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Abstract

Although few decisions are made without seeking advice, advice can challenge the autonomy of its recipient. As a result, it is viewed as potentially intrusive and is enacted cautiously. In part, these findings may reflect European American culture, which fosters respect for personal autonomy. Cultural models of social relationships can affect advice-giving. In contrast to European American cultural context, Russian cultural context fosters an emphasis on practical interdependence. Because advice can promote the exchange of practical information, it is viewed as helpful and is enacted freely. In three studies, we have compared advice-giving across groups from European American and Russian cultural contexts (European Americans, Russians living in Russia, and Russian Americans). Russians living in Russia were more likely than European Americans to give advice, particularly practical advice; less likely to modulate their advice-giving based on whether or not it was solicited; and more likely to describe advice as characteristic of supportive relationships. Together, these studies suggest that advice-giving is a culturally embedded behavior. Cultural models of social relationships can promote unsolicited advice, a seemingly intrusive form of social support, as a way to share information and connect with others.

Keywords

social support, advice, solicited help, Russian culture

“You can’t really say ‘Mind your own business!’ in Russian. You can translate the phrase literally, but the concept is not well understood.”

The above quotation from BBC correspondent James Rodgers (2007, para. 18) illustrates the frustration often expressed by foreigners trying to navigate social relationships in Russia. Time and time again, Rodgers found himself being lectured by passersby on personal matters, soon realizing that in Russia his behavior appeared to be “everyone’s business.” The bewilderment expressed by Rodgers arises from the fact that cultures foster different models of social support. Unsolicited advice from strangers is seen as intrusive and inappropriate in cultural contexts that foster relational independence (e.g., the United States, Western Europe). Although Russians also recognize that advice can be unwelcome, this cultural context fosters a preference for this

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seemingly intrusive behavior. Unsolicited advice from relatives, friends, and perfect strangers is so ubiquitous that before the fall of the Soviet Union, a widely known pun referred to the country as the “land of advice” (in Russian the word *Soviet* means “advice” as well as “an elected council”). It appears that although cultural contexts share some assumptions about advice (e.g., the notions that it can be helpful but can backfire), other assumptions diverge and promote different ways of supporting other people.

Although fundamental needs that shape the interpersonal dynamics of social support (maintaining secure relationships with others while establishing personal competence and autonomy) are thought to be similar across cultures (see Ryan & Deci, 2000), their salience and expression depend on cultural context. Social support is a culturally embedded behavior that reflects and promotes cultural models of how to be an individual and how to relate to others. In this article, we will focus on advice-giving, defined as the sharing of suggestions or directives intended to shape others’ ways of thinking, feeling, or behaving. Prior research on advice-giving has been conducted primarily with European Americans or Western Europeans, with a few exceptions (Bayraktaroglu, 2001; Fitch, 1998). Thus, much of the current theory on advice-giving reflects the values, beliefs, and norms of these cultural contexts. Studying cultural similarities and differences in advice provides us with an opportunity to closely examine our discipline’s assumptions about the dynamics of social support, and particularly the assumption that effective social support scaffolds the autonomy of its recipients (Coyne, Ellard, & Smith, 1990). In this article, we will describe studies that compare the ways in which Russian and European American cultural contexts shape the practice and understanding of advice-giving. Before describing these studies, we will briefly outline the literature on culture and social support.

Culture and Social Support

The meaning of most forms of social support is ambiguous; it depends on factors such as the motives of the participants, their interpretations of each other’s intentions, and the way in which the behavior is carried out (Horowitz et al., 2006). This ambiguity is reflected in the contradictory findings in the social support literature. Although social support is critical for physical and psychological well-being, it often goes awry, leading to feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction (Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2004; Robertson, Elder, Skinner, & Conger, 1991). One key source of variability in the meanings of social support is culture. Because concerns about developing and maintaining interpersonal bonds and preserving autonomy and face are at the core of cultural models of the self and social relationships, cultural contexts provide their members with interpretive frameworks for making sense of social interactions and organizing responses to them (Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004; Jacobson, 1987; Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006). Cultural contexts also differ in current or historical social conditions such as chronic failures of formal service structures that facilitate informal sharing of valuable resources and information (Rose, 2000). An emerging literature demonstrates that cultural contexts that foster relational independence (e.g., European American) and interdependence (e.g., East Asian) encourage different concerns about advice-giving.

European American models of social support. European American cultural context fosters an independent self-construal (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998) that foregrounds the autonomy, privacy, and competence of the individual. Although emotional connections to others are valued (Kagitcibasi, 2005), a key assumption of this model of the self is that well-functioning people formulate personal goals and make choices in pursuit of these goals without interference from others (Jacobson, 1987). This assumption shapes the European American repertoire for providing and recruiting social support. Within this context advice generates tension between, on one hand, the desire to share important information and to influence others and, on the other hand, concerns about relational asymmetry between adviser and recipient and threats to the

latter's autonomy (Rawlins, 1992; Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998). Therefore, it is seen as less desirable than other types of social support (e.g., emotional support) (Adams & Plaut, 2003).

Indeed, studies conducted with European American samples show that although advice carries some benefits (e.g., improvements in reasoning, shared accountability, confidence; Bonaccio & Dalal, 2006; Rawlins, 1992), it is associated with significant costs for recipient and adviser alike. Particularly when unsolicited, it may carry the message that the recipient lacks important knowledge, skills, or competency to make good choices and tackle problems independently and that the adviser disapproves of the recipient's thinking or behavior (Heritage & Sefi, 1992). As a result, the recipients of advice tend to be dissatisfied with this form of support, particularly when they feel capable of solving their own problems (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Over the long term, advice is associated with costs to the psychological and physical health of the recipients (Bolger & Amarel, 2007; Coyne & DeLongis, 1986). In turn, advisers run the risk of being seen as intrusive and unhelpful (Goldsmith & Fitch, 1997; Wilson & Kunkel, 2000).

