Cultural Differences in Daily Support Experiences

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Previous research has suggested that Asian Americans (AAs) are less likely to mobilize social support, and find support to be less helpful, when compared with European Americans (EAs). In a 10-day daily diary study of AA and EA college students, we hypothesized that AAs would activate support less frequently than EAs for both stressful and positive events, a cultural difference that would be mediated by group harmony values. We also predicted that AAs would find support to be less helpful, and we explored differences in the sources of support used. Results confirmed that cultural differences in support use were partially mediated by the value of maintaining group harmony through emotional restraint. AAs also perceived received support to be less helpful and more frequently used discretionary rather than kinship support sources. Findings suggest that naturalistic support experiences differ markedly for these groups, with implications for help-seeking behavior and mental health services.

Keywords: Asian American, social support, harmony, daily diary, cultural differences

"If you have a problem, sit down and talk about it." Thus states conventional wisdom in Western cultures, where individuals are typically encouraged to seek support for their problems. Extensive research has identified social support as an effective means of coping with stress associated with various health benefits (e.g., Thoits, 1995). However, this research has been dominated by a Western cultural understanding of how individuals activate and benefit from support. Emerging research has indicated that Asians and Asian Americans may not find social support, as traditionally defined, to be helpful and that mobilizing support may in fact be distressing (see Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008, for a review). Because social support occurs in relational contexts, which are largely governed by cultural values, it is important to understand the specific cultural mechanisms that shape support experiences.

A foundational theory in cultural psychology addresses the independent and interdependent self-construals, representing fundamentally distinct perceptions of the self in relation to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In individualistic societies, people tend to view the self as independent, with fixed defining attributes, and are socialized to assert personal desires and feelings. In contrast, members of collectivistic societies view the self as interdependent, and value the subordination of personal desires and feelings to accommodate group interests (e.g., Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002). We contend that harmony values, one of the value dimensions characteristic of interdependent orientations identified by Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier (2002), provide

a candidate explanation for cultural differences observed in support processes.

Activating social support implies some degree of emotion expression and the verbal solicitation of help, counsel, or comfort. However, the interdependent self-construal may promote the suppression of one's individual emotions for the prosocial goal of maintaining relationships (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007). Indeed, research has found greater restraint in the display of facial emotion expression in interdependent cultures (e.g., Camras, Chen, Bakeman, Norris, & Cain, 2006). Whereas the verbal expression of thoughts is a common practice in individualistic cultural contexts (Kim & Markus, 2002), verbalizing internal states is less important and may be seen as disruptive to the group in interdependent contexts (Kim & Sherman, 2007). Thus, willingness to seek support from others may be influenced by cultural norms about appropriate interpersonal communication and emotion expression.

Furthermore, harmony is an interdependent value that guides behavior and emotion displays that promote conflict-free relationships (Chen & Chung, 1994). The disclosure of emotionally significant events to others may encumber costs to harmony by demonstrating self-focus, burdening others, or inviting conflict or criticism. Research suggests that relationships are viewed as relatively freely chosen and voluntary in individualistic cultures, whereas relationships involve social obligation in collectivistic cultures (Adams & Plaut, 2003). In obligatory social contexts, soliciting support may be seen as disruptive to the social network, thus invoking loss of face (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004). The desire to maintain harmony may provide a disincentive for interdependent individuals to activate support from others.

A growing body of literature (see Kim et al., 2008, for a review) has found that Asians and Asian Americans are less likely to recruit social support than European Americans because of interdependent relationship concerns (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004). This

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effect was greater when participants were primed to think about closer relationships (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006), suggesting that support-seeking becomes less appealing as the importance of the relationship and the potential for negative consequences increase. Asians and Asian Americans also appear to suffer more emotional and biological distress when activating support (Taylor, Welch, Kim, & Sherman, 2007). Moreover, individuals seeking support are rated more negatively by Asians and Asian Americans, but more positively by European Americans (Chu, Kim, & Sherman, 2008). Across studies, these ethnic differences in social support vary by the degree of exposure to Asian versus American cultural values, suggesting underlying cultural factors.

