

Seeking Help From Close, Same-Sex Friends:
Relational Costs for Japanese and Personal Costs for European Canadians

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Abstract

People often seek help from close friends. Such social support is generally beneficial for help seekers, but also entails costs. Past cross-cultural research on social support suggested that East Asians tend to perceive relational costs (e.g., causing trouble for close friends), whereas North Americans tend to perceive personal costs (e.g., admitting incompetence). In Study 1, we collected European Canadian and Japanese people's everyday experiences of help-seeking behaviors. In Studies 2 and 3, we investigated whether culturally specific perceptions of costs predicted relationship expectations. Using the intersubjective approach to culture (Chiu et al., 2010), we also examined whether social norms regarding seeking help mediate these relationships (Study 2 for Japanese, Study 3 for European Canadians). The results indicated that culturally specific costs of seeking help influenced people's expectations of closeness in friendships through their perceived norms of seeking help. Implications for social cognitive research and clinical research are discussed.

Keywords: cross-cultural differences, social support, closeness, friendship, intersubjective perception

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Relational Costs for Japanese and Personal Costs for European Canadians

People often seek help from friends. Students ask classmates to lend them notes from a missed class. Doctors ask other doctors to provide feedback to confirm their diagnoses. Married couples seek advice from their friends to solve marital crises. Such help-seeking behaviors involve individuals' explicit request for aid from another person when the individuals encounter a problem or a need. In doing so, they become sensitive to the issue of whether the help request is socially appropriate or not. If the requested help is outside the accepted norms, or causes problems for the help providers, help seekers could experience negative social outcomes. Therefore, people tend to seek help with problems that can be more easily resolved or assuaged with the time, effort, or resources of another person (DePaulo, 1983). If there are cultural variations in people's normative beliefs about seeking help from close, same-sex friends, elucidating the diverging effects of the cultural norms will benefit research on close relationships, social support, and culture. In this study, we tested whether the cultural norms of help-seeking behaviors, which entail relational costs for East Asians and personal costs for North Americans, influence expectations of closeness in close, same-sex friendships. Following Fehr (2004), we focused on same-sex friendships to avoid possible confounding effects.

Past research indicates that East Asians and North Americans perceive different costs when they seek help from close others. East Asians tend to perceive relational costs, which refer to the costs associated with their self-evaluation as being interdependent, supportive of harmonious relationships, or perceptive about others' welfare (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006; Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008). The salience of relational costs among East Asians has been observed in cross-cultural studies. For example, Asian Americans and Asian immigrants

who hesitated to seek help from family members or close friends were highly concerned about embarrassment, harming a relationship, worsening a problem, the negative evaluation of others, or one's obligation to be self-reliant (Taylor et al., 2004). In addition, when they wrote letters soliciting help from family members or close friends, Asian Americans and Asian immigrants reported higher levels of distress and experienced greater increases in cortisol levels than did European Americans (Taylor, Welch, Kim, & Sherman, 2007).

North Americans, on the other hand, tend to perceive personal costs, which refer to the costs associated with their self-evaluation as independent, autonomous, or self-reliant individuals (Fisher, Nadler, & Witcher-Alagna, 1983). For people from Western cultural traditions, seeking help from others implies failure or an inability to handle difficulties in their lives, and involves admitting incompetence and inferiority to help providers (Nadler, 1983). Therefore, asking for help in certain situations can threaten their self-esteem. For example, American participants perceived high costs when they sought help to overcome problems that were central to their identity (Lee, 2002), when they sought help from socially powerless individuals or people from a lower social class (Druian & DePaulo, 1977), or when help providers were meaningful social comparison targets (i.e., attitudinally similar persons such as close friends; Fisher, Harrison, & Nadler, 1978).

Help-Seeking Behavior, Norms, and Intersubjective Approaches to Culture

Are there other parameters that will allow us to better examine people's cost and benefit expectations? We maintain that theories of norms in interpersonal relationships are relevant to the study of the costs of seeking help. The act of seeking help is often observed and evaluated not only by the targeted help providers but also by other members of a given group, so that the members of the group are aware of the norms or rules of interaction. According to the equity

theory, individuals who participate in a social relationship are expected to follow norms regarding the equitable distribution of resources within that relationship. The equity theory suggests that people in social relationships necessarily become sensitive to the equity norm because they will be socially punished for noncompliance (e.g., ostracism; Walster, Walster, & Berscheid, 1978). It also suggests that the act of seeking help is seen as a kind of behavior that potentially breaks the norm of equity and threatens interpersonal relationships, because help seekers benefit more than help providers when help is transacted (Hatfield & Sprecher, 1983). Therefore, when help seekers create or expect to create severe inequity by their help-seeking behaviors, they tend to feel distressed (Gross & McMullen, 1983). To reduce this distressed feeling, they become reluctant to seek help in order to avoid creating inequity (DePaulo & Fisher, 1980), or they become motivated to restore equity in the relationship through reciprocation (Wilke & Lanzetta, 1970).

In close interpersonal relationships such as friendships, romantic relationships, or kinships, people seem to be less concerned about the equitable distribution of resources. For example, Clark (1983) argued that the norm in close relationships is to be responsive to others' needs rather than to provide reciprocating rewards. Similarly, Fiske (1992) argued that people in close relationships treat each other as equals and offer help without monitoring the balance of costs and benefits. Because the norm is not a quid pro quo, the act of seeking help in such relationships is unlikely to create the perception of inequity. Corresponding to these arguments, there is evidence to suggest that people tend to seek help from close, same-sex friends, even if their friends will be penalized for providing help (Shapiro, 1980). Similarly, paired friends who cooperated to achieve a mutual goal were less likely to show signs of offering immediate

reciprocation, even when one person had contributed more than the other (Weinstein, DeV Vaughan, & Wiley, 1969).

