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Bo Feng¹

Abstract

The current study assessed an integrated model of advice giving (Emotional support—Problem inquiry and analysis—Advice) with 572 participants from United States and 540 participants from mainland China. Participants read and responded to a hypothetical scenario in which they received advice from a friend. Advice that was offered following the moves of emotional support and problem inquiry and analysis was judged by both American and Chinese participants to be higher in quality and was more likely to be implemented than advice that did not follow this sequential pattern. Compared to Chinese participants, American participants evaluated advice offered with emotional support or problem inquiry and analysis as higher in quality. Participants with a higher independent self-construal also rated advice offered in conjunction with emotional support or problem inquiry and analysis as higher in quality than participants with a lower independent self-construal.

Keywords

sequential placement, advice-giving model, emotional support, problem inquiry and analysis, advice quality, intention to implement advice, culture, individualism-collectivism, self-construal, U.S., Chinese

Advice, which can be defined as recommendation about what to do, think, or feel to manage a situation (MacGeorge, Graves, Feng, Gillihan, & Burleson, 2004), is a very common way for individuals to respond to others' problems and is a near-ubiquitous component of supportive interactions (e.g., Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; MacGeorge, Feng, & Burleson,

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2011). Research has shown that people's responses to advice can be influenced by a variety of factors, including the extent to which the advice attends to the recipient's desired self-image (Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, & Budarz, 2004), perceived content features of the advised course of action (Feng & Burleson, 2008; MacGeorge et al., 2004), and the perceived characteristics of advice-giver (for a review, see MacGeorge, Feng, & Thompson, 2008).

A major limitation with prior research on advice was that advice had been typically studied as an independent form of support that functions on its own, and most studies had ignored the interconnectedness of various supportive acts. In recognition of this limitation, Feng (2009) advocated that more research attention be paid to the sequential placement of advice in supportive interactions. Feng (2009) argued that advice can be integrated with other forms of supportive acts, such as comforting and problem inquiry and analysis, in a complementary fashion to achieve optimal effect. Based on these assumptions, Feng (2009) proposed a theoretical framework called the Integrated Model of Advice-giving (IMA), which suggests that advice in supportive interactions should be more effective after the helper has *first* provided emotional support to the target and *then* engaged in problem inquiry and analysis to assess the relevance of advice. Feng's (2009) initial testing of this model with European American subjects largely supported those predictions.

Given that IMA has only been tested with European American participants, it remains an empirical question as to whether, and if so, to what extent, the IMA applies in other cultures. As is well-known, individuals' cultural background and the plethora of beliefs, values, and norms of behavior that they acquire through their enculturation process can exert a strong influence on their communication behavior. Therefore, a reexamination of IMA from a cross-cultural perspective not only enables us to assess the generalizability of findings from prior research but also contributes to our understanding of supportive communication as a universal and culturally bound phenomenon.

The Integrated Model of Advice-Giving

The sequencing of advice in supportive interactions has received some research attention in the past. For example, the sequential placement of advice in conversations has been found to impact people's perception of the degree to which advice is solicited and threatens the recipient's face (Goldsmith, 2000). Relatedly, several studies demonstrated that the recipient's receptiveness to advice—the extent to which an individual is willing or ready to receive advice from others with respect to his or her situation—is an important factor influencing advice evaluations and outcomes (Goldsmith, 2000; Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; MacGeorge, Feng et al., 2004). Findings like these suggest that a support provider needs to assess the relevance of advice and the target's readiness to receive advice before offering advice. IMA identifies two supportive moves that can help to prepare the ground for advising: Emotional support and problem inquiry and analysis, which are discussed in more detail below.

The provision of emotional support prior to advice-giving. One of the most common goals pursued in supportive interaction is to help another person cope effectively with emotional

distresses, and this goal is often accomplished through the provision of emotional support (for a review, see MacGeorge et al., 2011). Although various conceptualizations of emotional support exist, this form of support is typically defined as expressions of sympathy, care, concern, affection, or interest that are directed at alleviating the emotional stress experienced by others (Cutrona & Russell, 1990; see Burleson, 2003). Depending on characteristics of specific support situation, such as causes of stress, emotional support may be manifested as esteem support, which focuses on helping the target maintain or restore self-esteem or positive self-identity through verbal and/or nonverbal expressions of concern, affection, reassurance, and positive appraisal (Collins & Feeney, 2004; Cramer, 2003; Weisz & Wood, 2005; Wills, 1985). Therefore, in this study, emotional support is viewed as encompassing esteem support (Dakof & Taylor, 1990; Graetz, Shute, & Sawyer, 2000; Holmstrom & Burleson, 2011).

Substantial research has documented the salutary effects of sensitive emotional support on the physical and psychological well-being of individuals, as well as the maintenance and development of personal relationships (e.g., Acitelli, 1996; Burleson, Kunkel, Samter, & Werking, 1996; Samter, 1994; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Huck, 1994). Correspondingly, the provision of emotional support has been consistently evaluated as a helpful and appropriate response to an individual's stress across a wide range of situations, and across cultures (for reviews, see Feng & Burleson, 2006; MacGeorge et al., 2011).

