Bicultural Identity and Social Support Seeking Processes: The Effects of Cultural Priming Among East Asian Americans

Maggie Yao, Delancey C. Wu, and Nancy L. Collins*
Department of Psychological & Brain Sciences, University of California, Santa Barbara

ABSTRACT. Research has discovered that those from individualistic cultures are more likely to seek social support and view it as effective when coping with stress compared to those from collectivistic cultures. However, many individuals have a bicultural background rooted in both individualistic and collectivistic values, which can enable them to adapt their support seeking behavior to different contexts, depending on which cultural values are salient. The present research evaluated the effects of identity priming on support seeking and support expectations among East Asian Americans. Participants (N = 146) recruited from undergraduate populations were randomly primed with either American (individualistic) or East Asian (collectivistic) cultural icons, followed by questionnaires evaluating their support seeking behaviors and perceptions of support for a current stressor. Generational status and cultural identification were assessed as potential moderators. Contrary to our hypothesis, cultural prime had no impact on support seeking behavior, but did affect perceptions of support. Participants primed with East Asian (vs. American) icons perceived significantly higher overall support ($b = -0.42, \beta = -.21, p = .014$) and family support ($b = -0.49, \beta = -.18, p = .038$). We also found that those who strongly identified with their American identity reported significantly higher overall perceived support ($b_{simple} = -0.71, \beta_{simple} = -.73, p = .003, \Delta R^2 = .030$) and friend support ($b_{simple} = -0.72, \beta_{simple} = -.68, p = .005$) when primed with East Asian (vs. American) icons. This study considers the within-group differences among East Asian Americans and expands understanding of the relationship between culture and social support.

Keywords: social support, culture, cultural identification, bicultural, priming

**ABSTRACT.** When people experience stressful events, they can utilize a wide range of coping strategies. Among these strategies, seeking and receiving social support has been shown to act as a buffer against the adverse mental and physical effects of stress (Cohen & McKay, 2020; Seeman, 1996). Social support is defined as information from others that leads one to feel genuinely cared for, respected, and...
included in a social network of reciprocal obligations (Cobb, 1976). A large body of research has shown the significant role of social support in fostering health, well-being, and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Cohen & Syme, 1985; Collins & Feeney, 2000; Uchino, 2008). Nonetheless, a growing body of research has identified important cultural variation in support seeking behavior and perceptions.

One important cultural dimension that can moderate the effect of social support is individualism vs. collectivism (Wu et al., 2021). Individualistic cultures value personal autonomy whereas collectivistic cultures value interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and these differences in self-concept influence how individuals from these cultures perceive social support. However, bicultural East Asian Americans are exposed to both individualistic and collectivistic values depending on the objective and subjective context they are in. Although research has examined cross-cultural differences in support seeking behaviors, there is minimal understanding of how identity priming can affect specifically bicultural individuals. Hence, the purpose of this study was to investigate how priming East Asian Americans with their ethnic (i.e., East Asian) or national (i.e., American) identity would affect their support seeking behaviors, with generational status and cultural identification as possible moderators to consider differences in level of cultural exposure.

Social Support
When faced with stressors, individuals often confide in members of their social circle for support. Past literature has shown the positive implications of social support on the mental and physical well-being of support seekers (e.g., Cohen & Syme, 1985; Uchino, 2008). For example, emotional and instrumental support from family can significantly reduce caregiver burden, which has been linked to severe health issues (Mashinchi et al., 2021). Some studies have also suggested that social support is effective in aiding recovery from disease, adaptation to chronic illness, and degree of psychiatric disturbance (Cohen & McKay, 2020; Uchino, 2008).

Although the positive effects of social support are well-documented, some studies have shown that there can also be negative consequences of seeking support. Bolger et al. (2000) found that participants who were aware that they received support can suffer an emotional cost, potentially as a result of feeling inequity within the relationship or that they are being pitied for not being able to support themselves (Dunbar et al., 1998). Explicitly seeking support may also negatively impact close relationships, especially when individuals expect that support should be provided without directly asking for it (Mills & Clark, 1982). These findings suggest that, although the benefits of social support seem to be universally applicable (Taylor, 2011), other factors can moderate the effectiveness of social support, with an important one being culture.

Culture and Relationships
There are established differences in ideologies and values regarding the self and others between individualistic (e.g., United States of America) and collectivistic cultures (e.g., China, Japan). Individualistic cultures emphasize an independent model of the self that regards individuals as possessing the freedom to make their own decisions and express their beliefs without many social obligations (e.g., Adams & Plaut, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This emphasis on autonomy allows individuals to freely choose their relationships and, therefore, face less severe consequences when the harmony of the group is not maintained. Collectivistic cultures, on the other hand, emphasize an interdependent model of the self that considers individuals to be connected and bound to others with a responsibility to prioritize the goals of the group above individual needs (e.g., Kim et al., 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Relationships in these cultures are assigned rather than voluntarily chosen, meaning there is a great sense of duty associated with them. As a result, those from collectivistic cultures face severe consequences when the harmony of the group is disrupted, thereby hindering their tendencies to self-disclose their personal stressors and conflicts to others (Schug et al., 2010). In short, personal comfort is often prioritized over group harmony within individualistic cultures, whereas the reverse is the case within collectivistic cultures.