An underexamined aspect of supportive interactions concerns potential cultural differences in seeking out supportive others when good things happen. Capitalization is the practice of seeking out others to communicate personal positive events, and has been associated with increased positive affect and relationship quality in primarily European American samples (e.g., Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). However, in East Asian cultures, humility is seen as prosocial, whereas boastfulness may threaten harmony (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, cultural values regarding harmony maintenance may affect not just the likelihood for sharing negative events, but also positive events.

Research on this topic has predominantly adopted experimental and traditional survey designs, with limited examination of support processes as they happen on a daily prospective level. One exception is Kim et al. (2008), who demonstrated, using daily reports, that European American students found explicit support-seeking for stressors to be more clearly helpful than did Korean students. Daily diary methods also allow exploration of sources of support used. Research on Western samples (e.g., Bolger & Eckenrode, 1991) suggests that, under some circumstances, contact with discretionary sources of support (e.g., friends) may be more helpful than contact with obligatory sources (i.e., kin). Some experimental research with Asian samples suggests that the dampening effect of interdependence values on support use increases as the relationship becomes closer to the self (Kim et al., 2006). Perhaps interdependent individuals are reluctant to rely on obligatory (kin) as compared with discretionary support sources.

The current study examined daily support experiences for Asian American and European American college students to test the following hypotheses. First, we hypothesized that Asian Americans would actively seek support from others less often than European Americans in response to daily stress events as well as positive events. Furthermore, we predicted that group harmony values would explain these hypothesized group differences. Second, we predicted that Asian Americans would find the daily support they receive to be less helpful than European Americans. Third, we examined group differences in the types of relationships accessed for support (kinship vs. discretionary), and hypothesized that Asian Americans would be more likely to turn to discretionary support sources.

Method

Participants

Participants were 244 Asian American and European American undergraduates at a university in California. Participants were either enrolled in introductory psychology courses or recruited through fliers and e-mails, and they received either course credit or monetary compensation. Eligibility criteria included English proficiency and self-identification as Caucasian/European American (EA) or Asian/Asian American (AA). Eighteen students were excluded because of missing data ($n = 6$) or being demographically ineligible ($n = 12$). The final sample included 226 students (72 first-generation AAs, 83 second-generation AAs, and 71 EAs). Among the 155 AAs, 82.6% were East Asian, 13.5% were Southeast Asian, and 3.9% were Filipino. The average age of participants was 19.21 years ($SD = 1.27$), and there was an approximately equal number of men (47.8%) and women (52.2%). The Institutional Review Board approved the protocol, and all participants provided online informed consent prior to participation.

Procedure

Participants were told that they would be participating in a study on daily experiences of positive and negative events, social interactions, and mood. They completed a baseline survey and provided one-time information on cultural values and other study variables such as personality. They were then instructed to complete the diary survey at the end of each day for the following 10 days about daily events and support experiences. Participants were e-mailed daily at 9 p.m. with the survey link, with a second reminder e-mail sent at 9 a.m. the next day if the participant failed to respond. The survey closed at noon the following day. These hours were chosen to maximize the report of daily events and social interactions that occurred as college students often keep late hours for social and academic reasons (e.g., pulling "all-nighters"). The proportion of completed diary reports was high, with complete data on 1,963 (87%) of the 2,260 days potentially available for analysis.

Measures

Harmony values. Harmony values were measured by two subscales of a broader measure of interdependent cultural values (Dimensions of Interdependence Scale; Lau & Shih, 2006), with the Emotion Harmony subscale measuring the maintenance of harmony through other-focused restraint of emotional expression (e.g., "It is better to hold one's emotions inside than to burden others by expressing them"), and the Social Harmony subscale measuring the maintenance of harmony through other-focused regulation of social–communicative behavior ("Even when I strongly disagree with someone close to me, I avoid an argument"). Responses were rated on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) scale. In the current sample, there was good internal reliability for the Emotion Harmony ($\alpha = .69$ for AAs; $\alpha = .83$ for EAs) and Social Harmony ($\alpha = .71$ for AAs; $\alpha = .74$ for EAs) subscales, and these scales were correlated ($r = .35$, $p < .001$). The concurrent validity of the harmony scales was also demonstrated in the current sample by their correlations (Emotion Harmony $r = .16$, $p < .05$; Social Harmony $r = .55$, $p < .001$) with the Interdependence subscale from the Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994). In addition, the harmony subscales were not significantly associated (Emotion Harmony $r = .09$, *ns*; Social Harmony $r = .11$, *ns*) with neuroticism as measured by the Big Five Inventory Neuroticism subscale (John & Srivastava, 1999),

demonstrating divergent validity between harmony concerns and the tendency to experience negative affect in our sample.

