

Chinese Evaluations of Emotional Support Skills, Goals, and Behaviors

An Assessment of Gender-related Similarities and Differences

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The present study assessed how people residing in China evaluate the emotional support they receive and provide, as well as whether gender-related influences on emotional support exhibited in American samples are also present among Chinese. Participants (253 native Chinese) responded to a questionnaire that assessed the value placed on emotional support skills, the importance of goals typically pursued in emotional support situations, the appropriateness of distinct coping strategies for providing emotional support, and the sensitivity of varied messages intended to provide comfort. Results indicated that whereas Chinese women rated emotional support skills as more important than Chinese men, women and men differed only slightly in their evaluations of the importance of different support goals, the appropriateness of different coping strategies, and the sensitivity of different messages. These results are compared to those obtained in previous research with samples of Americans and sojourning Chinese.

Keywords: *comforting; communication values; coping behaviors; interaction goals; sex differences*

The importance of providing emotional support to the well-being of distressed persons has been increasingly documented (Burlison, 2003a; Reis, 2001). Accumulating evidence suggests that emotional support not only contributes substantially to

physical and psychological well-being when coping with a stressful life event (e.g., Seeman, 2001; Spiegel & Kimerling, 2001) but also helps to establish, maintain, and improve interpersonal relationships (Acitelli, 1996; Samter, 2003). Consistent with this, research has found that emotional support is one of the most desired types of support provided by close relationship partners (Cutrona & Russell, 1987; Xu & Burleson, 2001).

Giving nurturance, comfort, and emotional support is viewed as feminine behavior in most Western and Eastern cultures; thus, the provision of emotional support is a gendered practice (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Taylor, 2002; J. T. Wood, 1994). Consistent with this stereotype, research has detected gender differences in several aspects of the provision of emotional support: Women are more likely than men to (a) be approached for emotional support (e.g., Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987), (b) provide emotional support (e.g., Burda, Vaux, & Schill, 1984), (c) focus on the emotional and expressive aspects of support situations (e.g., Trobst, Collins, & Embree, 1994), and (d) use highly sensitive and effective verbal strategies when providing support (e.g., MacGeorge, Gillihan, Samter, & Clark, 2003). These gender differences, in conjunction with the view that emotional support is a feminine activity, have contributed to the popularity of the Different Cultures Thesis (DCT)—the notion that men and women are so different in how they think, feel, and communicate that they should be regarded as members of distinct cultures (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Tannen, 1990; J. T. Wood, 1993).

The DCT has been featured in both popular books (e.g., Gray, 1992; see Zimmerman, Holm, & Haddock, 2001) and scholarly writing (e.g., Johnson, 2000; Noller, 1993), but recent empirical assessments of hypotheses derived from this thesis have yielded little support for it (see review by Burleson & Kunkel, in press). Indeed, so little empirical support has been obtained for the DCT that some scholars have concluded that it is little more than a myth—a myth that grossly overstates the degree of difference between men and women with respect to critical aspects of emotional support (Barnett & Rivers, 2004; MacGeorge, Graves, Feng, Gillihan, & Burleson, 2004). However, to date, most studies that have examined gender differences in emotional support processes have used samples composed of well-educated European Americans from middle-class backgrounds. This demographic group has undergone substantial changes in beliefs, values, and practices in the past 40 years, becoming more egalitarian in its gender-related attitudes and less gender-differentiated in numerous aspects of behavior (Steil, 2000). This raises the possibility that the large gender differences in emotional support concepts and practices predicted by the DCT might be observed in samples drawn from cultures characterized by a tradition of strongly differentiated gender roles. China has been portrayed as one such culture (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Wheeler, 1988; Yum, 1988).

The principal objective of the present study was to assess hypotheses pertaining to emotional support processes derived from the DCT with a sample of resident Chinese (i.e., native Chinese people who reside in China). Specifically, we examined the extent of gender differences among Chinese in their evaluations of (a) the significance of emotional support skills, (b) the importance of different goals often pursued by help-

ers in emotional support situations, (c) the appropriateness of various coping behaviors for providing emotional support, and (d) the sensitivity of different comforting message strategies. In addition, because little is currently known about emotional support preferences and practices among Chinese people, a secondary objective of the present study was to observe how Chinese conceptualize emotional support, as reflected in these evaluations of skills, goals, and behaviors. These conceptions can then be compared with those observed in research with Western samples, thereby enhancing our insight about emotional support preferences and practices across cultures.

To further elaborate the basis for the present study, we first provide a more detailed explication of the DCT and review research with Americans that has assessed gender differences in evaluations of skills, goals, and behaviors in emotional support contexts. Next, we identify some limitations in the existing research that show why an examination of emotional support preferences among resident Chinese should contribute both to the assessment of the DCT and, more generally, to our understanding of significant communication practices across cultures. We then review research conducted with samples of Chinese sojourners that has assessed evaluations of skills, goals, and behaviors in emotional support contexts and detail the research questions examined by the present study.

Literature Review

The Different Cultures Thesis (DCT)

The DCT maintains that in gender-differentiated societies, the distinct socialization patterns experienced by boys and girls, leads to the emergence of two distinct speech communities or cultures—one male and the other female (Maltz & Borker, 1982; J. T. Wood, 1993). Each of these cultures engenders in its members distinct assumptions concerning the functions of communication as well as distinct modes of thinking, speaking, and interpreting (see summary by Kyratzis, 2001). These are stylistic differences, not functional differences; each style is assumed to be equally valid and functionally equivalent for the members of its community. But these stylistic differences have profound consequences; the characteristic styles of communication employed by men and women are said to be so distinct that interaction between them is comparable to “cross-cultural communication” (Tannen, 1990, p. 18).

The DCT has been especially elaborated with respect to gender differences in emotion, the disclosure of emotional upset, and the provision of emotional support—what Tannen (1990) refers to as *troubles talk*. Thus, emotional support—the process of providing care, reassurance, and comfort to distressed others (Burlison, 2003a)—represents a critical communicative context for evaluating the merit of the DCT. According to the DCT, women tend to value close relationships for their expressive qualities, whereas men value relationships for their instrumental features. Thus, women should highly value the supportive communication skills of their relationship partners, whereas men value the instrumental communication skills of their partners;

women should view the provision of emotional support as a principal focus in support situations, whereas men should view solving practical problems as the most relevant priority; and women should prefer supportive strategies that focus on the elaboration and exploration of relevant feelings and perspectives, whereas men should prefer supportive strategies that seek to fix the problem or shift attention away from upset feelings (Tannen, 1990; J. T. Wood, 2005). An important corollary is that men and women are biased toward, and responsive to, the modes of enacting emotional support typically practiced in their own speech communities. Thus, according to the DCT, men do not experience feminine ways of providing support as helpful, nor do women experience masculine ways of providing support as helpful (Michaud & Warner, 1997; Tannen, 1990; J. T. Wood, 1993).