Culture and Social Support
Past research has discovered cultural differences in the way that social support is sought and perceived (Taylor et al., 2004). Generally, those from individualistic cultures are more likely to seek social support as a coping mechanism and appraise it to be helpful, whereas those from collectivistic cultures are less likely to seek support and tend to view social support as less effective (Kim et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2004). Other work has shown that Asian Americans are less likely than European Americans to seek social support because they are more concerned about relational complications, such as disturbing group harmony and losing face (Taylor et al., 2004). Overall, individualistic cultures are characterized by a focus on the self and emotional expression, whereas collectivistic cultures emphasize group harmony and emotional inhibition.

Although we might expect that East Asian Americans
Bicultural Identity and Social Support Seeking

Yao, Wu, and Collins

would lean more toward collectivistic values and seek less social support, many Asian Americans have a bicultural background rooted in both individualistic and collectivistic values. This dichotomy may place them in a difficult position to regulate contrasting, and sometimes conflicting, goals. In these circumstances, social contextual cues could guide their behavior. Although an abundance of research has examined cross-cultural differences in social support processes, little research has examined within-culture variation and how different identities within the self can play a role in shaping social support behavior and expectations for Asian Americans. Therefore, in the current study, we utilized a priming methodology to investigate if manipulating the saliency of one’s American or East Asian identity can influence support seeking behavior and perceptions. Addressing this gap in the literature will help overcome the common limitation in cultural research of over-aggregating Asian Americans into a single category. Grouping all Asian Americans together does not consider important within-group variation of different Asian and American cultures, which ultimately contributes to the misrepresentation and underrepresentation of this population in the literature (Shah & Kandula, 2020). Thus, examining within-group differences among bicultural East Asian Americans using experimental priming can provide a more accurate understanding of how culture shapes social support processes and promote greater cultural representation and equity in research. Another important cultural angle to examine is the effects of acculturation and enculturation.

The Role of Acculturation and Enculturation

When evaluating social support behaviors among Asian Americans, it is important to note that their values could differ depending on the degree of their acculturation to American culture or enculturation to Asian culture. Acculturation is defined as the degree to which people are assimilating to the norms of a dominant culture, while still upholding values of their heritage culture (Redfield et al., 1936). On the other hand, enculturation means the acquisition and preservation of the norms of one’s heritage culture (Miller et al., 2011). Generational status refers to one’s place of birth and the age at which one immigrates to a new region, and is often used as a proxy measure for acculturation and enculturation levels. For instance, one study found that foreign-born participants reported higher levels of behavioral enculturation (e.g., enjoying Asian language TV), whereas U.S.-born participants reported higher levels of behavioral acculturation (e.g., enjoying English language TV), suggesting that first-generation Asian Americans emphasize the values of their heritage culture more, and thus, may seek less support than later-generation Asian Americans (Miller et al., 2011). Furthermore, there are generational differences in the use of social support when coping with stress, in that Asian nationals and immigrants reported significantly less support seeking behavior than later-generation Asian Americans (Kim et al., 2008; Taylor et al., 2004). Similar results were found in a study about mental health services, where Asian immigrants utilized mental health services at significantly lower rates compared to U.S.-born Asian Americans (Abe-Kim et al., 2007). This line of research suggests that generational status can influence help-seeking behaviors and attitudes toward social support and mental health care, which can be critical in maintaining well-being. Consequently, it is important to investigate how generational status could influence support seeking behavior and moderate the effects of the priming manipulation in the present study.

Although generational status can be a useful proxy for one’s level of acculturation and enculturation, cultural identification and cultural orientation may also be useful. Cultural identification can be defined as how much individuals identify strongly (vs. weakly) with their culture. Research has found that people with stronger cultural identification are more likely to endorse and conform to that culture's values and norms (e.g., Jetten et al., 2002; Wan et al., 2007). Specifically, Jetten et al. (2002) found that, within an individualist culture, those who strongly (vs. weakly) identified with their national identity were more individualist in their internalized beliefs and behaviors, whereas the opposite effect occurred within a collectivist culture. Moreover, a study that utilized a similar priming approach as ours concluded that, among bicultural Asian Americans who strongly (vs. weakly) identified as American, priming them with American icons led to assimilative responses, such that their judgments shifted toward the norms of American culture (Zou et al., 2008). This suggests that bicultural individuals’ responses to social cues can depend on their cultural identity motives and how personally connected they feel toward their cultural group. Cultural orientation is defined as minority individuals’ degree of affiliation with their ethnic and majority cultures (Ying, 1995); in the case of our study and based on past research, we wanted to focus on Asian Americans’ individualistic-collectivistic orientation. In summary, because generational status may not tell the whole story of one's personal connection to one’s culture, we also investigated the roles of more subjective measures of acculturation (cultural identification and cultural orientation) as exploratory moderators.
Present Study
This study investigated the impact of cultural identity priming on support seeking behavior among East Asian American undergraduates. We utilized priming methods to experimentally manipulate the saliency of one’s national or ethnic identity. We decided to use priming based on past studies that have found that individualistic and collectivistic values can be primed with American and Asian imagery, respectively (Hong et al., 1997, 2000). Further, similar approaches have been found to affect social support processes. Specifically, Kim et al (2006) found that Asian Americans sought more support when primed with self-goals (which were intended to activate aspects of individualism), whereas there were no effects of priming on European Americans. This supports the idea that making individualistic and collectivistic values salient can motivate one to behave according to those values.

