

# INTERPERSONAL STRESS

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# Discussion Topics

1. Interpersonal Conflict
2. Social Support, Social Strain, and Health
3. Adjusting to Differences
4. Stress and Health Effects of Racism and Discrimination
5. Gender Differences in Response to Stress

# INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

A blurred background image of a business meeting. Several people in professional attire are gathered around a table. One person is holding a tablet displaying a chart, another is holding a smartphone, and a coffee cup is visible. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an office environment.

INTERPERSONAL  
CONFLICT

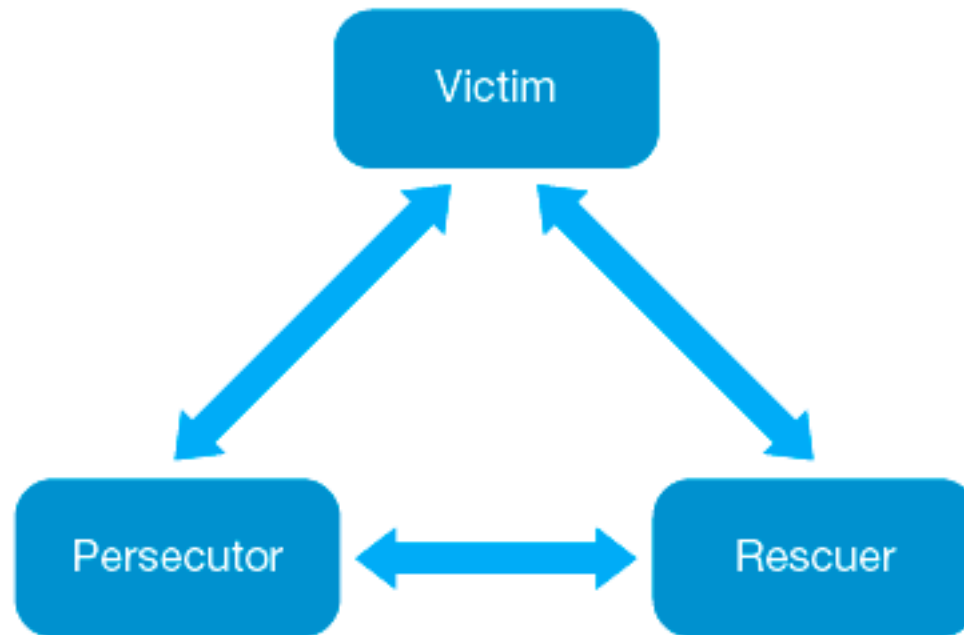
PROFESSIONAL  
OR  
PERSONAL

# High-Drama, Raising Tensions and Creating Distance

- Creating distance weakens relationships
- Distance can arise through:
  - **Differences**
  - **Power and control tactics** such as negative reciprocity and the demand-withdraw pattern
  - **Heavy control** communication
  - **Triangulation:** two people engage in a dispute and pull in a third person
    - A type of game that prescribes roles and promotes drama and dishonesty

# High-Drama Raising Tensions and Creating Distance

**Drama Triangle.** The drama triangle involves a victim, persecutor, and rescuer. Roles often interchange abruptly during the enactment of the drama triangle.



# High-Drama Raising Tensions and Creating Distance

- **Responsibility:** laying the blame on someone creates villains; each person thinks the other should be punished
- **Attributions:** causal inferences about why a person engages in a behavior

# Low-Drama Lowering Tension & Creating Closeness

- These approaches **value and nurture interpersonal relationships** and facilitate personal and relational growth

# Low-Drama, Lowering Tension & Creating Closeness

- Elements that promote these approaches:
  - **Similarities:**
    - search for common ground to minimize tensions
  - **Empathy:**
    - Putting yourself in the other person's place to experience the world through their eyes
    - Achieve empathy through positive reciprocity and active listening
  - **Constructive influence:**
    - express one's own needs and interests in a constructive manner that is mutually satisfying
  - **Be assertive:**
    - but use the minimally effective response
  - **Compromise:**
    - Key to successful negotiations is realizing they are necessary to maintain intimate relationships
  - **Responsibility:**
    - accept responsibility for our thoughts, feelings, and actions
  - **Boundaries:**
    - Set limits and boundaries

