

Cultural Differences in Support Provision: The Importance of Relationship Quality

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Abstract

Emotional expression is highly valued in individualistic cultures, whereas emotional restraint is prioritized in collectivistic cultures. We hypothesized that high-quality relationships in these cultures would exhibit the forms of support provision congruent with their respective expectations. Study 1 examined support transactions among friends in response to a laboratory stressor and found that objectively judged relationship quality (RQ) more strongly positively predicted emotion-focused support provision behaviors by European Americans than by Asian Americans. Study 2, a questionnaire study, found that self-reported RQ predicted emotion-focused support provision more strongly among European Americans than among Japanese. Study 3 investigated more indirect forms of support and found that RQ more strongly predicted worrying about and monitoring close others enduring stressors and spending time with them without talking about the stressor among Asian Americans compared with European Americans. These findings suggest that RQ is expressed in terms of support provision in culturally normative ways.

Keywords

social support provision, caregiving, relationship quality, culture/ethnicity, social support, close relationships

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People from all parts of the world have enduring and cherished relationships with others. Close others share a broad range of experiences, from joyous celebrations such as weddings and promotions to tragic occasions like the death of a loved one or losing one's job. During difficult times, close others provide individuals with the social resources necessary to cope with the situation. Research has continually shown that close relationships are important for an individual's emotional and physical well-being (e.g., Giles, Glonek, Luszcz, & Andrews, 2005; Sarason, Sarason, & Gurung, 1997). Yet, not all relationships benefit an individual equally when he or she is dealing with a stressful event. One hallmark of a high-quality relationship may be the exchange of optimal social support during negative events. Many factors determine what form of support is optimal, such as characteristics of the situation, the recipient, and the provider. We propose that culture is another factor that determines what type of support is considered optimal; specifically, that more direct, verbal forms of support provision are prioritized in individualistic cultures but not in collectivistic cultures. The present research sought to extend our knowledge of cultural variation in social support processes of close relationships.

Social support is an interpersonal process in which the provider communicates to the recipient that he or she is valued, cared for, and part of a reciprocal relationship (Cobb,

1976; Cohen & Wills, 1985). Receiving social support from friends and family can mitigate the experience of stress, reduce the severity of health problems, and speed recovery from health disorders when they do occur (Fleming, Baum, Gisriel, & Gatchel, 1982; Haines, Hurlbert, & Beggs, 1996; Lin, Ye, & Ensel, 1999; see Taylor, 2007, for a review). The social support transaction is often direct, involving verbal acknowledgment of the recipient's stressor and the exchange of advice, emotional comfort, or instrumental aid to ameliorate the stressor. Individuals often seek direct forms of support for their problems, and this process is termed *explicit social support seeking* (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008; Taylor, Welch, Kim, & Sherman, 2007). In contrast, people can also engage in *implicit social support seeking*, when they derive comfort from their social relationships without discussing the stressor (Kim et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2007).

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These forms of support seeking are utilized to varying degrees in different cultural contexts, and the extent to which people benefit from these forms of seeking support also varies (Mojaverian & Kim, 2013; see Kim et al., 2008, for a review). Based on these findings, we reasoned that there would also be cultural variation in the extent and way in which people *provide* support to their close others. Specifically, we expected that relationship quality (RQ) would differentially predict direct forms of support provision in individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

In more individualistic cultures, such as mainstream North American culture, the dominant model of the self is an independent self that regards a person as possessing a set of self-defining attributes. As such, the expression of personal beliefs, preferences, and emotions is strongly encouraged, highly valued, and psychologically beneficial in this cultural context (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2009; Kim & Markus, 1999; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Individualistic models of relationships reflect these self-expression norms, in that people construe close relationships to be freely chosen partnerships replete with emotional intimacy and self-disclosure (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010).

Consistent with these cultural values, past work demonstrates that direct forms of support, especially those that involve verbal and emotional expression, are characteristic of close relationships embedded in individualistic cultures. Namely, European Americans regularly explicitly seek support when experiencing a stressful event (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006; Kim et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2004) and provide support, characterized by verbal encouragement, to close others who are stressed (J. M. Chen, Kim, Mojaverian, & Morling, 2012). Furthermore, among European Americans, RQ is positively associated with several direct forms of support provision, such as providing reassurance, empathy, and validation (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). Therefore, we hypothesized that high-quality relationships among people in individualistic cultures would be associated with increased direct forms of support provision.

In more collectivistic cultures, such as East Asia, the dominant model of the self is an interdependent self that regards a person as context-dependent and inextricably connected to others (Cousins, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Collectivism emphasizes conforming to relational norms and viewing group goals—such as maintaining harmony and promoting the well-being of the group—as primary and personal needs and goals as secondary (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Self-expression in these cultures is less frequent, not highly valued, and oftentimes discouraged (Kim & Sherman, 2007; Matsumoto, Yoo, & Fontaine, 2008; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). Consequently, East Asians and Asian Americans are less likely to explicitly seek support from their close others than are European Americans, in part due to their desire to preserve relational harmony (Kim et al., 2006; Taylor

et al., 2004). In general, people from East Asian cultures are more likely to assert themselves over others indirectly (e.g., through an intermediary) than directly (Kojima, 1984). Furthermore, self-disclosure and emotional expression are not essential to initiating and maintaining close relationships within these cultural contexts (G. Chen, 1995; Schug et al., 2010).

Because East Asians' support provision is motivated by the desire to convey closeness with recipients rather than the desire to increase their self-esteem, and because providers would not want to provide support that is ineffective or potentially uncomfortable for the recipient (J. M. Chen et al., 2012), we hypothesized that RQ would be weakly or not at all predictive of direct forms of support provision in collectivistic cultures. In addition, given that cultural differences in support provision are more pronounced for emotion-focused support compared with problem-focused support (e.g., J. M. Chen et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2010; Taylor et al., 2004), we planned to investigate whether cultural differences in predicting direct provision from RQ might be stronger for emotion-focused than problem-focused support provision as well. We investigated these possibilities in a laboratory study with East Asian Americans and European Americans (Study 1) and a questionnaire study conducted in the United States and Japan (Study 2). In Study 3, another questionnaire study, we investigated the role of RQ in predicting alternative, more indirect forms of support provision among East Asian Americans and European Americans.

RQ is a multifaceted concept (see Gere & MacDonald, 2013). Some aspects of relationships, such as attachment style (You & Malley-Morrison, 2000), emotional intimacy (Ryan, La Guardia, Solky-Butzel, Chirkov, & Kim, 2005; Schug et al., 2010), and interpersonal stress (Hashimoto, Mojaverian, & Kim, 2012), vary systematically by culture and, accordingly, may not be indicative of RQ to the same extent across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Other aspects, such as relationship satisfaction (Funk & Rogge, 2007) and objectively perceived closeness (e.g., Gottman, 1993), are more characteristic of high-quality relationships across cultural contexts (see Endo, Heine, & Lehman, 2000). Thus, we operationalized RQ as perceived closeness in Study 1 and relationship satisfaction in Studies 2 and 3.