We then examined how identity (experimentally primed) shaped help-seeking behaviors in terms of how likely participants would be to seek instrumental and emotional support and how much they perceived it to be available and effective in the face of a stressor. We also examined individual differences that might moderate the effect of priming on support seeking behavior and perceptions. Generational status was assessed as a potential moderator to consider how environmental exposure can influence social behaviors. Cultural identification was another potential moderator, serving as a proxy for enculturation and acculturation levels. Finally, we examined cultural orientation (individualism and collectivism) as exploratory moderators.

We hypothesized that priming East Asian Americans with their Asian identity would make aspects of collectivism salient and lead them to seek and perceive less social support. On the other hand, priming them with their American identity would make aspects of individualism salient and, therefore, prompt them to seek and perceive more social support. Generational status was also expected to predict support seeking behavior and expectations. Later generations, who have acculturated to be more individualistic, should seek and perceive more social support in comparison to earlier generations. In addition, we predicted that generational status would moderate the effect of the primes. Specifically, we predicted that priming would be less effective in later generations because their American identity is more likely to be dominant and cognitively accessible (and their Asian identity is less accessible), making them less impacted by the Asian primes. Therefore, later generations should show less change in their behavior (as a function of the primes) compared to earlier generations. Similar patterns were expected for cultural identification, such that those who identify strongly with their American identity should be more acculturated and, thus, seek and perceive more support in comparison to those who identify strongly with their Asian identity. For the same reasons as generational status, the primes should also be less effective among participants with a stronger American (vs. Asian) identity. Given the history of underrepresentation of this population in the psychology literature (Shah & Kandula, 2020), we sought to conduct vital research that primarily focuses on the behaviors and perspectives of a specific Asian subgroup and how those may vary across individuals, despite their shared cultural background, as well as offer additional insight on generational status and cultural identification as potential moderators.

Method
Participants
A total of 146 undergraduate students (female = 65.1%; age, M = 20.29, SD = 1.68, range = 18–25) who self-identified as East Asian American took part in the study. We restricted the age range to focus on young adults (undergraduates), as this is a critical developmental period that is characterized by identity formation (e.g., Erikson, 1993), and to reduce noise that may be caused by including participants outside this age range. A sensitivity analysis conducted in GPower (Faul et al., 2007) for multiple regression [fixed model, R² increase, N = 146, α = .05, power = .80, tested predictors = 1, total predictors = 4], indicated that our sample size was well-powered for detecting relatively small effects (f² = .06).

Only 21.9% of participants were born outside the United States. Most classified themselves as second generation (55.5%) or beyond (17.8%). Participants were Chinese/Chinese American (51.4%), Japanese/Japanese American (14.4%), Korean/Korean American (13.7%), Taiwanese/Taiwanese American (12.3%), Mongolian/Mongolian American (0.7%), and Other (7.5%). See Table 1 for demographic information. An additional 44 participants enrolled in the study but were excluded because they did not meet eligibility requirements (i.e., age, East Asian background, undergraduate status; n = 16), failed to complete the study (n = 24), or showed a pattern of fabricated responses (e.g., marking “2” on every single scale item; n = 4).

Participants were recruited through the SONA undergraduate research pool (n = 83) and paid research pool (n = 63) at a public university. Participants received 0.5 course credits or a $5 Amazon e-gift card. To further incentivize participation, participants were able to enter a random drawing for two $50 Amazon e-gift cards. Additional recruitment was done through social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, GroupMe, Instagram).
Procedure
After obtaining approval from the University of California, Santa Barbara Institutional Review Board, participants were recruited for an online survey study about identity and social reactions. After providing informed consent, participants were randomly assigned to the American priming condition or the East Asian priming condition and presented with the associated set of cultural icons. Following the priming procedure, participants were asked to describe a current stressor (i.e., health, social, academic, financial, other) they were facing in an open-ended format for two minutes. If they were coping with multiple stressors, we asked them to select the most distressing one. After describing their stressor, their expected coping strategies (instrumental and emotional support seeking) were assessed. Participants then reported their expectations of their friends and family’s willingness to support them, as well as the perceived effectiveness of the support they would receive from friends and family. The final survey measured their cultural orientation. At the end of the study, participants completed demographic questions and were then given a debriefing statement and asked for permission to keep their data for research purposes.

Measures and Materials
Priming Materials
Participants were primed using an adaptation of the priming method from Hong et al. (2000), which exposes participants to a set of cultural icons created to activate the individualistic or collectivistic values. Ten types of icons were used per priming condition (20 total), such as symbols (i.e., the American flag vs. a Chinese dragon) and landmarks (i.e., the Statue of Liberty vs. the Genghis Khan monument). Pilot testing was conducted to ensure that the icons were culturally relevant. Participants were randomly assigned to be primed by either American or East Asian cultural icons. In both conditions, the 10 icons were shown all at once on the same page. After viewing the icons, participants were asked to select the one picture they felt most connected to and describe in an open-ended format how they identified with the picture, why they picked the picture, and/or what the picture made them think of in two minutes. As a manipulation check, they were asked to choose if the icons were representative of American or Asian culture. All participants chose the correct cultural category.

Use of Social Support
To assess differences in social support seeking, participants completed an 8-item questionnaire (adapted from the Brief COPE scale; Carver, 1997), which assessed their use of various coping strategies in response to a stressor. We utilized the adapted scale used by Kim et al. (2006). The primary outcomes of interest included instrumental support ($\alpha = .84$) and emotional support ($\alpha = .89$), which were both measured with 4-item subscales. Participants were given the following instructions: “With the stressor you have just described in mind, please rate the following statements based on how likely you will utilize that strategy to cope with the stressor.” Responses were given on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). Sample items included “I will talk to someone about how I feel” for emotional support and “I will ask people who have had similar experiences what they did” for instrumental support.