There are reliable and sometimes substantial differences in the behaviors that men and women exhibit in support situations; as indicated previously, women are more likely than men to be sought out for support, to provide support, to focus on the emotional aspects of support situations, and to use support strategies that focus explicitly on the feelings and perspective of the distressed recipient (Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987; Burda & Vaux, 1987; MacGeorge et al., 2003; Trobst et al., 1994). However, these gender differences in supportive behaviors are predicted by several different theoretical frameworks, including biological, evolutionary, social role, and social constructionist theories (W. Wood & Eagly, 2002). Thus, the existence of these behavioral differences, although potentially consistent with the DCT, does not provide any distinct support for it. However, the DCT does make several distinct predictions about gender differences in emotional support preferences and practices, and these provide a basis for evaluating the merit of the DCT.

In addition to differing behaviorally, members of different cultures are generally regarded as adhering to different systems of abstractions (i.e., having different cognitions such as beliefs, values, and perceptual schemes). Hence, if men and women constitute distinct cultures, this should be reflected in sizeable gender differences in abstractions or cognitions (Johnson, 1989, 2000) as well as corresponding differences in behavior. Cognitive differences are thus crucial to the claim of cultural difference; the DCT maintains that men and women differ in what they think and feel as well as in how they behave (J. T. Wood, 1996, 2000). More specifically, the DCT implies that men and women should differ—and differ substantially—with respect to (a) the value they place on supportive communication skills, (b) the importance they assign to various goals pursued by helpers in support situations, and (c) the perceived helpfulness, sensitivity, and appropriateness of various verbal strategies for providing comfort.² The DCT predicts the same pattern for each of these variables: Members of each gender are predicted to be biased toward their own form of doing emotional support.

Empirical Assessments of the DCT With American Samples: Findings and Limitations

Communication values. According to the DCT, men should value the instrumental skills of their associates (informative skill, persuasive skill), whereas women should

value the expressive skills of their associates (comforting skill, ego-support skill). However, studies conducted with samples of Americans have consistently found that women view expressive skills as only slightly more important than do men, whereas men view instrumental skills as only somewhat more important than do women. Moreover, contrary to the prediction by the DCT, both men and women value the expressive skills of their partners much more than the instrumental skills of these partners. This pattern has been found to hold for same-sex friendships, opposite-sex friendships, acquaintanceships, best friendships, romantic relationships, sibling relationships, and both younger and older adults (Burlison, Kunkel, Samter, & Werking, 1996; Finn & Powers, 2002; Griffiths & Burlison, 1995; MacGeorge, Feng, & Butler, 2003; Myers & Knox, 1998; Samter & Burlison, 2005; Westmyer & Myers, 1996). Thus, contrary to the DCT, the results of these studies suggest that American men and women have substantially similar communication values.

Interaction goals. The importance individuals assign to interaction goals they might pursue when seeking to provide support can suggest how men and women conceptualize both support situations and communication as a resource for managing these situations (Burlison, 2003b). Interaction goals reflect what people want to accomplish in a situation; they express people's pragmatic orientation to an interaction (Dillard, 1997) and thus may help explain their use and evaluation of distinct emotional support strategies (Kunkel, 2002; MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, Dane, & Passalacqua, 2005). Recent theory and research (e.g., Goldsmith & Dun, 1997; MacGeorge, 2001) indicate that people's goals in support situations include varying combinations of avoidance (the desire to change the focus of interaction away from the problem situation), problem management (the desire to determine actions that should be taken to resolve the problem), and emotion management (the desire to alleviate upset feelings). The DCT clearly suggests that women should prioritize the goal of emotion management in support situations, whereas men should prioritize the goals of problem management and avoidance. However, research conducted with American samples has found that both men and women assign greater priority to emotion-management than to problem-management, although women do place greater emphasis on emotion-management than do men (Burlison & Gilstrap, 2002; Burlison, Holmstrom, & Gilstrap, in press; Kunkel & Burlison, 1999). One noteworthy investigation (Samter, Whaley, Mortenson, & Burlison, 1997) compared evaluations of support goals by three different ethnic groups (African Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans) and found that across ethnicities, both men and women gave greatest priority to emotion-focused goals in support contexts. Contrary to the DCT, then, American men and women appear more similar than different in their evaluations of interaction goals for support situations.

Comforting messages. Research assessing gender differences in evaluations of the verbal strategies people use to provide support to distressed others has frequently used Burlison's (1984) hierarchy for comforting messages, which distinguishes messages in terms of the extent to which they explicitly acknowledge, elaborate, legitimize, and

contextualize the distressed others' feelings and perspective. The DCT maintains that men and women should have very different ideas about what constitutes effective, sensitive, comforting behavior; women should strongly endorse highly person-centered strategies that explicitly elaborate and explore a distressed other's feelings (Tannen, 1990; J. T. Wood, 2005), whereas men should prefer low person-centered messages that avoid discussion of feelings and focus on either fixing the problematic situation or directing attention away from that situation (Inman, 1996). Contrary to predictions derived from the DCT, few gender differences have been observed among Americans in evaluations of different comforting strategies, and when such differences have been observed, they have been small in magnitude. Numerous studies (Burleson et al., in press; Burleson & Samter, 1985b; Jones & Burleson, 1997, 2003; Kunkel & Burleson, 1999; MacGeorge et al., 2004; Samter, Burleson, & Murphy, 1987; Samter et al., 1997) have found that men and women evaluate comforting messages in very similar ways: Although women rate highly person-centered messages slightly more favorably than men whereas men rate less person-centered messages slightly more favorably than women, both men and women rate highly person-centered messages much more favorably than low person-centered messages.

Limitations. One major limitation in the tests of the DCT summarized here has been the reliance on exclusively American samples. The DCT was initially proposed with respect to Americans, so failure to obtain support for it with American samples certainly counts against it. However, the DCT was originally formulated in the 1970s and early 1980s when America was (arguably) a more gender-differentiated society. Most assessments of the DCT have been conducted in the past decade, so it is possible that more support for it might have been obtained had these studies been conducted decades earlier. This suggests that the DCT claim of large gender differences in emotional support processes may find greater substantiation in a contemporary society that has a tradition of strongly differentiated gender roles. One such society is China.