Study 1

Study 1 was our initial investigation as to whether RQ was differentially associated with direct forms of support provision by East Asians and European Americans. Study 1 was designed to assess the unfolding of social support interactions using an experimental manipulation of stress and behavioral observation. We used a laboratory manipulation of stress (a speech task, Feeney & Collins, 2001) and observed subsequent interactions among friendship pairs, enabling us to control the nature of the stressor and to observe support behaviors. We measured RQ, support seeking, and

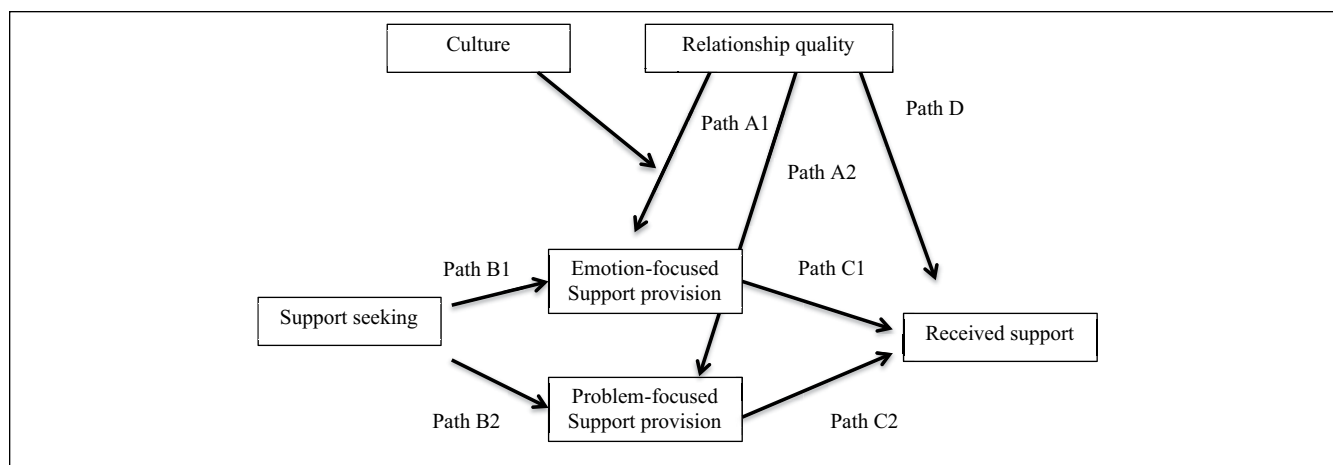


Figure 1. Graphical representation of Study 1 variables and processes.

support provision (emotion-focused and problem-focused). In addition, we measured the extent to which the speech giver felt supported, that is, *received support*.

Figure 1 presents our proposed theoretical model of how support interactions unfold and the moderating role of culture. Direct support provision is often given in response to an individual explicitly seeking support when he or she is under stress (e.g., Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987). Therefore, we expected explicit support seeking to predict both emotion-focused and problem-focused support provision (Figure 1, Paths B1 and B2). We also predicted that emotion-focused and problem-focused support provision would be positively associated with received support, above and beyond support seeking, because increased support provision should be associated with greater perception of received support (Figure 1, Paths C1 and C2).

Our key hypothesis was that RQ would be more strongly positively associated with support provision among European Americans than among Asian Americans, controlling for support seeking (Figure 1, Paths A1 and A2). Based on previous findings, we explored whether cultural differences in the link between RQ and support provision would be most pronounced for emotion-focused, rather than problem-focused, support. We were also interested in whether RQ would predict received support above and beyond actual support behaviors. Although past research has established that RQ predicts received support among European Americans (Collins & Feeney, 2000, 2004; Gurung, Sarason, & Sarason, 1997), we sought to determine whether the same association was present among Asian Americans and whether these associations held when controlling for support behaviors (Figure 1, Path D).

In this study, we assessed RQ using objective judges who observed the friends' interacting. Coding of RQ during laboratory interactions such as problem-solving tasks has been used extensively to predict important outcomes such as the likelihood that romantic couples will divorce or be characterized by

physical abuse (e.g., Cordova, Jacobson, Gottman, Rushe, & Cox, 1993; Gottman, 1993; Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Margolin, John, & Gleberman, 1988; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986). We adapted this methodology by having trained observers rate each friendship pairs' RQ during a neutral baseline task.

Method

Participants. Fifty-four friendship pairs participated in the study (81.5% female). Participants were undergraduate students. One of the friends was recruited to participate in the study for course credit or monetary compensation and was instructed to bring a friend of the same ethnicity and gender. Gender was matched in an effort to minimize potential romantic interest as a factor in our experiment. Twenty-five pairs were U.S.-born European Americans (76% female; $M_{age} = 18.56$ years, $SD = 0.63$), and 29 pairs were East Asian American (85% female; $M_{age} = 19.05$ years, $SD = 1.01$).¹ The average length of friendship, averaged across the two friends' self-reports, was 24.31 months ($SD = 40.15$ months) and did not differ by ethnicity.

Procedure

Background questionnaires. The experimenter seated the participants on opposite sides of a table in the laboratory. They completed the informed consent and responded to background questions about themselves (e.g., ethnicity) and about their friendship (e.g., relationship length). Both participants responded to the Inclusion of Other in Self item (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) as a measure of subjective closeness.

During this time, the experimenter activated a hidden camera from another room, and it began recording the participants' interactions. The remaining stages of the experiment were designed to enable us to observe the friendship

pair's interactions during a baseline task and then to observe social support processes during a stressful event.

Baseline task to assess RQ. Our primary predictor variable, objective RQ, was assessed during a period in which neither friend was particularly stressed. Friends completed a cooperative task—working together to form as many words as possible out of the letters in the word “ARTICHOKE”—for 3 min and this interaction was later coded (see below). The experimenter provided instructions and materials for the task and left the room before the friends began.

Task introductions. One of the chief motivators for support provision is support seeking. That is, support provision is often a response to interaction partner's support seeking. Given that we aimed to look at cultural differences in support provision and that there are studies documenting cultural differences in support seeking, both in terms of self-report (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004) and behavior (e.g., Mojaverian & Kim, 2013), we aimed to create a situation in which cultural differences in support seeking were minimized. Because an important barrier to support seeking by East Asians is reluctance to disclose to close others that a stressful event has occurred (Kim et al., 2008), we arranged for the speech task (the stressor) to be assigned to one friend in the presence of the other friend. Thus, the members of the friendship pair were randomly assigned to the *game player* (support provider) and *speech giver* (support recipient) roles by the experimenter in each other's presence.

The experimenter told the friends that they would be participating in a study on verbal and quantitative abilities and that they would engage in separate activities. Then the experimenter gave instructions to each friend on their respective tasks. The game player (support provider) was instructed to work on a game of SET (www.setgame.com) that involves finding sets of three cards based on similarities and differences between shapes, colors, and patterns on the cards. The speech giver (support recipient) was told to prepare a 3-min speech about the benefits of attending their university that would be videotaped, evaluated, and potentially viewed by prospective students and their parents at university admission sessions. We chose the respective tasks to create a situation in which one friend was clearly more stressed than the other. A paired samples *t* test on the post-task measure of task stress (e.g., “To what extent was preparing your speech stressful?”) on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*) confirmed that speech givers rated their task as significantly more stressful ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.48$) than the game players did ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.57$), $t(54) = -2.42$, $p = .02$. In addition, there was no cultural difference in the perceived stressfulness of the speech task, $F(1, 52) = .10$, $p = .76$.

Supportive interaction. After giving verbal instructions on each task, the experimenter informed the friends that they would have 9 min for their respective tasks. The speech giv-

ers were given paper and a pen to prepare the speech and they expected to give their speeches at the end of the 9-min period. In an effort to observe the most naturalistic interactions possible within the laboratory context, we did not instruct participants to refrain from talking to each other, nor did we explicitly encourage them to provide or seek social support.

Typically during this period, speech givers brainstormed the points that they wanted to make during the speech (i.e., positive attributes of their university) and then began writing their speeches. Occasionally they would practice aloud. During this time, the game player played the SET game and then filled out questionnaires regarding the game. The game players' tasks were intended to be relatively stress-free so that they would be available to support their friends. During this period, the game players would often check on the speech givers' progress in speech preparation and offer suggestions about what to say.

During the 9 min, support interactions were videotaped for coding by objective judges later (see below). At the end of this period, the experimenter informed the speech giver that he or she would not have to give the speech after all.