Drawing upon prior theory and research on supportive communication (e.g., Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998; Samter, 1994), counseling (e.g., Greenberg & Paivio, 1997; Greenberg, Rice, Elliot, 1993), and promotion of healthy behaviors (Prochaska, 1999), the IMA (Feng, 2009) proposes that advice can be integrated with emotional support to achieve optimal advising outcomes. More specifically, the IMA proposes that *initial* attempts at helping a person dealing with a problematic situation should be directed at helping the person to overcome negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, fear, and anger that typically arise in problematic situations. The provision of emotional support can not only help the target overcome those negative emotions, but also create a supportive environment for subsequent interactions (Burleson, 2003; Greenberg, 2002; Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Silverman, Bor, Miller, & Goldman, 1992; Vehviläinen, 2001).

Problem inquiry and analysis before advice-giving. The advice-giving process is typically triggered by the helper's perception that advice is warranted. However, this assumption can be wrong, because people are oftentimes resistant to receiving advice from others (Feng & MacGeorge, 2006; Goldsmith, 2000). Even when the target makes an overt request for advice or acknowledges explicitly the presence of a problem for which he or she needs advice, advice that is offered without inquiry into the target's situation or assessing the target's specific needs and capacities will likely be ill-matched with the target's situation or be redundant with a solution that the target has already tried or planned (MacGeorge et al., 2008). Accordingly, the IMA argues that, following provision of emotional support, a helper who engages in problem inquiry and analysis will be in a better position to decide whether or not to offer advice, and if so, what advice to offer. Like advice, problem inquiry and analysis is a form of informational support, which can be defined as providing information, knowledge, or guidance that is useful for solving problems (Wills & Shinar, 2000).

Problem inquiry and analysis differs from advice in that it focuses on appraising and understanding the target's situation rather than identifying solutions to the situation. Engaging in this second supportive act can enable the helper to determine the relevance of advice and formulate a piece of advice that takes into account the target's situation and perspectives (Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Kinnell & Maynard, 1996; Maynard, 1991; Vehviläinen, 2001). Some research suggests that involving the target in analysis of the problematic situation can be even more helpful than advising *per se* (Elliot, 1985), possibly because doing so can provide the target with opportunities to display their knowledge and ability to cope with the problem they are experiencing and facilitate their cognitive reappraisal of their situation (Burlinson & Goldsmith, 1998).

In sum, the integrated model of advice-giving proposes that a helper should perform two supportive acts before attempting to offer advice: provide emotional support and engage in inquiry and analysis of the target's situation to gauge the relevance of advice and, when advice is deemed relevant, to formulate a piece of advice that fits the target's situation. Testing the model would require the assessment of (a) the necessity of each "preparatory" move (i.e., emotional support, problem inquiry and analysis), and (b) the effectiveness of the particular sequential order of the three steps described in the model. Accordingly, the following set of hypotheses was derived from the model:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Advice offered *after* emotional support will elicit higher evaluation of advice quality and stronger intention to implement the advice than advice offered *before* or *without* emotional support.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Advice offered *after* problem inquiry and analysis will elicit higher evaluation of advice quality and stronger intention to implement than advice offered *before* or *without* problem inquiry and analysis.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Advice offered in the Emotional Support—Problem Inquiry and Analysis—Advice (EPA) sequence will elicit higher evaluation of advice quality and stronger intention to implement the advice than advice offered in the Problem Inquiry and Analysis—Emotional Support—Advice (PEA) sequence.

The Moderating Role of Culture

Will Americans and Chinese respond differently to advice that is offered in conjunction with emotional support and/or problem inquiry and analysis? The cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism can serve as a useful framework for predicting cultural differences in this domain. Different nations are often categorized as being predominantly individualistic or collectivistic: The United States is typically characterized as an individualistic culture whereas China is typically viewed as a collectivistic culture (Adler, Brahm, & Graham, 1992). In individualistic cultures, personal goals and identities provide a dominant guide for the individual's behavior, whereas in collectivistic cultures, relational harmony and conformity to group norms and obligations exert a stronger influence on the individual's social behaviors (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996; Triandis, 1994). People from individualistic cultures tend to engage in low-context communication

by relying more heavily on explicit and elaborated verbal utterances to create and interpret messages (Hall, 1976). In contrast, people from collectivistic cultures tend to exhibit a high-context communication style by relying more extensively on relational context to perceive and understand others' messages, and to "read other people's minds" (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996; Kim, Pan, & Park, 1998; Triandis & Suh, 2002; Wu & Rubin, 2000).