Overall Perceived Support
To assess participants’ expectations about their friends’ and family’s willingness to provide support and the effectiveness of that received support, we used a 4-item scale adapted from Kim et al. (2006). Participants reported how much they expected their friends and family to be willing to support them in coping with their stressor (e.g., “With the social stressor you have just described in mind, how much do you expect your friends to be willing to help you in coping with it?”) and how effective that support would be in resolving their stressor (e.g., “With the stressor you have just described in mind, how effective do you expect your family to be in helping you overcome it?”). Responses were given on a 7-point scale from 1 (not at all willing/effective) to 7 (very willing/effective). We computed an overall perceived support index by averaging all four items ($\alpha = .64$). However, the reliability was somewhat low because the friend items were not consistently correlated with the family items ($r$’s ranging from .07 to .62). Thus, we also computed two 2-item subscales to measure perceived friend support ($\alpha = .69$) and family support ($\alpha = .72$) due to the low reliability of the combined index and past literature demonstrating differences between friend and family support (e.g., Poulin et al., 2012).

Generational Status and Cultural Identification
To assess generational status, participants were asked to identify their generation, with higher numbers indicating that their family has been in the U.S. longer. Although generational status is typically coded as a dichotomous categorical variable, we retained it as a continuous, interval variable to capture the full variance and nuance of exposure to American culture. Seven participants who classified themselves as “Other” were excluded in all analyses involving generational status. See Table 1 for the distribution of these responses.

To measure cultural identification, we asked participants to rate their level of identification with their
American or East Asian culture (i.e., “Thinking about your feelings towards American and East Asian culture, how much do you identify with each?”). Responses were given on a 7-point scale from –3 (mostly identify with East Asian culture) to 3 (mostly identify with American culture), where higher numbers represented identifying more strongly with American culture. Generational status and cultural identification were positively correlated with each other ($r = .42, p < .001$). As would be expected, participants with later generational status reported greater identification with American (vs. Asian) culture.

### Cultural Orientation

Cultural orientation was measured as an additional exploratory moderator variable using items adapted from Oyserman et al. (2002) and using the adaptation from Kim et al. (2016). This 14-item scale assessed individuals’ orientation toward individualism ($\alpha = .78$) or collectivism ($\alpha = .73$). Participants responded to each item on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Sample items included “It is better for me to develop my own personal style” for individualism and “Family is more important to me than almost anything else” for collectivism. Individualism and collectivism were not significantly correlated with each other ($r = .13, p = .114$)

## Results

### Analysis Plan

Table 2 shows means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all study variables. To test the main hypotheses, we conducted moderated regressions with priming condition as a binary variable (coded 0 = East Asian, 1 = American) and generational status (centered) or cultural identification (centered) as continuous moderator variables. The main effects of priming condition and generational status (or cultural identification) were entered on Step 1, and the two-way interaction was entered on Step 2. We included gender (coded 0 = M, 1 = F) as a covariate at Step 1 because it was unevenly distributed between priming conditions, $\chi^2(1) = 3.85, p = .05$, and because there were gender differences on some of the outcome variables (see Table 2). We used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) in SPSS to follow up on significant interactions by computing simple slopes at 1 SD above and below the mean for generational status (or cultural identification). See Tables 3 and 4 for these results.

In addition to these primary analyses, we conducted a comparable set of regression analysis in which we entered cultural orientation—individualism and collectivism—as exploratory moderator variables in place

---

**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Information for the Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (including cis women and transgender women)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (including cis men and transgender men)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other or Prefer not to answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese/Chinese American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese/Japanese American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean/Korean American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwanese/Taiwanese American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolian/Mongolian American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generational Status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation (born in Asian country, came to U.S. as adult)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 generation (born in Asian country, came to U.S. as child or adolescent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation (born in U.S., parents born in Asian country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third generation (born in U.S., parents born in U.S., grandparents born in an Asian country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth generation (born in U.S., parents born in U.S. and at least one grandparent born in an Asian country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth generation (born in U.S., parents and grandparents born in U.S.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. $N = 146$. *Other responses: Chinese/Vietnamese American; Mixed (Chinese and White); Cantonese/HK-American; Adopted.*

---

**TABLE 2**

| Intercorrelations and Descriptive Statistics for Main Study Variables |
|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Variable | $M$ | $SD$ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| Priming Condition | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (0 = Asian, 1 = American) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Gender | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| (0 = Male, 1 = Female) | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Generational Status | 2.91 | 0.97 | -16 | -10 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Cultural ID | 0.34 | 1.61 | -0.07 | -0.01 | -0.42** | - | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Overall Support | 3.95 | 0.97 | -15 | -10 | -0.09 | -0.01 | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Friend Support | 4.17 | 1.07 | -13 | -0.07 | -0.06 | -0.06 | -0.72*** | - | - | - | - | - |
| Family Support | 3.73 | 1.39 | -11 | -19 | -0.08 | -0.03 | -0.85** | -0.24** | - | - | - | - |
| Instrumental | 3.39 | 1.10 | -0.02 | -15 | -0.02 | -0.09 | -0.31*** | -0.21** | -0.27** | - | - | - |
| Emotional | 3.64 | 1.08 | -0.03 | -0.03 | -0.06 | -0.05 | -0.34*** | -0.38*** | -0.18 | -0.60*** | - | - |
| Individualism | 5.63 | 0.92 | -14 | -30 | -0.03 | -0.07 | -0.01 | -0.05 | -0.02 | -0.19** | -0.19 | - |
| Collectivism | 4.72 | 0.90 | -0.05 | -15 | -15 | -25 | -0.31*** | -0.20 | -0.28*** | -0.26 | -0.22 | -0.13 |


---
of generational status and cultural identification. These analyses allowed us to explore whether differences in specific cultural dimensions moderate the impact of the prime on support behavior and perceptions.