Post-task questionnaires. The final stage of the experiment consisted of questionnaires and demographics. The speech giver's questionnaire included four scale items measuring received support (e.g., “To what extent did you feel supported by your friend?” and “How much did you rely on your friend for support during your speech preparation?”; $\alpha_{\text{EuroAm}} = .86$, $\alpha_{\text{AsianAm}} = .88$) anchored from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*a great deal*). Participants then received a funnel debriefing to unearthen any suspicion about the hidden video camera or nature of the experiment. Finally, participants were compensated and provided consent for their videotapes to be used for research purposes.

Coding of relationship quality and social support behaviors. The videotaped behavior was coded by five judges (one Asian American, two European Americans, one Multiracial, and one Latina) who were trained together and blind to the study hypotheses. All five of the judges had good reliability (total intraclass correlations [ICCs] across variables ranged from .64 to .88). Forty-four of the 54 (81.4%) friendship pairs were independently coded by two judges, and then their scores were averaged. Ten of the pairs were coded by single judges due to scheduling constraints.

Coding of RQ. Judges viewed the 3-min baseline interaction (i.e., the ARTICHOKE task) and rated the closeness of the pair (1 = *not at all close* to 5 = *very close*) and the positivity of the pair's tone (1 = *very negative* to 7 = *very positive*). For the latter item, coders focused on coding the valence of the pair's tone (how pleasant they were toward one another) rather than the pair's arousal or excitement level because there are cultural differences in the valuation and expression

of arousal (Tsai et al., 2006). The closeness and positivity ratings were standardized and averaged for an index of RQ, $r(52) = .59, p < .001$. The association between closeness and positivity did not differ by culture, $p = .17$, and there was no cultural difference in RQ, $p = .61$. ICCs for Asian friends ranged from .43 to 1.0 and for European American friends ranged from .796 to .80.

Coding of support seeking and provision. The judges counted and recorded the total number of times social support was sought and provided for each 30-s increment within the 9-min period (to ease the coding process by breaking it down into more manageable parts). Refer to the appendix for examples of support seeking and provision behaviors. For each behavior, the judges coded whether it was the speech giver or game player doing the behavior. For support provision behaviors, the judges coded whether it was emotion-focused or problem-focused support. Consistent with J. M. Chen et al. (2012), emotion-focused support was operationalized as speech addressing the emotional response of the speech giver to the stressful task (e.g., “You’ll be fine”), and problem-focused support was defined as providing advice about how to handle the speech task (e.g., “Try to sell the school, remember?”). ICCs for seeking ranged from .49 to 1.0 for European American friends and .81 to .95 for Asian friends. ICCs for emotion-focused provision ranged from .67 to .91 for European American friends and .68 to .86 for Asian friends. ICCs for problem-focused provision ranged from .94 to .99 for Asian friends and .50 to .98 for European American friends.

Results

Our analyses sought to predict three social support variables—support seeking, support provision, and received support—from culture and RQ. Regressions determined that culture did not moderate any of the associations between the social support variables. Refer to Tables 1 and 2 for zero-order correlations between the support variables for each cultural group.

We had designed the experiment to control for cultural differences in social support seeking. Consistent with our intention, culture did not moderate the amount of support sought, $F(1, 52) = .002, p = .97$. Then, we conducted a 2 (Culture) \times 2 (Support Type) mixed model ANOVA on support provision, with the latter factor within-subjects. There was a main effect of support type, reflecting that participants provided more problem-focused support than emotion-focused support during the study, $F(1, 52) = 6.13, p = .02, \eta_p^2 = .11$. There was no cultural difference in the amount of support provided, $F(1, 52) = .09, p = .76$. Contrary to our prediction, there was no culture by support type interaction, $F(1, 52) = .56, p = .46$. Culture also did not moderate the amount of received support, $F(1, 52) = .17, p = .68$.

Table 1. Zero-Order Correlations Between Support Seeking Behaviors, Support Provision Behaviors, and Received Support Among Asian Americans in Study 1.

	1	2	3	4
1. Support seeking	—	.61***	.62***	.301 [†]
2. Emotion-focused support provision		—	.16	.27
3. Problem-focused support provision			—	.56**
4. Received support				—

[†] $p < .15$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Zero-Order Correlations Between Support Seeking Behaviors, Support Provision Behaviors, and Received Support Among European Americans in Study 1.

	1	2	3	4
1. Support seeking	—	.31 [†]	.49**	.16
2. Emotion-focused support provision		—	.47*	.23
3. Problem-focused support provision			—	.46*
4. Received support				—

[†] $p < .15$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

The role of relationship quality. We conducted a series of regression analyses to test our remaining hypotheses. Figure 2 summarizes the results reported below.

Support seeking. As intended, support seeking behaviors were not predicted by culture, $t(50) = .03, p = .98$, RQ, $t(50) = -1.04, p = .30$, or their interaction term, $t(50) = -.60, p = .55, R^2 = .04$.

Support provision (Paths A and B). We conducted moderated regressions to determine whether RQ predicted explicit support provision and whether culture moderated this association, above and beyond support seeking.

Emotion-focused support. In Step 1, we entered support seeking as a control variable, $\beta = .47$ (95% confidence interval [CI] = [.22, .72]), $t(52) = 3.82, p < .001, R^2 = .31$. In Step 2, we entered culture, $t(50) = 1.28, p = .21$, and RQ, $t(50) = .57, p = .57, \Delta R^2 = .03$. In Step 3, we entered the culture by RQ interaction, $\beta = -.38$ (95% CI = [-.78, .03]), $\Delta R^2 = .05, t(49) = 1.85, p = .07$. Investigation of the simple slopes revealed that RQ positively predicted support provision among European Americans, $\beta = .37$ (95% CI = [-.03, .078]), $p = .04$, but not among Asian Americans, $\beta = -.10, p = .53$. Cultural differences in support provision were absent for low-quality relationships (1 SD below the mean), $t(49) = .42, p = .68$. However, at high levels of RQ (1 SD above the mean), European Americans ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 2.02$) provided significantly

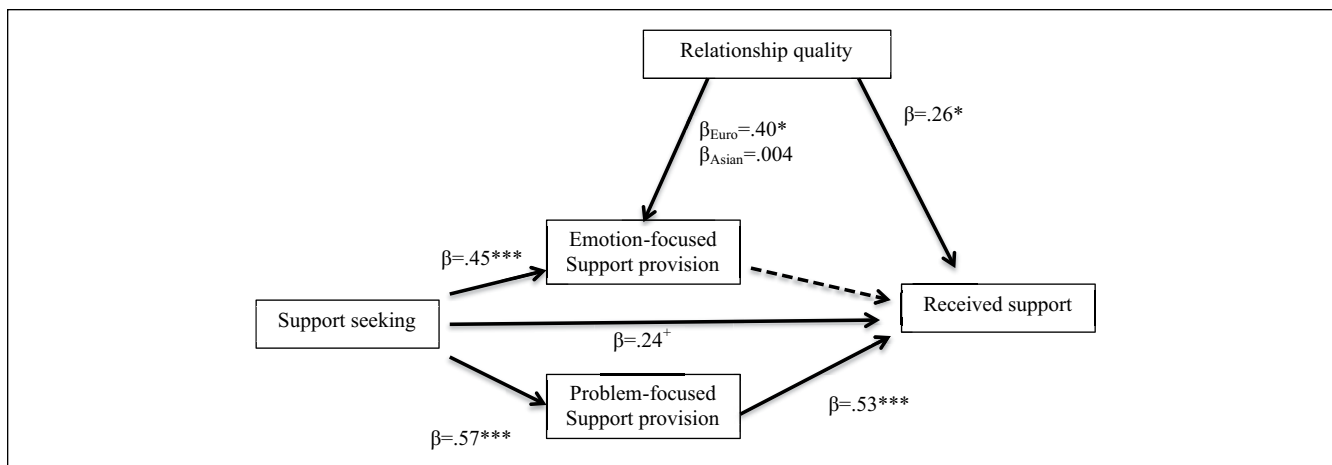


Figure 2. Graphical representation of Study 1 findings.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

more support than did Asian Americans ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 0.21$), $\beta = -.40$ (95% CI = $[-.76, -.04]$), $t(49) = -2.25$, $p = .03$.