In individualistic cultures, supportive responses that grant legitimacy to an individual's distress, such as highly person-centered comforting messages, are a way to recognize the individual's thoughts, emotions, and personal agency, which are all individual attributes highly valued in individualist cultures (Chen, Kim, Mojaverian, & Morling, 2012). Moreover, members of individualistic cultures are regularly encouraged to share their feelings with others and to seek others' help in dealing with upset feelings; thus, they should be particularly inclined to seek and value emotional support in times of need. In contrast, people from collectivistic cultures may be loath to discuss their negative emotions with in-group members, as doing so may bring inappropriate attention to the self and may even be upsetting for the entire social group (Burlinson, 2003). Therefore, collectivists may be less likely than individualists to expect and value support that is specifically directed at improving a distressed person's emotional state (i.e., emotional support).

Available research findings concerning the role of culture in supportive communication are consistent with the above line of thought. People from individualistic cultures, such as the United States, tend to prefer coping strategies that are framed in terms of their own thoughts and feelings (e.g., Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2003), and are more likely than people from collectivistic cultures to seek (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006; Mortenson, Burlinson, Feng, & Liu, 2005; Shams, 2001; Taylor et al., 2004; for reviews, see Feng & Burlinson, 2006; Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008) and value emotional support (Burlinson & Mortenson, 2003) or emotional expression (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007, 2009). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed based on the above reasoning and review of relevant literature:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): American participants will respond to advice offered in conjunction with emotional support more positively than Chinese participants.

There is research evidence showing that in collectivistic cultures, offering problem-focused support such as advice is a culturally appropriate way to respond to others' stress (Chen et al., 2012; Chentsova-Dutton & Vaughn, 2012). Relatedly, accommodating to others' influence attempts, especially when the influencer is believed to have an other-serving motive (e.g., helping the target solve a problem), is normative in collectivist cultures (Savani, Morris, Naidu, Kumar, & Berlia, 2011). Therefore, in a collectivist context, people may be more receptive to advice and are less likely to expect an advice giver to prepare the ground for advice with problem inquiry and analysis. Meanwhile, because advice may carry the implication that the recipient lacks knowledge or competence concerning the issue at hand (Goldsmith, 2000), addressing this face threat is a salient concern for people from individualistic cultures (Chentsova-Dutton & Vaughn, 2012). Individualists may thus

be particularly attuned to an advice-giver's effort to mitigate the potential threats of advice to the recipient's face concerns. As problem inquiry and analysis provides the advice recipient with opportunities to display their knowledge and ability to cope with the problem they are experiencing, advice that is offered with this move is likely to be received more positively by recipients from individualistic cultures (Burluson & Goldsmith, 1998). Further, being more sensitive to explicit verbal messages, people from individualistic cultures may be more influenced by explicit attempt from the advice giver to understand and analyze the problematic situation. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): American participants will respond to advice offered in conjunction with problem inquiry and analysis more positively than Chinese participants.

Thus far, this study has categorized Americans and Chinese into two groups by using the culture-level dimension of individualism-collectivism. However, as many scholars have pointed out, assuming value orientations based on participants' country of origin and using nationality as a "catch-all" variable (Singelis & Brown, 1995) in cross-cultural comparisons does not provide us with much *empirical* evidence to explain why observed cultural differences in communication exist (e.g., Cai & Fink, 2002). Assuming value orientations based on participants' country of origin is problematic for at least two reasons. First, dimensions such as individualism-collectivism capture a limited, albeit important, aspect of the complex, dynamic constellation that we call a culture. Cultures such as the United States and China obviously differ from each other in many other important ways. Hence, when national differences in individualism-collectivism are invoked to predict cultural differences in the area of interest but are not measured and employed to test their moderating effects, there is reason to suspect that other variables that are confounded with individualism-collectivism (e.g., masculinity-femininity, power distance, uncertainty avoidance; Hofstede, 2001) may account for observed cultural differences. Second, although using dimensions such as individualism-collectivism helps us to categorize different cultures and facilitates our understanding and study of those cultures, we should be cautious not to essentialize any culture or stereotype its members. As within-culture variance may be substantial, results based on assumptions about national culture may not demonstrate how specific values affect *individuals'* responses to communication behaviors.

Therefore, to empirically assess the mechanisms through which culture might influence how people respond to advice, it is necessary to introduce corresponding individual-level constructs into the study. Doing so would serve three purposes: (a) It allows us to empirically assess whether the groups of American and Chinese participants in this study indeed differ on the dimension of individualism-collectivism; (b) it can reveal the more basic causes behind observed cultural differences in responses to advice; and (c) by measuring value orientations at the individual level, we can explain within-culture, individual differences in responses to advice. Accordingly, the following set of hypotheses was proposed:

Hypothesis 6 (H6): American participants will report higher levels of individualism and lower levels of collectivism than Chinese participants.

Hypothesis 7 (H7): Participants with a high independent self-construal will respond to advice offered in conjunction with emotional support more positively than participants with a low independent self-construal.

Hypothesis 8 (H8): Participants with a high independent self-construal will respond to advice offered in conjunction with problem inquiry and analysis more positively than participants with a low independent self-construal.