Assessing the DCT With Chinese Samples

Both casual observation (e.g., Wheeler, 1988) and systematic research (Hofstede, 1980; Yum, 1988) suggest that people in many Eastern societies believe that there are large differences in the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of men and women, including those relevant to emotional support processes. Traditional philosophies, typically infused by Confucianism, lay out a specific set of ethical and moral rules with regard to men's and women's different social and familial responsibilities (Tu, 1996). One of the core positions is that a woman should exemplify a "filial daughter" (xiao nv), "virtuous wife" (xian qi), and "good mother" (liang mu) by being obedient, caring, and supportive to the male adults in her household, whereas a man should take charge of "cultivating himself, managing the family, governing the state, and keeping the world in order" (xiu shen, qi jia, zhi guo, ping tian xia) (Cheng, 1946, p. **PAGE**). Many in Eastern societies view it as common sense that women are more nurturant and emotionally oriented with regard to interpersonal relationships, whereas men are more

problem-focused and instrumentally oriented. This tradition of gender-differentiated roles suggests that consistent with the DCT, there may be large gender differences among Chinese in evaluations of emotional support skills, goals, and behaviors.

However, radical social changes have taken place in Eastern societies in recent decades and traditional values have undergone significant challenge and revision, especially in the realm of gender dynamics and interpersonal relationships. There is some evidence that with increasing globalization, the once strongly collectivist Chinese culture is becoming more individualist in nature, which has important consequences for gender norms and characteristics of romantic relationships (Dion & Dion, 1993). For instance, since Mao's era, all Chinese women have been encouraged by the government to participate in the workforce and support "half the sky" (ban bian tian) (PLS PROVIDE REF WITH PAGE). Correspondingly, a good Chinese man has been redefined as one who is not only capable of dealing with "external affairs" (zhu wai) but can also be a source of caring and support to his spouse. Thus, it is intriguing to ask whether Chinese samples will exhibit the large gender differences in emotional support processes predicted by the DCT or will exhibit the small gender differences in these processes observed with samples of Americans.

We are not aware of any previous research that has examined gender differences in evaluations of emotional support skills, goals, or behaviors with samples of resident Chinese (i.e., native Chinese who reside in China). However, several recent studies have examined gender differences in these variables using samples of sojourning Chinese, native Chinese who temporarily reside outside China (e.g., in the United States) while they conduct business or pursue an education. For example, a recent cross-cultural study using samples of Americans and sojourning Chinese compared men's and women's evaluations of supportive communication skills and found gender differences only among Americans, with women placing a significantly higher value on both ego-support and comforting skills than did men (Mortenson, 2002). However, this study used a small sample of Chinese sojourners and thus had limited power to detect what have typically been small gender differences in American samples (for $d = .20$, power was .17; for $d = .50$, power was .70). Xu and Burluson (2001) assessed the value placed by married Americans and Chinese sojourners on five types of spousal support (emotional, esteem, network, informational, and tangible). In each national group, men and women both valued emotional support more than any other kind of spousal support, although women viewed this type of support (and, indeed, all types of support) as somewhat more desirable than did men. The small gender differences observed among the Chinese sojourners in these studies provides minimal support for the DCT.

Burluson and Mortenson (2003) conducted a cross-cultural study with samples of Americans and sojourning Chinese that compared men's and women's evaluations of (a) the importance of three interaction goals often pursued in support situations (avoidance, problem management, and emotion management), (b) the sensitivity of comforting messages that differed in degree of person centeredness, and (c) the appropriateness of four different interactive coping behaviors, giving solace, trying to solve the problem, escape from negative emotions, and dismissal of the problematic situa-

tion (Barbee & Cunningham, 1995). The DCT suggests that men should view the behaviors of solve, dismiss, and escape as more appropriate than do women and, further, should view these behaviors as more appropriate than the behavior of solace; the opposite pattern should be observed for women. However, few significant gender differences were reported by Burleson and Mortenson (2003). Both American and sojourning Chinese men and women viewed highly person-centered messages as more sensitive than low person-centered messages, although there was a marginally significant trend for women to view highly person-centered messages as more sensitive than men and for men to view low person-centered messages as more sensitive than women. Gender did not moderate evaluations of interactive coping behaviors for either Americans or sojourning Chinese.

Overall, then, studies with Chinese sojourners provide minimal support for the DCT; these studies have detected few gender differences in evaluations of emotional support skills, goals, or messages. Although data from sojourners are informative, sojourners are obviously not representative of the vast majority of nonsojourning citizens in a nation. Sojourners are distinct in having chosen to leave their homeland (at least temporarily) for business, educational, or personal reasons. Sojourners may also become contaminated by the attitudes, values, and practices that are prevalent in the culture in which they temporarily reside. For these reasons, it is desirable to evaluate the hypotheses derived from the DCT with a sample of resident (i.e., nonsojourning) Chinese.

Focus of the Present Study

The primary purpose of the present study was to assess the merit of the DCT by assessing predictions derived from it with a sample of resident Chinese men and women. Specifically, we sought to determine whether the large gender differences in evaluations of emotional support skills, goals, and behaviors predicted by the DCT would be observed in a sample of resident Chinese. The DCT makes the following predictions:

- H1: Among resident Chinese, women will place a substantially higher value on the supportive communication skills (ego support and comforting) of their partners than do men.
- H2: Among resident Chinese, (a) men will rate the interaction goals of problem management and avoidance as more important than the goal of emotion management, (b) women will rate the goal of emotion management as more important than the goals of problem management and avoidance, (c) women will rate the goal of emotion management as more important than do men, and (d) men will rate the goals of avoidance and problem management as more important than do women.
- H3: Among resident Chinese, (a) men will rate comforting messages low in person-centeredness as more sensitive than message high in person centeredness, (b) women will rate messages high in person-centeredness as more sensitive than message low in person centeredness, (c) women will rate highly person-centered messages as more sensitive than do men, and (d) men will rate low person-centered messages as more sensitive than do women.

H4: Among resident Chinese, (a) men will evaluate solve, dismiss, and escape behaviors as more appropriate than solace behaviors; (b) women will evaluate solace behaviors as more appropriate than solve, dismiss, and escape behaviors; (c) women will evaluate solace behaviors as more appropriate than do men; and (d) men will evaluate solve, dismiss, and escape behaviors as more appropriate than do women.