Problem-focused support. In Step 1, we entered support seeking and found that it positively predicted problem-focused support provision, $\beta = .55$, $t(52) = 4.80$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .31$. In Step 2, culture, $t(50) = -.12$, $p = .91$, and RQ, $t(50) = 1.59$, $p = .12$, did not predict provision. In addition, Step 3 indicated that there was no culture by RQ interaction, $t(49) = .91$, $p = .37$.

Received support (Paths C and D). We conducted another moderated regression to determine whether culture and RQ predicted received support above and beyond support seeking and provision behaviors. In Step 1, we entered support seeking, $t(50) = -.78$, $p = .44$, emotion-focused support provision, $t(50) = 1.07$, $p = .29$, and problem-focused support provision, $\beta = .53$, $t(50) = 3.64$, $p < .001$, as control variables, $R^2 = .28$. In Step 2, culture and RQ were entered separately. RQ positively predicted received support, $\beta = .26$ (95% CI = $[.01, .50]$), $t(48) = 2.09$, $p = .04$, $\Delta R^2 = .06$, and culture did not moderate this association, $t(47) = -.13$, $p = .90$. Speech givers in higher quality friendships perceived that they had received more support, above and beyond actual support behaviors.

The role of subjective closeness. We also conducted moderated regressions to investigate the role of subjective closeness (i.e., the inclusion of other in self) in the support transactions. Because the recipient's and provider's perceived closeness were only moderately correlated, $r(52) = .44$, $p < .001$, they were kept separate in analyses. (Neither the recipient's, $r(52) = -.14$, $p = .32$, nor the provider's perceived closeness, $r(52) = .09$, $p = .54$, was significantly associated with observed RQ.) Subjective closeness did not predict any of the support variables with one exception; the seeker's perceived closeness

positively predicted support seeking. See Supplemental Material for full details.

Discussion

Study 1 featured behavioral assessment, observing friendship pairs of different cultures and how they reacted to the same stressor, obviating an issue of prior research where participants describe a focal stressor. Our key hypothesis was partially supported; high-quality relationships among European Americans were associated with increased emotion-focused support provision, but this association was absent among Asian American friends. In addition, the measure of RQ was validated within the study by its positive association with the recipient's feeling supported above and beyond actual support behaviors. Study 1 adds to the large body of research documenting that trained observers can extract meaningful information about a close relationship from a laboratory interaction.

It is important to note that RQ predicted emotion-focused support provision by European Americans above and beyond social support seeking. Therefore, our findings cannot be explained by European Americans feeling more comfortable seeking support in their high-quality relationships compared with Asians. Study 1 established that European American friends freely gave more emotion-focused support in high-quality relationships whereas Asian American friends in high-quality relationships did not.

Study 1 also provided unique behavioral insights into the unfolding of social support transactions and when cultural practices converge and diverge. Although RQ differentially predicted emotion-focused support provision for European Americans and Asian Americans, support seeking positively predicted support provision for both cultural groups. When someone explicitly asks for support, friends are generally responsive to this request regardless of their cultural

background. Furthermore, there was a dissociation between support provision and received support such that culture interacted with RQ to predict provision behaviors, but RQ positively predicted received support above and beyond support seeking and provision among both Asian Americans and European Americans. Therefore, in both cultural contexts, individuals in high-quality relationships benefit from having their close other nearby during a stressful event independent of their verbal support seeking and provision behaviors. In addition, culture did not moderate the association between provided and received support. Speech givers of both cultural groups who received more actual support from their friends also reported receiving more support. Given the controlled nature of the support interaction and the fact that received support was measured directly after the interaction, it is not surprising that both Asian Americans' and European Americans' perceptions were in line with the social interactions that they just had.

It may seem surprising that subjective closeness did not have the same association with support behaviors as observed RQ. However, it is important to note that relationships can vary independently in subjective closeness (e.g., parent vs. friend) and relationship satisfaction/quality. Indeed, previous research documented only a moderate correlation between inclusion of other in self and relationship satisfaction ($r = .30$, indicating only 9% shared variance) when people rated their friendships (Dibble, Levine, & Park, 2012). Therefore, subjective closeness is not necessarily an indicator of RQ. As such, the fact that subjective closeness was not correlated with observed RQ or support provision behaviors is neither consistent nor inconsistent with our hypothesis.

Study 1 did not find overall cultural differences in the amount of support sought or provided. Because we circumvented barriers to stressor disclosure for the speech giver, our null finding with respect to support seeking was consistent with our expectations. Although we had expected to find overall cultural differences in support provision, we only found cultural differences in emotion-focused support provision among high-quality friendships. One possibility is that RQ was relatively uniform within the sample because the laboratory experiment restricted participants to a college friend who was willing and able to participate with them. In the subsequent studies, we had support providers answer questions about their support interactions with close others using survey methodology.

Study 2

In this study, we created a questionnaire to assess how Japanese and European Americans supported their friends during a recent stressful event. Our goal was to extend the findings from Study 1 by testing the culture and RQ association with support provision in another East Asian population and using a more traditional, well-validated measure of RQ. As such, we measured RQ with items adapted from previously validated

scales of romantic RQ (Funk & Rogge, 2007; Gere & MacDonald, 2013). Because these items had not been previously used cross-culturally or to study friendship, we planned to select the scale with the strongest validity and highest reliability across both cultural groups.

We hypothesized that European Americans would report providing more direct, verbal support than would Japanese. In addition, we hypothesized that RQ would be more strongly positively associated with support provision among European Americans than among Japanese. On the basis of previous research and Study 1, we expected that cultural differences in RQ predicting support provision would be stronger for emotion-focused than problem-focused support.

Method

Participants. Sixty-two European American undergraduates (39 female; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.92$ years, $SD = 2.12$) and 69 Japanese undergraduates (56 female; $M_{\text{age}} = 18.88$ years, $SD = 0.92$) participated in exchange for partial course credit. Exploratory analyses by participant gender for Studies 2 and 3 are contained in the Supplementary Online Material.

Materials and procedure. Participants were recruited from psychology courses and completed the survey online. The survey was created in English and then translated into Japanese by a bilingual social psychologist. Participants completed the survey in their native language.

The questionnaire about social support provision was adapted from the Brief COPE measure (Carver, 1997) with additional items (see J. M. Chen et al., 2012, for a similar method). The questionnaire asked participants first to recall and describe a recent stressful event experienced by a friend and how they helped the friend cope with the event. Participants were not guided to select a friend of any particular nationality, ethnicity, or gender to avoid experimentally increasing the salience of these social identities. Then, participants used a 7-point scale (0 = *not at all* to 6 = *very much*) to answer closed-ended questions about the event. Two of these items (i.e., "This event was stressful for my friend" and "This event was negative for my friend") were averaged together to create a composite variable of stressor severity, $r(128) = .58, p < .001$. (Regression confirmed that culture did not moderate the association between these two items, $p = .66$.)

Next, participants indicated the degree to which they supported their friend in both emotion-focused (e.g., "I tried to offer comforting and encouraging words"; $\alpha_{\text{US}} = .84$; $\alpha_{\text{JP}} = .77$) and problem-focused (e.g., "I tried to help my friend think clearly about their problem"; $\alpha_{\text{US}} = .74$; $\alpha_{\text{JP}} = .84$) ways. There were three items per support type, and they used the same 7-point scale adapted from J. M. Chen et al. (2012). The items were embedded among additional items that were exploratory in nature and not analyzed as part of this investigation.