Method

Participants

American participants were 572 college students recruited from communication classes at a large Midwestern university and a large West coast university. The majority of the participants were European Americans ($n = 432$), but the sample also included Asian Americans ($n = 70$), African Americans ($n = 23$), and Hispanic Americans ($n = 18$). The American participants ranged in age from 18 to 36 and averaged 20.6 years old (389 females, 183 males). Chinese participants were 540 college students recruited from university-wide English classes at a large university in Northern China. The vast majority of Chinese participants were of Han ethnicity ($n = 528$), which is the majority ethnic group in mainland China. Chinese participants ranged in age from 16 to 41 and averaged 23.2 years old (304 females, 236 males).

Experimental Design

An experimental design was used to isolate and control the variables of interest (i.e., the presence or absence of emotional support and problem inquiry and analysis, as well as the sequential placement of advice in supportive interactions). Testing the effectiveness of the Emotional support-Problem inquiry and analysis-Advice (EPA) sequence in comparison to alternative sequences requires that a total of eleven sequences be generated: EPA, EAP, PAE, PEA, AEP, APE, EA, AE, PA, AP, and A. This design is similar to the Component Control Designs (Dismantling) used in psychotherapy research (for a review, see Haaga & Stiles, 2000). The rationale behind the Component Control Designs is that investigators can learn about the effective components of treatment protocols experimentally by using a portion of the treatment as comparison conditions. The impact of the isolated components is estimated in this design by the difference in effectiveness between conditions including the components and conditions excluding them (Davison, Williams, Nezami, Bice, & DeQuattro, 1991; Jacobson et al., 1996).

Participants were randomly assigned to read a transcript of a conversation putatively taking place between the participant and a friend. There were altogether 22 versions of the conversation, defined by crossing factors of advice giving sequence (eleven levels: EPA, EAP, PAE, PEA, AEP, APE, EA, AE, PA, AP, A), and type of problem that the participant was portrayed as experiencing in the scenario (two levels; failing an important exam, wanting salary increase for an underpaid part-time job). The two different problem types

were included solely to enhance generalizability of the results. Participants were assigned to read only one version of the conversation, and were encouraged to imagine that the scenario happened between themselves and a real friend and were asked to respond to the scenario as if they were responding to that friend. After reading the conversation, participants were instructed to evaluate the quality of the advice offered by the helper and rate their level of intention to implement the advice if they were in the situation described in the scenario.

Two versions of the questionnaires and relevant materials were used; with the version completed by American participants written in English and the version completed by Chinese participants written in Mandarin Chinese. To ensure accuracy and appropriateness in the translation, the Chinese versions of the materials were then back-translated into English by a bilingual Chinese graduate student who was proficient in both languages and with professional experience translating English texts. Cross-examination of the two sets of translation indicated that the Chinese versions of the questionnaires and related materials were appropriate.

Manipulation of Supportive Moves

In this study, the supportive moves performed by the helper in the hypothetical scenarios were designed to reflect good quality support based on criteria identified in past research. Specifically, advice was operationalized through statements that employ facework to show concern of the target's positive and negative face needs, and statements articulating the response efficacy, feasibility, and absence of limitations of the advised action (see Feng & Burleson, 2008). Research investigating features of quality emotional support has established that high person-centeredness, which refers to the extent to which supportive messages explicitly acknowledge, elaborate, legitimize, and contextualize the distressed other's feelings and perspective, is a quality that reliably characterizes sensitive and helpful supportive messages (e.g., Burleson & Mortensen, 2003; Jones, 2004; see MacGeorge et al., 2011). Therefore, emotional support was operationalized in this study through statements reflecting "person centered" comforting messages that explicitly acknowledge and legitimate the feelings and perspectives of the distressed target, and statements that aim to foster a positive outlook on the issue. The move of problem inquiry and analysis was operationalized through statements soliciting the target's perspective on the problem, and statements helping the target to identify possible causes of the problem (see Heritage & Sefi, 1992). An example of a conversation that contains all the three moves is provided in the Appendix.

Measurement of Variables

Advice quality. Five items on 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) were used to assess participants' evaluation of the overall quality of the advice message. This measure was identical to that used several previous studies of advice (e.g., Feng, 2009; Feng & MacGeorge, 2006; Goldsmith & MacGeorge, 2000; MacGeorge, Feng

Table 1. Correlations Among Variables.

Variables	2	3	4
1. Independent self-construal	.16***	.21***	.07*
2. Interdependent self-construal		.14***	.14***
3. Evaluation of advice quality			.59***
4. Implementation intention			

Note: * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

et al., 2004). The five items exhibited good internal consistency for both the Chinese and the American samples ($\alpha = .84$ for Chinese and $.88$ for Americans) and were averaged to form an index of message quality.

Intention to implement advice. Three items on 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) were used to assess participants' intention to implement the advised action (e.g., "I would probably follow the advice I was given"). These measures were similar to those used in several recent studies of advice (e.g., Feng & MacGeorge, 2010; MacGeorge, Feng et al., 2004). Reliability analyses indicated that the items formed a reliable scale ($\alpha = .89$ for Chinese and $.92$ for Americans), so an index was formed from the mean of the items.