In sum, European American culture emphasizes the tension between the supportive and informational functions of advice and its potential threat to personal autonomy. If autonomy is threatened, the psychological costs of advice can outweigh its benefits. In a mainstream European American cultural context, it is possible to rely on public services without resorting to informal advice networks for solving many practical problems. To minimize the potential threats of advice, European Americans develop sensitivity to cues that indicate whether or not a potential recipient desires advice (Goldsmith, 2000; Horowitz et al., 2001). When unsolicited, advice may be moderated or, if provided, may not be viewed as supportive.

A European American cultural context provides one model of interpreting and negotiating interactions with other people. It is not the only way, nor is it the natural way. Other cultural contexts foster different models of the self and social relationships. The potential threats to face presented by advice, relative to other strategies of influencing the behavior of others, are thought to be similar across cultures, but culture may affect the likelihood that these threats become realized (Cai & Wilson, 2000; Wilson et al., 1998).

Cultural similarities and differences in social support. A growing number of studies have examined cultural similarities and differences in social support (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Cai & Wilson, 2000; Kim et al., 2006; Mortensen, Burlinson, Feng, & Lui, 2009; Taylor, Welch, Kim, & Sherman, 2007). Most of these have focused on comparing European American and East Asian participants. In contrast to independent European American cultural contexts, East Asian cultural contexts foster an interdependent self-construal that stresses the continuity between an individual's self and other's selves and places importance on responsiveness to group needs and norms (Fiske et al., 1998). One key assumption of this model is that well-functioning people take the thoughts and feelings of others into account when thinking, acting, and making decisions.

Somewhat paradoxically, although East Asians report that they wish to receive advice (Xu & Burlinson, 2001), they are at least as sensitive to its potential costs as European Americans (Taylor et al., 2007). East Asians are more reluctant to solicit advice and are less, rather than more, likely to benefit from it than European Americans (Kim et al., 2006; Taylor et al., 2007). It appears that different cultural models of the self and social relationships foster a similar outcome: heightened awareness of the potential threats of advice. Whereas the possibility that advice may threaten the autonomy of others is a salient concern in a European American cultural context, the possibility that advice may threaten relational harmony and face, or reputation and dignity, is a salient concern in East Asian cultural contexts (Chang & Holt, 1994). Indeed, higher levels of interdependence and lower levels of independence are associated with the perception that advice threatens face (Kim, Wilson, Anastasiou, Aleman, Oetzel, & Lee, 2009). Moreover, economically developed East Asian contexts (e.g., Korea) do not foster the need to obtain practical information via informal social networks (Rose, 2000). Thus, both cultural values and social conditions may be tempering advice in East Asian cultural contexts.

One interpretation of these findings is that advice carries significant costs across cultural contexts. Yet there are indications that some interdependent contexts, such as Russia, but also Turkey and Colombia (Bayraktaroglu, 2001; Fitch, 1998), foster a preference for advice. Thus, the broad contrast between independence and interdependence may fail to capture the diverse ways of enacting interdependence. East Asian cultures, with their emphasis on interpersonal harmony and face-saving, represent one way of negotiating relational interdependence. Other interdependent cultures, such as Russia, engender an in-your-face social support that baffled the BBC correspondent on the streets of Moscow. In order to further advance research on the cultural shaping of relationships, we need to examine social support in these cultural contexts.

Russian models of social support. Although no prior studies have examined advice-giving in Russia, this culture may encourage advice by placing emphasis on the sharing of practical information and downplaying concerns about autonomy and face. As East Asians, Russians fall higher on measures of collectivism and interdependence than Western Europeans and North Americans (Matsumoto, Takeuchi, Andayani, Kouznetsova, & Krupp, 1998; Naumov & Puffer, 2000; Realo & Allik, 1999; Tower, Kelly, & Richards, 1997). And yet practical interdependence Russian-style is different from the harmony-based interdependence observed in East Asian cultural contexts. One of its distinctive features is an emphasis on developing and maintaining diffuse social networks that can be helpful in solving practical problems (e.g., obtaining medical care). This may be a reflection of a post-totalitarian cultural legacy (Rose, 2000). In Soviet society, reliance on informal networks allowed its citizens to cope with ubiquitous corruption and the inefficiency and unpredictability of service structures (Ledeneva, 1998; Rose, 2001). Despite recent political and economic changes, reliance on such networks continues to be important and widespread in modern Russia (Michailova & Hutchings, 2006; Rose, 2000). Because advice-giving can efficiently disseminate valuable practical information across informal networks, a Russian cultural context fosters this form of social support.

In turn, barriers to advice-giving are downplayed. Russians report lower levels of concern with autonomy and a higher level of comfort with social dominance than European Americans (Michailova & Hutchings, 2006; Naumov & Puffer, 2000). Unlike East Asian cultures, Russian culture does not emphasize relational harmony and face (Matsumoto et al., 1998; Michailova & Hutchings, 2006). Instead, direct and assertive communication of one's thoughts and feelings is valued (Wierzbicka, 2002). Many Russians feel that norms of politeness interfere with spontaneity and honesty (Rathmayr, 2008). Although there is an awareness that direct communication can offend others, conflicts or challenges to the autonomy of others are seen as acceptable in the interest of telling the truth or enforcing social norms. Thus, in Russia, advice is less likely to be moderated by fears of threatening the autonomy or competency of others than in the United States. As a result, it may be offered more often and to wider circles of people and may depend less on cues that indicate that a recipient desires help.