However, even seeking help from close friends is not free of cost. People tend to seek help only when other members of their respective cultural groups would approve of the act of seeking help. For East Asians, seeking help from close friends is perceived to be costly when it harms the relationships by causing inconvenience (Taylor et al., 2004), whereas it is costly for North Americans when it leads to negative self-evaluation by threatening one's self-reliance (Fisher et al., 1978). These findings indicate that when seeking help from close friends, people are sensitive to culturally specific costs associated with their perception of noncompliance to culturally specific norms. To better understand the culturally specific costs of seeking help from close friends, we need to understand the cultural norms on which the perceptions of costs are based. The main purpose of this study is to construct a theoretical framework that incorporates the cultural norms underlying culturally specific perceptions of the costs of seeking help from close friends, and to investigate the effects of the perceived norms on close friendships.

To investigate the cultural norms, we used the intersubjective approach to culture to formulate our hypotheses (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010). A basic premise of the intersubjective approach to culture is that people act on what they perceive to be the common beliefs, values, or practices in their culture. Chiu et al. (2010) argued that this perception of commonness (i.e., intersubjective perception) forms a mental representation of cultural ideas, in which members of a given culture acquire acceptable guidance from their social environment to coordinate their behaviors within that culture. We maintain that this perceived commonness can be seen as a loosely shared social representation of cultural practices, through which people find behavioral guidance outside the self.

The intersubjective approach to culture benefits our investigation in two ways. First, it allows us to articulately predict individuals' help-seeking behaviors. Previous research has shown that help-seeking behaviors are by nature interpersonal experiences in which people tend to behave normatively, even if their behavior is at odds with their personal attitudes (cf. Prentice & Miller, 1993). In addition, people in a given cultural community consciously perceive and report such cultural norms; they can refer to explicit knowledge about the degree of commonness of concrete behaviors (Zou et al., 2009). Therefore, unlike the self-report of personal cultural values, which has been criticized for low validity (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002), the self-report of explicitly stated cultural norms can be a useful measure with relatively high face validity. Second, the intersubjective approach allows us to examine relational expectations based on these cultural norms, because actions based on such norms are indicative of relational closeness. Hardin and Conley (2001) reported that individuals become and act more close or intimate with each other as they establish common beliefs, values, or practices in their relationships. Common actions communicate willingness to affiliate and shared understanding of common ground. Researchers in the area of social influence have repeatedly shown that in order to socially verify that their actions are common and thus expected to increase closeness in relationships, people are equipped with skills to extract and create norms (Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990; Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Sherif, 1936). Applying these arguments to the intersubjective approach to culture, we speculated that when a person seeks more common (i.e., culturally appropriate) help from a close friend, he or she expects a subsequent increase in closeness of the friendship.

Hypotheses

This paper undertakes to prove that cultural norms are an important underlying factor of culturally specific costs of help-seeking behavior, and that these norms play a pivotal role in individuals' expectations for relational outcomes in friendships. First, based on the past cross-cultural research on help-seeking behavior in close relationships, we expect that whereas East Asians are sensitive to relational costs of seeking help from close friends, personal costs are salient for North Americans. Second, from the intersubjective approach to culture, we assumed that these culturally specific costs would be associated with the perception of behavioral commonness. That is, when help-seeking behaviors are characterized by higher culturally specific costs, people in that culture perceive the behaviors to be less common in friendships. Finally, we assumed that the perception of commonness would in turn be associated with expectations of relational outcomes. That is, if people perceive a help-seeking behavior to be more common in friendships, they will expect higher closeness in a friendship after seeking help. In other words, we hypothesized that the degree of perceived commonness of help-seeking behaviors would mediate the relationship between perceived costs and closeness in friendships.

Overview of Studies

In testing these hypotheses, we first collected people's everyday experiences of seeking help from close, same-sex friends. The purpose of Study 1 was to identify common help-seeking behaviors between European Canadians and their friends or Japanese people and their friends. We asked European Canadian and Japanese participants to describe their experiences of seeking help from close, same-sex friends in an open-ended format. Then, using Fehr's (2004) selection criteria, we selected a list of help-seeking situations from Study 1. In Study 2, we asked a different group of participants to imagine expected cultural norms (commonness of behaviors)

and expected outcomes of the selected help-seeking behaviors. We expected that perceived relational costs for seeking help were a salient feature that would influence closeness in friendships, especially for Japanese participants. We also examined whether Japanese participants' perception of commonness of the behaviors mediated the relationship between their perception of relational costs and subsequent closeness in friendship.

In Study 3, referring to past findings that North Americans are sensitive to personal costs more than relational costs, we aimed to conceptually replicate the results of Study 2 with European Canadian participants, by investigating the effect of their perceived personal costs. Here again, by taking an intersubjective approach to culture, we examined whether commonness of the behaviors mediated the relationships between Canadians' perception of personal costs and closeness in friendship.

Study 1

Methods

Participants. Participants were 123 European Canadian undergraduate students (58 females) at the University of Alberta, Canada, and 110 Japanese undergraduate students (43 females) at Kyoto University and Kobe University, Japan. The average age of Canadian participants was 19.38 ($SD = 3.21$); that of Japanese participants was 20.69 ($SD = 2.16$). Participants responded to an online questionnaire at separate workstations in groups of 5 to 20 people. Canadian participants received a partial course credit, and Japanese participants received a \$5 gift certificate for their participation.