Independent and interdependent self-construals. Participants' individual level individualism and collectivism value orientations were measured with a simplified version of Leung and Kim's (1997) self-construal scale. In recent years, there has been some controversy over the measurement of self-construal (Bresnahan et al., 2005; Gudykunst & Lee, 2003; Kim & Raja, 2003; Levine et al., 2003). In particular, some scholars have criticized various widely used measures of self-construal for containing items that measure constructs other than self-concept and thus being multidimensional (Levine et al., 2003). The simplified version clearly focuses on and reflects conception of the self as independent from, or interdependent with, others. The scale contains five items measuring individualism (e.g., "I act as a unique person, separate from others") and five items measuring collectivism (e.g., "My relationships with my friends and family are more important than my personal accomplishments"). Each subscale exhibited acceptable internal consistency (independent self-construal: $\alpha = .78$ for Chinese and $.85$ for Americans; interdependent self-construal: $\alpha = .66$ for Chinese and $.74$ for Americans). Independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal were only weakly correlated (see Table 1), indicating that the two dimensions are conceptually independent of each other.

Results

Power

With a sample of 540 Chinese and 572 Americans and a two-tailed $\alpha = .05$, the estimated power of the present study to detect a significant main effect of the manipulation of

emotional support or the presence of problem inquiry and analysis was .86 for small effects ($f = .10$) and in excess of .99 for moderate effects ($f = .25$) and large effects ($f = .40$). The estimated power of the study to detect a significant two-factor interaction was .86 for small effects ($f = .10$) and in excess of .99 for moderate effects ($f = .25$) and large effects ($f = .40$). The estimated power of the study to detect significant differences among the eleven advice-giving models was .59 for small effects ($f = .10$) and in excess of .99 for moderate effects ($f = .25$) and large effects ($f = .40$).

H1 predicted that advice offered *after* emotional support would elicit higher evaluation of advice quality and stronger implementation intention than advice offered *before* or *without* emotional support. This hypothesis was evaluated with a pair of 3 x 2 x 2 ANOVA. The between-groups factors included manipulation of emotional support (absent, present before advice, present after advice), culture (China vs. U.S.), and problem type (fail exam, wanting salary increase for an underpaid part-time job). The dependent variables were perceived quality of the advice and intention to implement the advice, respectively.

Advice quality. The ANOVA detected a significant main effect for manipulation of emotional support, $F(1, 1100) = 29.29, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons showed that, consistent with H1, advice offered following emotional support ($M = 5.74, SD = .95$) was evaluated more positively than advice offered before emotional support ($M = 5.49, SD = 1.04$), $p < .01$, or without emotional support ($M = 5.15, SD = 1.10$), $p < .001$.

A significant main effect was detected for culture, $F(1, 1100) = 52.64, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Overall, American participants ($M = 5.72, SD = 1.02$) perceived the advice messages to be of higher quality than did Chinese participants ($M = 5.25, SD = .98$). Among all the interaction terms, only the interaction between culture and problem type was significant, $F(1, 1100) = 6.83, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Decomposition of this interaction revealed that while American participants rated the advice in the “wanting salary increase” scenario as slightly higher in quality ($M = 5.89, SD = .98$) than advice in the “fail exam” scenario ($M = 5.63, SD = 1.11$), this pattern was reversed for the Chinese participants (“fail exam”: $M = 5.36, SD = .96$; “wanting salary increase”: $M = 5.18, SD = .99$).

Implementation intention. The ANOVA detected a main effect for manipulation of emotional support, $F(1, 1100) = 17.56, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .03$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons showed that, consistent with H1, participants reported stronger intention to implement the advice that was offered following emotional support ($M = 5.31, SD = 1.11$) than advice offered before emotional support ($M = 4.93, SD = 1.17$), $p < .001$, or without emotional support ($M = 4.81, SD = 1.24$), $p < .001$. Therefore, H1 was supported. Only the interaction between culture and problem type was significant, $F(1, 1100) = 22.51, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Decomposition of this interaction revealed that while American participants reported stronger intention to follow the advice in the “wanting salary increase” scenario ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.05$) than advice in the “fail exam” scenario ($M = 4.90, SD = 1.20$), this pattern was reversed for the Chinese participants (“fail exam”: $M = 5.21, SD = 1.20$; “wanting salary increase”: $M = 4.94, SD = 1.17$).

H2 predicted that advice offered *after* problem inquiry and analysis would elicit higher evaluation of advice quality and stronger intention to implement than advice offered *before* or *without* problem inquiry and analysis. This hypothesis was also evaluated with a pair of

3 x 2 x 2 ANOVA. The between-groups factors included manipulation of problem inquiry and analysis (absent, present before advice, present after advice), culture (China vs. U.S.), and problem type (fail exam, wanting salary increase for a part-time job). The dependent variables were perceived quality of the advice and implementation intention, respectively.

Advice quality. The ANOVA detected a significant main effect for manipulation of problem inquiry and analysis, $F(1, 1100) = 20.82, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Follow-up pairwise comparisons showed that, consistent with H2, advice offered following problem inquiry and analysis ($M = 5.76, SD = .97$) was evaluated more positively than advice offered before problem inquiry and analysis ($M = 5.15, SD = 1.08$), $p < .001$, or without problem inquiry and analysis ($M = 5.21, SD = 1.04$), $p < .001$.