# Low-Drama Lowering Tension & Creating Closeness

- **Stressors of divorce include:**

- Child custody battles
- Conflicts with ex-spouse
- Loss of financial resources
- Loss of social support

- **Protective factors include:**

- Individual personal resources
- Interpersonal resources (i.e., new partner, etc.)
- Structural resources

SOCIAL  
SUPPORT,  
SOCIAL  
STRAIN, AND  
HEALTH

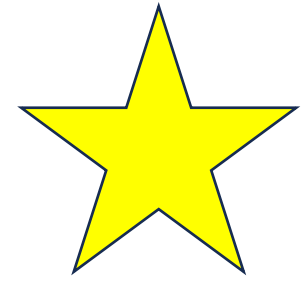
# Social Support and Health

- **Social support:** social interactions embedded in relationships that provide a person with potential access to actual or perceived resources from others perceived as caring
  - Related to better health and increased longevity
- There are interpretation and practical limitations for studies dealing with actual social support
  - **Perceived support proves more reliable**

# Social Support and Health (cont'd.)

- **SS Related to higher overall immune functioning**
- Having at least one person to trust and confide in makes a big difference in health
- Example: marital status a good indication
  - Men have five times greater health benefit from marriage than women

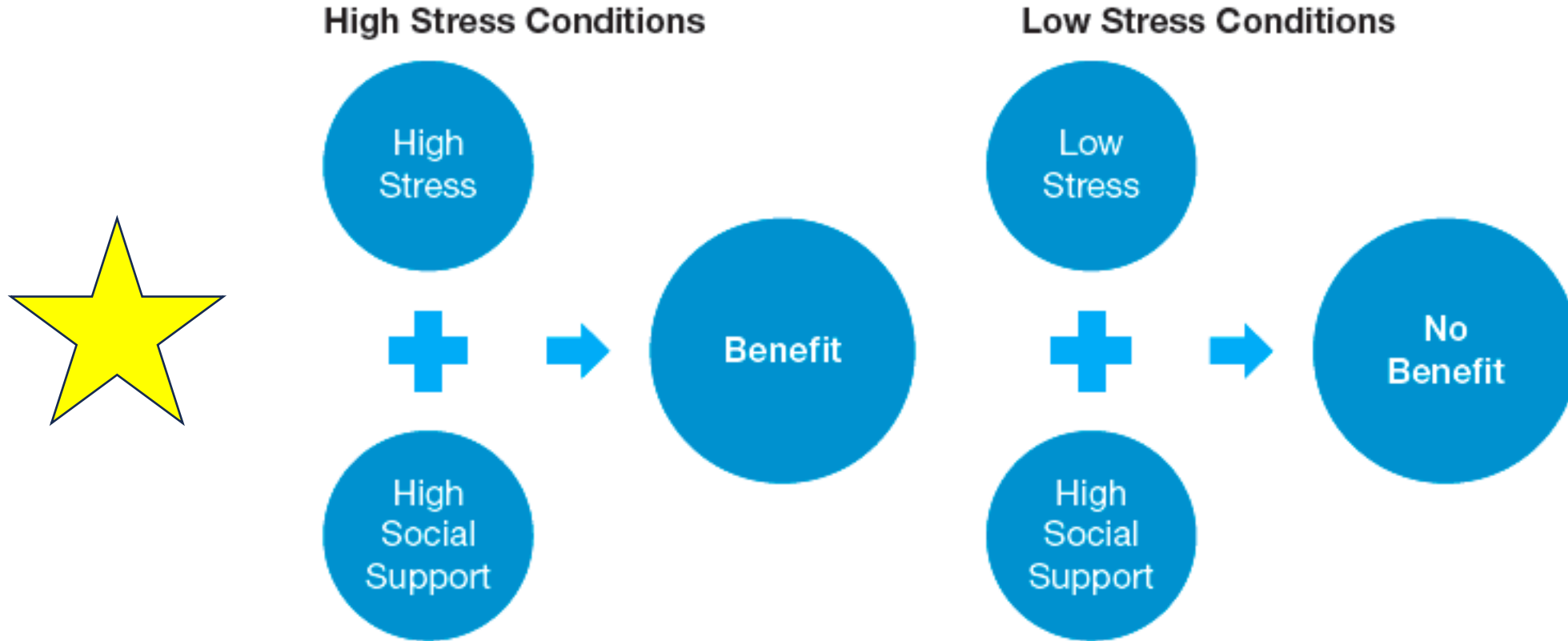
# Social Support and Health



- Two models describe how social support promotes health and well-being:

- 1. Stress buffer model of social support:** social support moderates effects of stress

# Stress Buffer Model

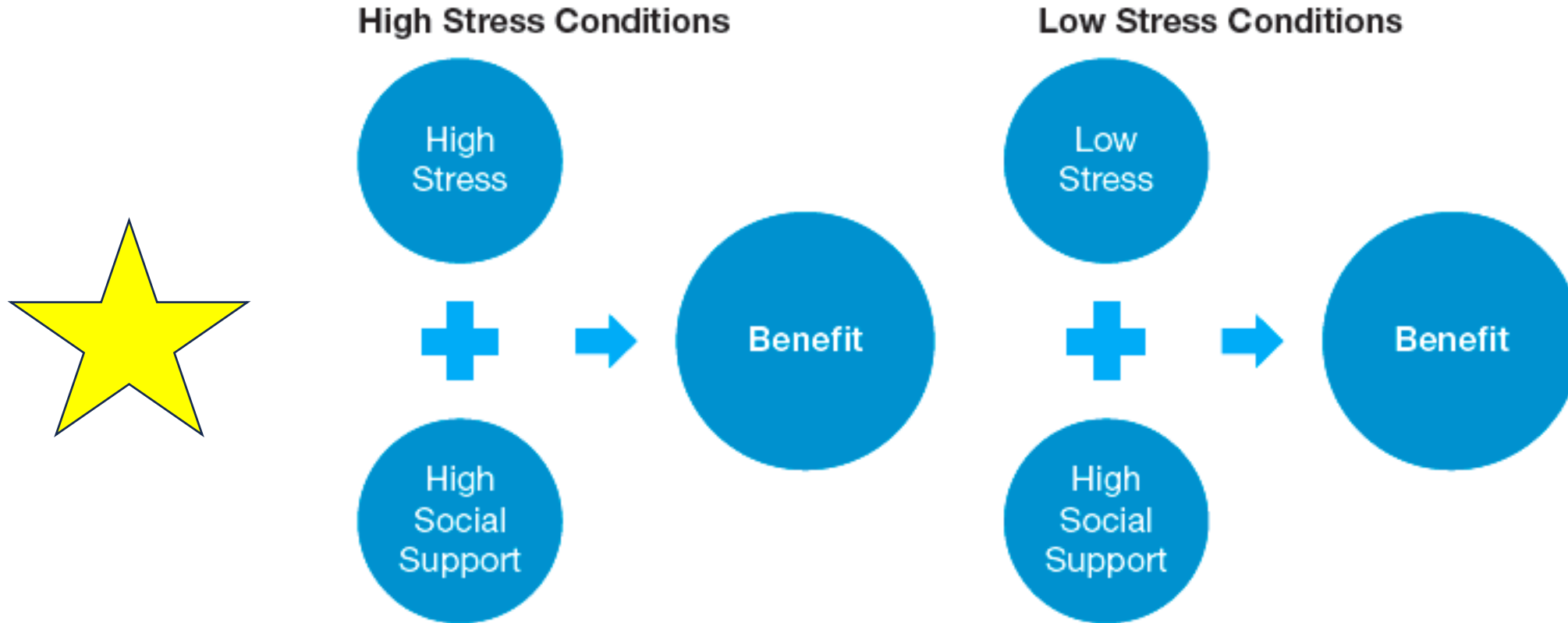


**Figure:** The stress buffer model of social support suggests that social support moderates the effects of stress so that social support is only beneficial under high stress conditions.