Procedure. To facilitate their understanding of the task, participants were first asked to read a passage describing a narrow definition of close friends. They were asked to think of same-sex friends whose relationship with them was as intimate as the one described in the passage.

Afterwards, they reported their concrete experiences of asking a favor of close, same-sex friends. For each favor requested, participants responded to two elements of the favor: (a) whether or not their friend actually granted the favor, and (b) the inappropriateness of the favor if asked outside of a close friendship, as an indicator of perceived commonness (9-point scale). Participants answered the questionnaires in their native language. The English version of the questionnaire was first translated into Japanese and then back-translated into English for consistency. Any disagreements in translations were resolved through discussions among the translators.

Results and Discussion

Participants reported 1407 help-seeking behaviors in total ($M = 6.04$); these numbers are comparable to those in previous studies that used similar methods (e.g., Fehr, 2004; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). To focus only on help-seeking behaviors specific to friendship interactions, we selected help-seeking behaviors that would be considered highly inappropriate had the favor been asked outside of a close, same-sex friendship (i.e., rating of 5 or greater on question b). We also excluded favors that had not been granted by friends, because the friends might have considered those favors to be unusual in friendship contexts. As a result, 25% of the help-seeking behaviors (355 behaviors, of which 197 were reported by Canadian participants and 158 were reported by Japanese participants) were excluded from further analysis. Five Canadian and seven Japanese participants did not report any help-seeking behaviors specific to friendship interactions; therefore, we excluded their data. We then compared the frequency of help-seeking behaviors between the two cultural groups, and found that Japanese participants reported fewer help-seeking behaviors ($M = 3.83$, $N_{Situation} = 396$) than did European Canadians ($M = 5.56$, $N_{Situation} = 656$), $t(219) = 4.06$, $p < .001$. This result corroborated a previous study in which East Asians perceived higher relational concerns and

thereby were less likely than North Americans to seek help from close others (Taylor et al., 2007).¹

The number of obtained situational and cultural difference in seeking help from others in Study 1 suggested that people have mental representations of concrete help-seeking behaviors. Thus, using the list of help-seeking behaviors obtained in Study 1, we moved on to test the predictions regarding Japanese individuals' perceived relational costs from the standpoint of the intersubjective approach to culture. In particular, we hypothesized the mediation effect of Japanese individuals' perceived commonness of specific help-seeking behaviors. That is, Japanese participants' perceived relational costs would be negatively associated with the perceived commonness of help-seeking behaviors in friendships. The perceived commonness would, in turn, be positively associated with subsequent closeness expectations in friendships.

Study 2

Methods

Participants. Seventy-seven European Canadian undergraduate students (37 males and 40 females) at the University of Alberta and 76 Japanese undergraduate students (35 males and 41 females) at Kyoto University participated in Study 2. The average age of Canadian participants was 19.30 ($SD = 1.70$); the average age of Japanese participants was 18.86 ($SD = .89$). Participants responded to an online questionnaire at separate workstations in groups of 5 to 20 people. Canadian participants received a partial course credit, and Japanese participants received a \$5 gift certificate for their participation

Stimuli Selection. In order to select descriptions of help-seeking behaviors with a wide range of commonness, we first selected shared help-seeking behaviors within each cultural group from the descriptions reported in Study 1. According to Fehr's (2004) study, when two or more

participants in a sample reported an identical or synonymous behavior in an open-ended questionnaire, individuals in the sample were likely to have a shared representation of this behavior. In other words, the behavior was likely to be a common or familiar experience among the sample group. Also, Fehr (2004) found that the perceived degree of commonness was positively associated with the number of synonymous behaviors reported among the sample group. As the number of synonymous descriptions of a behavior increased, individuals in the sample group reported higher commonness for the behavior. Following Fehr's selection criteria, we had coders identify and count the number of identical or synonymous behaviors reported in Study 1 to estimate the commonness of help-seeking behavior. The first author, who is a Japanese-English bilingual, coded both Canadian and Japanese help-seeking behaviors. A native English or Japanese speaker independently coded Canadian or Japanese help-seeking behaviors, respectively. An inter-rater reliability analysis between the first author and the coders, using the Cohen's Kappa statistic, showed fair to good consistency for both Japanese ($\kappa = .51, p < .001$) and Canadian ($\kappa = .40, p < .001$) help-seeking behaviors (Fleiss, 2003). Help-seeking behaviors on which the coders and the first author disagreed were excluded from the analysis. Four hundred eighty-nine idiosyncratic (or culturally uncommon) help-seeking behaviors (46%), of which 326 were reported by Canadian participants and 163 were reported by Japanese participants, were excluded from the analysis. An example of idiosyncratic help-seeking behaviors includes the following: "Ask a friend to keep an eye on my partner when I was out of town." Nine Canadian and 17 Japanese participants reported only idiosyncratic help-seeking behaviors. In total, 330 Canadian-generated and 233 Japanese-generated help-seeking behaviors remained for further selection.

Next, we chose the behaviors with varying degrees of perceived commonness in the respective cultures, that is, those that had different numbers of synonymous descriptions. We selected 20 behaviors that had been generated by Canadian participants and 20 behaviors generated by Japanese participants. According to Cohen (2007), behavioral descriptions that are obtained through open-ended questionnaires such as the situation sampling method, although not a perfect replication of reality, are appropriate to consider as a replication of reality (Appendix A & B). That is, a behavior reported by many (few) Japanese participants may be considered relatively common (uncommon) in Japanese culture, and a behavior that many (few) Canadian participants reported may be considered relatively common (uncommon) in Canadian culture. Thus, these behaviors cover the range of commonness in Canadian and Japanese cultures.