The Present Research

In the present studies, we examine advice-giving in Russian and European American cultural contexts. We address several gaps in the literature on cultural shaping of social support. First, we aim to expand our knowledge of the sociocultural factors that shape social support by focusing on Russia, a cultural context that differs in its model of interdependence from the harmony-based interdependence of East Asian cultures. Second, we assess not only reports of giving advice but also advice-giving in online social forums and the extent to which people perceive advice to be supportive. Therefore, these studies tap into the enactment and meaning of advice across cultural contexts, allowing us to explore how cultures affect what is in the head (retrospective recall of advice episodes, ideas about value of advice) and what is in the world (advice behavior). Finally,

we include not only Russians living in Russia but also Russian immigrants in the United States in an effort to test whether cultural differences in advice-giving depend on cultural context (as opposed to being due to stable temperamental factors or a situational response to Russian service structures or immigration).

Based on the literature on cultural shaping of models of social relationships, we predict that Russians will be more likely to give advice—particularly culturally valued practical advice—than European Americans (Hypothesis 1). We also predict that Russians will be less likely to modulate their advice-giving based on whether or not it was solicited by the recipient than European Americans (Hypothesis 2). Finally, we predict that Russians will be more likely to conceptualize advice as supportive social behavior than European Americans (Hypothesis 3).

Study 1

Study 1 tested whether Russians in Russia (RRs) and Russian Americans (RAs) give advice more often than European Americans (EAs). It also examined whether RRs and RAs favor practical advice and give unsolicited advice more often than EAs.

Method

Participants. One hundred and twenty-four RRs, 73 RAs, and 83 EAs participated in the study. RR participants were recruited on university campuses in Ekaterinburg and at an internship site in Southern Russia (drawing students from St. Petersburg and Kazan). RA and EA participants were recruited from the San Francisco Bay Area, New England, and Washington, D.C. Participants were recruited online, through community centers and on college campuses. Snowball recruitment (i.e., through word of mouth) was encouraged.

Cultural membership of participants was based on their reports of cultural identification, language proficiency, and family heritage. RRs and RAs were included in the study if they (a) were born and raised in the former Soviet Union and had parents and grandparents who were born and raised there and (b) identified with Russian culture (i.e., stated that they thought of themselves as Russian). RAs were required to be fluent in both Russian and English. We excluded participants who primarily identified with cultures other than Russian or were more fluent in other languages (e.g., Uzbek) while growing up. Although all RRs and RAs in this sample identified with Russian culture, many (15.3% of RRs and 61.6% of RAs) also identified with other cultures of the former Soviet Union (e.g., Jewish, Ukrainian, Tatar) or reported that at least one of their parents or grandparents identified with these cultures. This is not surprising in light of the multi-ethnic composition of Russia (Levinson, 1998). There were no significant differences for any of the dependent variables in the responses of Russian participants who did or did not identify with additional cultures. Most RAs ($n = 48$, 65.8%) and RRs ($n = 118$, 95.2%) were born in Russia. The rest were born in other former Soviet republics, such as Ukraine. The average RA in this sample arrived in the United States at age 21.27 ($SD = 7.60$) and had spent 8.36 years ($SD = 6.36$) in the United States. EA participants were included in the study if they (a) were born and raised in the United States, (b) had U.S.-born parents of Western European descent, and (c) identified with European American culture (i.e., stated that they thought of themselves as American). We excluded European Americans of Eastern European descent from this study.

The sample's demographics are presented in Table 1. The three groups significantly differed in age, $F(2, 277) = 25.96$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .16$. There was also a significant group difference in family socioeconomic status, $F(2, 267) = 39.01$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .23$, consistent with country-level economic differences.

Table 1. Study I—Sample Characteristics

	Means (SD) and percentages		
	RR (n = 124)	RA (n = 73)	EA (n = 83)
Demographics			
Female	66.10	68.50	57.80
Household income ^a	2.82 (0.80)*	2.83 (0.72) _a	3.78 (0.86) _b
Age	21.15 (3.60) _a	28.86 (7.45) _b	24.29 (10.68) _c
Cultural orientation			
GEQ-American	—	3.52 (0.55) _a	4.07 (0.42) _b
GEQ-Russian	3.89 (0.48) _a	3.53 (0.50) _b	—

Note. RR = Russians in Russia; RA = Russian Americans; EA = European Americans; GEQ = The Generalized Ethnicity Questionnaire, American and Russian versions.

a. Measured on a 1-5 scale, with higher scores indicating higher levels of household income (a score of 3 is equivalent to middle-class income). A dash indicates that data were not applicable. Means with different subscripts are different at $p < .01$. * $p < .01$.

Cultural orientation. To ensure that participants were oriented to the cultures of interest, RAs and EAs completed the General Ethnicity Questionnaire (GEQ) assessing orientation to American culture (Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000), and RRs and RAs completed the GEQ assessing orientation to Russian culture. Due to a Web questionnaire failure, some participants did not fill out the GEQ (the *ns* for these analyses: RRs 86; RAs 57 for GEQ-American and 65 for GEQ-Russian; EAs 60). These questionnaires measure linguistic, social, behavioral, and emotional orientation to American and Russian cultures and allow for independent assessment of these orientations. GEQ-American ($\alpha = 0.91$ for EAs; 0.94 for RAs) and GEQ-Russian ($\alpha = 0.86$ for RRs; 0.84 for RAs) had adequate reliability. RRs and EAs were highly oriented to Russian and American cultures, respectively (see Table 1). As expected, immigrant RAs reported lower orientation to American culture than EAs, $F(1, 115) = 37.15, p < .01, \eta^2 = .24$, and lower orientation to Russian culture than RRs, $F(1, 149) = 21.11, p < .01, \eta^2 = .12$.

