
1 = Rarely, None of the time (less than one day),  
4= Most of the time (5-7 days)
- "How long have you felt this way during the past week: 'I feel depressed'"

### Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

(Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, 1989)

Chronbach's  $\alpha = .78$

- 11 likert-type items
- Responses: 1-4  
1 = Strongly Agree, 4= Strongly Disagree



"On the whole, I am satisfied with myself."

## Correlation Matrix

\*sig. at .05 level, \*\*sig. at .01 level

|   | 1      | 2      | 3     | 4  | 5     | 6      | 7 |
|---|--------|--------|-------|----|-------|--------|---|
| Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale | 1      |        |       |    |       |        |   |
| UCLA-SSI: Emotional Support                         | -.18** | 1      |       |    |       |        |   |
| UCLA-SSI: Aid or Assistance                         | -.16** | .57*   | 1     |    |       |        |   |
| UCLA-SSI: Information and Advice                    | ns     | .54**  | .49** | 1  |       |        |   |
| UCLA-SSI: Stress in Relationships                   | .26**  | ns     | .14*  | ns | 1     |        |   |
| Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale                         | -.48** | .13*   | ns    | ns | ns    | 1      |   |
| UCLA Loneliness Scale                               | .60**  | -.21** | ns    | ns | .30** | -.42** | 1 |

## Univariate Statistics

| Variables               | Mean  | SD   | Possible Range | $\alpha$ |
|-------------------------|-------|------|----------------|----------|
| Social Support:         |       |      |                |          |
| Emotional Support       | 3.81  | .62  | 0-36           | .85      |
| Aid/Assistance          | 3.21  | .74  |                |          |
| Information and Advice  | 3.01  | .69  |                |          |
| Stress in Relationships | 2.14  | .65  |                |          |
| Self-Esteem             | 28.75 | 2.72 | 11-44          | .46      |
| Loneliness              | 12.91 | 6.63 | 10-40          | .93      |
| Depression              | 16.82 | 8.6  | 1-43           | .86      |

Regression Analysis  $F(6, 309) = 42.09, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = .44$

| Predictor Variables     | $\beta$ | t     | p   |
|-------------------------|---------|-------|-----|
| Social Support:         |         |       |     |
| Emotional Support       | -.001   | -.03  | .98 |
| Aid/Assistance          | -.16    | -2.95 | .00 |
| Information and Advice  | .16     | 1.88  | .06 |
| Stress in Relationships | .11     | 2.4   | .02 |
| Self-Esteem             | -.27    | -5.68 | .00 |
| Loneliness              | .45     | 9.19  | .00 |

## Results & Clinical Implications

- Our findings show that social support is differentially associated with depression, suggesting that social support is not always beneficial and future research identify how and why different dimensions of social support contribute to depression.
- Based on our research, college campuses nationwide can adequately develop treatment programs focusing on decreasing feelings of loneliness and increasing self-esteem among students.

## Limitations

- The use of self-report data may contribute to response bias.
- The cross-sectional correlational design of our study limits causal inferences from being made.
- Generalizability is limited by our sample's composition of self-selected respondents.

## References

- Please refer to handout.