Procedure. Participants were presented with 40 help-seeking behaviors and were asked to imagine seeking help from their close, same-sex friends. The “typical close friendship” passage used in Study 1 was presented to participants before they answered the questions. For each help-seeking behavior, participants were asked to rate, on 9-point scales, (a) the degree of commonness of the behaviors, as an indicator of perceived commonness; (b) the degree of trouble the favor would inflict upon their friend, as an indicator of relational costs; and (c) the expected intimacy levels in the friendship after the help request, as an indicator of closeness in friendship.² Participants answered the questionnaires in their native language.

Results and Discussion

In the first step, we tested the direct association between perceived relational costs and subsequent closeness expectations in friendships. This analysis reconfirmed that for forming relational expectations, relational cost is a more salient feature of help-seeking behavior for Japanese participants than for European Canadian participants. A multiple regression method

was used to analyze data, because participants' ratings on perceived relational costs were a continuous variable. We first regressed participants' ratings on subsequent closeness expectations in friendships according to the cultural origins of help-seeking behaviors (Canadian-generated vs. Japanese-generated), cultural backgrounds of participants (European Canadians vs. Japanese), participants' ratings of relational costs, and interactions among the three predictors. Ratings of relational costs were centered around the grand mean. The results of this analysis revealed a significant 3-way interaction, $\beta = .27$, $t = 6.18$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .19$, which suggested that participants from the two cultural groups responded to Canadian-generated and Japanese-generated help-seeking behaviors differently. Thus, we separated responses to the Canadian-generated behaviors and the Japanese-generated behaviors, and analyzed the effects of cultural backgrounds of participants and ratings of relational costs on the subsequent closeness expectations in friendships. For Japanese-generated help-seeking behaviors, we found a significant interaction between participants' cultural backgrounds and the ratings of relational costs, $\beta = .30$, $t = 2.06$, $p < .05$. A simple slope analysis for Japanese participants showed that they reported lower subsequent closeness in friendships as they perceived higher relational costs for seeking help, $\beta = -.36$, $t = -2.33$, $p < .05$. In contrast, Canadian participants' ratings of relational costs were not associated with their ratings of subsequent closeness in friendships, $t < 1$, ns. These patterns supported our hypothesis that perceived relational costs for seeking help are a salient feature that influences closeness in friendships, especially for the Japanese.

For Canadian-generated help-seeking behaviors, we also found a significant interaction between participants' cultural backgrounds and their ratings on relational costs, $\beta = .30$, $t = 2.98$, $p < .01$. Simple slope analysis for Japanese participants showed that they reported lower closeness in friendships as they perceived higher relational costs for seeking help, $\beta = -.37$, $t = -$

2.46, $p < .01$. In contrast, Canadian participants' ratings on relational costs were not associated with their ratings on subsequent closeness in friendships, $\beta = .17$, $t = 1.68$, $p = .10$. That is, in response to foreign help-seeking behaviors, Japanese participants showed the same pattern as in their responses to help-seeking behaviors of their own culture. Japanese participants' responses to foreign help-seeking behaviors will be discussed in the General Discussion section in conjunction with the mediation effect of their perceived commonness. As expected, Canadian participants' perceived relational costs for domestic (Canadian-generated) and foreign (Japanese-generated) help-seeking behavior was not associated with subsequent closeness in friendships; thus, the analysis was stopped. Then, in Study 3, on the basis of previous findings (Fisher et al., 1983), we examined whether European Canadian participants' perceived personal costs are associated with subsequent closeness in friendships.

In the second step, we tested whether the association between perceived relational cost and closeness expectation was mediated by the commonness of help-seeking behaviors. This mediation analysis (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005) examined whether the perceived commonness—a shared cultural norm—underlies the relational costs and influences relational expectations for Japanese participants. The results indicated that, for Japanese-generated help-seeking behaviors (see Figure 1), Japanese participants' ratings on relational costs were negatively associated with their ratings on commonness of the help, $\beta = -.43$, $t = 3.13$, $p < .001$. This association suggests that, as hypothesized, the cultural norms (perceived commonness) underlie Japanese participants' perception of relational costs for seeking help from close friends. Commonness of the help was, in turn, positively associated with their ratings on subsequent closeness in friendships, after controlling for the effect of relational costs, $\beta = .54$, $t = 3.40$, $p < .001$. That is, as Japanese participants perceived higher costs for seeking help, they reported the

help to be less common in their friendships. By imagining seeking uncommon help, then, Japanese participants expected less closeness in their friendships. This association also supported our hypothesis that cultural norms influence people's relational expectations (closeness in friendship). In fact, because of the mediating effect of the commonness, the residual effect of relational costs on closeness ratings became nonsignificant, $\beta = -.13$, ns, *Sobel* $z = 2.30$, $p < .05$.³ For Canadian-generated help-seeking behaviors, the mediation effect was not significant, *Sobel* $z = 1.58$, $p = .11$.⁴ As we will discuss in the General Discussion section, we expected this pattern of results, as we assumed that Japanese participants find it difficult to assess foreign (Canadian-generated) behavioral samples when they assess the commonness of behaviors.