A secondary purpose of the present study was to compare the evaluations of emotional support skills, goals, and behaviors obtained from resident Chinese with those of Americans (obtained in previous studies). Such comparisons should provide insight about cross-cultural similarities and differences in key aspects of a core communication process (emotional support). Although previous research has not examined how resident Chinese evaluate emotional support skills, goals, or behaviors, expectations regarding these can be gleaned from studies that have employed samples of sojourning Chinese. For example, studies suggest that Americans and sojourning Chinese place an equally high value on the supportive communication skills of their intimates (Mortenson, 2002; Xu & Burlison, 2001). With regard to the importance assigned different interaction goals, Burlison and Mortenson (2003) found that sojourning Chinese viewed avoidance and problem-management as more important than did Americans, whereas Americans viewed emotion management as more important than did sojourning Chinese; furthermore, both groups rated problem and emotion management as more important than avoidance. With respect to evaluations of emotional support behaviors, these researchers found that both Americans and sojourning Chinese viewed comforting messages that exhibited high person centeredness as more sensitive than messages that exhibited low person centeredness; Americans also differentiated between messages exhibiting moderate and low person centeredness but Chinese sojourners did not. In addition, both Americans and sojourning Chinese rated the interactive coping behaviors of escape and dismiss as less appropriate than the behaviors of solve and solace. In something of a surprise, Chinese also viewed the strategy of solace as more appropriate than did Americans.

The present study afforded the opportunity to observe how resident Chinese evaluated emotional support skills, goals, and behaviors. Based on previous findings, we hypothesized

H5: Resident Chinese will rate (a) the goal of problem management as more important than the goal of emotion management and (b) the goals of problem and emotion management as more important than the goal of avoidance.

H6: Resident Chinese will rate highly person-centered comforting messages as more sensitive than either moderately or low person-centered messages.

RQ1: Do resident Chinese evaluate moderately person-centered messages as more sensitive than low person-centered messages?

H7: Resident Chinese will rate solve and solace strategies as more appropriate than escape and dismiss strategies.

Method

Participants

Participants were 253 college students (141 men and 112 women) drawn from a major Chinese university in Beijing, China. The majority of participants ($N = 247$, 97.6%) ranged in age from 19 to 24; this group consisted largely of undergraduates ($N = 226$, 89%) and a small portion of graduate students ($N = 26$, 10%); one participant that did not report student status. The majority of participants were recruited from English classes that were required of all undergraduate students regardless of their academic departments in the university; graduate students were recruited from a graduate course in English writing that was offered for science and engineering students across the campus. One of the top-tier universities in China, this university enrolls students from all major cities and provinces of the country based on a quota system. As such, participants in the study represented resident Chinese from a variety of geographical areas.

Procedure

Permission to collect data was provided by officials at the Chinese university. All materials for participants including the instruments and consent form were translated into Chinese to ensure that participants had a full understanding of their rights and role within the project. Linguistic equivalency was obtained via back-translation technique. Bilingual Chinese graduate students with professional experience translating English texts were employed as translators.³

Instructors teaching college English and English writing courses were contacted to make arrangements for data collection. Participants were informed that they would receive a small amount of class extra credit in accordance with the university policy. During a period of 1 month, both in-class and out-of-class data collection sessions were arranged in which students received a consent form and then completed the study questionnaire.

Instrumentation

Communication values. Participants' judgments about the value of comforting and ego-support communication skills were obtained by having them complete a Chinese version of Burleson and Samter's (1990) Communication Functions Questionnaire (CFQ). This version of the CFQ was composed of 40 randomly ordered items written to reflect outcomes typically achieved through effective exercise of eight different communication skills; five 7-point items are used to tap evaluations for each of the eight skills. Only those items pertaining to comforting skill (the ability to make others feel better when depressed, sad, or upset) and ego support (the ability to make another feel good about himself or herself) were retained for analysis in the current study.

Participants were asked to rate how important it was for a close, same-sex friend to exhibit each of these abilities (1 = *somewhat important*, 7 = *very important*). The CFQ has been used in a number of studies and has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure in cross-ethnic studies (Samter et al., 1997). Communication values, as tapped by the CFQ, have been found associated with several interesting relationship outcomes such as interpersonal acceptance (Samter & Burlleson, 1990), loneliness (Samter, 1992) and relationship satisfaction (Burlleson, Kunkel, & Birch, 1994). In this study, Cronbach's alpha for the five comforting items was .68 and was .71 for the five ego-support items. Given the minimally acceptable reliabilities, scores were averaged over the five items for each support skill.

Interaction goals in support situations. An assessment of the perceived importance of several goals frequently pursued in support situations was obtained by having participants complete a version of Burlleson and Gilstrap's (2002) Support Goals Inventory (SGI). The version of the SGI employed in this study provides a measure of participants' evaluations of three goals relevant in support situations suggested by MacGeorge's (2001) review of the literature: avoidance, problem management, and emotion management. The present version of the SGI described two situations in which a good friend is distressed by an upsetting circumstance, one in which the friend is upset about having received citation for a minor infraction of the law and the other in which the friend is upset about having recently discovered that his or her boyfriend or girlfriend for the past 1.5 years has been cheating on him or her. Accompanying each situation was a list of nine statements describing goals that might be pursued when talking to the upset friend, three items for each goal (avoidance, problem management, and emotion management). Participants rated each goal statement for how important they thought it would be when talking to their distressed friends on 7-point scales (1 = *unimportant*, 7 = *very important*). The SGI has been used in several studies and has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure in cross-cultural and cross-ethnic studies (Burlleson & Mortenson, 2003; Samter et al., 1997).

Reliabilities (Cronbach's *alphas*) were computed for each of the three support goals by assessing the internal consistency of the six items for each goal (i.e., the three items for each goal for the two situations). Cronbach's alphas were as follows: for avoidance, .75; for emotion management, .74; and for problem management, .84. Given the acceptable reliabilities, scores were averaged over the six items for each of the three goals.

Evaluations of interactive coping behaviors and comforting messages. Instruments developed by Burlleson and Mortenson (2003) in their cross-cultural study of emotional support were employed to assess participants' evaluations of the appropriateness of interactive coping behaviors and the sensitivity of comforting messages.