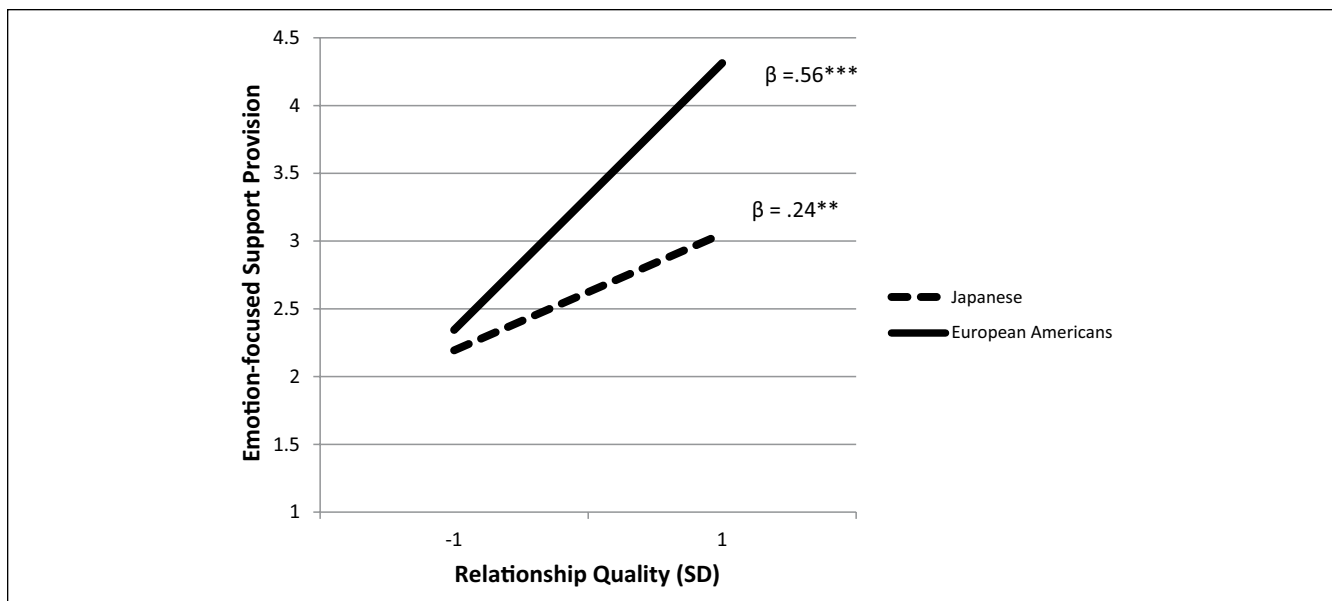


Figure 3. Cultural differences in the association between relationship quality and emotion-focused support provision in Study 2, controlling for stressor severity.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Finally, participants completed measures of RQ. They completed 11 adapted items from Gere and MacDonald (2013) that measured trust, intimacy, and satisfaction.² Participants also completed an adapted version of the Couple's Relationship Satisfaction Index (CSI; Funk & Rogge, 2007) consisting of 18 items (e.g., "My friendship is strong" and "I have a warm and comfortable relationship with my friend"). Items were adapted to describe friendships as opposed to romantic relationships (as were their original intended focus). Three items were dropped: two because they did not adapt well to the friendship context and one because it was culturally not equivalent across cultures. Refer to Online Supplemental Materials for more details on the selection of items for the RQ measure. The remaining 15 items were summed to create an RQ composite ($\alpha_{US} = .94$; $\alpha_{JP} = .96$).³ At the conclusion of the study, participants completed a demographic questionnaire and were debriefed.

Results

Severity of stressor and level of relationship quality. European Americans ($M = 6.05$, $SD = 1.15$) rated their friends' stressors as more severe than did Japanese ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 1.55$), $F(1, 128) = 9.00$, $p = .003$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$. European Americans ($M = 79.47$, $SD = 9.84$) also reported higher RQ than did Japanese ($M = 67.51$, $SD = 14.55$), $F(1, 129) = 29.67$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$.

Amount of support provided. To insure that any cultural differences observed in the amount of support provided were not due to differences in perceived stressor severity or RQ, we

tested for cultural differences in the amount of support provided using a 2 (Culture: United States vs. Japan) \times 2 (Support Type: Emotion-focused vs. Problem-focused) mixed model ANCOVA controlling for stressor severity and RQ. The ANCOVA revealed only a main effect of culture, $F(1, 126) = 17.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .12$. European Americans ($M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.21$) reported providing more direct support than did Japanese ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.21$).

The role of relationship quality. To test our main hypotheses, we conducted two moderated regressions predicting support provision with culture, RQ, and their interaction. Stressor severity was entered in Step 1 as a control variable.

Emotion-focused support. In Step 1, we controlled for stressor severity, $\beta = .30$ (95% CI = [.14, .47]), $t(128) = 3.59$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .09$. Participants provided more support when the stressor was more severe. In Step 2, we entered culture (0 = European American, 1 = Japanese) and mean-centered RQ. Culture negatively predicted support provision, $\beta = -.25$ (95% CI = [-.41, -.09]), $t(126) = -2.96$, $p = .004$, and RQ positively predicted support provision, $\beta = .34$ (95% CI = [.18, .50]), $t(126) = 4.21$, $p < .001$. Step 3 revealed a marginally significant culture by RQ interaction, $\beta = -.24$ (95% CI = [-.52, .04]), $\Delta R^2 = .02$, $t(125) = -1.74$, $p = .084$. (A one-tailed test, warranted because Study 2 was a conceptual replication of Study 1, yields a p value of .04.). Analysis of the simple slopes revealed that RQ more strongly predicted support provision by European Americans, $\beta = .56$ (95% CI = [.27, .85]), $t(125) = 3.78$, $p < .001$, than by Japanese, $\beta = .24$ (95% CI = [.05, .43]), $t(125) = 2.48$, $p = .01$ (see Figure 3). Replicating

Study 1, at low levels of RQ (1 *SD* below the mean), there were no cultural differences in support provision, $t(125) = -0.32$, $p = .75$. However, at high levels of RQ (1 *SD* above the mean), European Americans provided more support ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 4.31$) than did Japanese ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 3.05$), $\beta = -.37$ (95% CI = $[-0.58, -.16]$), $t(125) = -3.40$, $p < .001$.

Problem-focused support. In Step 1, stressor severity predicted increased problem-focused support provision, $\beta = .26$ (95% CI = $[.09, .43]$), $t(128) = 3.03$, $p = .003$, $R^2 = .07$. In Step 2, culture negatively predicted problem-focused support provision, $\beta = -.33$ (95% CI = $[-.50, -.16]$), $t(126) = -3.84$, $p < .001$, and RQ positively predicted problem-focused support provision, $\beta = .27$ (95% CI = $[.10, .43]$), $t(126) = 3.20$, $p = .002$. Consistent with Study 1, in Step 3, there was not a significant culture by RQ interaction, $\beta = -.17$ (95% CI = $[-.47, .11]$), $t(125) = -1.22$, $p = .23$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$.

Discussion

In Study 2, we assessed RQ and support provision using established self-report methods to determine whether these variables were indeed associated in the minds of support providers and found the consistent pattern of results as in Study 1. Although it is possible that participants' reported support provision influenced their reported RQ such that European Americans reported higher RQ as a result of recalling providing more emotion-focused support, this possibility is consistent with our hypothesis that direct support provision and RQ are more closely linked in European Americans' conceptualizations of close relationships than in those of Japanese. Across Studies 1 and 2, we have documented that RQ is more strongly positively associated with perceived emotion-focused support provision and emotion-focused support behaviors among European Americans relative to Asian Americans and Japanese people, respectively.