Daily diary reports.

Stress and positive events. Participants described their most stressful and most positive events on each day in an open-ended format, and provided a self-rating of either how stressful or how important (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*) the event was. Participants also indicated who they shared their event with first (first support source), if they shared. The first support sources were coded as either discretionary sources (friends, roommates, and romantic partners) or kinship sources (siblings and parents).

Perceived helpfulness of support. When participants mobilized support, they were asked to rate how helpful the support was on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) scale, where higher scores indicated greater helpfulness. Given the nature of the events, the question stems differed when assessing support for positive versus stress events, resulting in two separate measures of perceived helpfulness. For positive events, five items were used to assess helpfulness of support (e.g., "He/she reacted enthusiastically to my good event"). A mean helpfulness score was computed on each day to reflect the degree of perceived helpfulness of support for positive events.

For stress events, participants also responded to five items about the helpfulness of the support received. A dichotomous coding scheme was used to classify support for stress events as either helpful or unhelpful. Because stress events are negative, involve more personal vulnerability for disclosure, and there is more of a clear demand for positive support, we reasoned that a continuous composite measure characterizing support as being more or less helpful was less relevant. Rather, whether or not the support received was considered helpful versus unhelpful may be a much more salient indicator of problems with social support. Thus, perceptions of unhelpful support for negative events were coded when the respondent *disagreed* (scored a 1 or 2) with the three helpful items (e.g., "He/she listened to me and provided support and comfort") or *agreed* (scored a 4 or 5) with the two unhelpful items (e.g., "He/she pointed out ways I make the situation worse"). Individuals who did not indicate receiving unhelpful support according to this rubric were coded as receiving helpful support for negative events.

Stress event impact rating. The open-ended descriptions of stress events were examined by two raters to determine the objective stress impact of the event, a strategy that allowed us to parse out the influence that participants' mood and personality have on their self-reports regarding the stressfulness of the event. Two trained research assistants who were unaware of participant characteristics (e.g., ethnicity) were supervised (by JS) in rating these descriptions for objective stress impact following Hammen, Marks, Mayol, and deMayo's (1985) guidelines for their episodic stress interview. Stress impact was rated on a scale from 0 (*no stress impact*) to 4 (*severe stress impact*), indicating how severe the stress would be for a typical person under comparable conditions. A total of 2,031 stress events were reported and rated, but only 351 (17.3%) events received a stress impact rating above 0, of which 64% were rated a 1 (e.g., "A date I went on went badly"), 27% were rated a 2 (e.g., "Another phone interview with law schools"), 7% were rated a 3 (e.g., "I failed my midterm"), and 2% were rated a 4 (e.g., "My mother was admitted to the hospital, and likely won't live longer than a couple of months"). To assess

reliability of the stress impact ratings (e.g., Shih, 2006), both raters independently randomly selected and rated 250 stress events, yielding an intraclass correlation of .97.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 displays means and standard deviations for the variables of interest measured for the first-generation AAs, second-generation AAs, and EAs in our sample. One-way analysis of variance revealed significant ethnic differences for Emotion Harmony values, with first-generation AAs scoring higher than EAs. Regarding stress events, a higher percentage of social interactions was rated as unhelpful by first-generation AAs compared with the other two groups. Second-generation AAs reported significantly more positive events and were less likely to seek interactions with kin following positive events. First-generation AAs reported seeking fewer social interactions and having less helpful interactions in response to positive daily events.