Participants read descriptions of 30 interactive coping behaviors (10 behaviors for each of three situations) that might be used when seeking to help an emotionally distraught friend. The three situations involved friends who were distressed because of (a) a conflict with his or her parents, (b) getting fired from his or her job, and (c) the

break-up of a long-term romantic relationship. For each situation, the items described 2 escape behaviors (e.g., changing the subject of the conversation to a happier topic), 2 dismiss behaviors (e.g., telling the target not to make too much of the situation), 3 solve behaviors (e.g., encouraging the target to describe what happened in the situation), and 3 solace behaviors (e.g., letting the target know that his or her feelings about the situation were understood). Participants were asked to indicate (on 7-point scales) how appropriate it would be to enact each behavior in each situation (1 = *very inappropriate*, 7 = *very appropriate*). Internal consistencies for evaluations of each of the four interactive coping behaviors across the three situations were as follows: escape (6 items) = .68, dismiss (6 items) = .75; solve (9 items) = .83, and solace (9 items) = .92.

Instruments originally developed by Samter et al. (1997) in their cross-ethnic study of emotional support, and modified by Burleson and Mortenson (2003) in their cross-cultural study, were adapted for use in the current investigation to obtain participants' evaluations of the sensitivity of comforting messages that exhibited different levels of person centeredness. Participants were presented with three randomly ordered hypothetical situations in which a close, same-sex friend was portrayed as experiencing some form of emotional distress. These included (a) coping with a recently announced parental divorce, (b) failing an important exam, and (c) being dropped by a long-term dating partner. Each of these situations has been employed in message construction (e.g., Samter, 1992) and message-perception studies (e.g., Kunkel & Burleson, 1999); all have been found to reflect realistic instances in which comforting is called for. In addition, Burleson and Mortenson's (2003) cross-cultural study of emotional support found that the situations were perceived as realistic and serious by both Americans and Chinese.

A list of nine randomly ordered messages followed each of the hypothetical scenarios. For each situation, three messages exhibited a low level of person centeredness, three exhibited a moderate level of person centeredness, and three exhibited a high level of person centeredness, as defined by Burleson's (1984) hierarchy for comforting strategies. Participants were instructed to rate each strategy for its sensitivity using a 7-point scale (1 = *very insensitive*, 7 = *very sensitive*). Previous research indicates that ratings of message sensitivity are highly correlated with other dimensions of message evaluation, including effectiveness, helpfulness, appropriateness (e.g., Jones & Burleson, 1997); they thus provide a good overall index of message quality. In sum, participants evaluated a total of 27 messages: 3 messages for each of the three levels of person centeredness for each of the three situations. Principle components analyses conducted on the sets of 9 messages for each level of person centeredness indicated that 2 messages should be dropped from each set. Internal consistencies for evaluations of the messages at each level of person centeredness (*low*, *moderate*, and *high*) were as follows: low person centeredness (7 items) = .68; moderate person centeredness (7 items) = .63; high person centeredness (7 items) = .73.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Rated Importance of Communication Skills (i.e., Communication Values; $N = 253$)

Variables	Men		Women	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Ego support skill	5.04	0.90	5.32	0.90
Comforting skill	4.99	0.92	5.32	0.79

Results

With a sample consisting of 141 men and 112 women, and alpha set at $p < .05$, statistical power to detect gender differences in the dependent variables for our directional hypotheses was .47 for a small effect size ($d = .20$), .99 for a medium effect size ($d = .50$), and 1.00 for a large effect size ($d = .80$). For our nondirectional research question, power was .35, .97, and 1.00 for small, medium, and large effect sizes, respectively.

Gender Differences in Communication Values

Hypothesis 1 predicted that resident Chinese men and women would differ in the value placed on supportive communication skills (ego support and comforting). The hypothesis was evaluated with a 2×2 mixed-model analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures on the second factor. The between-groups factor was gender (men vs. women), the within-groups factor was type of supportive communication skill (ego support vs. comforting), and the dependent variable was perceived importance of the communication skill.

Means and standard deviations for this analysis are displayed in Table 1. The ANOVA detected a small but significant main effect for gender: $F(1, 251) = 8.64, p < .004, \eta^2 = .03$. Women were found to value these supportive skills ($M = 5.32$) more highly than did men ($M = 5.02$). However, no significant effect was found for the within-groups factor of skill type— $F(1, 251) = 0.41, ns$ —nor was there a significant interaction between the two factors: $F(1, 251) = 0.30, ns$. Thus, consistent with Hypothesis 1, resident Chinese women evaluated supportive communication skills more positively than did resident Chinese men but only slightly so.

Gender Differences in Evaluations of Support Goals

Hypothesis 2 focused on gender differences in the importance assigned to interaction goals and predicted that (a) men would rate problem management and avoidance as more important than emotional management, whereas (b) women would rate emotion management as more important than either problem management or avoidance. Furthermore, the DCT predicted that (c) women would rate emotion management as

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for
Rated Importance of Support Goals ($N = 253$)

Variables	Men		Women	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Avoidance	5.20	1.07	5.19	1.17
Emotion management	5.02	0.95	5.14	0.99
Problem management	5.34	1.11	5.72	0.98

more important than would men, whereas (d) men would rate problem management and avoidance as more important than would women. Hypothesis 5 predicted that across gender, resident Chinese would (a) rate problem management as more important than emotion management and (b) rate emotion management as more important than avoidance. These hypotheses were evaluated with a 2×3 mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the second factor. The between-groups factor was gender (men vs. women), the within-groups factor was type of support goal (avoidance, emotion management, and problem management), and the dependent variable was rated importance of the support goal.

Means and standard deviations for this analysis are summarized in Table 2. The ANOVA detected a main effect for the within-groups factor of support goal type: $F(2, 502) = 23.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .09$. Participants rated the problem-management goal ($M = 5.52$) as significantly more important than either the avoidance goal ($M = 5.19$)— $t(252) = 4.68, p < .001$ —or the emotion-management goal ($M = 5.07$)— $t(252) = 6.63, p < .001$; evaluations of the avoidance and emotion-management goals did not differ significantly: $t(252) = 1.74, p = .08$. These results provide support for Hypothesis 5a but are inconsistent with Hypothesis 5b.