Together, Studies 1 and 2 provide additional support for the documented dissociation between perceived support and actual support behavior (e.g., Wethington & Kessler, 1986). In Study 1, observed RQ predicted emotion-focused support behaviors among European Americans, whereas in Study 2, perceived RQ predicted perceived emotion-focused support provision among European Americans. We believe that the diverse methodology across Studies 1 and 2 strengthens our findings by providing conceptual replication across behavioral observation and self-report methods.

Study 2 also documented that European Americans reported providing more support than did Japanese overall, providing additional support for cultural differences in the relative importance of direct support for close relationships. This finding corroborates previous research documenting cultural differences in explicit support seeking (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004). However, we did not replicate J. M. Chen et al. (2012) in which a cultural difference was found in the amount of emotion-focused versus problem-focused support provided.

This difference could be due to Study 2 using more items to measure support provision than did J. M. Chen et al. or to the fact that our items were embedded among additional exploratory items. Moreover, because the paradigm asks participants to recall a close other's stressor, it is possible that natural variation in stressor type could have contributed to the different results.

Study 3

Studies 1 and 2 have shown that RQ is more strongly associated with a direct form of support provision, emotion-focused support, in individualistic cultural contexts compared with collectivistic cultural contexts. The primary goal of Study 3 was to determine support provision processes that characterize high-quality relationships among East Asians.

As reviewed previously, East Asians are more likely than European Americans to seek implicit support, spending time with their close others without the potential relational consequences of discussing the stressor (Kim et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2007). However, in past research, implicit support has been discussed in the context of support seeking, is based on the support seeker's intentions and feelings, and does not capture the analogous process in the context of support provision. In Study 3, we aimed to investigate analogous processes from the perspective of the provider. As the initial investigation of this topic, Study 3 was somewhat exploratory. Building on previous research, we generated predictions investigating three support processes that are more indirect than the typically studied direct forms of support provision.

European Americans tend to view their close others as separated from the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In contrast, East Asians view their close others as inextricably linked to the self and their relationships are characterized by interdependence and mutual obligation (Goodwin & Findlay, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Consequently, East Asians may be more psychologically engaged in their close other's situation compared with European Americans such that they are more likely to be preoccupied with worry and concern in response to a close other's stressor. Furthermore, East Asians may be more active in monitoring their close others' stressful situations, particularly because their close others are less likely to talk about their stressors and how they are coping (Kim et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2007). Finally, as an alternative to direct forms of support provision and as a corollary to implicit support seeking, we proposed that individuals can provide support by spending time with their close others without mentioning the stressor, that is, providing companionship. Given that direct forms of support provision were indicative of high-quality relationships among European Americans more so than among East Asians in Studies 1 and 2, we expected that companionship would be more indicative of RQ among East Asians compared with European Americans.

In sum, Study 3 investigated whether RQ differentially predicted direct and indirect support processes among East Asian Americans and European Americans. Of particular interest was whether RQ predicted three more indirect support processes among East Asians compared with European Americans: worrying about the close other, monitoring the close other's situation, and providing companionship. We also sought to replicate Studies 1 and 2 by testing the relationship between RQ and emotion-focused support provision among Asian Americans and European Americans using self-report methodology. In Study 2, we found that RQ had a small but statistically significant positive association with emotion-focused support provision among Japanese. Because Asian Americans are exposed to the cultural values and norms of European Americans, they may value emotional expression and talking in their relationships more than do East Asians in Asia. Indeed, Asian Americans are more likely than East Asians to seek emotion-focused support from their close others (Taylor et al., 2004). Therefore, it was reasonable to expect that the differences between Asian Americans and European Americans would be smaller than those among Japanese and European Americans for predictors of emotion-focused support provision.

Method

Participants. A total of 332 undergraduates participated in the study for partial course credit. The sample included 147 U.S.-born European Americans (118 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.27$ years, $SD = 1.57$) and 184 East Asian Americans (120 U.S.-born, 61 Asia-born; 132 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 19.41$ years, $SD = 1.45$).

Materials and procedure. Participants completed the online study in the laboratory in groups from one to four. As in Study 2, participants first recalled a situation in which a friend had recently endured a stressful event. They briefly described the situation and rated it on negativity and stressfulness. The ratings were averaged for a composite score of stressor severity: Asians, $r(181) = .59$, $p < .001$; Euros, $r(144) = .48$, $p < .001$. As in Study 2, we did not instruct participants to think of a friend with any particular ethnicity or gender.

Then participants completed the measures of support provision and RQ. The order of these two measures was counter-balanced and did not moderate the results presented below. As in Study 2, the RQ was measured by the sum of 15 items from the CSI ($\alpha = .97$; Funk & Rogge, 2007). We also included the Gere and MacDonald (2013) items to be consistent with Study 2. The support measures were identical to Study 2, with the addition of new items created to measure three new processes: worrying, monitoring, and companionship. Each new process was measured with three items. The worrying items measured the extent to which participants thought about and were preoccupied with their friends' problems ($\alpha_{\text{AsianAm}} = .86$,

$\alpha_{\text{EuroAm}} = .88$). The measure of monitoring assessed the extent to which participants actively checked on their close other's situation and well-being ($\alpha_{\text{AsianAm}} = .86$, $\alpha_{\text{EuroAm}} = .87$). The companionship measure assessed the extent to which participants spent time with their close others without talking about the specific stressor ($\alpha_{\text{AsianAm}} = .83$, $\alpha_{\text{EuroAm}} = .81$). At the end of the survey, participants were thanked and debriefed.

An exploratory factor analysis of all items (emotion-focused, problem-focused, worrying, monitoring, and companionship) yielded three factors: direct support (emotion-focused and problem-focused), companionship, and attentiveness (worrying and monitoring). See the Online Supplemental Material for details of the factor analysis. Based on this analysis, we collapsed indirect support into the two support types of companionship and attentiveness, and our analyses examined support type as a four-level factor (emotion-focused, problem-focused, companionship, and attentiveness).

Results and Discussion

Severity of stressor and level of relationship quality. As in Study 2, European Americans rated their close others' stressors as more negative ($M = 6.21$, $SD = 0.95$) than did Asian Americans ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.30$), $F(1, 329) = 20.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. There was a marginal difference in European Americans' ($M = 75.22$, $SD = 15.45$) and Asians Americans' RQ ($M = 72.37$, $SD = 14.75$), $F(1, 329) = 2.93$, $p = .09$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$. Our subsequent analyses controlled for stressor negativity to insure that cultural differences observed were not due to this confound.

Amount of support provided. Tables 3 and 4 display the zero-order correlations between the five types of support measured (emotion-focused, problem-focused, attentiveness, and companionship) for each cultural group.

A 2 (Culture) \times 4 (Support type: emotion-focused, problem-focused, attentiveness, and companionship) ANCOVA controlling for stressor severity revealed a marginally significant main effect of support type, $F(4, 984) = 2.29$, $p = .08$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, that was moderated by a significant culture by support type interaction, $F(3, 984) = 9.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. The within-culture comparisons revealed that Asian Americans provided more problem-focused support ($M = 5.16$, $SD = 1.63$) than emotion-focused support ($M = 4.83$, $SD = 1.63$), $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, and that European Americans provided more emotion-focused support ($M = 5.28$, $SD = 1.58$) than problem-focused support ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.58$), $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. These findings replicated J. M. Chen et al. (2012). Refer to Table 5 for all descriptive statistics and pairwise comparisons. These comparisons revealed that problem-focused support was the most common support type provided by Asian Americans and that emotion-focused support was the most common support type provided by European Americans.

Table 3. Zero-Order Correlations Between the Four Types of Support Provision Among Asian Americans in Study 3.