Analytic Approach

Study hypotheses were tested by estimating multilevel models (Bryk & Raudenbush, 1992) with Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) Version 6.04 software. Within-subject variables that were measured daily were entered in the Level 1 model, with intercept and slope values representing the average within-person regression line. Between-subjects variables were entered in the Level 2 model to examine the impact of between-subjects predictors on Level 1 daily processes. All HLM results reported here represent the final estimation of fixed effects, with robust standard errors, and all coefficients were modeled as random effects. The restricted maximum likelihood method of estimation was used. Within-subject variables were group-mean centered and between-subjects variables were grand-mean centered.

Multilevel models were estimated to examine whether sex and ethnicity were associated with daily reports of stress events and positive events. Two Level 1 models estimated the average baseline event occurrence—one model for stress event occurrence and the other model for positive event occurrence. Dummy variables for sex, first-generation AA status, and second-generation AA status were entered simultaneously in both models as predictors at Level 2. Findings showed no group differences by sex or AA generational status for either type of event.

Tests of Ethnic Group Differences on Daily Support Use

Ethnic differences in daily support use. Multilevel models were used to investigate ethnic differences in daily support use (dichotomous) for stress events and positive events. Day was first entered at Level 1 as a covariate in both models to control for any systematic changes in support use over the 10 days, and it was associated with less support use for both stress events and positive events. Perceived stress level and stress impact rating were then entered at Level 1 to control for the effects of both self-reported and objective stressfulness on support use for stress events. Likewise, importance was entered at Level 1 to control for the effects of self-reported event importance on support use for positive

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Ethnic Group Differences on Study Variables

Variable	European American				Second-generation Asian American				First-generation Asian American				F
	n	Mean (SD)	Min	Max	n	Mean (SD)	Min	Max	n	Mean (SD)	Min	Max	
					Group harmony values								
Social harmony	71	4.02 (1.03)	1.60	6.00	83	4.33 (0.96)	1.80	6.40	72	4.34 (1.10)	1.80	6.60	2.388[†]
Emotion harmony	71	3.45 (1.19)ₐ	1.00	6.60	83	3.80 (0.95)ₐᵦ	2.00	6.20	72	4.14 (0.96)ᵦ	2.00	6.20	7.905[***]
					Stress events								
Number of stress events	71	8.58 (2.14)	0	10	83	9.20 (0.96)	5	10	72	8.69 (1.94)	0	10	2.931[†]
Objective stress severity	70	0.31 (0.37)	0.00	1.38	83	0.29 (0.39)	0.00	2.11	71	0.36 (0.44)	0.00	2.38	0.644
Perceived stressfulness	70	3.30 (0.63)	1.80	4.63	83	3.50 (0.72)	2.00	5.00	71	3.42 (0.68)	1.50	4.90	1.700
Number of support interactions	70	6.10 (2.19)	0	10	83	6.22 (2.16)	2	10	71	5.45 (2.37)	0	10	2.508[†]
Percentage unhelpful	65	0.20 (0.22)ₐ	0.00	0.75	78	0.19 (0.23)ₐ	0.00	0.80	62	0.30 (0.27)ᵦ	0.00	1.00	4.300[*]
Percentage discretionary	69	0.84 (0.22)	0.00	1.00	83	0.87 (0.22)	0.00	1.17	69	0.91(0.20)	0.20	1.50	1.728
					Positive events								
Number of positive events	71	8.59 (2.07)ₐᵦ	0	10	83	9.18 (0.98)ₐ	5	10	72	8.51 (2.11)ᵦ	0	10	3.358[*]
Perceived importance	70	3.54 (0.66)	2.00	5.00	83	3.55 (0.83)	1.40	5.00	71	3.52 (0.61)	2.20	4.89	0.027
Number of support interactions	70	6.51 (2.34)ₐ	1	10	83	6.19 (2.40)ₐᵦ	0	10	71	5.39 (2.57)ᵦ	0	10	3.984[*]
Perceived helpfulness	70	2.98 (0.21)ₐ	2.30	3.40	82	2.93 (0.23)ₐᵦ	2.20	3.40	70	2.85 (0.23)ᵦ	2.18	3.30	5.851[**]
Percentage discretionary	70	0.81 (0.23)ₐ	0.17	1.20	82	0.90 (0.18)ᵦ	0.25	1.25	70	0.88 (0.23)ₐᵦ	0.00	1.33	3.405[*]