Implementation intention. The ANOVA detected a small main effect for manipulation of problem inquiry and analysis, $F(1, 1100) = 9.96, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Results of follow-up pairwise comparisons revealed that participants reported stronger intention to implement the advice that was offered following problem inquiry and analysis ($M = 5.28, SD = 1.10$) than advice offered without problem inquiry and analysis ($M = 4.82, SD = 1.15$), $p < .001$, or before problem inquiry and analysis ($M = 4.96, SD = 1.19$). Therefore, H2 was supported.

H3 predicted that advice offered in the EPA sequence would elicit higher evaluation of advice quality and stronger intention to implement the advice than advice offered in the PEA sequence. A pair of independent samples t-tests was conducted to assess this hypothesis. The results showed that participants considered the advice in the EPA model to be of higher quality ($M = 5.68, SD = .73$) than advice in the PEA model ($M = 5.14, SD = 1.25$), $t = 4.04, df = 218, p < .001$; advice in the EPA model also elicited stronger implementation intention ($M = 6.11, SD = .57$) than advice in the PEA model ($M = 5.64, SD = 1.13$), $t = 3.95, df = 218, p < .001$. Therefore, H3 was supported.

H4 and H5 predicted that American participants would respond to advice offered in combination with emotional support (H4) or problem inquiry and analysis (H5) more positively than Chinese participants. Univariate analysis of variance revealed that American participants evaluated advice that was offered in conjunction with emotional support as higher in quality ($M = 5.81, SD = 1.03$) than Chinese participants ($M = 5.41, SD = .92$), $F(1, 781) = 31.83, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$. American participants also rated advice that was offered in conjunction with problem inquiry and analysis as higher in quality ($M = 5.77, SD = 1.06$) than Chinese participants ($M = 5.37, SD = .98$), $F(1, 803) = 30.34, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .04$. The two cultural groups did not differ significantly in terms of intention to implement advice. Therefore, H4 and H5 were partially supported.

H6 predicted that American participants would report higher levels of individualism and lower levels of collectivism than Chinese participants. This hypothesis was assessed with a univariate analysis of variance. The results showed that Chinese participants exhibited slightly higher interdependent self-construal ($M = 5.25, SD = .84$) than American participants ($M = 5.15, SD = .90$), $F(1, 1098) = 4.34, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .01$; American participants exhibited higher independent self-construal ($M = 5.67, SD = .90$) than Chinese participants ($M = 5.14, SD = .98$), $F(1, 1098) = 89.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$. Therefore, H6 was supported.

Table 2. Differences Between Participants With High Independent Self-Construal (SC) and Participants With Low SC.

	High independent SC		Low independent SC		Univariate test	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	η^2
Advice with emotional support						
Advice quality	5.83	.94	5.42	1.02	35.00***	.04
Implementation intention	5.20	1.18	5.07	1.14	2.57	.00
Advice with problem inquiry and analysis						
Advice quality	5.74	1.04	5.43	1.03	17.73***	.02
Implementation intention	5.14	1.25	5.09	1.13	.33	.00

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

H7 and H8 predicted that participants with a high independent self-construal would respond to advice offered in conjunction with emotional support (H7) or problem inquiry and analysis (H8) more positively than participants with a low independent self-construal. To test these hypotheses, two levels (high vs. low) of independent self-construal were formed, using median as the cut-off point. Univariate analysis of variance was conducted to assess the hypotheses. Results are summarized in Table 2. As the results showed, compared to participants with low independent self-construal, participants with high independent self-construal rated advice offered with emotional support or problem inquiry and analysis as higher in quality. The two groups did not differ significantly in implementation intention. Therefore, H7 and H8 were partially supported.

Discussion

Various theoretical models of support and counseling process (Burlinson & Goldsmith, 1998; Elliot, 1985; Heritage & Sefi, 1992; Vehviläinen, 2001) combine to suggest that before giving advice, helpers should help the target work through his or her distress through the provision of emotional support and assess the relevance of giving advice through inquiry and analysis of the target's problematic situation. Feng's (2009) theorizing and testing of this integrated model of advice-giving with American participants demonstrated that advice that is offered following the Emotional support—Problem inquiry and analysis—Advice sequence tends to be perceived by its recipient as higher in quality than advice that does not follow this sequence. The present study presents the first cross-cultural assessment of this integrated model of advice-giving by simultaneously assessing the applicability of the IMA in a Western culture and an Asian culture. This study also extends prior work on IMA by evoking the concept of self-construal to predict cultural and individual variations in responses to IMA. In addition, by adding including two different outcome measures (i.e., evaluation of advice quality and intention to implement advice), this study was able to assess the relative effectiveness of IMA with regard

to different outcome indicators. The following sections summarize the major findings of the present study, and discuss their implications for future research.

