How social support manifests itself varies by cultural context, most notably between members of individualist and collectivist cultures. Perceptions of social support interactions have also been thought to differ. We looked at a sample of Asian Americans (n = 33) to see how their perceptions of social support varied by cultural context, as well as by the type of problem being discussed, gender, and receiver-giver status (whether one gives the support or receives it). We found that advice for practical problems was perceived as more helpful than non-practical problems. Advice for emotional problems is perceived as less helpful, less satisfying, and less liked compared to advice for problems that were not emotional. Advice for relational problems is perceived as less helpful compared to support for problems that were not relational in nature. The ethnicity of the advice partner, that is, whether the partner was Asian American or European American, and whether or not the participant was the receiver or giver of the advice in the interaction has no relationship with the perceptions of the interactions. Asian Americans interacting with European Americans find advice less helpful and less liked if the problem at hand is emotional, whereas interactions with other Asian Americans do not differ that much in perceived helpfulness or liking when dealing with an emotional problem. Males find the advice of a given problem to be less helpful than females do when the problem is emotional or relational, relative to advice for non-emotional or non-relational problems. Taken together, these findings suggest that cultural and gender differences and the type of problem may play a significant role in the efficacy of advice. This study lays the groundwork for further investigation into how the type of problem at hand and other demographic differences between individuals in an interaction may affect perceptions of a social support exchange.
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