The main effect for gender on goal evaluations was not significant; $F(1, 251) = 2.33, ns$. However, there was a significant interaction between gender and goal type: $F(2, 502) = 4.42, p < .013, \eta^2 = .02$. Planned comparisons evaluating H2a and H2b indicated that although men rated problem management and avoidance ($M = 5.27$) as more important than emotion management ($M = 5.02$)— $F(1, 140) = 10.01, p < .002, \eta^2 = .07$ —women even more strongly endorsed problem management and avoidance ($M = 5.45$) vs. emotion management ($M = 5.14$)— $F(1, 111) = 11.77, p < .001, \eta^2 = .10$. Viewed together, these results provide little support for the DCT. In addition, the test of H2c indicated that men and women did not differ in the rated importance of the emotion-management goal: ($M_s = 5.02$ and 5.14 for men and women, respectively), $t(251) = 0.97, ns$. Moreover, in refutation of H2d, men rated the problem management goal ($M = 5.34$) as less important than did women ($M = 5.72$): $t(251) = 2.88, p < .004$. Men and women did not differ in the rated importance of the avoidance goal ($M_s = 5.20$ and 5.19 for men and women, respectively): $t(251) = 0.11, ns$.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations for
Rated Sensitivity of Comforting Messages ($N = 253$)

Variables	Men		Women	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Low level of person centeredness	3.27	0.90	3.34	0.93
Moderate level of person centeredness	3.47	0.87	3.43	0.87
High level of person centeredness	3.98	1.02	4.06	1.12

Gender Differences in Evaluations of Comforting Messages and Interactive Coping Behaviors

Hypothesis 3 predicted that (a) men would rate messages low in person centeredness as more sensitive than messages high in person centeredness, (b) women would rate messages high in person centeredness as more sensitive than messages low in person centeredness, (c) women would rate highly person centered messages as more sensitive than would men, and (d) men would rate messages low in person centeredness as more sensitive than would women. Hypothesis 6 predicted that across gender, resident Chinese would rate highly person-centered comforting messages as more sensitive than either moderately or low person-centered messages; Research Question 1 asked whether resident Chinese would rate moderately person-centered messages as more sensitive than low person-centered messages. These hypotheses and the research question were evaluated initially with a 2×3 mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the second factor. The between-groups factor was gender (men vs. women), the within-groups factor was level of message person centeredness (low, moderate, and high), and the dependent variable was rated sensitivity of the messages.

Means and standard deviations for this analysis are displayed in Table 3. The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for level of person centeredness: $F(2, 502) = 78.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .24$. Consistent with H6, participants viewed messages exhibiting a high level of person centeredness ($M = 4.01$) as significantly more sensitive than messages exhibiting either moderate person centeredness ($M = 3.45$)— $t(252) = 8.64, p < .001$ —or low person centeredness ($M = 3.30$)— $t(252) = 10.83, p < .001$. In answer to RQ1, participants evaluated messages exhibiting moderate person centeredness as significantly more sensitive than messages exhibiting low person centeredness: $t(252) = 3.21, p < .001$.

The main effect for gender on evaluations of comforting messages was not significant— $F(1, 251) = 0.13, ns$ —nor was there a significant interaction between the factors of gender and message level— $F(2, 502) = 0.57, ns$. Consistent with H3b, women rated messages exhibiting high person centeredness as significantly more sensitive than messages exhibiting low person centeredness— $F(1, 111) = 51.08, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$ —but so did men— $F(91, 140) = 65.67, p < .001, \eta^2 = .32$ —which disconfirmed

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for
Rated Appropriateness of Interactive Coping Behaviors ($N = 253$)

Variables	Men		Women	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Escape	4.13	0.96	4.18	0.93
Dismiss	3.88	1.07	3.65	1.01
Solve	4.85	0.91	5.15	0.76
Solace	5.70	0.96	6.02	0.61

H3a. There was no support for H3c or H3d; evaluations of comforting messages that varied in person centeredness were not moderated by participant sex.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that (a) men would evaluate solve, dismiss, and escape behaviors as more appropriate than solace behaviors; (b) women would evaluate solace as more appropriate than solve, dismiss, and escape; (c) women would evaluate solace as more appropriate than would men; and (d) men would evaluate solve, dismiss, and escape as more appropriate than would women. Hypothesis 7 predicted that across gender, resident Chinese would rate dismiss and escape interactive coping behaviors as less appropriate than solace and solve strategies. These hypotheses were evaluated initially through a 2×4 mixed-model ANOVA with repeated measures on the second factor. The between-groups factor was gender (men vs. women), the within-groups factor was type of interactive coping behavior (escape, dismiss, solve, solace), and the dependent variable was the rated appropriateness of the coping behavior.

Means and standard deviations relevant to this analysis are summarized in Table 4. The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for type of support strategy: $F(3, 753) = 322.42, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .56$. Consistent with H7, a planned comparison indicated that the escape and dismiss strategies were viewed as significantly less appropriate ($M = 3.95$) than the solace and solve strategies ($M = 5.41$): $F(1, 252) = 272.41, p < .001, \eta^2 = .64$.

The main effect for gender on evaluations interactive coping behaviors was not significant: $F(1, 251) = 2.23, ns$. However, there was a significant interaction between gender and strategy type: $F(3, 753) = 6.30, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$. Contrary to the DCT prediction embodied in H4a, a planned comparison indicated that men viewed solace behaviors ($M = 5.70$) as more appropriate than solve, dismiss, and escape behaviors ($M = 4.29$): $F(1, 140) = 341.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .71$. With regard to H4b, a planned comparison indicated that women also viewed solace behaviors ($M = 6.02$) as more appropriate than solve, dismiss, and escape behaviors ($M = 4.32$): $F(1, 111) = 416.86, p < .001, \eta^2 = .79$. With regard to H4c, women viewed solace strategies as significantly more appropriate than did men: $t(251) = 3.10, p < .002$. With regard to H4d, men and women did not differ in their evaluations of escape strategies— $t(251) = 0.47, ns$ —or dismiss strategies— $t(251) = 1.79, p < .08$; contrary to the predictions of the DCT,

women viewed solve strategies as significantly more appropriate than did men: $t(251) = 2.79, p < .01$.

Discussion

Gender Differences Among Resident Chinese: Assessing the DCT

The primary purpose of the present study was to assess the merit of the DCT by testing predictions derived from it with a sample of resident Chinese men and women. Specifically, we sought to determine whether the large gender differences in evaluations of emotional support skills, goals, and behaviors predicted by the DCT would be observed in a sample of resident Chinese. Although a few statistically significant gender differences were observed, these were all of small magnitude. Moreover, several of the significant gender differences were in a direction opposite to that predicted by the DCT (e.g., women viewed solve coping behaviors as more appropriate than did men; men rated the goal of problem management as less important than did women). Overall, however, the most common result was the absence of significant gender differences. Within the limitations imposed by our method and sample, the data from resident Chinese provide scant support for the DCT.

More specifically, we observed a small, but significant, gender difference in supportive communication values, with women valuing these skills somewhat more than did men. These findings resemble those obtained in studies of Americans (e.g., Burluson et al., 1996; MacGeorge et al., 2003) in which women have rated supportive communication skills as more important than have men. They differ, however, from Mortenson's (2002) results obtained with a sample of sojourning Chinese in which men and women did not differ in their evaluations of supportive communication skills. The magnitude of gender differences in communication values has been small in all studies, typically explaining only about 5% of the variance in skill evaluations (and 3% of the variance in the current study). Thus, whether this small effect emerges as statistically significant in any study may be a function of sample size, measurement error, and other methodological factors.