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Study 3

North Americans tend to perceive personal costs, which refer to the costs associated with their self-evaluation as independent, autonomous, or self-reliant individuals (Fisher et al., 1983). For people from Western cultural traditions, seeking help from others implies failure or an inability to handle difficulties in their lives, and involves admitting one's incompetence and inferiority to help providers (Nadler, 1983). Therefore, Westerners perceive high personal costs in various situations that threaten their sense of self. For example, American participants perceived high costs when they sought help to overcome problems that were central to their identity (Lee, 2002), when they sought help from socially powerless individuals or people from a lower social class (Druian & DePaulo, 1977), or when help providers were meaningful social comparison targets (i.e., attitudinally similar people such as close friends; Fisher et al., 1978).

Method

Participants. Sixty-eight European Canadian undergraduate students (31 males and 37 females) at the University of Alberta participated in Study 3. The average age of participants was 19.26 ($SD = 2.17$). Participants responded to an online questionnaire at separate workstations in groups of 5 to 20 people, and received a partial course credit for their participation.

Procedure. We used the same sets of help-seeking behaviors that were used in Study 2. For each help-seeking behavior, participants were asked to rate on 9-point scales (a) the degree of commonness of behaviors (perceived commonness), (b) the degree of trouble they would inflict upon their friend (relational costs), and (c) the expected intimacy levels in the friendship after the help request (closeness in friendship). Different from Study 2, we also asked (d) the expected degree of feeling good about themselves for requesting help (personal costs),⁵ in order to scrutinize a culturally specific pattern of friendship formation among European Canadians.

Results and Discussion

We used a series of multiple regression analyses to examine the hypothesized mediating effect of perceived commonness of the help (Baron & Kenny, 1986). We included participants' ratings on relational costs in the first step of all analyses, to test whether the effect of perceived personal costs for seeking help was above and beyond the effect of relational costs. As shown in Figure 2, we found a marginally significant effect of personal costs on closeness for Canadian-generated help-seeking behaviors, $\beta = -.18$, $t = -1.38$, $p = .08$, after controlling for the effect of European Canadians' perceived relational costs. This indicates that European Canadians perceived personal costs for seeking help from close friends as a salient feature that influences closeness in friendships. Participants' ratings on personal costs were also negatively associated with the commonness of help-seeking behaviors, $\beta = -.44$, $t = -3.84$, $p < .01$, after controlling for the effect of their perceived relational costs. This association indicates that, as hypothesized, the

cultural norms underlie European Canadian participants' perception of personal costs for seeking help from close friends. After controlling for the effect of personal costs and relational costs, the ratings on the commonness of the behaviors were, in turn, positively associated with their subsequent expectation of closeness in friendships, $\beta = .22$, $t = 1.68$, $p = .05$. That is, as European Canadian participants perceived higher personal costs for seeking help, they reported the help to be less common in their friendships. By imagining seeking uncommon help, Canadian participants expected less closeness in their friendships. This pattern of associations supported our hypothesis that cultural norms influence relational expectations. Because of this mediating effect, the residual effect of personal costs on the closeness ratings became nonsignificant, $t < 1$.⁶ The mediation effect was marginally significant, *Sobel* $z = 1.53$, $p = .06$. Remember that these results were observed after we included the effects of the perceived relational costs in the first step of all regression analyses. Therefore, the results suggest that European Canadian participants' cultural norms underlie their perception of personal costs rather than relational costs. The cultural norms, in turn, influenced European Canadian participants' relational expectations.

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For Japanese-generated help-seeking behaviors, we also found a significant relationship between participants' ratings on personal costs and subsequent closeness of friendships, $\beta = -.32$, $t = -2.69$, $p < .01$, after controlling for the effect of perceived relational costs. However, the mediation effect of the commonness of the behaviors was not significant, *Sobel* $z = 1.09$, $p = .14$.⁷ Canadian participants' responses to foreign help-seeking behaviors will be discussed in the General Discussion section, in conjunction with Japanese participants' responses to foreign help-seeking behaviors in Study 2.

General Discussion

In three studies, we examined cultural norms that underlie culturally specific costs for seeking help, and the impact of these norms on people's expectations for relational outcomes in the context of close, same-sex friendships. We hypothesized and found that Japanese and European Canadians differ in their concerns about seeking help, in that Japanese were concerned more with relational costs than were European Canadians in Study 2. In Study 3, we attempted to ascertain whether European Canadians are concerned with personal costs rather than with relational costs. These culturally specific costs were negatively associated with the cultural norms of help-seeking behaviors; that is, help-seeking behaviors were perceived to be less common as they become more costly. The cultural norms, in turn, formed a basis for expectations of relational outcomes, so that participants reported expectations of higher closeness in friendship as they imagined seeking more common help from close, same-sex friends. These findings indicate that people in a given culture navigate themselves in a complex cultural environment according to what they perceive to be common, widespread, or frequent in their sociocultural environment (Chiu et al., 2010). People rely on their perception of common practices, values, or beliefs seemingly shared among members of their cultural groups, to socially verify their actions (Hardin & Higgins, 1996), form trust with others (Hardin & Conley, 2001), and avoid offending other members of the culture (Yamagishi, Hashimoto, & Schug, 2008). In the following, we will discuss the issue of cultural affordance and implications of the current study in social cognitive and clinical research.

Cultural Affordance

According to the notion of cultural affordance proposed by Kitayama and his colleagues (Kitayama et al., 1997; Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006; Morling, Kitayama, &

Miyamoto, 2002), everyday situations prevalent in a given culture highlight and elaborate values and beliefs that are loosely shared among members of that culture. Mature members of a culture are those who acquire ways of thinking, feeling, and relating that enable them to navigate themselves appropriately within the culturally specific confines of situations. In other words, the characteristics of situations elicit dominant ways of thinking, feeling, and relating in a given culture. Past studies showed that situations in North American cultures were likely to highlight self-enhancement, socially disengaging emotions (i.e., emotions deriving from self-reliance), or primary control (i.e., one's active influence on the social environment), whereas situations in East Asian cultures were likely to highlight self-criticism, socially engaging emotions (i.e., emotions deriving from relational harmony), or secondary control (i.e., one's adjustment to the social environment).