### TABLE 3

**Summary of Regression Analyses for Priming Condition and Generational Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>–0.22 (–.11)</td>
<td>0.18 (.08)</td>
<td>–0.62 (–.21)†</td>
<td>–0.37 (–.17)†</td>
<td>0.07 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[–0.57, 0.13]</td>
<td>[–0.22, 0.57]</td>
<td>[–1.11, –0.13]</td>
<td>[–0.75, 0.01]</td>
<td>[–0.31, 0.46]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priming Condition</td>
<td>–0.42 (–.21)*</td>
<td>–0.34 (–.16)†</td>
<td>–0.49 (–.18)†</td>
<td>–0.20 (–.10)</td>
<td>–0.13 (–.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Asian = 0, American = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[–0.75, 0.09]</td>
<td>[–0.71, 0.04]</td>
<td>[–0.96, –0.03]</td>
<td>[–0.57, 0.16]</td>
<td>[–0.50, 0.24]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational Status</td>
<td>0.11 (.11)</td>
<td>0.10 (.09)</td>
<td>0.12 (.09)</td>
<td>0.02 (.02)</td>
<td>–0.05 (–.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[–0.06, 0.28]</td>
<td>[–0.09, 0.29]</td>
<td>[–0.12, 0.36]</td>
<td>[–0.17, 0.20]</td>
<td>[–0.24, 0.14]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.062*</td>
<td>.034</td>
<td>.079†</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priming Condition</td>
<td>–0.20</td>
<td>–0.12</td>
<td>–0.27</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>–0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\times)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generational Status</td>
<td>–0.54 (0.14)</td>
<td>–0.51 (0.26)</td>
<td>–0.76 (0.21)</td>
<td>–0.31 (0.44)</td>
<td>–0.51 (0.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\Delta R^2)</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unstandardized coefficient (b) listed first, standardized coefficients (β) are shown in parentheses only for main effects and are not shown for interactions, 95% CI for \(b\) are shown in brackets. *\(p < .10\). †\(p < .05\).

### TABLE 4

**Summary of Regression Analyses for Priming Condition and Cultural Identification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>–0.20 (–.10)</td>
<td>0.15 (.07)</td>
<td>–0.54 (–.19)†</td>
<td>–0.34 (–.15)†</td>
<td>0.08 (.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[–0.54, 0.14]</td>
<td>[–0.23, 0.52]</td>
<td>[–1.03, –0.06]</td>
<td>[–0.71, 0.04]</td>
<td>[–0.31, 0.46]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priming Condition</td>
<td>–0.36 (–.19)†</td>
<td>–0.29 (–.14)</td>
<td>–0.43 (–.16)†</td>
<td>–0.16 (–.07)</td>
<td>–0.11 (–.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Asian = 0, American = 1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[–0.68, 0.04]</td>
<td>[–0.65, 0.07]</td>
<td>[–0.89, 0.03]</td>
<td>[–0.52, 0.20]</td>
<td>[–0.48, 0.26]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identification&lt; –0.01 (–.01)</td>
<td>–0.04 (–.06)</td>
<td>0.03 (.04)</td>
<td>0.05 (.07)</td>
<td>0.02 (.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[–0.10, 0.09]</td>
<td>[–0.15, 0.07]</td>
<td>[–0.11, 0.17]</td>
<td>[–0.06, 0.16]</td>
<td>[–0.09, 0.14]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>.027</td>
<td>.059†</td>
<td>.032</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priming Condition</td>
<td>–0.21*</td>
<td>–0.26*</td>
<td>–0.16</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\times)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Identification&lt; –0.40 (–.01)</td>
<td>–0.48 (–.04)</td>
<td>–0.44 (–.13)</td>
<td>–0.07 (0.37)</td>
<td>–0.17 (0.28)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\Delta R^2)</td>
<td>.030*</td>
<td>.038*</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unstandardized coefficient (b) listed first, standardized coefficients (β) are shown in parentheses only for main effects and are not shown for interactions, 95% CI for \(b\) are shown in brackets. *\(p < .10\). †\(p < .05\).

### Primary Analyses

**Priming and Generational Status**

**Overall Perceived Support.** At Step 1, there was a significant main effect of priming condition on overall perceived support (\(b = –0.42, \beta = –.21, p = .014\)). Participants who saw the American primes perceived lower overall support from friends and family compared to those who saw the Asian primes. There was no significant main effect of generational status. At Step 2, the interaction between priming condition and generational status was not significant, so the effect of priming condition did not depend on generational status (\(b = –0.20, \beta = –.35, p = .25\)).

**Perceived Friend Support.** At Step 1, there was a marginally significant main effect of priming condition on perceived friend support (\(b = –0.34, \beta = –.16, p = .08\)). On average, participants who saw the American primes reported marginally lower perceived support from friends than those who saw the Asian primes. There was no significant main effect of generational status. At Step 2, the interaction between priming condition and generational status did not add significant variance to explaining perceived friend support.