Note. Groups that do not share a subscript denote significant differences. The degrees of freedom varied for each variable and are as follows: Social harmony (2, 223), Emotion harmony (2, 223), Number of stress events (2, 223), Objective stress severity (2, 221), Perceived stressfulness (2, 221), Number of support interactions for stress events (2, 221), Percentage unhelpful for stress events (2, 202), Percentage discretionary for stress events (2, 218), Number of positive events (2, 223), Perceived importance (2, 221), Number of support interactions for positive events (2, 221), Perceived helpfulness (2, 219), and Percentage discretionary for positive events (2, 219).
[*] $p \leq .05$. [**] $p \leq .01$. [***] $p \leq .001$. [†] $p \leq .10$.

events. At Level 2 in both models, sex and ethnic group dummy variables were entered simultaneously to examine their unique effects on baseline levels of support use. Perceived stress level predicted more support use for stress events, $b = .34$, $SE = .05$, $t(223) = 6.59$, $p < .001$, and perceived importance level predicted more support use for positive events, $b = .34$, $SE = .05$, $t(223) = 6.71$, $p < .001$. Women were also more likely to use support for both stress events, $b = .52$, $SE = .13$, $t(220) = 4.01$, $p < .001$, and positive events, $b = .39$, $SE = .15$, $t(220) = 2.66$, $p < .01$. Results further showed that first-generation AAs were less likely to mobilize support in response to stress events, $b = -.42$, $SE = .17$, $t(220) = -2.49$, $p < .05$, as well as positive events, $b = -.58$, $SE = .18$, $t(220) = -3.19$, $p < .01$, and that second-generation AAs were less likely to use support for positive events, $b = -.35$, $SE = .17$, $t(220) = -2.03$, $p < .05$, compared with EAs.

Harmony values as a mediator. Mediation analyses were conducted using multilevel models recommended by Krull and MacKinnon (2001) to determine whether harmony values mediated ethnic differences on support use. First, we examined whether ethnic group status was associated with the emotion harmony and social harmony dimensions of interdependence. Because these variables were both Level 2 factors, we used ordinary least squares regression to determine the relationships between ethnic group and endorsement of these harmony values. Results show a significant link between first-generation AA status, $b = .69$, $SE = .17$, $t(222) = 4.03$, $p < .001$, and second-generation AA status, $b = .35$, $SE = .17$, $t(222) = 2.09$, $p < .05$, with emotion harmony. In

addition, first-generation AA status, $b = .33$, $SE = .17$, $t(222) = 1.91$, $p < .10$, and second-generation AA status, $b = .32$, $SE = .17$, $t(222) = 1.91$, $p < .10$, were marginally associated with social harmony.

Next, we examined whether social harmony and emotion harmony were associated with less daily support use, and whether the relationships between ethnic group status and daily support use still remained after controlling for the effects of harmony. In separate models at Level 2, social harmony and emotion harmony were entered in addition to the sex and ethnic group dummy variables. Social harmony was not significantly associated with daily support use; thus, mediation analyses with social harmony were not pursued. However, emotion harmony was linked to less support use for stress events, $\gamma = -.15$, $t(219) = -2.27$, $p < .05$. When emotion harmony was entered in the model, the first-generation AA variable becomes only marginally significant, from $\gamma = -.42$ to $\gamma = -.31$, $t(219) = -1.84$, $p < .10$, suggesting partial mediation. Similarly for positive events, emotion harmony was associated with less support use, $\gamma = -.18$, $t(219) = -2.59$, $p < .05$, and the size of the effect of the first-generation AA variable decreases from $\gamma = -.58$ to $\gamma = -.46$, $t(219) = -2.43$, $p < .05$, and the second-generation AA variable loses significance from $\gamma = -.35$ to $\gamma = -.29$, $t(219) = -1.68$, *ns*. Full results are reported in Table 2. Sobel's (1982) statistic was calculated to determine whether there was a significant reduction in the relationship between ethnic group status and support use. Results support emotion harmony as a mediator in the relationship be-

