Linking social reward responsiveness and affective responses to the social environment: an ecological momentary assessment study

Carola Dell’Acqua¹, Grace Allison², Connie H. Yun ², and Anna Weinberg²

¹Università degli Studi di Padova
²McGill University

March 13, 2024

Abstract

Social support is a key predictor of well-being, but not everyone experiences mental health benefits from receiving it. However, given that a growing number of interventions are based on social support, it is crucial to identify features that make individuals more likely to benefit from social ties. Emerging evidence suggests that neural responses to positive social feedback (i.e., social reward) might relate to individual differences in social functioning, but potential mechanisms linking these neural responses to psychological outcomes are yet unclear. This study examined whether neural correlates of social reward processing, indexed by the reward positivity (RewP), relate to individuals’ affective experience following self-reported real-world positive social support events. To this aim, 193 university students (71 % females) underwent an EEG assessment during the Island Getaway task and completed a 10-day ecological momentary assessment where participants reported their positive and negative affect (PA, NA) nine times a day and the count of daily positive and negative events. Experiencing a higher number of social support positive events was associated with higher PA. The RewP moderated this association, such that individuals with greater neural response to social feedback at baseline had a more positive association between social support positive events count and PA. Individual differences in the RewP to social feedback might be one indicator of the likelihood of experiencing positive affect when receiving social support.

Hosted file