The patterns of the mediation effect found in Studies 2 and 3 supported the notion of cultural affordance. The commonness of the help was strongly associated with perceptions of costs when Japanese or European Canadian participants responded to local help-seeking behaviors.⁸ Specifically, when Japanese participants responded to Japanese-generated help-seeking behaviors, their ratings on the commonness of the help mediated the effect of perceived relational costs on expected closeness in friendships. Similarly, the mediation effect was significant, albeit marginal, only when Canadian participants responded to Canadian-generated help-seeking behaviors. These patterns of results suggest that there is a consensus within each cultural group in terms of which local help-seeking behaviors, characterized by culturally specific costs, are common and facilitate closeness in friendships. In other words, although both Japanese (Study 2) and Canadian participants (Study 3) shared similar associative mindsets regarding the commonness of local help-seeking behaviors, the perceived cost of the help-

seeking behaviors, and subsequent closeness with other members, the kinds of costs were influenced by their respective cultural worldviews: Japanese participants were concerned with relational costs, whereas European Canadians were concerned with personal costs. In addition, the results of Studies 2 and 3 suggest that these associative mindsets were intensified when participants judged commonness of behaviors generated by members of the same cultural group. But such associative beliefs were not shared for foreign help-seeking behaviors. In order to be a mature member of a given culture as suggested by the notion of cultural affordance, people may need to develop these associations between characteristics of behaviors and the consequences of the behaviors.

Implications

Prototype interaction-pattern model. The current research provided an awaited cross-cultural comparison of the prototype interaction-pattern model in the area of close relationship research. Fehr (2004) proposed the prototype interaction-pattern model of intimacy in close friendships, which specifies the mental structure of common practices. According to this model, people organize various behaviors in friendships according to the prototypicality of the behaviors. Some behavior is more representative of intimate interactions in friendships than others. Fehr (2004) showed that Canadian participants were able to delineate behaviors based on the degree of prototypicality, responded more quickly to prototypical behaviors than nonprototypical behaviors, and expected negative relational outcomes for failing to execute highly prototypical behaviors.

Our results regarding the mediation effect of perceived commonness have suggested the influence of culture on the prototype interaction-pattern model. As the model predicts, the current results indicate that both European Canadian and Japanese participants have a mental

structure of behaviors that form a basis for intimacy in friendships. The results of Studies 2 and 3 showed a significant association between participants' perceived commonness of help-seeking behaviors and their expectations of closeness in friendships, confirming Fehr's (2004) model. However, Japanese help-seeking behaviors were influenced by relational costs, whereas European Canadian help-seeking behaviors were influenced by personal costs. This suggests a systematic cultural variation in prototypicality of interaction patterns. A specific help-seeking behavior that Japanese individuals think of as common or prototypical is unlikely to be perceived as such by European Canadians. In fact, in Studies 2 and 3, the mediation effect of perceived commonness of help-seeking behavior was found only when Japanese participants responded to Japanese-generated behaviors and when Canadians responded to Canadian-generated behaviors. To extend this line of research, future studies should examine what would happen when people chose not to follow the perceived cultural norms regarding commonness of help-seeking behaviors. Fehr (2004) showed that people tend to estimate low intimacy in friendships if their friends fail to do what is commonly done in friendships. We must further investigate whether such uncommon behaviors lead to more serious outcomes such as being ostracized by the group or by society.

Taijin kyofusho. Our results also suggest a possible way to remedy the Japanese psychological disorder, *taijin kyofusho*. *Taijin kyofusho* refers to a Japanese culture-specific social anxiety disorder characterized by a fear of offending, displeasing, or embarrassing others by means of one's body parts or functions (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). According to Maeda and Nathan (1999), individuals who are diagnosed with *taijin kyofusho* tend to fear that their odors, eye contact, facial expressions, or physical features offend their interaction partners. Therefore, these individuals become convinced that they are disrupting harmonious relationships,

and they avoid or fear interacting with others. The current findings offer a possible explanation for the mechanism of *taijin kyofusho*, from a social cognitive perspective. That is, people who are diagnosed with *taijin kyofusho* may have dysfunctional cognitions about which behaviors lead to closeness in interpersonal relationships. As we reported, Japanese participants' normative beliefs about behaviors were organized according to relational costs. Actions based on the normative beliefs were, in turn, associated with expectations of closeness in the relationship. *Taijin kyofusho* patients may perceive overly high relational costs for most of their actions in interpersonal relationships, and perceive their actions to be obnoxiously uncommon. Therefore, they become convinced that their actions will offend others. In order to relieve some of the symptoms of *taijin kyofusho*, cognitive behavioral therapy that rectifies maladaptive cognition may be useful.

Limitations

The current studies had several limitations. First, the analysis used in the current studies was correlational by nature. To enhance the confidence of our interpretation, future research needs to be designed to experimentally investigate the effect of relational costs for Japanese, and the effect of personal costs for European Canadians, on the perceived commonness of the help and subsequent closeness in friendships. For example, we may be able to manipulate the perceived commonness of help-seeking behaviors by providing participants with false information about other participants' perceptions of commonness of behaviors. The second limitation of the current studies is the generalizability of current results to other members of East Asian or North American cultures. The hypotheses of the current studies are deductively formulated on the basis of past findings from Canadian, European, and Asian American participants, as well as Korean, Chinese, Japanese, and Hindu Indian participants. Whether our

results apply to all these groups of people needs further investigation. It is possible that people in a society, a region within a society, or a community within a region within a society use distinct help-seeking behaviors and organize them around different values, depending on the expected closeness in interpersonal relationships.

