

Asian-American Assertion: A Social Learning Analysis of Cultural Differences

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This study examined cultural differences in assertiveness by using a social learning analysis to better articulate the influence of cultural variables. Differences in self-reported assertion responding between Asian and Caucasian Americans were assessed across nine different situations, and the differences were related to prior experiences, expectancy outcomes, or self-efficacy beliefs. The findings suggest that assertion differences among Asians and Caucasians are situationally specific, with most differences occurring in interactions with strangers. Ethnic differences in self-efficacy paralleled those found for self-reported assertive responding. Compared to Caucasians, Asians tended to experience greater anxiety and guilt, regardless of whether or not they reportedly were less assertive. Implications for counseling Asian Americans using different assertion interventions are discussed.

As more Asian Americans seek counseling services, a concern they increasingly present to counselors is efficacy in interpersonal situations (Guimares, 1980; Sue, 1977). A number of investigators have noted that both Chinese and Japanese people tend to be quiet, verbally inhibited, and nonassertive, and researchers have attributed a wide range of apparent behavioral deficits and problems to this lack of assertiveness: limited occupational mobility in high-level administration positions (Cabezas, 1980; Minami, 1980), lack of adequate public speaking skills (Klopf & Cambra, 1979), discomfort in situations demanding interpersonal fluency (Callao, 1973), lowered mental health, overconformity, feelings of inadequacy (Sue, Zane, & Sue, 1985), and a lower preference for Asian-American men as dating partners by Asian-American women (Weiss, 1970).

Despite these observations, considerable debate exists over several issues concerning the assertiveness of Asian Americans (Sue & Morishima, 1982). Although previous studies have reported that Asians are less assertive than Caucasians (on the basis of self-reports; Fukuyama & Greenfield, 1983; Johnson & Marsella, 1978), it is still unclear whether Asians are less likely than Caucasians to perform certain behaviors considered "assertive." Sue, Ino, and Sue (1983) found that when Asian-American students were asked to role play assertive responses, they were behaviorally as assertive as their Caucasian counterparts. However, role playing elicits more assertive behavior than would occur in naturalistic situations (Higgins, Frisch, & Smith, 1983), and Asians tend to be more role

oriented in their social relationships (Shon & Ja, 1982). The conditions in the Sue et al. (1983) study would tend to be optimal for eliciting assertive behavior on the part of Asian-American students and may not correspond to their actual tendencies under more naturalistic conditions. Moreover, most studies of Asian assertion are limited to the administration of a general assertiveness measure. Absent are investigations that examine assertiveness across different situations. Such studies are important, given the situational and response-specific nature of assertive behaviors (Kolotkin, 1980) and the tendency of Asians to adopt more situationally variant public behaviors (Hsu, 1970).

Even if such ethnic differences exist, how can one account for these behavioral patterns? The various cultural explanations proposed are largely based on naturalistic observations, anecdotal materials, case histories, and historical records. Some investigators believe that Asians are highly anxious in situations that might require assertive responses because Asians are often socialized on cultural values of modesty and self-effacement that inhibit the direct expression of personal wants. Others argue that Asian value harmonious relationships and are less likely than Caucasians to engage in assertive responses that might disrupt interpersonal harmony (Fukuyama & Greenfield, 1983). Still others have proposed that Asians tend to be more indirect in communication patterns, which would make them appear less confrontive with others (Kitano & Kikumura, 1976). Although these explanations may, indeed, reflect cultural differences in values, attitudes, and behaviors, they lack precision and are not well grounded in theory.

The social learning perspective posits that certain cognitive processes are important in the performance of behaviors such as assertiveness. Specifically, the performance of a behavior is determined by certain variables such as the perceived value of the goal of the response, the perceived self-efficacy in performing the response, and the expectancy that certain outcomes will occur upon performance of the response (Mis-

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chel, 1973). More importantly, a social learning analysis may provide the means for systemically identifying certain situational and personal factors that may account for cultural differences in behavior. In the case of assertion, it is still unclear whether differences in assertion responding between Asians and Caucasians are situationally specific or cross-situational. It is also unclear if such differences are related to cultural values, anxiety, guilt, relative skill deficits, or other factors. For instance, with respect to outcome expectancies, previous research and clinical observation suggests that Asian-White differences in assertiveness may be related to varying expectancies about experiencing anxiety and guilt (Sue, Ino, & Sue, 1983), maintaining harmony in a relationship (Fukuyama & Greenfield, 1983), expressing oneself (Sue & Sue, 1977), and achieving one's personal goals (Cambra, Klopff, & Oka, 1978). Finally, in view of the frequent finding of gender effects in assertive responding (e.g., Hollandsworth & Wall, 1977), there may be important interactions between ethnicity and gender in this behavioral domain.