**Perceived Family Support.** At Step 1, there was a significant main effect of priming condition on perceived family support (\(b = –0.49, \beta = –.18, p = .038\)). Participants primed with American icons perceived less family support compared to those primed with Asian icons. There was no significant main effect of generational status. At Step 2, the interaction between priming condition and generational status was not significant.

**Instrumental and Emotional Support Seeking.** At Step 1, there were no significant main effects of priming condition or generational status on either instrumental or emotional support seeking. At Step 2, the interaction effects were also not significant.

**Priming and Cultural Identification**

**Overall Perceived Support.** At Step 1, there was a significant main effect of priming condition on overall perceived support (\(b = –0.36, \beta = –.19, p = .028\)). On average, participants in the American condition perceived lower support from friends and family, compared to those in the East Asian condition. There was no significant main effect of cultural identification. At Step 2, there was a significant interaction (\(b = –0.21, p = .037; \Delta R^2 = .030, F(1, 137) = 4.42, p = .037\)) that explained 3.0% additional variance in overall perceived support. Simple slopes analyses revealed a significant effect of priming condition, but only for those who identified more with their American identity (\(b_{\text{simple}} = –0.71, \beta_{\text{simple}} = –.73, p = .003, 95\% \text{ CI [–1.16, –.25]}\)), such that when primed with East Asian (vs. American) icons, they reported significantly higher perceived support (see Figure 1).
Perceived Friend Support. At Step 1, there was no main effect of priming condition or cultural identification on perceived friend support. At Step 2, there was a significant interaction ($b = -0.26$, $p = .019$; $\Delta R^2 = .038$, $F(1, 137) = 5.61$, $p = .019$) explaining 3.8% additional variance in friend support. Simple slopes analyses displayed a significant effect of priming condition among those who identified more with their American identity, such that they reported significantly higher perceived support when primed with East Asian (vs. American) icons ($b_{simple} = -0.72$, $\beta_{simple} = -.68$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [-1.23, -0.22]; see Figure 2).

Perceived Family Support. At Step 1, there was a marginal main effect of priming condition ($b = -0.43$, $\beta = -.16$, $p = .064$). Participants assigned to the American condition perceived lower family support than those assigned to the East Asian condition. There was no significant main effect of cultural identification. At Step 2, the interaction was not significant.

Instrumental and Emotional Support Seeking. At Step 1, there were no significant main effects of priming condition or cultural identification on either instrumental or emotional support seeking. At Step 2, the interaction effects were also not significant.

Secondary Analyses
In addition to the primary analyses, we explored whether individual differences in cultural orientation—individualism and collectivism—would predict support seeking behavior and perceptions, or moderate the effect of the priming manipulation on these support variables. First, we examined the associations between individualism and collectivism and all dependent variables. As shown in Table 2, individualism was positively associated with instrumental and emotional support seeking behavior, but not with perceived support from friends and family. Collectivism was positively associated with all outcome variables; those who were high (vs. low) in collectivism had more positive expectations of support from friends and family and were more likely to seek instrumental and emotional support. Next, to explore whether cultural orientation moderated the effects of the priming manipulation on our dependent variables, we ran two sets of regression analyses: (a) priming condition and individualism, and (b) priming condition and collectivism. We found significant main effects of collectivism and individualism consistent with the significant correlations described above and marginal interactions with priming condition (see supplemental materials for complete results). These findings show that participants high in collectivism (or those primed with East Asian icons) were more likely to seek support and to hold positive expectations of support from friends and family. The interactions showed a similar pattern, such that among those in the Asian prime condition, participants who were high (vs. low) in both individualism and collectivism marginally perceived higher friend support. These findings further highlight the within-group variability among East Asian Americans.

Discussion
In the present study, we evaluated the effects of identity
priming on East Asian Americans’ social support seeking behaviors and perceptions of support from family and friends. Our goal was to extend prior work showing that people from collectivistic cultures are less likely to seek social support than those from individualistic cultures (Kim et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2004). However, contrary to this literature and to our hypotheses, results showed that participants primed with East Asian icons perceived significantly higher overall support and family support than those primed with American icons. A similar pattern was found among participants who strongly identified with their American identity. Within our secondary analyses, we found a conceptually similar pattern in that higher levels of collectivism were linked to more support seeking behavior and higher perceived support. Overall, these results differ from prior research showing that those from collectivistic cultures are less inclined to seek support and view it as less effective when coping with stress (Kim et al., 2006, 2008; Taylor et al., 2004). However, one important difference between the current study and prior studies is that we examined variability within a sample of East Asian individuals, whereas prior studies have typically examined variability between Asian and American samples. Our findings suggest that, among those who share East Asian cultural heritage, those who are reminded of their Asian identity, or who hold more collectivistic values, are more likely to perceive and seek support.

Although our main results were unexpected, prior work primarily focused on the act of seeking social support (Kim et al., 2006, 2008; Taylor et al., 2004), rather than perceptions of social support. Despite Asian Americans’ desire for emotional reassurance (Chang, 2015), they are hesitant to seek support due to social strains that come with certain collectivistic values, such as norms of reciprocity (Kim et al., 2001). However, there are other types of support and coping mechanisms that align with collectivistic values. For example, implicit support has been shown to benefit Asian Americans more than European Americans because implicit support conveys support and availability without explicitly drawing attention to the self or burdening the relationship (Taylor et al., 2007; Uchida et al., 2008), and upholding more Chinese values was associated with stronger perceived support availability and can be an effective coping mechanism for Asian Americans (Lee et al., 2012). In the context of this literature, our findings on perceived support complement work that explores more nuanced aspects of social support and highlight the importance of considering the complexities of within-culture variability and how cultural norms guide social behaviors.