Measures

Typical advice-giving. Participants filled out a questionnaire describing how often they typically give advice to parents, significant others, relatives, friends, work supervisors, supervisees, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers (0 = “not at all” to 4 = “5-7 times/week”).

Recent episodes of advice. Because participants' reports of typical advice could have been influenced by the perceived desirability of advice, or differences in anchoring heuristics, they also reported the frequency of specific episodes of giving advice in the past week. They also provided a description of the last episode, indicated whether the advice was solicited by responding to an open-ended question (“Did the person solicit your advice?”; all participants responded with “yes” or “no”), and described the problem and their advice. Two coders recorded whether advice focused on solving physical health and practical problems. Included in this category were instances of advice aimed at addressing problems with one's body and physical health and/or practical problems related to everyday experiences (e.g., “I helped a person at the gym. I pointed out the correct way of doing a certain exercise,” RA participant; “My boyfriend was not feeling well, I suggested he take a nap and some Motrin,” EA participant) ($\kappa = .78$). Examples of advice that did not focus on solving physical health and practical problems included advice on topics such as emotional well-being and emotion regulation (e.g., “I told my friend to exercise to get his mind off something,” EA participant) and relationships (e.g., “I asked my friend to reconsider her

opinion of her boyfriend. We are best friends and I think I can point out someone's shortcomings to her," RR participant).

Procedure. Participants filled out the study questionnaires on paper or via a secure Web site. All participants indicated their consent to participate by reading and signing consent forms (physical or online) or listening to a consent script and indicating oral consent (for RRs). All forms were translated and back-translated from English into Russian by native speakers to ensure linguistic equivalence. RRs responded in Russian, EAs in English, and RAs were given the opportunity to respond in either language. Most RAs completed the forms in English ($n = 48$, 62.80%). Analyses of variance that included language of presentation as a factor indicated that language did not affect RAs' responses to the questionnaires. The questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Results

We conducted univariate analyses of variance for continuous and chi-square analyses for categorical dependent variables. Preliminary analyses included gender and controlled for differences in age and SES. Because there were no main effects and no interactions involving gender for any of the analyses and because adjusting for age and SES did not alter the observed results, we omit these variables from this presentation.

Typical advice-giving. Participants' self-reported tendency to give advice to other people was examined using one-factor ANOVAs (Cultural Group [RRs, RAs, EAs]). Because some participants indicated that certain categories of relationships did not apply to them (e.g., no supervisees), the sample size differed by type of relationship. Therefore, we conducted analyses separately for each type of relationship (parents, significant others, other relatives, friends, supervisors, supervisees, colleagues, acquaintances, and strangers), controlling for pairwise error (Bonferroni-corrected $\alpha = .05/9 = .006$).

There were significant main effects of cultural group for frequency of advice offered to parents ($n = 259$), significant others ($n = 211$), other relatives ($n = 241$), friends ($n = 270$), work supervisors ($n = 162$), supervisees ($n = 115$), colleagues ($n = 196$), acquaintances ($n = 268$), and strangers ($n = 261$) (all F s > 5.42 , all p s $< .006$, η^2 ranging from .04 for strangers to .16 for supervisees). Post hoc analyses demonstrated that, consistent with Hypothesis 1, RRs gave more frequent advice than EAs in the context of all relationships except friendships, where the two groups did not differ. Consistent with their bicultural orientation, RAs tended to report frequency of advice-giving that fell between the other two groups (see Table 2 for group contrasts).

Recent episodes of advice. A one-way ANOVA (Cultural Group [RRs, RAs, EAs]) was conducted to examine cultural differences in the number of specific episodes of advice given within the last week. Consistent with participants' reports of typical advice-giving, there was a significant main effect of cultural group, $F(2, 270) = 12.97$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .09$. Bonferroni-corrected post hoc analyses revealed that RRs ($M = 10.44$, $SD = 13.62$) reported giving advice more often within the last week than RAs ($M = 5.32$, $SD = 4.70$) and EAs ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 2.48$) ($p < .01$). A higher percentage of these advice episodes was dedicated to health and practical problems for RRs (40.8%) than for EAs (11.4%), $\chi^2(2, N = 236) = 19.23$, $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = .29$, with RAs (33.3%) between the other two groups.

There was also an association between cultural group and whether or not the last episode of advice was solicited, $\chi^2(2, N = 268) = 10.25$, $p < .01$, Cramer's $V = .20$. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, RRs (45.4%) were more likely to report giving unsolicited advice than EAs (28.2%) and RAs (24.6%). In an effort to better understand the meaning of differences, subgroups of RRs ($n = 106$), RAs ($n = 39$), and EAs ($n = 32$) answered additional qualitative questions about advice. They were asked to explain the reactions of other people to their advice as well as their

Table 2. Study 1—Frequency of Typical Advice-Giving^a

	Means (SD)		
	RR	RA	EA
Parents**	1.99 (1.24) _a	1.63 (1.21) _{ab}	1.27 (0.90) _b
Significant others**	2.84 (1.26) _a	2.68 (1.33) _{ab}	2.16 (1.24) _b
Other relatives**	1.37 (0.98) _a	1.07 (1.03) _b	0.77 (0.95) _b
Friends**	2.91 (1.06) _a	2.04 (0.96) _b	2.67 (1.01) _a
Supervisors**	1.21 (1.19) _a	1.39 (1.17) _a	0.61 (0.89) _b
Supervisees**	2.26 (1.54) _a	1.60 (1.45) _{ab}	0.88 (1.19) _b
Colleagues**	2.11 (1.10) _a	1.79 (1.15) _{ab}	1.36 (1.08) _b
Acquaintances**	1.78 (1.12) _a	1.16 (1.11) _b	1.11 (0.86) _b
Strangers**	0.78 (0.88) _a	0.52 (0.74) _{ab}	0.43 (0.59) _b

Note. RR = Russians in Russia; RA = Russian Americans; EA = European Americans.

a. Frequency on a 1-4 scale, ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*5-7 times per week*).