The present study investigated the usefulness of social learning theory in accounting for differences in assertiveness among Asian and White Americans. The study involved two empirical foci. First, we determined if a social learning analysis had cross-cultural applicability, particularly for Asian Americans. By comparing the relationship between certain important social learning processes and self-reported assertive responses for Asian and Caucasian Americans, it was possible to test the cross-cultural applicability of social learning theory. Second, we assessed for cultural and gender differences in self-reported assertiveness in a number of diverse situations and determined if these differences could be accounted for by certain social learning processes (e.g., experiences, expectancy outcomes, or perceived self-efficacy).

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 28 Chinese-heritage, 27 Japanese-heritage, and 74 Caucasian undergraduate students. All subjects were recruited from introductory psychology courses and received research credit for participation. Both Asian and Caucasian samples tended to have more women (69% of the Asians were women and 70% of the Caucasians were women) and more American-born students (76% of the Asians and 89% of the Caucasians were born in the United States), but chi-square tests indicated no significant differences between the two ethnic groups on these characteristics. It is possible that other demographic characteristics, most notably, socio-economic status, were associated with ethnicity. However, this study used a predominantly American-born Asian sample, and in a recent study using identical sampling procedures at the same university, no differences were found between Caucasian students and American-born Asian students in age or socio-economic status (Abe & Zane, 1990).

We conducted a series of *t* tests between the Japanese- and Chinese-heritage groups on all dependent measures used in the study. The number of significant differences found between these two Asian groups did not exceed that expected by chance, using a .05 criterion level. Only 16 significant differences were found out of 324 comparisons, which included 9 measures of experience, 45 measures of response preference, 45 self-efficacy expectancies, and 225 outcome

expectancies (five outcome expectancies for each of the five responses in nine situations). Also, no significant group differences were evident on the demographic measures. Consequently, the two Asian groups were combined in the subsequent analyses.

Instrument Development

A questionnaire was empirically developed, based on the behavioral-analytic method proposed by Goldfried and D'Zurilla (1969). The behavioral-analytic approach was derived from a social learning model of assessment. In this approach, the comprehensive assessment of a particular class of behaviors (in this case, assertive responses) involves three steps: representative sampling of the (a) types of situations in which the behaviors are likely to occur (situational analysis), (b) types of responses that are likely to occur in those particular situations (response enumeration), and (c) types of anticipated consequences or outcomes that are likely to occur with each response (response evaluation).

Situational analysis. For the situational analysis, three modes of data collection—a survey, interviews with students, and direct behavioral observations by research staff—were used to obtain a large sample of problematic situations that may have required an assertive response. Fifty undergraduate subjects (the sample was 50% female, 60% Caucasian, and 40% Asian) completed a survey form that first defined an assertive response and provided an example of assertiveness. Subjects were asked to describe at least ten situations in which they were, or thought they should have been, assertive. For each situation, a subject provided the following information: (a) the people involved, the setting, and the interpersonal problem of concern; (b) background data about the events and circumstances that led up to the particular situation; (c) the actual or anticipated response, regardless of whether it was actually assertive or not; and (d) the actual or anticipated consequences or reactions to the subject's response. In both interviews and behavioral observations, interviewers and observers, respectively, completed data forms that elicited the same information contained in the survey forms. One-hour interviews were conducted with 21 (this sample was 48% female, 57% Caucasian, and 43% Asian) undergraduates. In the behavioral observations, four research assistants over a 4-week period recorded every situation in which either they observed a person behaving assertively or the observer believed an assertive response was possible.

We identified a total of 557 situations using these three methods. Only situations that were noted somewhat frequently (more than five times) were retained, leaving 197 situations. From this set, we combined situations that were quite similar in content (e.g. expressing dissatisfaction over the quality of service with a waiter as opposed to a department salesperson). Other situations were eliminated because they were either redundant or trivial or there was disagreement among the researchers over whether the situation actually could have elicited an assertive response. We also, omitted situations that tended to elicit only a few alternative responses (less than five). As a result of this screening process, 22 situations were retained for use in the response enumeration phase.