Finally, we used a conservative coding scheme in the selection of stimuli in Study 2, following a previous study with similar design (Fehr, 2004). As a result, the list of help-seeking behaviors was trimmed down to 40% of its original length. We speculate that the reason the percentage of idiosyncratic behaviors was reasonably large was that participants differed in various dimensions that might influence their need for support, such as socioeconomic status, dwellings, residential mobility, support networks, and personality. Despite the large proportion of idiosyncratic behaviors, participants who imagined seeking help from others were able to estimate the commonness of help-seeking behaviors. It was remarkable to discover that people within a given culture encountered similar situations in their everyday lives. Therefore, we concluded that it was worth investigating the way in which people used the knowledge of shared help-seeking behaviors to navigate themselves within their culture.

Footnotes

¹ We also examined variations in the types of help-seeking behaviors. Coders sorted help-seeking behaviors into four categories: instrumental help, emotional help, informational help, and shared activity. We found that European Canadian participants reported more instrumental help than did Japanese participants, $t(515) = 4.28, p < .001$; Japanese participants reported more emotional help and shared activity than did European Canadian participants, $t(515) = 2.44, p < .05$, and $t(515) = 4.59, p < .001$, respectively. The two cultural groups reported a similar proportion of informational help, $t < 1$, ns. In addition, female participants in our study were more likely to report emotional help, $t(507) = 3.87, p < .001$, and less likely to report informational help, $t(507) = 2.44, p < .01$, than male participants. The interaction effect between participants' cultural backgrounds and gender was not significant, $\chi^2(3) = 5.86, p = .12$.

² Relational cost was measured as the degree to which help seekers perceive causing cause trouble for their friend as a result of seeking help. According to Kim et al. (2008), East Asians hesitate to seek help from close others because they are concerned about harming interpersonal relationships with help providers. Their hesitation to seek help was associated more strongly with concern for the relationship than with either a feeling of obligation to solve their own problem or perceived availability of implicit or unsolicited support from close others.

³ When Japanese participants' ratings on relational costs were used as a mediator variable, with their ratings on commonness of help-seeking behaviors being a predictor variable, the mediation effect was not significant, *Sobel* $z < 1$, ns.

⁴ For illustrative purposes, we conducted mediation analysis for Canadian and Japanese participants' responses to Canadian-generated help-seeking behaviors. For Canadian participants,

the association between their ratings of relational costs and commonness was not significant, $\beta = -.06$, ns. After controlling for the effect of relational costs, their commonness ratings were positively associated with their closeness in friendships, $\beta = .26$, $t = 3.17$, $p < .01$. In contrast, Japanese participants perceived help-seeking behaviors to be more common as they perceived higher relational costs, $\beta = -.32$, $t = -1.93$, $p < .05$. After controlling for the effect of relational costs, Japanese participants' commonness ratings were positively associated with their closeness ratings at the marginally significant level, $\beta = .26$, $t = 1.58$, $p = .06$. The residual effect of relational costs on closeness in friendships remained significant, $\beta = -.29$, $t = -1.87$, $p < .05$. As a result, Japanese participants' ratings of commonness partially mediated the negative relationship between relational costs and closeness in friendships, though the effect of the mediation was nonsignificant, *Sobel* $z = 1.22$, $p = .22$.

⁵ We phrased the question regarding personal costs in a reverse manner, to avoid unnecessary reactance to evaluating oneself negatively (Hamamura, Meijer, Heine, Kamaya, & Hori, 2009).

⁶ When European Canadian participants' ratings on personal costs were used as a mediator variable, with their ratings on commonness of help-seeking behaviors being a predictor variable, the mediation effect was not significant, *Sobel* $z = 1.53$, $p = .13$.

⁷ For illustrative purposes, we conducted mediation analysis for European Canadian participants' responses to Japanese-generated help-seeking behaviors. The ratings on personal costs were significantly associated with the ratings on the commonness of help-seeking behaviors, $\beta = -.33$, $t = -2.76$, $p < .01$. However, the commonness of help-seeking behaviors was not associated with European Canadians' ratings on closeness in friendships, $\beta = .15$, $t = 1.19$, $p = .24$, after controlling for the effect of personal costs. As a result, the residual effect of personal

costs on their closeness expectation in friendships remained significant, $\beta = -.27$, $t = -2.17$, $p < .05$.

⁹ See footnotes 4 and 7 for the analysis.