Table 2
Predictors of Daily Support Use for Stress Events and Positive Events

Predictor	Stress event support use			Positive event support use		
	Coefficient (OR)	SE	t	Coefficient (OR)	SE	t
Level 1						
Day	−.07 (0.93)	.02	−4.36***	−.08 (0.93)	.02	−4.90***
Perceived stress	.35 (1.41)	.05	6.62***	—	—	—
Perceived importance	—	—	—	.34 (1.40)	.05	6.73***
Objective stress impact	.00 (1.00)	.08	−0.03	—	—	—
Level 2						
Female	.47 (1.60)	.13	3.58***	.33 (1.40)	.15	2.28*
First-generation AA	−.31 (0.73)	.17	−1.84†	−.46 (0.63)	.19	−2.43*
Second-generation AA	−.08 (0.92)	.15	−0.53	−.29 (0.75)	.17	−1.68
Emotion harmony	−.15 (0.86)	.07	−2.27*	−.18 (0.84)	.07	−2.59*

Note. OR = odds ratio; AA = Asian American. Support use was scored dichotomously, where no support use = 0 and support use = 1. Logistic regression analysis was used because of the binary nature of the support use outcome. The degrees of freedom varied for each variable and are as follows: for Level 1 variables, *df* = 223; for Level 2 variables, *df* = 219.
* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$. † $p \leq .10$.

tween first-generation AA status and daily support use in response to both stress events ($z = -1.98$, $p < .05$) as well as positive events ($z = -2.08$, $p < .05$), but not for second-generation AA status and daily support use for positive events ($z = -1.31$, *ns*).

Tests of Ethnic Group Differences on Helpfulness of Support

Ethnic group differences in the helpfulness of daily support for both stress events and positive events were also examined. Like before, the effects of day, perceived stress level, importance level, and stress impact rating were entered at Level 1 as covariates. Sex and ethnic group dummy variables were entered simultaneously at Level 2 to examine their unique effects on perceived helpfulness of support. All Level 2 analyses are presented in Table 3. Results show that first-generation AAs were more likely to find stress event support to be categorically unhelpful and positive event support to be less helpful over the 10 days of the study.

Tests of Ethnic Group Differences on First Support Sources

We explored ethnic group differences in the sources of support that participants first turned to about their daily events. Days on which no support was sought were not included in this analysis. The same daily covariates used previously were entered at Level 1 in the stress event and positive event models. At Level 2 in both models, sex and ethnic group dummy variables were entered to examine their effects on daily first support sources. Full results from the Level 2 predictors are shown in Table 4. For both stress and positive events, participants were more likely to turn to kinship support as the perceived stressfulness or importance rating increased. Analyses indicate that, compared with EAs, first-generation AAs were more likely to turn toward discretionary support sources to cope with stress events as well as positive events. Second-generation AAs also preferred discretionary sup-

Table 3
Predictors of Daily Perceived Support Helpfulness for Stress Events and Positive Events

Predictor	Stress event support helpfulness			Positive event support helpfulness		
	Coefficient (OR)	SE	t	Coefficient	SE	t
Level 1						
Day	−.01 (1.01)	.02	−0.61	.00	.00	0.22
Perceived stress	.10 (0.91)	.06	1.59	—	—	—
Perceived importance	—	—	—	.02	.01	1.79†
Objective stress impact	.11 (0.89)	.10	1.18	—	—	—
Level 2						
Female	.56 (0.57)	.14	3.93***	.01	.03	0.50
First-generation AA	−.53 (1.69)	.18	−2.89**	−.15	.04	−4.36***
Second-generation AA	.13 (0.88)	.16	0.77	−.04	.03	−1.09

Note. OR = odds ratio; AA = Asian American. Stress event support helpfulness was scored dichotomously, where 0 = not helpful and 1 = helpful. Positive event support helpfulness was scored on a continuous scale, where 1 = *not helpful* and 5 = *most helpful*. Logistic hierarchical linear modeling was used for the stress event analysis because of the binary nature of the support helpfulness outcome. The degrees of freedom varied for each variable and are as follows: for Level 1 Stress event support helpfulness variables, *df* = 220; for Level 1 Positive event support helpfulness variables, *df* = 221; for Level 2 Stress event support helpfulness variables, *df* = 217; for Level 2 Positive event support helpfulness variables, *df* = 218.
* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$. † $p \leq .10$.