Response enumeration. In this phase, 51 undergraduates (this sample was 53% female, 55% Caucasian, and 45% Asian) were surveyed and asked to describe in detail as many responses as they could think of that could occur in each of the 22 situations. Two nonoverlapping forms were used so that each subject only responded to 11 situations. To illustrate the degree of detail required in the response descriptions, the research assistant modeled imaging actual responses to the situation and noted the specific details that he or she would write on the survey form. Subjects were also asked to indicate how frequently they had experienced a situation similar to the one described.

Response enumeration provided 11 to 21 different responses for each of the 22 situations. The 22 situations were examined for the range of response alternatives and the extent to which most undergraduates would have experienced such situations. Next, the research staff grouped and combined responses that were quite similar in content. It was possible to synthesize most sets of behavioral options into five to eight discrete responses. For each situation, the five most frequently occurring responses accounted for 83% or more of the original responses obtained from the response enumeration phase. Consequently, we selected the five most frequently occurring behavioral options in each situation for the final assertion questionnaire. The following extract describes one of the situations selected and its response alternatives:

This quarter I have an especially heavy class load and must study extra hours every week. It seems all I do is go to work, class, and study. Recently, a friend of mine ended a relationship and has been quite upset and depressed about it. She/he calls me frequently, usually after I have gotten off of work and am very tired. After spending close to an hour talking with her/him, I have little time left at night for studying. I am quite concerned about her/him and know that she/he relies on me for support. On the other hand, I need more time to study if I am to do well in my classes.

- A. I listen to my friend's problems whenever she/he calls and stay up later to finish studying for my classes.
- B. I avoid my friend's call by going to the library and leaving the phone off the hook until I have finished studying.
- C. I frequently mention that I have little time for my studies, hoping that she/he will recognize my need to study and keep the calls short.
- D. I suggest to my friend that rather than short phone calls, we can meet for a longer time over dinner or lunch.
- E. I tell my friend that I need more time to study and would appreciate it if she/he would call less frequently. (Assertive option)

Response evaluation. Response evaluation requires that individuals with expertise in the area of interest judge each behavioral option as to the degree it reflects an effective response in that particular aspect of psychosocial functioning (Goldfried & D'Zurilla, 1969). A research team consisting of the three investigators and three research assistants constituted the panel of experts in this study. Each researcher had a minimum of two years research experience in the area of assertiveness. The judges rated each behavioral response on the degree to which the response was a direct expression of feelings or desires at the risk of punishment or loss in social reinforcement (Rich & Schroeder, 1976). There had to be unanimous agreement among the research team as to which response was the assertive option; otherwise, the situation was not used. Through this process, we selected nine situations for the final assertion questionnaire.

Measures

All nine situations involved negative assertion, ranging from simple refusal responses to asserting one's personal rights. Specifically, the following situations were assessed: Asking a question in a large lecture class, declining a request for a date, discouraging an over-attentive salesperson, voicing an opposing opinion in a committee meeting, objecting to a person who has asked to be served out of turn, refusing the request of an overly dependent friend, telling a friend of his or her personal shortcomings, telling parents of the decision to forego a family gathering for another social engagement, and voicing disapproval of co-workers' irresponsible behavior on the job. For each of the nine situations, subjects provided the following information:

Experience. Subjects rated the degree to which they had been in a situation similar to the one described on a 6-point Likert scale (1 =

never to 6 = very frequently). A similar situation was defined as one that differs only in unimportant details that do not alter the problematic aspects of the situation. Examples of similar situations were provided by the research assistant to give subjects a good understanding of the definition.

Response preference. This self-report measure provided an index of how a person would respond in each situation. A person may not always respond identically to a given situation from one time to another. The measurement format was developed to account for this natural variation. Subjects were asked to imagine that the situation occurred 100 times, and report how many times out of 100 they would perform each of the five behavioral options. Assertiveness was measured in terms of the percentage of times participants reported they would perform the assertive option (e.g., 60% of the time I would "tell this person that others are ahead of him/her and that it is not his/her turn to be served").

Self-efficacy expectancies. For self-efficacy ratings, subjects were instructed to consider each of the five response alternatives separately and to indicate the degree to which they felt certain they could perform that particular response effectively on a 100-point scale ranging from *very uncertain* to *very certain*.