	1	2	3	4
1. Emotion-focused	—	.57***	.69***	.59***
2. Problem-focused		—	.54***	.41***
3. Attentiveness			—	.55***
4. Companionship				—

*** $p < .001$.**Table 4.** Zero-Order Correlations Between the Four Types of Support Provision Among European Americans in Study 3.

	1	2	3	4
1. Emotion-focused	—	.43***	.59***	.47***
2. Problem-focused		—	.41***	.26**
3. Attentiveness			—	.52***
4. Companionship				—

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.**Table 5.** Amount of Support Provision by Type in Study 3.

	Asian Americans	European Americans
Emotion-focused	4.83 (1.59) _a	5.28 (1.59) _a
Problem-focused	5.16 (1.59) _b	4.68 (1.59) _b
Attentiveness	4.74 (1.36) _{a,c}	4.79 (1.37) _b
Companionship	4.34 (1.63) _d	4.34 (1.64) _c

Note. Means in the same column with different subscripts differ at $p < .05$. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Between-culture differences were significant at $p < .01$ for emotion-focused and problem-focused support only.

The role of relationship quality. We conducted moderated regressions to test whether culture and RQ interacted to predict each support process above and beyond differences in stressor severity. For each of the regressions, stressor severity was entered in Step 1. In Step 2, we entered culture (0 = *Asian Americans*, 1 = *European Americans*) and RQ. In Step 3, we entered the culture by RQ interaction term.

Emotion-focused support. Stressor severity positively predicted emotion-focused support provision, $\beta = .28$ (95% CI = [.19, .36]), $t(329) = 5.18$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .08$. European Americans provided more emotion-focused support than did Asian Americans, $\beta = .10$ (95% CI = [.01, .19]), $t(327) = 2.06$, $p = .04$, and individuals provided more emotion-focused support in their higher quality relationships, $\beta = .45$ (95% CI = [.36, .54]), $t(327) = 9.62$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .22$. There was no interaction, $t(326) = -0.86$, $p = .39$, $\Delta R^2 = .001$. Thus, both European Americans and Asian Americans report providing more emotion-focused support in higher quality relationships. Contrary to Study 2, Study 3 did not find that RQ more strongly predicted emotion-focused support provision among European Americans than among East Asians. This may be because Study 3 was conducted

with Asian Americans, who are bicultural (e.g., LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993) and tend to exhibit social support processes reflecting this biculturalism (e.g., Taylor et al., 2004).

Across three studies using behavioral and self-report measures, we have shown a consistent, strong positive association between emotion-focused support and RQ among European Americans. The results for Asian Americans have been less consistent. Namely, the Study 3 results are inconsistent with the behavioral results for Asian Americans in Study 1, in which we found no relationship between RQ and emotion-focused support provision. There were a few differences between Studies 1 and 3 that could have contributed to the inconsistency between Asian Americans' provision behaviors and self-reports. Study 1 presented all participants with the same laboratory stressor, a speech task. In Study 3, participants reported recently occurring stressors of the close others, and these stressors might have been more amenable to emotion-focused support (e.g., a romantic breakup, a death in the family) compared with a speech task. In addition, we were able to predict support provision from RQ and culture controlling for support seeking behaviors in Study 1 but not in Study 3. Finally, it is possible that Asian Americans' self-report is inconsistent with their behaviors, such that they perceive themselves to provide more emotion-focused support in higher quality relationships but their behaviors are not in line with this perception. This potential perception-behavior inconsistency could be more common among bicultural individuals than monocultural individuals because bicultural people are navigating two different cultural worldviews and value systems. In general, biculturalism may lead individuals to have more inconsistency between their thoughts or intentions and their actual behaviors (e.g., wanting to provide emotional support but providing advice instead). These possibilities highlight factors that deserve attention in future research.

Problem-focused support. Stressor severity was associated with increased problem-focused support provision, $\beta = .21$ (95% CI = [.10, .32]), $t(329) = 3.92$, $p < .001$. Asian Americans provided more problem-focused support than did European Americans, $\beta = -.17$ (95% CI = [-.27, -.07]), $t(327) = -3.22$, $p = .001$, and RQ was positively associated with the provision of problem-focused support, $\beta = .27$ (95% CI = [.17, .37]), $t(327) = 5.22$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .09$. There was a marginal interaction, $\beta = -.12$ (95% CI = [-.27, .03]), $t(326) = -1.64$, $p = .10$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$. RQ marginally more strongly predicted problem-focused support provision by Asian Americans, $\beta = .35$ (95% CI = [.21, .49]), $t(326) = 4.93$, $p < .001$, than by European Americans, $\beta = .18$ (95% CI = [.03, .33]), $t(326) = 2.37$, $p = .02$. These results are consistent with Study 2, in which we also found a positive association between RQ and problem-focused support in both Eastern and Western cultural groups using self-report measures. Given that we found a marginal culture by RQ interaction

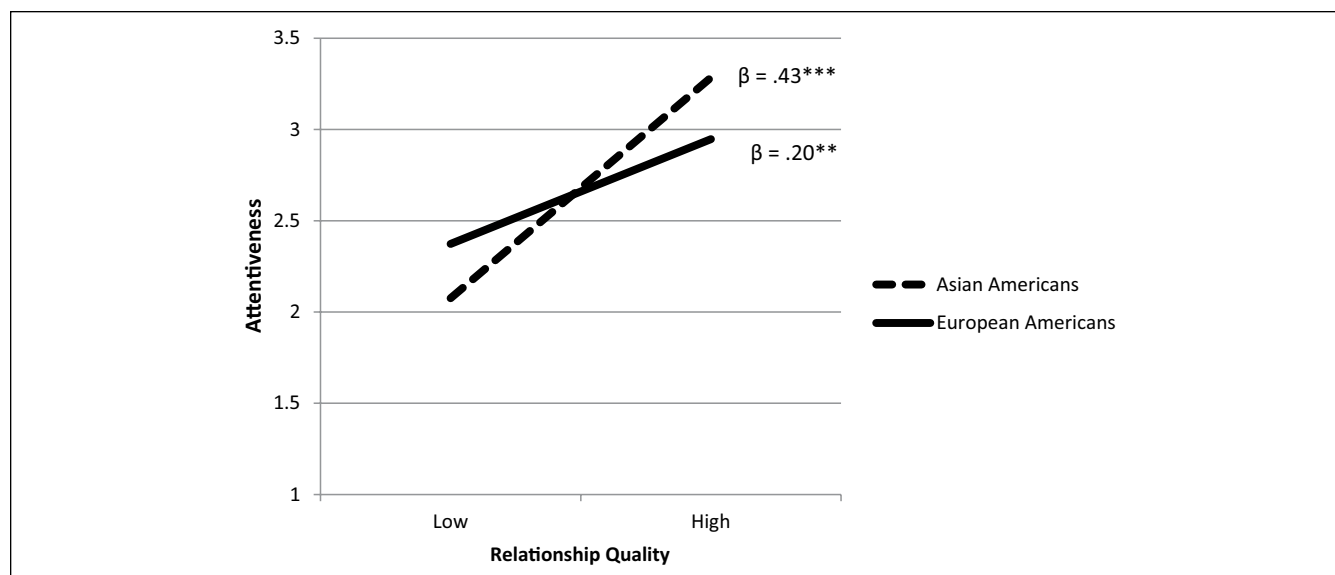


Figure 4. Cultural differences in the association between relationship quality and attentiveness (worrying about and checking on the recipient) in Study 3, controlling for stressor severity.

** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

predicting problem-focused support only in Study 3, the robustness of this finding should be investigated in follow-up research. The current investigation has found consistent positive associations between RQ and problem-focused support for both European Americans and East Asians in our survey studies.