Table 4
Predictors of Daily First Support Sources for Stress Events and Positive Events

Predictor	Stress event first support source			Positive event first support source		
	Coefficient (OR)	SE	t	Coefficient (OR)	SE	t
Level 1						
Day	−.01 (0.99)	.01	−1.05	−.02 (0.98)	.02	−0.90
Perceived stress	−.11 (0.89)	.05	−2.32*	—	—	—
Perceived importance	—	—	—	−.20 (0.82)	.06	−3.44**
Objective stress impact	−.01 (0.99)	.09	−0.09	—	—	—
Level 2						
Female	.11 (1.11)	.14	0.79	−.37 (0.69)	.15	−2.49**
First-generation AA	.41 (1.51)	.16	2.60**	.48 (1.61)	.19	2.49**
Second-generation AA	.26 (1.30)	.17	1.54	.63 (1.87)	.17	3.74***

Note. OR = odds ratio; AA = Asian American. First support source was scored dichotomously, where 0 = kinship and 1 = discretionary. Logistic regression analysis was used because of the binary nature of the support source outcome. The degrees of freedom varied for each variable and are as follows: for Level 1 Stress event first support source variables, $df = 220$; for Level 1 Positive event first support source variables, $df = 220$; for Level 2 Stress event first support source variables, $df = 217$; for Level 2 Positive event first support source variables, $df = 217$.
* $p \leq .05$.   ** $p \leq .01$.   *** $p \leq .001$.

port sources in response to positive events, but not stress events relative to EAs.

Discussion

This study provides some of the first naturalistic evidence identifying and explaining ethnic differences in the experience of daily support-seeking. Consistent with predictions, Asian Americans were less likely than European American students to use support in response to both stress and positive events, and these differences were explained by the cultural value of maintaining group harmony, specifically through the control of emotional expression. The data also support our hypothesis that Asian Americans perceive received support to be less helpful than European Americans. In terms of the types of relationships tapped for support, Asian Americans were more likely to access support from discretionary ties (e.g., friends), whereas European Americans were more likely to access support from kin (e.g., parents), although it should be noted that all groups most commonly relied on discretionary support. Overall, the pattern of results was similar for first- and second-generation Asian Americans, but the strongest and most consistent results were found when comparing first-generation Asian Americans with European Americans. The generational differences suggest that acculturation influences support-seeking behavior in Asian Americans.

Because there were no ethnic group differences in whether or not stressful or positive events occurred, study findings corroborate the notion that it is differences in the response to daily events that shape these interpersonal processes and not differences in life circumstances. Our findings are particularly compelling because all analyses controlled for the participants' subjective experience of the event as stressful or important, as well as unbiased appraisal of stress impact coded by third-party raters. Thus, the observed ethnic differences in tapping social support networks cannot be explained by Asian Americans being less (subjectively) reactive to daily events or having less (objectively) stressful lives.

Our findings parallel phenomena observed in the laboratory and in cross-sectional studies. For example, our results indicate that first-generation Asian Americans are simply less likely to activate

support on a daily basis to deal with stressful events, which corroborates questionnaire and experimental studies that find Asian Americans to generally report less support use than European Americans (Kim et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2004). Whereas prior studies have broadly identified concerns about relationships as an explanatory variable for these ethnic group differences (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004), we pinpoint a specific dimension of interdependence as an explanatory factor. Specifically, the cultural value of preserving group harmony by modulating one's emotional expression (and not social–communicative behavior) was implicated in these findings, suggesting that for certain cultural groups, expressing distress or a need for help is inherently threatening to social ties because of the potential for burdening others. Whereas a broader literature has theorized about the importance of harmony values in East Asian cultures for interpersonal dynamics, this is the first study to our knowledge that actively tests the impact of the cultural priority of group harmony on defined social processes.