Means with different subscripts are different at $p < .01$. ** $p < .006$.

own reactions to the last advice they received. We recorded references to whether or not advice was wanted and/or solicited by the recipient (e.g., “She sought my help herself” or “I did not want advice”). Two coders recorded participants’ responses ($\kappa = .84$). RRs (4.7%) and RAs (2.6%) were less likely than EAs (28.1%) to recruit solicitation as an explanation for the recipients’ reactions to other people’s advice, $\chi^2(2, n = 177) = 19.62, p < .01$, Cramer’s $V = .29$.

Study 1 Discussion

The results of Study 1 suggest that advice in a Russian cultural context is more common, more practical in its focus, and less contingent on solicitation than in a European American cultural context. Responses of RAs were consistent with the fact that they were bicultural in their orientation. Thus, a Russian immigrant’s tendency to give advice appears to gradually change with acculturation, a pattern consistent with adoption of the norms and values of the host culture.

Interestingly, interactions with friends provided the sole exception to the overall pattern of cultural differences in advice-giving. EAs were just as likely to give advice to their friends as RRs. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that European Americans often give advice to their friends (MacGeorge, Feng, Butler, & Budarz, 2004). Unlike relationships with family members, coworkers, and strangers, friendships are close relationships that are voluntarily chosen and egalitarian. It appears that within the norms of these voluntaristic relationships the benefits of advice may outweigh the costs even for EAs. It is acceptable to speak up when a friend is making a mistake (see Rawlings, 1992). It is also possible that in EA cultural contexts friends may be more sensitive to whether or not advice is solicited and may be more effective in mitigating threats to competence posed by the advice.

Cultural differences emerged against the background of similarities in the likelihood that advice tended to be offered to particular targets (colleagues, significant others). Across cultural groups, participants were less likely to give advice to those in positions of authority (supervisors versus supervisees, $F(1, 108) = 14.44, p < .01, \eta^2 = .10$, and colleagues $F(1, 145) = 68.92, p < .01, \eta^2 = .31$). There was an interaction between status and cultural group, $F(2, 108) = 4.44, p = .01, \eta^2 = .07$, and $F(2, 145) = 4.47, p = .01, \eta^2 = .04$, respectively. Status was more likely to modulate advice-giving for RRs than for RAs and EAs, perhaps reflecting an emphasis on social dominance in Russian culture. In contrast, relational distance affected advice similarly across

cultural groups (strangers versus family members, $F(1, 230) = 38.81, p = .01, \eta^2 = .14$ and significant others $F(1, 196) = 414.30, p = .01, \eta^2 = .67$); with no cultural group by distance interactions ($F(2, 196) = 2.38; F(2, 230) = 1.10$, respectively, both *ns*). These patterns support the hypothesis that status and social distance affect willingness to share information across cultural groups (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Wilson et al., 1998) and suggest that culture may affect sensitivity to status differences more than sensitivity to relational distance.

This study had its limitations. First, it did not examine the extent to which solicitation by the recipients shaped the advisors' tendency to give advice. Second, it relied on participants' retrospective reports of advice-giving. These reports may reflect participants' conceptions of advice more than actual behavior. The next study addressed these limitations by (a) assessing the role of advice solicitation and (b) examining behavior of participants on Russian and American online parenting forums to requests for social support.

Online forums are well-suited for examination of these questions for several reasons. First, this method allows for unobtrusive observation of social groups from Russia and the United States. Second, easy-to-identify sequences of posed questions and the ensuing advice are common in online communities (Morrow, 2006). Finally, virtual groups show heightened conformity to group norms, such as cultural norms (McKenna & Green, 2002). Therefore, examining online communities is likely to provide an indication of cultural differences in advice-giving.

Study 2

Method

Participants. Participants were parents posting and responding to posts on Russian and American online parenting forums. These forums provide opportunities for parents (mostly mothers) to exchange social support. Participants initiating a thread with a new post typically address the forum community with a question, a complaint, or a comment, and then others reply to the initial post, forming a thread of responses. This study was exempt from informed consent procedures by the Institutional Review Board based on the fact that the research involved observation of public behavior and the anticipated risk of harm to the participants was minimal.

Measures. Below, we provide examples of the typical exchanges and a description of the coding system used to assess advice-giving in these exchanges (identifying details have been removed and text has been slightly altered to protect confidentiality).

A typical exchange on the Russian forum. Initial post: "My child is 2. We went to the New Year's party, and it went great, but he was not happy with Grandfather Frost [GF, Russian version of Santa], he refused to take his picture with GF. At home, every time he thinks of this episode he says: 'Scary, scary!' . . . Maybe someone observed a similar reaction and it went away? *What do we do* [emphasis added—advice solicitation]? The main issue here is that our grandmother invited [an actor playing] GF to her home party. All our relatives will be there, including my nephew who is a year older than my son. My nephew is already looking forward to this. If we cancel GF's visit, my nephew will be upset. . . . I can take my kid away, but if there are other ways to get rid of this fear, I would be very grateful."

Response: "*Hold* your child in your arms, and talk to the GF ahead of time. Also *try to play* with your child, *make him* a mask with the beard, GF's costume, a bag with toys, and *have him pretend* he is GF who gives away gifts [emphases added—specific advice]."

A typical exchange on the U.S. forum. Initial post: "My sister came to tell me that my niece has lice. . . . None of our kids ever had lice before. What a hassle. Every time I talk to my sister I feel itchy; just thinking about it makes me itch. . . . On the positive side—I checked my kids and they're fine. My sister has washed her kids' hair with medicated shampoo and washed their linens and clothing. Gross—it still makes me feel itchy."