We did not find any significant results regarding generational status, possibly because most of our participants were second generation and above, thus our sample did not have adequate variation in cultural exposure. However, our analyses with cultural identification showed that those who self-reported a stronger American identity perceived significantly higher support from close others (particularly friends) when primed with East Asian (vs. American) icons. It was expected that those who strongly identified with American culture would view social support more favorably because of their greater inclination toward individualism, but this was only the case when these participants were exposed to East Asian icons. Although our results do conflict with past research (Zou et al., 2008), these findings may be explained by a combination of our participants’ tendency to lean toward individualistic values of self-directedness, while also being reminded of collectivistic values that are tied to closeness and interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Huynh et al. (2011) also concluded that bicultural individuals who rate low in bicultural identity integration (BII) tend to perceive their cultures as polarizing and thus respond to cultural cues by displaying contrasting behaviors (e.g., behaving in American ways after being primed with Asian culture). Given this, it may be that our participants with a stronger American identity also had lower BII between their two identities, leading them to exhibit prime-resistant behaviors. We also unexpectedly found that both individualism and collectivism were positively correlated with instrumental and emotional support seeking. This could have been due to our items for instrumental and emotional support lacking differentiation between friend and family support.

Although our results did not support our hypotheses, the overall pattern of findings was clear across multiple measures and in experimental and correlational findings. Within our sample of East Asian American participants, East Asian cultural icons and collectivistic values were associated with more support seeking behavior and higher perceived support. At first glance, these findings differ from prior work. However, prior studies have primarily compared Asian participants to European participants and have not yet fully explored variability within Asian American participants. Moreover, past research have demonstrated the complexities within collectivism itself, such as how collectivistic cultures outside of East Asia (e.g., Latinx) embody other forms of collectivism (e.g., convivial collectivism) that are associated with higher emotional expression and support seeking (Campos & Kim, 2017). This could also serve as a potential explanation as to why we found a positive correlation between collectivism and instrumental and emotional support seeking. Thus, in the context of the broader culture and support literature, our findings can be understood as highlighting the importance of...
exploring within- and between-culture variation in social support processes, and the impactful role of bicultural identity.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

Several limitations of this study should be noted. First, we relied on a relatively homogenous population of young undergraduate students from East Asian regions. Given that the main objective of our study was to explore within-group differences, we narrowed our population to those who identify as East Asian American. In addition, most of our sample were female, second generation, Chinese American, and all college students. Thus, our findings may not generalize to the diverse Asian American community (e.g., South Asians, older adults, recent immigrants) of different educational or socioeconomic backgrounds, which may hold more traditional or different cultural identities. Future studies should attempt to replicate these findings with larger and more diverse samples of Asian Americans, as well as additional comparison groups from cultures that vary in collectivism and individualism (Campos & Kim, 2017; Wu et al., 2021).

Second, our research design would have benefited from additional control groups. For example, in future studies, it would be helpful to include a no-prime or noncultural prime condition to provide a baseline assessment as a comparison for our East Asian American participants. This could highlight whether our participants' default schemas aligned more with American or Asian culture, as well as improve the internal validity of our priming methodology.

Third, although research has shown that cultural priming activates cultural constructs in memory (Hong et al., 2000), we cannot be certain that cultural values were the only causal factor in producing changes in support perceptions in the present study. The cultural icons we used may also not be representative of the priming that occurs in everyday life, as well as inadvertently prime other constructs beyond culture, such as masculine or feminine gender role norms. Nonetheless, studies have shown that priming is an effective method for activating specific cultural schemas associated with American and East Asian identities (Hong et al., 1997, 2000; Morris & Mok, 2011). Replicating this study with a larger sample size and in a laboratory setting with manipulation checks or pre-tests for other constructs (e.g., perceptions of masculinity and femininity) would be a valuable next step in this work.

Finally, although we did find several statistically significant results, our effect sizes (R2) were modest. One reason for the modest results may be that our priming manipulation was somewhat subtle. In addition, participants completed the priming activity online at home (during the COVID-19 pandemic), where they might have spent less time and effort concentrating on their task than if they had come to the lab. Additionally, our effects might have been stronger if we had been able to recruit more recent immigrants (below second generation), allowing greater variability in bicultural identity and a greater impact of the primes.

**Implications and Conclusions**

With research showing important disparities in the use of mental health care within the Asian American community (Abe-Kim et al., 2007), understanding the underlying motivations and barriers to seeking support may provide insight on ways to foster greater help-seeking behavior. Although social support is not parallel to mental health services, studies have found that poorer perceived quality of support is associated with increased mental health issues (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009; Wang et al., 2018). Thus, perceiving and receiving higher quality social support may act as a cushion against the detrimental effects of mental illness, which could then help reduce the disproportionate gap between Asian American patients and mental health services. Moreover, Asian Americans’ degree of acculturation has been shown to be positively associated with their attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help (Hamid et al., 2009), perhaps due to having more individualistic values and more favorable attitudes regarding support. Our data adds to this finding by showing that Asian Americans who identified strongly (vs. weakly) with their American identity perceived higher support when reminded of their East Asian (vs. American) heritage, indicating that acculturation can affect perceptions of social support seeking for professional or peer support. Thus, it is pivotal that providers consider acculturation, whether it is a patient’s generational status or cultural identity, when developing their theoretical orientation for their practice. Understanding how bicultural experiences intersect with social behaviors, such as support seeking, can ultimately help clinicians develop a strong therapeutic relationship that is built on mutual trust and cultural sensitivity.