What has been much less studied in the literature is the activation of social ties after the occurrences of positive or fortunate events. We found that emotion harmony values played a nondiscriminate role in suppressing the use of social contacts in response to stress and positive events for first-generation Asian Americans. Given prior research explicating a focus on humility in East Asian cultures as being prosocial (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), these results suggest that sharing about opportune events may be perceived as boastful or tactless. The desire to preserve relationships through the regulation of one's emotions governs relational norms across different types of situations. It is interesting that evidence was found only for the role of *emotion harmony*—and not *social harmony*—in mediating support use. Whereas social harmony values focus on agreeableness and avoiding conflict, emotion harmony prioritizes emotional restraint and is more proximally related to reluctance to lean on others.

Not only did our Asian American participants use social support less, they also found the support they received to be less helpful, which supports findings from laboratory manipulations and surveys (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004, 2007). The support may have been perceived as more distressing and therefore less helpful for the

same cultural reasons stated above that impede the mobilization of support. It should be noted that in this analysis, we investigated the active use of support through initiation of contact with others. This active explicit support differs from the perception that support is available if needed (Wethington & Kessler, 1986) and the implicit support gained by reflecting on valued social groups (Taylor et al., 2007) that has been found to be more beneficial for Asian Americans. Thus, the present findings pertain specifically to explicit support, which may be most salient for individuals from independent cultural contexts.

Interesting patterns emerged regarding primary support sources. The Asian American students in our sample were more likely to turn to discretionary sources of support, whereas their European American counterparts more readily accessed kinship or obligatory sources of support. This pattern of findings echoes that of Kim and colleagues (2006), who found that Asian Americans were less likely to use support when primed to think about closer relationships, perhaps because of reluctance about burdening more valued relationships. Asian Americans may be more willing to lean on friends who can listen to their concerns without feeling obliged to provide instrumental assistance. Alternatively, Asian Americans may avoid discussions of events with family members because they anticipate negative outcomes such as criticism, blame, or demands. As such, Asian Americans may select discretionary support sources because they expect them to be more helpful.

Some limitations of the study must be acknowledged. First, we studied the experiences of college students who volunteered for a study on daily events and social experiences, which may have resulted in a sample selected for sociability, perhaps rendering a restricted range. This may have yielded a more conservative test of ethnic differences, yet the expected relations were largely observed. However, our findings may not generalize beyond the social context of college students. Second, we employed a new measure of harmony values, and more psychometric study of the scale is needed. Next, our investigation of support sources pertained specifically to the first person from whom the individual sought support. Thus, the study does not provide a comprehensive picture of the multiple support sources that may have been accessed. Third, the participants in this study reported a limited range of daily stress events, and most of these were minor hassles rather than serious stressful events. Although we believe that the study of everyday stressors lends valuable insight into basic social processes, the extent to which our findings inform support-seeking for traumatic and major life events is unknown. Lastly, our pattern of findings for first- and second-generation Asian Americans was similar but not identical. The current article focused on comparing Asian Americans with European Americans and thus did not directly examine the role acculturation plays in support-seeking processes.

These cultural patterns in social interactions that characterize the day-to-day rhythms of relationships may also be relevant to formal help-seeking. Many studies have documented higher symptoms of depression, anxiety, and overall distress in Asian American compared with European American college students (e.g., Norasakkunkit & Kalick, 2002; Okazaki, 1997) that likely occur alongside cultural barriers to accessing support in basic social relationships. Researchers have also documented cultural barriers that deter use of mental health services in Asian Americans (Leong & Lau, 2001). Values endorsing restraint in display of strong emotion may be a specific pathway by which culture affects support use processes in everyday relationships as well as in treatment-seeking.

Our findings may also provide some insights that can inform effective treatment for Asian Americans. For example, providing psychoeducation and modifying cognitions about the benefits and consequences of accessing social support may encourage Asian Americans to mobilize support in ways that have been found to be empirically beneficial. Alternatively, recent work by Lu and Stanton (2009) found that among mildly depressed college students, Asian Americans received relatively greater benefit from an expressive writing intervention compared with European American students. Values that deter support-seeking and open expression of emotion may make expressive writing an especially therapeutic technique for Asian Americans. Our study provides further evidence that Asian Americans are hesitant to activate explicit social support, and that facilitating other avenues toward expression, meaning-finding, and communion with others may represent alternative forms of care.

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