

What factors relate to degree commitment?

- **Remote teaching due to COVID-19.**
 - During this time, students reported greater uncertainty about their educational plans¹. Since future intentions influence college persistence², students likely struggle with degree commitment during times of unprecedented stress and uncertainty, like a pandemic.
- **Threat stress appraisals.**
 - **Students high in threat appraisals tend to interpret stressors as intimidating or harmful.**
 - These negative dispositional perceptions of stress³ are linked to lower motivation⁴.
- **Social support.**
 - While greater social support is related to greater college persistence⁵, **students' ability to cope can mitigate the beneficial effects of social support** (e.g., resilience moderates the association between social support and loneliness⁶).

Hypothesis

- We hypothesized that social support would be related to greater degree commitment, and that threat stress appraisals would moderate this relationship.
- We posited that the effects of social support might be diminished by high threat stress appraisals.

Method

Participants & Procedure

- $N = 194$ college students: 78.5% women; 56% students of color; $M_{age} = 22.46$, $SD = 6.37$.
- Students completed a one-time online survey.

Measures

- *Stress Appraisal Measure - Revised*³
 - Threat appraisals (e.g., anxiety-inducing; $\alpha = .78$).
- *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support*⁷
 - Perceived adequacy of support from friends, family, and a significant other ($\alpha = .83$).
- *College Persistence Questionnaire*⁸
 - Degree commitment subscale ($\alpha = .70$).

Results

- All associations between study variables were statistically significant (Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics & Bivariate Correlations (N = 192).

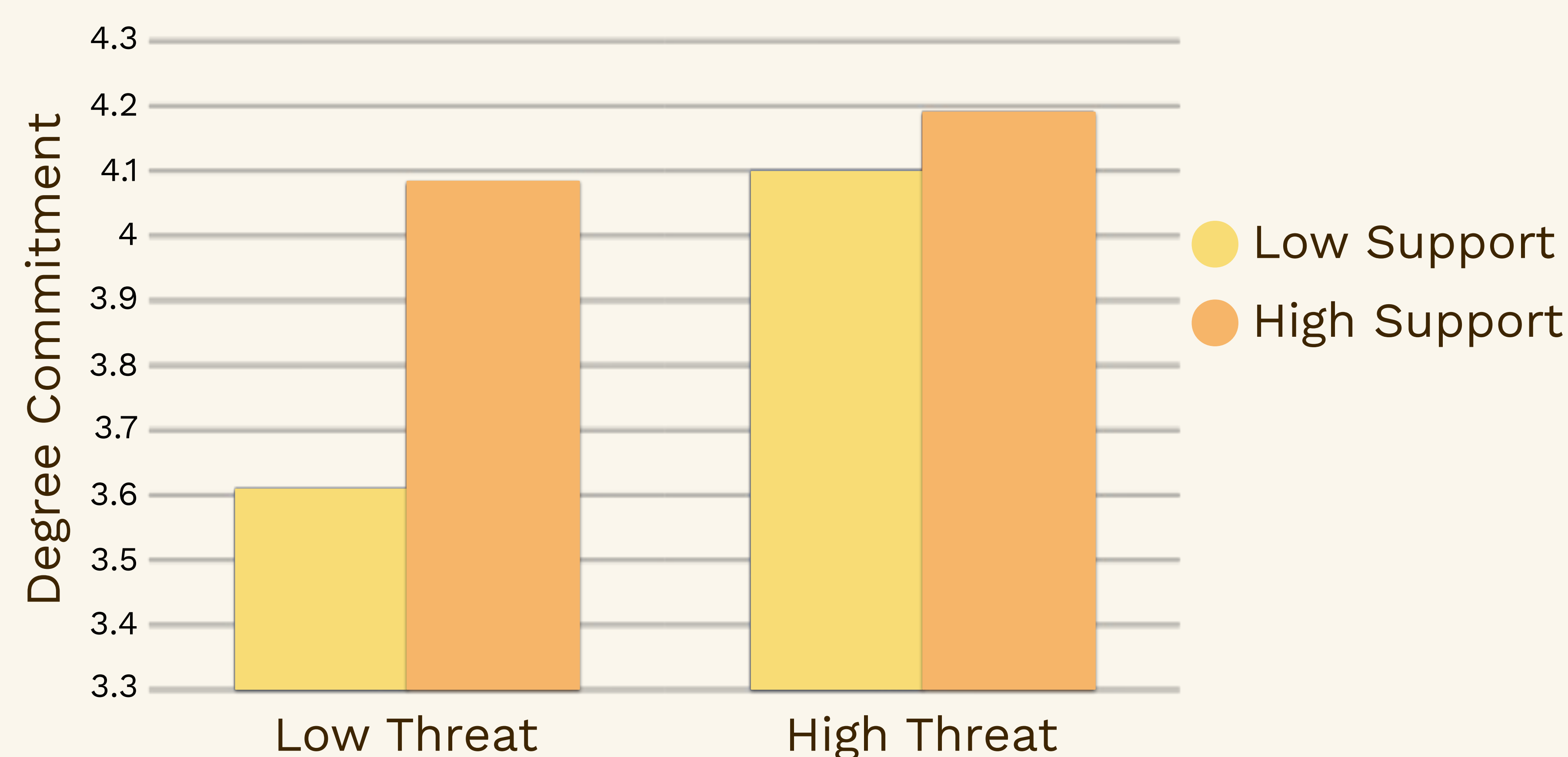
Variables	1	2	M (SD)
1. Threat Stress Appraisals	--		1.45 (0.72)
2. Perceived Social Support	.24***	--	5.30 (0.96)
3. Degree Commitment	.27***	.26***	5.20 (0.62)

Note: *** $p < .001$.

- Threat stress appraisals ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$), social support ($\beta = -.26$, $p < .001$), and their interaction ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .05$; Figure 1) significantly predicted degree commitment ($R^2 = .17$, $F(1,164) = 4.73$, $p = .03$).
- Threat stress appraisals influenced the strength of the relationship between perceived social support and degree commitment.

Figure 1

Interaction between Threat Stress Appraisals and Social Support for Degree Commitment.



At low threat, college students who perceived greater social support reported greater degree commitment compared to those who reported less adequate social support.

Discussion

- We found support for moderation, although surprisingly, students with high threat stress appraisals reported the greatest degree commitment.
 - This could be due to COVID-19-related stress or other factors unique to the pandemic.
 - Previous work has examined how appraisals of stress moderate the effects of social support in a work setting⁹; few studies have examined the moderating effect of threat stress appraisals in education. Additional research is needed.
- A limitation of our study is the high percentage of women participants, who may differ in social support and threat appraisals compared to men.
 - Future studies should consider how socialized differences may influence the way students perceive stress and seek social support¹⁰.

Implications for Student Success

- Social support may not be a sufficient buffer on its own for the negative effects of threat stress appraisals.
- **Reappraisal interventions can help students practice more adaptive responses to stress**¹¹.
 - Such interventions predict greater academic success.
 - Lower threat stress appraisals may allow students to better reap the benefits of social support.

Conclusion

- The results indicate preliminary support for a moderating effect of threat stress appraisals on the relationship between perceived social support and degree commitment.

References

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