The current research shows that, although all humans have a fundamental need to belong (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), people can perceive relationships differently depending on their cultural background. Although social support may foster well-being (e.g., Cohen & Syme, 1985), the processes of deliberately seeking support can differ depending on cultural context (Kim et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2004). Unlike previous research that focuses on cross-cultural analyses, the present study considered within-group differences among East Asian

---

**Bicultural Identity and Social Support Seeking**

Yao, Wu, and Collins
Bicultural Identity and Social Support Seeking | Yao, Wu, and Collins

Americans, who are exposed to contrasting cultures, making it valuable to obtain an understanding of how that exposure can influence behaviors. Although our hypotheses were not supported, our results reveal that cultural values play an important and complex role in shaping interpersonal behavior and perceptions. Considering these differences helps increase accurate representation of this group by not assuming that Asian Americans are a homogenous category. We accomplished this by thoroughly examining bicultural East Asian American individuals’ unique experiences and how environmental cues influence their usage and evaluation of social support. Further research exploring these individuals can better inform professionals and researchers on ways to adjust their treatment and research approaches to suit the diverse needs of these populations.

References


Yao, Wu, and Collins | Bicultural Identity and Social Support Seeking


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.02.001

Author Note

Maggie Yao https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4749-2204

Delancey C. Wu https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6613-3012

Nancy L. Collins https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3670-6745

All materials and data for this study can be found at https://osf.io/fqyb4/. We have no conflict of interest to disclose. This study was supported by the University of California, Santa Barbara Undergraduate Research and Creative Activities Grant.

Positionality Statement: Maggie identifies as a cisgender, bisexual woman. She also identifies as a second-generation Chinese American and first-generation college graduate, and as part of the LGBTQ+ and the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities.

Delancey identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual woman, who is currently a 5th-year PhD candidate studying social support processes in the context of cultural psychology and close relationships. She also identifies as a second-generation, Taiwanese American who grew up in the United States and as part of the Asian American and Pacific Islander community.

Nancy identifies as a third-generation American of European and Jewish ancestry, and as a first-generation college graduate. She also identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual woman. She has studied close relationships and health psychology from a social psychological perspective for almost three decades.

All authors are nondisabled and acknowledge that their perspective is influenced by their position within all of these dimensions of identity.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Maggie Yao. Email: maggieyao26@gmail.com
Turn Your Compassion Into a Career in Mental Health

Our online degree programs feature relationship-focused curriculum, innovative faculty, and lead to licensure.

alliant.edu/psychology
Call for Doctoral-Level Reviewers

 Psi Chi Journal is seeking reviewers interested in providing constructive feedback on our authors’ original empirical research. To increase the journal’s scope and relevance, diverse people of varied racial, ethnic, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious, and social class backgrounds are welcomed. If you have a doctoral degree in psychology or a related field, please join us.

TO SUPPORT OUR EXCEPTIONAL REVIEWERS
• Our online portal allows you to submit specific subject areas that you feel comfortable with reviewing.
• At any time, you can set unavailability dates so that we will know when not to contact you.
• With each request to review, you will receive basic instructions and a template review form, which you can use in order to save you time during your review.

TO BECOME A REVIEWER, EMAIL
steve.rouse@psichi.org

Psi Chi’s digital anthology brings together our very best advice about applying to graduate school—advice accumulated from 25+ experts in over 20+ years of Eye on Psi Chi magazine issues.

In nineteen chapters, this eBook will help you navigate the seven primary steps that are vital to your acceptance at the graduate program of your choice.

• Preparing for and Selecting a Graduate Program
• The Application Process
• Preparing for the GRE
• Soliciting Letters of Recommendation
• Writing the Personal Statement
• Interviewing
• Choosing a Program and Succeeding in Graduate School

Download Today at Store.PsiChi.org
Log in as a Psi Chi Member to receive a discount!
Publish Your Research in *Psi Chi Journal*

Undergraduate, graduate, and faculty submissions are welcome year round. Only one author (either first author or coauthor) is required to be a Psi Chi member. All submissions are free. Reasons to submit include

- a unique, doctoral-level, peer-review process
- indexing in PsycINFO, EBSCO, and Crossref databases
- free access of all articles at psichi.org
- our efficient online submissions portal

View Submission Guidelines and submit your research at www.psichi.org/?page=JN_Submissions

---

**Become a Journal Reviewer**

Doctoral-level faculty in psychology and related fields who are passionate about educating others on conducting and reporting quality empirical research are invited become reviewers for *Psi Chi Journal*. Our editorial team is uniquely dedicated to mentorship and promoting professional development of our authors—Please join us!

To become a reviewer, visit www.psichi.org/page/JN_BecomeAReviewer

---

**Resources for Student Research**

Looking for solid examples of student manuscripts and educational editorials about conducting psychological research? Download as many free articles to share in your classrooms as you would like.

Search past issues, or articles by subject area or author at www.psichi.org/journal_past

---

**Learn About Psi Chi**

Psi Chi is the International Honor Society in Psychology. Membership is primarily open to undergraduates, graduate students, transfer students, full-time and part-time faculty members, and alumni.

See membership benefits and a link to apply at www.psichi.org/page/member_benefits

---

Register an account:
http://pcj.msubmit.net/cgi-bin/main.plex