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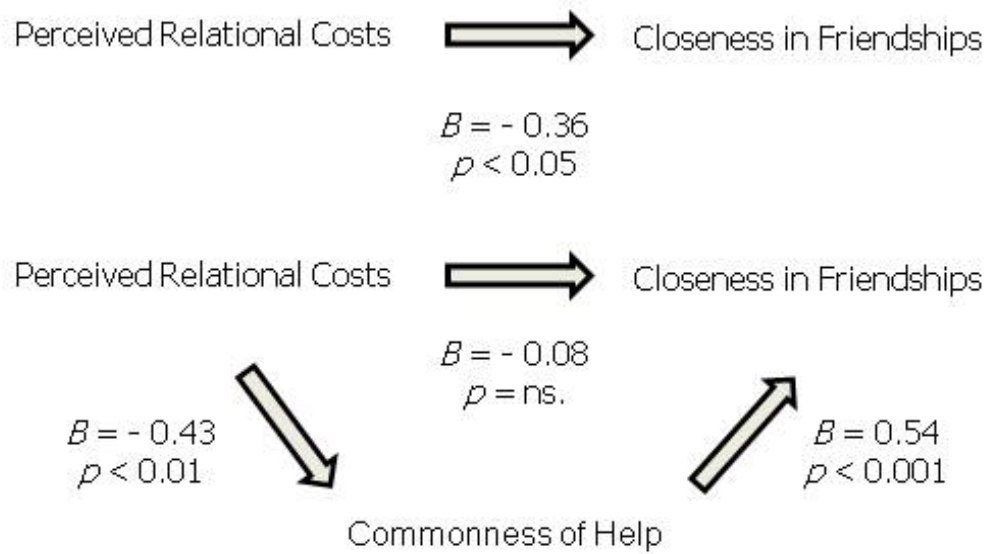


Figure 1. Mediation model for Japanese participants' responses to Japanese-generated help-seeking behaviors being tested in Study 2.

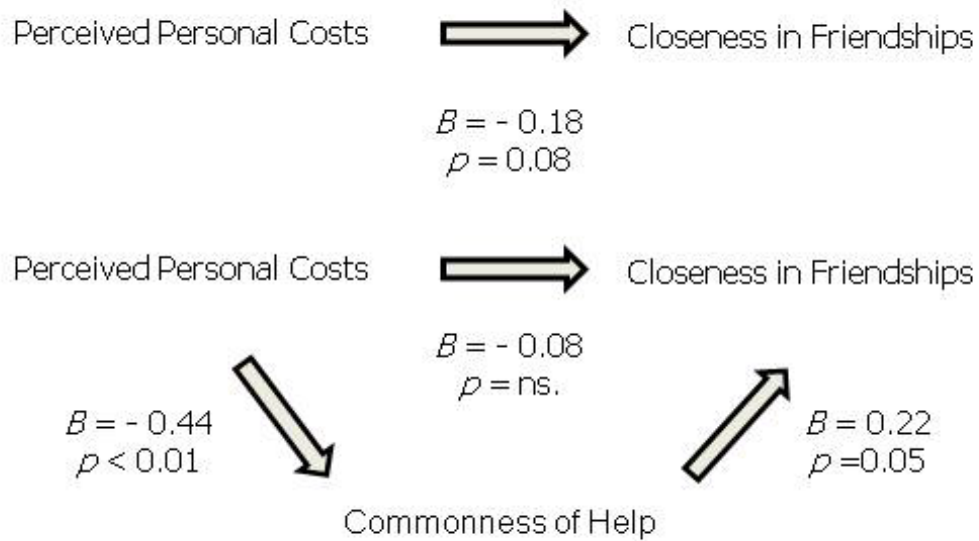


Figure 2. Mediation model for participants' responses to Canadian-generated help-seeking behaviors being tested in Study 3, after controlling the effect of perceived relational costs.

Appendix A

Canadian-generated Help-seeking Behaviours used in Studies 2 and 3

(Descriptions are in ascending order based on the number of synonymous behaviors reported in Study 1)

1. Asking a friend to do laundry at his/her place when my washing machine was not working
2. Asking a friend to help fix my car
3. Asking a friend to come to a funeral with me for support
4. Asking a friend to help me get a job where he/she works
5. Asking a friend to babysit my younger sibling while I was away
6. Asking a friend to back me up when I got in a fight
7. Asking a friend for a ride home when I was stranded
8. Asking a friend to talk to a person of opposite sex I liked for me
9. Asking a friend to help organize a party for a mutual friend
10. Asking a friend to tell a lie to my parents in order to keep me out of trouble
11. Asking a friend to edit my long paper
12. Asking a friend to let me stay at his/her place for a few days
13. Asking a friend to pick me up from a party
14. Asking a friend to watch my pets while I was out of town for a week
15. Asking a friend for a ride to or from work
16. Asking a friend to keep a secret of mine from others
17. Asking a friend to pay for a meal when I forgot my wallet
18. Asking a friend to lend me some of their clothes

19. Asking a friend to lend me a small amount of money
20. Asking a friend to help me move

Appendix B

Japanese-generated Help-seeking Behaviours used in Studies 2 and 3

(Descriptions are in ascending order based on the number of synonymous behaviors reported in

Study 1)

1. Asking a friend to wake me up by calling me in the morning
2. Asking a friend to let me stay at his/her parents' place when I am going to his/her hometown though my friend has already moved out
3. Asking a friend to nurse me when I was sick
4. Asking a friend to help complete my assignment though he was not taking the class
5. Consulting a friend regarding issues about a group of friends
6. Asking a friend to make time to teach me the materials covered in a class
7. Asking friend to hang out when I am bored
8. Asking a friend to listen to me vent for hours until late at night
9. Asking a friend to do the school work that I was supposed to do
10. Asking a friend to go shopping with me
11. Consulting a friend about my personal problems when he/she is preparing for a final exam
12. Asking a friend to lend me a large amount of money when I lost my wallet when we were travelling together
13. Asking a friend to let me stay at his/her place after a party
14. Asking a friend to come with me when I appealed my grade directly to a professor
15. Asking a friend to let me stay overnight without prior notice
16. Consulting a friend regarding my problems in romantic relationship

17. Asking a friend to come to events/places with me although he/she was not interested in going
18. Asking a friend to let me copy his/her assignment
19. Asking a friend to pick up handouts from class for me
20. Asking a friend to let me copy his/her notes for a class