Resident Chinese men and women differed very little in their evaluations of support goals: Both rated problem management as more important than emotion management, and although Chinese women rated problem-management as somewhat more important than did Chinese men, the genders did not differ in perceived importance of emotion management and avoidance. None of these results are consistent with the DCT.

Resident Chinese men and women did not differ in their evaluations of the sensitivity of comforting messages that varied in level of person centeredness. Both men and women viewed highly person-centered comforting messages as more sensitive than moderately person-centered messages and moderately person-centered messages as more sensitive than low person-centered messages. These findings are largely similar

to those obtained with both Americans and sojourning Chinese, although studies have occasionally found small gender differences in evaluations of messages exhibiting high and low levels of person centeredness (Kunkel & Burleson, 1999; MacGeorge et al., 2004). No evidence of such gender differences was present with the current sample of resident Chinese; thus, the data for evaluations of comforting messages provide a particularly noteworthy disconfirmation of the DCT.

Resident Chinese men and women also differed little in their evaluations of interactive coping behaviors. Although Chinese women rated solace strategies as more appropriate than did Chinese men, counter to the DCT, these women also viewed solve strategies as more appropriate than did men. There were no gender differences in the perceived appropriateness of escape and dismiss strategies. Again, these findings provide little support for the DCT. However, the findings with resident Chinese resemble results obtained with samples of both Americans (Burleson et al., in press) and sojourning Chinese (Burleson & Mortenson, 2003) in which women have consistently rated solace behaviors and have occasionally rated solve behaviors, as more appropriate than men. However, the modest magnitude of this gender difference should not be overstated and clearly is inconsistent with claims that men and women inhabit different cultures or speech communities.

Most assessments of predictions derived from the DCT with American samples have provided very little support for this thesis (Burleson & Kunkel, in press; MacGeorge et al., 2004). The findings of similarities across gender and nationality detected in the current study and previous work (Burleson & Mortenson, 2003; Mortenson, 2002; Xu & Burleson, 2001) further disconfirm the claims made by proponents of the DCT that men and women live in distinct emotional worlds and exhibit large differences in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to the provision and receipt of emotional support. Although gender differences are regularly found in some aspects of supportive communication, the functions that men and women see emotional support performing are much more similar than different. With particular regard to the Chinese culture, although traditional philosophies provide an unambiguous set of rules and expectations for Chinese men and women via household teachings such as *Women's Bible* and *Zhu Zi Family Words*, our findings of larger gender similarities than differences suggest that the socialization experiences that result in gender differences should not be overstated. Although Chinese women appear to take a more active role in the provision of emotional support than men (consistently rating emotional support skills, problem management goals, and approach-based strategies such as solace and solve as more important than do men), Chinese men exhibited similar patterns of value, goals, and behavior to those of women. It is possible that the degree of similarity observed in the present study between Chinese men and women reflects broader social and economic changes in Chinese life taking place during the past 30 years. Perhaps contemporary Chinese men and women are embracing increased gender equality not only in economic and social life but also so in interpersonal relationships (Dion & Dion, 1993).

Cross-Cultural Similarities and Differences in Evaluations of Support Skills, Goals, and Behaviors

A secondary purpose of the present study was to obtain evaluations by resident Chinese of emotional support skills, goals, and behaviors, and compare these with similar evaluations obtained from American samples in previous research. Although considerable research indicates that there are noteworthy cultural differences in a broad range of communication practices and behaviors (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996), our study found that resident Chinese converged substantially with both sojourning Chinese and Americans in their evaluations of support-related communication skills, interaction goals, comforting messages, and interactive coping behaviors.

We replicated Burlison and Mortenson's (2003) finding that both Americans and Chinese evaluated approach-based coping strategies (i.e., solace and solve) as more appropriate than avoidance-based strategies (i.e., escape and dismiss). We further replicated Burlison and Mortenson's finding that both Americans and Chinese evaluated highly person-centered comforting messages as more sensitive than messages that exhibited moderate or low person centeredness. The substantial similarity in evaluations of support behaviors across ethnicities (Samter et al., 1997) and national boundaries is consistent with the view that highly person-centered messages and solace behaviors are more effective at relieving distress, not because they are conventionally approved responses in particular cultures (see Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997) but rather because of how these support forms influence the cognitions that underlie emotional experiences (see Burlison & Goldsmith, 1998; Greenberg, Rice, & Elliott, 1993).

The current findings have important pragmatic implications for the provision and receipt of emotional support in intercultural communication contexts. Much cross-cultural research has emphasized cultural differences to the exclusion of similarities, often leaving the providers of emotional support bewildered about what to do and say when members of other cultures need assistance (Donnelley, 1987). The findings of the current study and previous research are far from definitive, and caution must be exercised in dispensing advice about how to provide emotional support as well as in the actual provision of such support. However, our findings, coupled with those of previous research, suggest that members of both American and Chinese societies value emotional support and, in particular, view highly person-centered comforting messages and solace coping behaviors as helpful. Thus, the provision of solace and person-centered comforting may prove helpful across cultures to those experiencing emotional distress, at least in some circumstances. Additional research is needed to identify situational moderators or boundary conditions for the use of these forms of emotional support (see Cunningham & Barbee, 2000) and whether the effects of such moderators are themselves further moderated by culture. In addition, because the provision of solace and highly person-centered comfort are demanding social skills that appear to be undeveloped in many people, research is needed on how to best foster the training and development of these skills (see Burlison, 2003a).

Despite substantial transcultural similarities in evaluations of emotional support values, goals, coping behaviors, and message strategies, comparison of the present

results with those obtained in previous studies suggests there may also be some noteworthy cultural differences in emotional support processes and outcomes. For example, in studies of Americans' evaluations of comforting messages, level of message person centeredness has been found to explain a very large percentage of the variance (55% to 85%) in ratings of message sensitivity and effectiveness (Burleson & Samter, 1985a; Jones & Burleson, 1997; Kunkel & Burleson, 1999; MacGeorge et al., 2004; Samter et al., 1997). In the present study of resident Chinese, level of message person centeredness explained only 24% of the variance in ratings of message sensitivity; similarly, Burleson and Mortenson (2003) found that level of message person centeredness explained only 30% of the variance in ratings of message sensitivity by sojourning Chinese. Thus, although the person-centeredness construct does a reasonably good job of capturing Chinese intuitions about the nature of sensitive comforting messages, it does an even better job of capturing the intuitions of Americans about the nature of sensitive comforting. A similar pattern is evident in evaluations of the appropriateness of interactive coping behaviors: Type of coping behavior explains more variance in ratings of behavior appropriateness among Americans than it does among Chinese (see Burleson & Mortenson, 2003). Future research should seek to determine whether these cultural differences are attributable to aspects of the methods used in conducting the studies or reflect systematic differences in underlying cultural conceptualizations of what counts as helpful comforting and emotional support.