The Integrated Model of Advice-Giving

Results of this study revealed that, compared with advice offered without or before the provision of emotional support, advice offered following the provision of emotional support was associated with higher evaluations of advice quality and stronger intention to implement advice in both the American and Chinese samples. This finding replicates and extends Feng's (2009) work by showing that prefacing advice with emotional support can not only elicit positive appraisal of the overall quality of advice but also lead to positive behavioral outcomes such as implementation of the advised course of action. It also provides further empirical evidence supporting the proposition that the provision of emotional support is an important component of supportive interactions, and is a desirable initial response to a person's problem (e.g., Acitelli, 1996; Burleson et al., 1996; Samter, 1994). The fact that this finding was observed for both American and Chinese samples suggests that people across cultures have similar emotional needs when coping with stressful situations (Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Samter & Burleson, 2005; Samter, Whaley, Mortenson, & Burleson, 1997).

While Feng (2009) did not observe evidence in support of the proposition that advice offered *after* problem inquiry and analysis would be more effective than advice offered *without* problem inquiry and analysis, the present study found evidence in support of this proposition. Specifically, advice offered following problem inquiry and analysis was associated with higher evaluations of advice quality and stronger implementation intention than advice offered without problem inquiry and analysis, indicating that problem inquiry and analysis prior to advice giving is effective in preparing grounds for giving advice. The present study also found that, compared with advice that was offered *before* problem inquiry and analysis, advice that was offered *after* problem inquiry and analysis elicited higher evaluation of advice quality and stronger implementation intention.

Results of this study revealed that although the EPA sequence elicited more favorable responses than alternative advice giving models, its supremacy was relatively small. There are several possible explanations for this. First, this may be partly due to the fact that the advice messages, which were held constant across all conditions, were high quality advice to start with. Consistent with prior research (Feng, 2009; Feng & Burleson, 2008), results of this study indicated that participants' responses to these high quality advice messages were generally positive. Further testing of the integrated model can examine if using less "rhetorically skilled" advice will produce larger effects than those reported in this study. In addition, one of the key functions of offering emotional support and engaging in problem inquiry and analysis is to prepare the ground for advice giving when advice is deemed needed and appropriate. Engaging in these two "preparatory" supportive acts should be especially beneficial when advice is *not* solicited. In the current experiment, the advice in both scenarios was solicited in that the advice recipient made explicit statements indicating that he/she did not know what to do. This contextual feature of the supportive interaction

might have diluted the effectiveness of the preparatory moves. Future research should test the integrated advice giving model within different contexts. Finally, the current experiment examined two life stressors that are of relatively small magnitude of severity (i.e., failing an exam and being underpaid at a part-time job). It is possible that the integrated model of advice-giving will be more effective for addressing stressors of greater severity, such as coping with job loss or cancer. This is a direction for future research to pursue.

Cultural Similarities and Differences

Overall, findings of this study suggest that the integrated model of advice-giving functions very similarly with Americans and Chinese. Both Americans and Chinese participants responded more favorably to advice-giving sequences containing emotional support than those that did not contain emotional support. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that (a) there are broad similarities in how distressing situations are interpreted and approached by people from different cultural backgrounds, and (b) person-centered comforting messages, which were used to embody emotional support in this study, are effective at facilitating the support recipient's coping (see Burleson, 2003). In addition, this study found that both Americans and Chinese participants responded more positively to advice-giving sequences in which advice was offered following the move of problem inquiry and analysis than those that was offered before or without the inquiry move. This finding suggests that there is consensus across cultures about how advice should be introduced and how it should fit into the target's situation.

Against the broad baseline of cultural similarities, a few cultural differences were also observed. American participants viewed advice that was offered in conjunction with emotional support or problem inquiry and analysis as higher in quality than their Chinese counterparts, indicating that when Americans receive advice from others, they are more oriented toward the support-provider's explicit efforts at alleviating their stress and understanding their problematic situation. It should be recognized, however, that the observed cultural differences were small in magnitude, suggesting that caution should be exercised in interpreting the implications of cultural differences observed in this study. Although comparing cultural groups inevitably emphasizes cultural differences in support processes, this analysis does not assume there is intra-cultural homogeneity in the ways in which members of different cultures seek support. Data of this study indicate that demographic factors such as nationality affect support processes by influencing underlying psychological states such as beliefs and value orientations. These psychological variables (e.g., self-construal) represent mediating factors linking the demographic indices of culture (e.g., nationality) with behavioral patterns. In addition, these psychological variables are a source of intra-cultural heterogeneity in support processes.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, this study employed hypothetical scenarios to elicit imagined behaviors or responses from participants and

has relied exclusively on paper-and-pencil measures of variables. Although these methodological choices were believed to be appropriate given the focus of the study, there are limitations inherent in these methodological approaches (see Burleson & MacGeorge, 2002). For example, participants' imagined responses to hypothetical supportive messages may differ from their responses to those messages in real-life supportive interactions due to factors such as concerns for image maintenance and politeness (i.e., social desirability). One of the limitations with cross-national survey research is that there may be cultural differences in response styles (for an overview, see Van de Vijver & Leung, 2000). For example, Asians tend to exhibit a middle response style whereas European Americans tend to exhibit an extreme response style (Harzing, 2006). Cultural similarities and variations in responses to advice may be more (or less) pronounced in actual interactions. To address these limitations, future studies should try to obtain *in situ* assessments of advice giving behaviors and message evaluations. Such research could focus on observing either naturally occurring advice giving and receiving behaviors (e.g., Chentsova-Dutton & Vaughn, 2012; Study 2) or those that occur in controlled lab settings (MacGeorge, Hanasono, Guntzville, Feng, & Mincy, 2009).