Attentiveness. Stressor severity positively predicted attentiveness, $\beta = .33$ (95% CI = [.23, .43]), $t(329) = 6.39$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .11$. In Step 2, we entered culture, $\beta = -.01$, $t(327) = -.21$, $p = .84$, and RQ, $\beta = .32$ (95% CI = [.22, .42]), $t(327) = 6.24$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .10$. As RQ increased, participants spent more time worrying about and monitoring their close other's situation. This association was qualified by a significant interaction, $\beta = -.16$ (95% CI = [-.29, -.03]), $t(326) = -2.31$, $p = .02$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$. Refer to Figure 4 for a visualization of the interaction. RQ strongly predicted attentiveness to the close other among Asian Americans, $\beta = .42$ (95% CI = [.30, .56]), $t(326) = 6.35$, $p < .001$, and to a lesser extent among European Americans, $\beta = .20$ (95% CI = [.06, .34]), $t(326) = 2.78$, $p = .012$. At low levels of RQ, there was a trend such that Asian Americans ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 2.08$) were less attentive to their close others compared with European Americans ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 2.37$), $\beta = -.11$, $t(326) = 1.51$, $p = .13$. At high levels of RQ, there was a trend such that Asian Americans ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 3.28$) were more attentive than European Americans ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 2.95$), $\beta = -.11$ (95% CI = [-.26, .02]), $t(326) = -1.73$, $p = .09$.

This finding reflects the idea that high-quality relationships in East Asian contexts are truly interdependent, such that support providers are more psychologically engaged in the stressors of these close others. Low-quality relationships

among East Asians may reflect lower attentiveness similar to the lack of consideration given to out-group members (see Yuki, 2003). In contrast, consistent with Western conceptualizations of relationships as external to the self, European Americans' attentiveness was less strongly linked to the quality of their close relationships.

Companionship. Stressor severity was not significantly associated with companionship, $\beta = .09$, $t(329) = 1.65$, $p = .10$, $R^2 = .01$. In Step 2, we entered culture, $\beta = -.03$, $t(327) = -.46$, $p = .65$, and RQ, $\beta = .28$ (95% CI = [.18, .39]), $t(327) = 5.39$, $p < .001$, $\Delta R^2 = .09$. RQ positively predicted providing companionship to a close other enduring a stressful event. There was also a marginally significant interaction, $\beta = -.14$ (95% CI = [-.28, .008]), $t(326) = -1.87$, $p = .06$, $\Delta R^2 = .01$. RQ predicted companionship more strongly among Asian Americans, $\beta = .38$ (95% CI = [.24, .52]), $t(326) = 5.21$, $p < .001$, than among European Americans, $\beta = .18$ (95% CI = [.03, .33]), $t(326) = 2.32$, $p = .02$. There was no cultural difference in companionship at low levels of RQ, $t(326) = 1.02$, $p = .31$. At high levels of RQ, there was a trend such that Asian Americans ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 4.48$) provided more companionship than did European Americans ($M_{\text{predicted}} = 4.08$), $\beta = -.12$ (95% CI = [-.27, .03]), $t(326) = -1.61$, $p = .11$.

In sum, Study 3 provided interesting insights as to how RQ manifests differently depending on the cultural context by exploring how it relates to more indirect forms of support provision. Specifically, RQ was more closely associated with attentiveness and companionship among Asian Americans compared with European Americans.

General Discussion

Although close relationships are universal, some aspects of the ways in which people derive social resources from those relationships depend on the cultural context in which the relationship occurs. Across three studies, we observed several cross-cultural differences. European Americans reported providing more direct forms of support than Japanese and more emotion-focused support than Asian Americans. Furthermore, RQ more strongly predicted reported emotion-focused support provision among European Americans than Japanese and emotion-focused support behaviors among European Americans compared with Asian Americans. Therefore, our research has consistently linked emotion-focused support provision with RQ among European Americans across samples and measures. Thus, the availability of direct emotion-focused support is one factor that distinguishes high-quality relationships from low-quality relationships among European Americans. Given the importance of emotion-focused support in European American relationships, it would not be surprising if the exchange of these types of support also predicts relationship satisfaction and commitment over time.

Our research builds upon past work documenting that emotion-focused support provision is normative in European American relationships (e.g., J. M. Chen et al., 2012; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Taylor et al., 2007). Our findings are consistent with research documenting that Westerners psychologically and physiologically benefit from emotional expression (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007, 2009) and emotionally responsive support (e.g., Collins & Feeney, 2004; Feeney & Collins, 2015).

In contrast, emotion-focused support was more weakly related to RQ among East Asians compared with European Americans. Although RQ was positively associated with self-reported emotion-focused support provision by Japanese and Asian Americans in Studies 2 and 3, RQ did not predict emotion-focused support behaviors among Asian Americans in Study 1. Therefore, the relationship between RQ and emotion-focused support among Asians was weaker and less reliable compared with European Americans.

Appendix

Support seeking	Emotion-focused support provision	Problem-focused support provision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I don't want to give a speech. • Don't laugh. • Can you not make fun of me? It's going to be so funny. • What's another word for ____? • What do you like about UCSB? • I don't know what the hell I'm going to say. I have three minutes to prepare! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can do it! • It's a positive, relaxed environment. • You'll be fine. • Nice! (thumbs up) • It's fine. • Don't get nervous, it's just me. • That's good. • It's just an experiment, so you can screw up. It's not like you're getting graded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you talk about the beautiful landscape? • Tell a joke. • Are you going to have a paper? I don't think they're going to let you read it off. • Try to sell the school, remember? • What are you going to say? • You could write about how it is such a diverse environment . . .

Nonetheless, we found that RQ more strongly predicted problem-focused support, attentiveness, and companionship among Asian Americans relative to European Americans. Thus, this research shows that problem-solving, interdependence, and companionship play a stronger role in distinguishing high from low-quality relationships among Asian Americans than among European Americans. Because Study 3 was the initial investigation into more indirect forms of social support, additional research is necessary to more fully understand the ways in which East Asians derive benefits from their optimal close relationships.

This research may shed light on mental health disparities between East Asian Americans and European Americans. Although East Asians derive benefits from implicit support (Taylor et al., 2007), there are certainly occasions when all individuals need emotion-focused support to help them cope with negative events. Whereas European Americans can rely on their close others to provide emotion-focused support regardless of how much they seek, the association between emotion-focused support provision and RQ is more tenuous among East Asians. Namely, East Asians are less likely to seek support *and* less likely to receive emotion-focused support, even in their high-quality relationships. As a result, East Asians may be less likely than European Americans to be able to fulfill their need for emotion-focused support, if and when it occurs. In conjunction with the fact that East Asians are also less likely to seek professional mental health services (Mojaverian, Hashimoto, & Kim, 2013; see Leong & Lau, 2001), our results may help to illuminate why Asian Americans, who may be aware of the discrepancy between their high-quality relationships and Western models of ideal forms of support and coping, may be more susceptible to mental health disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2007).

People rely on their close friends and family when coping with stressful times. When stressful things happen—a looming deadline, a disappointing job interview, a serious medical diagnosis—people draw the strength to cope from their friends and family. Our research extends past work to show that high-quality relationships are characterized by different practices and norms depending on their cultural context.

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Notes

1. Of the 58 Asian participants (in the 29 friendship pairs), 26 participants were born in East Asia (China, Japan, or Korea) and 31 participants were born in the United States. One participant did not specify his or her birthplace.
2. We did not use the Gere and MacDonald (2013) measure of relationship quality (RQ) in our analyses. Many of the items emphasized emotional intimacy and validation of the self, which are more valid characteristics of high-quality relationships in Western than Eastern cultures.
3. The reported results are largely unchanged when including the dropped items in the RQ composite. A detailed description of these analyses is available upon request.

Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at <http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

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