# Social Support and Health

- 2. Direct effect model of social support:** social support has beneficial health and well-being effects independent of the level of stress

## Direct Effect Model of Social Support



**Figure:** The direct effect model of social support suggests that social support exerts beneficial effects at all stress levels.

# Social Strain and Health

Effects of **hostile** relationships:

1. Elevated blood pressure and heart rate
2. Amplified when hostile behaviors are added
3. More pronounced and prolonged for wives than for husbands
4. Can lead to immune system dysregulation

# ADJUSTING TO DIFFERENCES



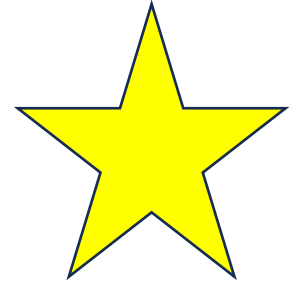


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## Adjusting to Cultural Differences

- Cultures have unique values, beliefs, words, and customs
- A bicultural person has both a superculture (the prominent culture where one resides) and a subculture (the embedded culture from which one came)
  - Members of subculture may judge a member if they become too close to the superculture
  - Members of superculture may judge subculture with suspicion

# Adjusting to Cultural Differences



- Choices leading to ethnic identity for minority group members:

- 1. Acculturation:** absorption into main culture while maintaining subculture
- 2. Alternation:** modify behavior to fit the social context
- 3. Multiculturalism:** maintain identity as a member of two or more cultures
- 4. Fusion:** assimilate but blend cultural identity with others (“melting pot”)

STRESS AND  
HEALTH EFFECTS  
OF RACISM AND  
DISCRIMINATION

# Stress and Health Effects of Racism and Discrimination

- **Racism:** beliefs, attitudes, arrangements, and acts that tend to denigrate individuals based on phenotypic characteristics or ethnic group affiliation
- **Prejudice:** negative attitudes about a group
- **Discrimination:** behaviors motivated by prejudice
  
- Most research on racism in U.S. looks at African American experiences

# Stress and Health Effects of Racism and Discrimination

- Racism blocks educational and economic opportunities, which can lead to stress over limited resources
- Increased rates of hypertension in African Americans could be related to racism/social factors
- Experiencing racism can cause activation of HPA axis and/or result in health negative behaviors

GENDER  
DIFFERENCES  
IN RESPONSE  
TO STRESS

# Gender Differences in Response to Stress

- **Tend-and-befriend:** hormone oxytocin leads women under threat to tend to offspring and befriend (utilize and build social ties)
- Physiological responses to stress are similar, but behaviors are different for the genders
- Women are more likely to affiliate (seek out others for help)
- However, differences can be due to socialization rather than biobehavioral factors
- Males also receive health and well-being benefits from social support
- Gender differences in general are likely to be small with regards to coping with stress

# Summary

- Similar interests, beliefs, attitudes, and world views cause people to have less interpersonal conflict
- The drama triangle involves a persecutor, victim, and rescuer
- People blame each other in unhealthy relationships
- Marriage related to positive health benefits for men and women, especially men

# Summary (cont'd.)

- Social strain has a negative physiological impact
- A bicultural person identifies with a superculture and a subculture
- Exposure to racist situations results in elevation in blood pressure and cardiovascular activity
- Supportive evidence for tend-and-befriend model, but gender differences are small