This study was also limited by its use of college students as participants. There is empirical evidence showing that responses from college student participants tend to be more homogeneous than those of noncollege student participants and the effect sizes derived from studies utilizing college student samples may differ from those using noncollege student samples (Peterson, 2001). Therefore, caution must be exercised when attempting to make any generalizations to other noncollege student (e.g., adult) populations, and future research can replicate the current study with older and/or less educated samples of participants from both cultures.

Pragmatic Implications

Despite the limitations, this study offers several important pragmatic implications. Advice-giving behaviors are ubiquitous in supportive interactions, often outnumbering other kinds of supportive communication behaviors (e.g., Cutrona & Suhr, 1994; Goldsmith & Dun, 1997). To the extent that support providers can offer advice in ways linked to more positive cognitive and behavioral responses from the recipients, the support is beneficial, at least in the short term. The present study suggests several considerations for would-be advice givers. First, while trying to help a distressed person solve his or her problem, support providers should pay attention to the feelings of the distressed other and try to create a supportive conversational context through the provision of sensitive emotional support. Second, before giving advice, it is probably best to focus communicative efforts on comforting and problem inquiry until it is clear that advice is desired and a solution is available (see Burleson & Goldsmith, 1998). Third, giving advice in a polite, logical, and convincing manner (Feng & Burleson, 2008) is as important as providing emotional support and engaging in problem inquiry and analysis. The substantial degree of cultural similarities observed in this study suggests that these guidelines can be applied effectively in intercultural communication contexts.

Finally, although the three-step, sequential mode proposed in the integrated model of advice-giving has its theoretical attraction of being parsimonious, it should be understood that this specification in no way implies that advice-giving, or supportive communication in general, is a simplistic process of applying the correct formula to achieve the right solution. In real-life practice, supportive communication can be highly complex and fluid; topics and focus of a conversation may change for a variety of reasons. Therefore, it is important for the helper to monitor and adjust to the target's responses while using the model as a general guideline. Since each individual is different, for a helper to be open and flexible during supportive interactions, the helper may need to devise a relatively idiosyncratic, customized helping plan in response to perceived idiosyncratic needs and characteristics of a specific target, and for that matter, to deviate responsively from the plan at any time as feedback or observations suggest (Haaga & Stiles, 2000).

Appendix

An Example of Conversations Exhibiting the EPA Sequence

- Your friend:* Hi there! How are you doing?
You: Oh, hi. OK. Well, maybe not so OK. You know I've been working part time at a company near campus?
Your friend: Yeah? Is everything going OK?
You: Well, I've been debating with myself about what to do with it. The thing is: I've been working for the company for almost 13 months now and I never received a raise. Given that I have 3 years prior experience doing this job and I've developed a quality control program for them from scratch, I thought they would have given me a raise or at least given me some indication of a raise by now. It's so frustrating.
- [Emotional support]*
Your friend: Sure. That's very understandable. I would probably feel the same way if I were in that situation. You have worked hard for the company and you deserve to be paid enough for it. It may make you feel being taken advantage of. I know a lot of people hate asking for pay raises cos' you don't want the employer to think that you are just there for the money. This is really a sticky situation.
You: Yeah, that's exactly why it bothers me. I don't know if I should ask for a raise now or just wait it out. It's been bugging me for a while.
- [Problem inquiry and analysis]*
Your friend: Do you know what the common standards are for hiring someone with your qualifications? I mean in terms of salary?
You: Well, I actually did a bit of research on that recently and I think I'm definitely underpaid according to industry standards.
Your friend: If that's the case. I think they should know that and give you a raise. Do you know what their policy is regarding salary raise?
-

(continued)

Appendix (continued)

- You:** Well, they never explicitly told me how often they would give pay raise, but I've heard that many companies give it once a year. I don't know why they didn't give me a raise cos' I thought I've done very well and deserve it.
- [Advice]**
- Your friend:** If I were you, I'd probably talk to my boss about it. Explain to him/her your case and let him/her know that you deserve a pay raise for the hard work you've put in for your company. You probably need to be nice yet firm on your position. You might be surprised at what you'll get. It might not work, but at least you tried. Then, you know and won't have to look back and be like "Dang, I should've asked." If they don't give you what you deserve for what you've done, then maybe you should consider moving on. If they don't appreciate you now, probably less chances they'll do it later.
- You:** Those are some good ideas; I just wish I didn't have to deal with this.

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