The current study also found interesting patterns in how resident Chinese prioritized interaction goals for support situations. We replicated Burleson and Mortenson's (2003) findings that whereas Americans rated emotion management as more important than problem management, Chinese rated problem management as more important than emotion management. However, although Burleson and Mortenson found that both Americans and Chinese (sojourners) rated emotion- and problem-management goals as more important than avoidance, this pattern was not present in the current sample of resident Chinese, whose evaluations of avoidance and emotion-management did not differ significantly.

These differences in evaluations of interaction goals suggest that members of different national cultures may diverge, at least to some extent, in how they define support situations and in the goals they are likely to pursue in those situations (Burleson, 2003b). Members of collectivist cultures, such as Chinese, typically engage in a greater amount of high-context communication than do European Americans (Gaines, 1997; Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996). Influenced by the Confucian teaching that "The gentleman wishes to be slow to speak but quick to act," (*jun zi yu na yu yan er min yu xing*) (Analects 4:24), Chinese appear particularly oriented to fixing whatever problem is responsible for another's distress; they appear somewhat less likely than Americans to talk explicitly about intense, personal feelings and the situations that generate these feelings. Chinese may view emotion management as less important than problem management because in collectivist cultures, overt expression of negative emotions (i.e., distress) is often considered disruptive of face and group harmony and thus is discouraged (Bond, 1986).

Taken together, the current results for resident Chinese evaluations of support goals, messages, and coping behaviors suggest that although Chinese may be less likely to provide emotion-focused support than Americans, Chinese and Americans have similar ideas about what constitutes quality emotional support and likely are best comforted by similar types of messages and interactive coping behaviors. This particular pattern of similarity and difference may reflect the distinction between the recognition of emotionally sensitive social support versus the motivation to engage in emotionally sensitive social support—that is, although most individuals across cultures can recognize emotionally sensitive support messages when they see them, the use of such messages may vary as a function of culture and other factors. For Chinese, in particular, pursuing emotionally focused social support is likely to be less comfortable than discussing the problem, or distracting a distressed friend away from upsetting feelings. Perhaps the recognition of sensitive support represents a sense of emotional appropriateness, whereas the pursuit of different kinds of support goals better represents a sense of emotional efficacy in social support. Indeed, although emotion-focused communication is widely recognized as more important than instrumental skills within American friendships (Samter, 2003), Chinese friends often put a great deal of emphasis on pragmatic, instrumental skills, such as persuasiveness (Chang & Holt, 1991).

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations of the current study should be noted and addressed in future research. First, all constructs in this study were assessed with paper and pencil measures. Although this is defensible in the early phases of a research program, future studies should seek to evaluate cultural preferences for support behaviors in richer, more interactive contexts where both verbal and nonverbal behaviors can be examined (e.g., Jones & Guerrero, 2001).

Second, many of the measures employed in the current study exhibited only minimally acceptable reliabilities (internal consistencies). There are several possible reasons for the low reliabilities, including (a) unfamiliarity of the research participants with social science questionnaires, (b) ambiguous translations of item wordings, and (c) the small number of items used to assess most constructs. These problems should be addressed in future research to improve the assessment of constructs of interest; low reliabilities can lead to artifactually weak or nonsignificant effects (i.e., Type II errors). In particular, more thorough pilot testing of instruments with appropriate samples should lead to enhanced reliabilities.

Third, our sample of resident Chinese was restricted in terms of the age, location, and educational level of the participants. This has two problems. First, the homogeneity of the sample probably resulted in a restricted range of scores on most measures and thereby increased the probability of Type II errors. Second, the results of this study are largely generalizable to young, educated, urban Chinese adults—an important, but small, segment of China's 1.2 billion people. It is quite possible that research conducted with a more representative sample of contemporary Chinese (e.g., older,

less educated, agricultural or industrial workers living in rural areas) might find larger gender differences. Hence, future research with resident Chinese should strive to include more diverse, representative samples.

Fourth, the current study (similar to most previous studies) examined evaluations of emotional support in only one relationship context—that of close friendship. However, emotional support is a process that may occur in many relationship contexts, and features of the context in which emotional occurs may shape numerous aspects of its characteristics and outcomes. For example, emotional support may be provided by supervisors, managers, or coworkers in public, organizational contexts where cultural differences in qualities such as power distance (Hofstede, 1980) may influence support processes to a greater extent than they do in the private context of close relationships. Hence, future research should examine emotional support processes in a broader array of relationship contexts and ascertain the extent to which the institutional context moderates cultural differences in support processes.

The provision and receipt of emotional support is a complicated communication phenomenon that requires close examination and the cautious development of generalizations. Communication scholarship should seek to delineate where cultural factors (e.g., gender, ethnicity, nationality) lead to both convergence and divergence in supportive communication processes.

NOTES

1. Brief presentations based on some of the data reported in this article were made at the annual meeting of the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language, and Gender, Notre Dame, IN, October, 2004, and at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New York City, May, 2005.

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2. Burlison and Kunkel (in press) identify two other variables on which the DCT suggests that men and women should differ substantially: the preferred gender of support providers and preferences for the supportive behavioral styles of relationship partners. Research relevant to these variables is not reviewed here because of space limitations and because these variables were not assessed in the present study.

3. Prior to collecting data from the resident Chinese sample, a pilot study was conducted with a small sample of sojourning Chinese to ensure that the stimulus situations and items for all measures were seen as realistic and that the language used to express these situations and items was viewed as appropriate. Interviews with participants in the pilot study indicated that the original wording for some of the stimulus situations and items was perceived as unrealistic, thus, a focus group composed of additional sojourning Chinese was conducted to ascertain ways in which the stimulus situations and items (and the wording of these) could be made more realistic; the services of a bilingual Chinese graduate student were essential in this endeavor. The stimulus situations and items were then rewritten to incorporate the phrasing and linguistic devices identified in these focus group interviews.

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