Response: "Oh no! And your niece probably will be worried about it for weeks, too, wondering if the lice are really gone. Poor girl!"

Coding of responses. Three coders coded characteristics of the initial posts and the responses. Two of the coders were fluent in Russian and English (Coders 1 and 2); one coder spoke English only (Coder 3). The coders were trained in the use of the coding system using a set of examples from the Russian (translated and back-translated into English for Coder 3) and the U.S. parenting forums. Following training, the Russian responses were coded by Coders 1 and 2, and the U.S. responses were coded by Coders 1 and 3. The coders recorded whether advice was solicited in the initial post. The criteria were developed based on research on communication of desire for informational support (Horowitz et al., 2001). We recorded whether or not the initial post included requests for advice or opinion, or statements indicating that the parent did not know what to do, think, or feel (e.g., "My 3 year old still needs help with routine tasks like climbing the chair. . . . What would you suggest?").

For each of the subsequent posts, the coders identified instances of advice. In popular threads, it was common for participants to diverge from the initial post. Thus, no more than 20 posts were coded for each thread, and any posts that clearly diverged from the question were excluded. The coders recorded whether or not the posts included specific recommendations on how to behave, think, feel, or regulate feelings, or guidance on how to make a decision (e.g., "Toss out her booster seat now and have her sit on a regular chair like you"). For each thread, we calculated the proportion of the total number of analyzed posts that included instances of advice. Inter-rater reliability was based on a set of individual posts for 25 Russian and 25 U.S. threads (Initial posts: $\kappa = .75$ for the Russian forums and $.70$ for the U.S. forums; the responses: $.83$ for the Russian forums and $.77$ for the U.S. forums).

Procedure. A set of online Russian ($n = 5$) and U.S. ($n = 6$) parenting forums was identified based on popularity and demographics. Although all of these forums allowed anonymous participation, most participants identified their city of residence. Forums were selected for study when more than 80% of 100 randomly selected participants indicated that they resided in Russia or Ukraine (for Russian forums) or the United States (for the U.S. forums). We selected forums with comparable levels of activity (more than 20 initial posts per day). Google Trends and Yandex Pulse data confirmed that at the time of the study these sites drew large numbers of unique visitors (more than 2,000 per day) and that the Russian sites were visited predominantly by residents of Russia and Ukraine, and the U.S. sites by residents of the United States, rather than by expatriates residing abroad. Exchanges on the Russian forums were conducted in Russian, and on the U.S. forums in English. Every fifth thread was selected from the forums during the same period of time. In cases when the selected thread contained no responses, a replacement was made. Overall, 80 threads were selected (40 from Russian and 40 from U.S. forums).

Results

First, we examined the likelihood that initial posts requested advice. Initial posts on the Russian forums ($n = 31, 77.5\%$) were more likely to request advice than initial posts on the U.S. forums ($n = 21, 52.5\%$), $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 5.50, p < .05$, Cramer's $V = .26$.

We then tested Hypothesis 2 by conducting a two-way ANOVA for the proportion of posts containing advice (Solicitation [solicited; not solicited]; Forum Culture [Russian; U.S.]). This analysis yielded a significant main effect of solicitation, $F(1, 76) = 12.17, p < .01, \eta^2 = .12$. There was no main effect of forum culture, $F(1, 76) = 2.81, ns$; however, there was a significant solicitation by forum culture interaction, $F(1, 76) = 4.37, p < .05, \eta^2 = .04$ (see Figure 1). For the Russian forums, the proportion of advice responses did not statistically differ for the initial posts that did or did not solicit advice ($p = .10$). In contrast, for the U.S. forums a higher proportion of responses included advice when the initial post solicited advice ($p < .001$).

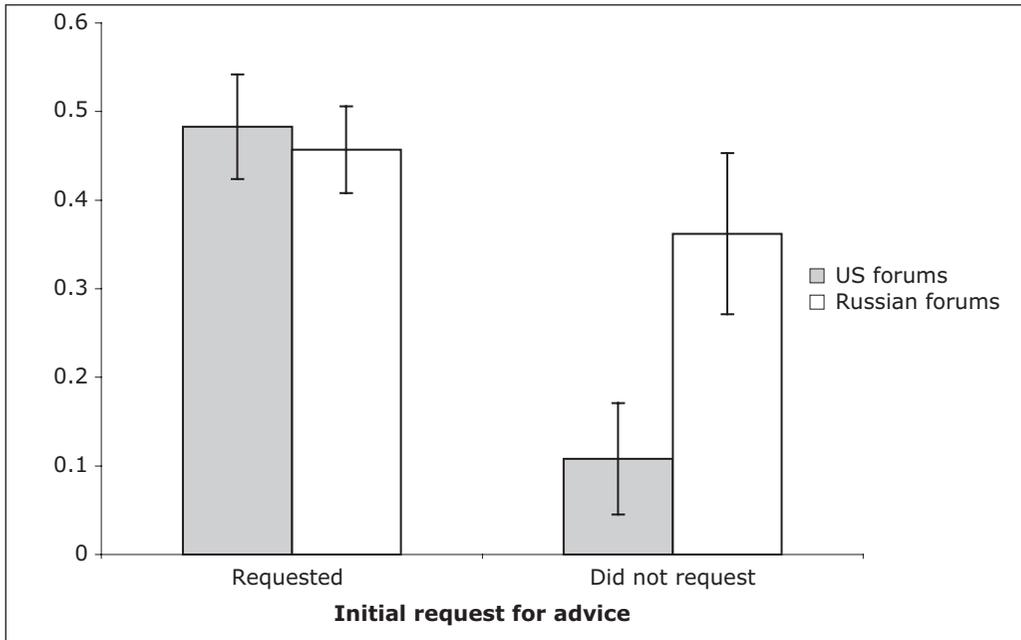


Figure 1. Ratios of Posts on Russian and U.S. Forums Providing Advice by Solicitation
 $p < .05$.

Study 2 Discussion

In line with the results of Study 1, advice was a ubiquitous form of communication in the Russian online communities. Compared to their counterparts on the U.S. parenting forums, participants on the Russian forums were more likely to request and provide advice. Although previous research links solicitation to reduced face threat (Goldsmith, 2000), Russian participants gave advice regardless of whether or not it was solicited. In contrast, participants on the U.S. forums attended to social cues that signaled the recipients' willingness to receive potentially intrusive suggestions. These data are consistent with the idea that Russian culture deemphasizes face work in advice-giving and makes seemingly blunt communication acceptable in the interests of preserving closeness and transmitting important information (Larina, 2005).

One important question that was not answered by Studies 1 and 2 is whether or not cultural groups differ in the meaning of advice-giving. It has been observed that European American samples do not perceive advice to be supportive (Cutrona & Suhr, 1992). Given the high frequency of unsolicited advice in Russian cultural contexts, do RRs and RAs perceive the supportive function of advice differently than European Americans? In the third study, we tested Hypothesis 3 by asking RRs, RAs, and EAs to describe their conception of supportive behavior.

Study 3

Method

Participants. One hundred and six RRs (77.4% women), 42 RAs (76.2% women), and 136 EAs (75.0% women) participated in the study. The inclusion criteria and the recruitment strategy were identical to those described for Study 1. As in Study 1, cultural groups differed in age,

$F(2, 281) = 14.78, p < .01, \eta^2 = .10$, and family socioeconomic status, $F(2, 281) = 52.54, p < .01, \eta^2 = .27$. RAs ($M = 26.07, SD = 5.44$) were older than RRs ($M = 20.34, SD = 4.49$) and EAs ($M = 21.55, SD = 6.76$). EAs ($M = 3.83, SD = 0.89$) reported growing up in households with higher levels of socioeconomic status than RRs ($M = 2.85, SD = 0.70$) and RAs ($M = 2.79, SD = 0.87$).

All RRs in this study were born and raised in Russia. Most RAs were born in Russia ($n = 26, 61.9\%$) or other former Soviet republics ($n = 15, 35.7\%$). On average, RAs came to the United States at the age of 18.18 ($SD = 7.37$) and spent 7.78 years ($SD = 5.99$) in the United States.

Measures. Participants filled out a 24-item questionnaire describing ideal ways to be supportive. The questionnaire was adapted from a desired spousal support measure used by Xu and Burleson (2001). We retained items that were not specific to spousal relationships. The questionnaire was translated and back-translated to and from Russian.

Participants read a list of statements and indicated the extent to which each statement described a "very supportive person" on a scale of 0 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*very important*). The questionnaire included a 6-item subscale measuring the perceived importance of provision of information and advice ($\alpha = .64$ for RRs; $.69$ for RAs; $.73$ for EAs; e.g., "Giving you advice about what to do"). The remaining items measured perceived importance of other types of social support including emotional (i.e., expressions of love), esteem (i.e., bolstering self-esteem), network (i.e., assistance with developing social connections), and tangible (i.e., practical assistance) support. Cultural groups differed in their response style on this questionnaire (as evidenced by cultural group differences in response to the average item, $F(2, 281) = 10.08, p < .01, \eta^2 = .07$, with RRs ($M = 3.79, SD = .49$) endorsing an average item less than EAs ($M = 3.95, SD = .45$), who, in turn, endorsed it less than RAs ($M = 4.17, SD = .48$)), and the scores for the perceived importance of informational support were ipsatized by removing each individual's mean score on the entire questionnaire from his or her score on the subscale. Thus, individuals' ipsatized scores represented their endorsement of the importance of informational support relative to their endorsement of the importance of social support more generally.

Procedure. Participants received paper copies of the questionnaire or a secure Web link. Questionnaires were administered in Russian to RRs and in English to RAs and EAs and took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Consent procedures were identical to those in Study 1.

Results

Preliminary analyses included gender and controlled for differences in age and SES. There were no main effects and no interactions involving gender. Controlling for age and SES did not alter the observed results. Hence, we omit these variables from the presentation.

To test Hypothesis 3, we conducted a one-way ANOVA (Cultural Group [RRs, RAs, EAs]) for perceived importance of informational support. The main effect of Cultural Group was significant, $F(2, 281) = 3.20, p < .05, \eta^2 = .02$. Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc analyses revealed that RRs ($M = 0.27, SD = 0.45$) were more likely to report that informational support was an important part of being supportive than EAs ($M = 0.13, SD = 0.45, p = .04$), with RAs ($M = 0.19, SD = 0.45$) falling between the other groups and not significantly different from either.

Study 3 Discussion

As predicted, RRs were more likely than EAs to believe that providing information and advice is characteristic of being supportive. RRs, but not EAs and RAs, perceived informational support to be significantly more important than other types of support. These data suggest that people in Russian cultural contexts may give advice not only out of necessity but also because they believe that this behavior will be interpreted as supportive. Although this difference was significant, its

effect size was small, reflecting the fact that informational support was considered to be a valuable social support strategy across cultural groups. It is possible that when responding to the questionnaire, EAs tended to think about the importance of providing informational support to people who have solicited this type of help, thus focusing on situational factors that mitigate threats of advice. Future studies should examine context-specific meanings of advice to identify factors that affect the perception that advice is valuable.

General Discussion

The present studies confirm anecdotal evidence that Russian cultural context fosters unsolicited advice, a form of social support that is perceived to be inappropriate and intrusive in a European American cultural context. We found that participants in Russia gave advice more often and relied on recipients' solicitation less than participants in the United States. They were also more likely to believe that advice is an important part of being supportive. Consistent with their bicultural orientation, RAs yielded results that were between those of RRs and EAs. Thus, abundant advice exchanged by Russians is unlikely to be due to stable temperamental factors or short-term reactions to the unpredictability of service structures. These data differ from the observed de-emphasis on explicit social support in East Asian cultural contexts (Taylor et al., 2004), highlighting the fact that there is more than one way to conceptualize and enact interdependent models of social support. A construct of interdependence tends to conflate different kinds of sociality (Fiske, 2002). It is important to remember that aspects of sociality in one interdependent cultural context may not transfer to another interdependent context as a coherent package. It is important to consider social conditions and cultural models of social relationships that affect the costs and benefits of social support within each cultural context instead of relying on broad cultural dimensions.

Russian participants in our studies directed their advice broadly. They were more likely than EAs to give advice to strangers and to those who did not indicate that they wanted to receive advice. Previous research in cultural psychology has shown that individuals from independent cultural contexts are less sensitive to relational cues than those from interdependent cultural contexts (e.g., Masuda et al., 2008). Our results suggest that EAs effectively attend and respond to cues that signal salient cultural concerns (e.g., safeguarding the autonomy of others).

Cultural differences observed in this study emerged against the background of similarities in some aspects of advice-giving. Across cultural contexts people were similar in their provision of advice to those who requested it. These similarities suggest that when potential threats of advice are mitigated, sharing of valuable information becomes common across cultural groups. Indeed, although RRs and EAs differed in the relative importance placed on giving advice, this type of support was valued by our participants in Washington, D.C., and Ekaterinburg alike.

Limitations and Future Directions

These data have several important limitations. First, we did not examine whether cultural differences exist in the intrapersonal and interpersonal consequences of advice. In EA cultural contexts, advice-giving poses significant threats to the adviser and the recipient. In Russian culture, these threats may not be realized or may be offset by positive perceptions of advice. Future studies should examine informational, emotional, and interpersonal consequences of advice. In addition, the present studies did not examine whether factors such as relational motives (i.e., the desire to connect with others or the desire to influence others) (Horowitz et al., 2006), cultural values (e.g., preference for direct communication or the belief that advice is valuable), endorsement of face threats (e.g., perception that advice implies disapproval), or beliefs about quality of

advice account for our results. It would be important to examine the role of these factors in order to develop a comprehensive model of the ways in which culture affects advice-giving.

Our work was also limited by the fact that two of the studies relied on self-report questionnaires. It is possible that cultural norms of social support affect our participants' ability or willingness to accurately and openly describe their advice-giving behavior. Future studies need to include observations of actual behavior of individuals trading advice at playgrounds, hospitals, and workplaces to examine how advice unfolds in interpersonal interactions.

Testing whether these findings hold for other cultural contexts would be another important future direction. The results obtained for Russian participants are consistent with Adams and Plaut's (2003) work on West African models of social support. It is possible that cultures and subcultures that have historically faced chronic failures of formal service structures have fostered similar models of practical interdependence. If so, one would expect to see a similar pattern of results for other post-totalitarian or totalitarian societies, such as China, and for subcultures that have historically endured lack of access to formal service structures, such as African Americans.

Despite these limitations, these data have important implications for the study of social support. The observed differences can help us account for cases of cross-cultural miscommunication. Anecdotally, RAs have described to us their disappointment in the lack of advice forthcoming from EA doctors and teachers; this was interpreted as an indication of indifference rather than respect. In turn, RAs may unintentionally violate social norms when they try to strengthen their relationships with EAs by offering unsolicited advice. The norms regarding advice-giving may be tacit and difficult to acquire. Indeed, research in second-language acquisition shows that foreigners in the United States are slow to adopt native English speakers' strategies for softening advice in their speech. Their tendency to be direct (e.g., using "you should") persists long after they gain high levels of proficiency in English (DeCapua & Dunham, 2007). Future studies can fruitfully examine cross-cultural communication of advice and test whether explicit training strategies may be helpful for preventing miscommunication. Finally, just as culture shapes transmission of advice, advice can shape and reinforce cultural norms and values. Future studies should examine the role of advice in selection and propagation of ideas and practices.

Our findings demonstrate that Russians use advice to transmit practical and health-related information. In Russia, official channels have been so unreliable that important practical information, such as the best way to fix one's car or prevent the flu, is preferentially transmitted through informal social channels. Exchanging advice allows Russians to develop, strengthen, and test these channels. In contrast, European Americans may prefer to transmit and receive these types of information via official channels (e.g., health care providers). These findings may be important in developing strategies for disseminating important policy- and health-related information in different cultural groups.

In sum, the boundary between one's "own business" and "everyone's business" is shaped not only by relational distance but also by sociocultural forces. In our studies, reported and observed advice-giving was consistent with different cost-benefit ratios for advice in different cultural contexts, suggesting that this ubiquitous form of social support is a culturally embedded behavior. While sensitivity to advice solicitation in the United States reflects and reinforces European American culture's emphasis on individual autonomy, unsolicited and in-your-face advice on the streets of Moscow reflects and reinforces Russian culture's emphasis on collective responsibility for solving practical problems. This work advances our understanding of cultural factors that influence social support and has implications for developing effective cross-cultural communication strategies. Because advice is essential to the propagation of information and skills and to the optimization of decision-making, this work may be valuable in a number of settings, including schools, health care facilities, large organizations, and diplomacy.

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The authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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