Outcome expectancies. A diverse number of outcome expectancies may influence assertive responding, depending on the situation and the individual involved. The present study focused on only those expectancies that may be related to cultural differences in assertive responding. As indicated previously, our review of assertion research and the Asian-American mental health literature revealed that the following outcome expectancies were important to assess: feeling anxious (anxiety), feeling guilty (guilt), maintaining a positive relationship with the assertion target (relationship), expressing the actual ideas and feelings one experiences in the situation (personal expression), and achieving the targeted goal of the assertive response (goal achievement). For each outcome, subjects rated on a 100-point scale ranging from *very unlikely* to *very likely* the likelihood that the outcome would occur if they actually performed that particular response. The following items assess outcome expectancies for one of behavioral options linked to the situation cited in the preceding example:

- A. If I listen to my friend's problems whenever she/he calls and stay up later to finish studying for my classes. I WILL:
 - ___ 1. feel guilty.
 - ___ 2. maintain a good relationship with my friend.
 - ___ 3. feel anxious or tense.
 - ___ 4. be able to reduce the number of times she/he calls me.
 - ___ 5. express how I actually feel about this situation.

Each of the measures were internally consistent with assertion self-efficacy, assertion response preference, anxiety outcome, guilt outcome, maintain relationship outcome, achieve goal outcome, and express self outcome, having alpha coefficients of .72, .62, .88, .83, .73, .72, and .75, respectively.

Data Collection Procedure

Subjects were assessed in small groups ranging from 3 to 10 individuals. They anonymously responded to the questionnaire, which required less than 1 hr to complete. Research assistants led subjects through one complete sample situation to acquaint them with the different types of measurement formats that were used in the questionnaire.

Data Reduction and Situation Clustering

The situational specificity of assertion has been well documented (Eisler, Hersen, Miller, & Blanchard, 1975; Kolotkin, 1980). Simply

analyzing assertion tendencies by summing across situations may obscure important situational variations that should be considered. On the other hand, analyzing each situation separately may not be warranted because people may construe assertion-relevant situations similarly, as Rudy, Merluzzi, and Henahan (1982) found. In their multidimensional analysis of complex assertion situations Rudy et al., (1982) found two major dimensions underlying how people perceived assertion situations, the level of intimacy of the interaction, and the status level of the target. When the two dimensions were used in a cluster analysis of situations, four types of situations were identified, namely, those involving intimates (e.g., boyfriend, family member), friends and acquaintances, service workers or strangers, and people with status or in a position of authority. All situations yielded by the behavioral-analytic approach could be categorized into the four types empirically derived by Rudy et al. (1982), but only one situation, an interaction with a professor, fell into the status-authority group. For the purposes of our study, this situation was reassigned to the strangers cluster. In the assertion measure, three situations involved acquaintances, three involved intimates; and three involved interactions with strangers or service workers.

Analysis

Before making any meaningful ethnic comparisons, we felt it was important to determine if the theory on which the methodology was based was applicable across ethnic groups. One way of assessing social learning theory's cross-cultural applicability is to determine if the nomological net (in this case, the relationships between assertion and different types of expectancies) evolved as predicted by the theory. We used multiple regression analyses to test the theory's validity. An inspection of the beta weights and partial correlations revealed the relative importance of each type of predictor variable (e.g., self-efficacy expectancies). Also hierarchical regression analyses were used to test if certain variables could significantly add to the prediction of response preference after controlling for the effects of other variables. Specifically, social learning theory would predict that self-efficacy expectancies would be the most important predictor of assertive response preference and, even after controlling for self-efficacy expectancies, outcome expectancies still would be a significant predictor of response preference. First, we conducted analyses on the total sample to determine if the observed relationships supported the theory's stated hypotheses. Next, we conducted separate regression analyses for each ethnic group to determine if the theory was applicable across ethnicity.

To determine if ethnic differences in self-reported assertion actually occurred, and if these differences were situationally specific or cross-situational, we conducted an Ethnicity (Asian, Caucasian) \times Situation (intimate, acquaintance, stranger) repeated measures analysis of var-

Table 1
Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis on Assertive Responding for the Total Sample

Variable	β	Partial r	t
Self-efficacy	.45	.45	5.59***
Anxiety	-.31	-.23	-2.57*
Guilt	-.06	-.04	-.49
Maintain relationship	-.05	-.06	-.62
Achieve goal	.09	.08	.88
Express self	.17	.18	2.02*
Experience	-.00	-.00	.93

Note. Higher scores indicate greater likelihood of occurrence.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis on Assertive Responding for Asians

Variable	β	Partial r	t
Self-efficacy	.41	.36	2.64*
Anxiety	-.39	-.26	-1.83
Guilt	.09	.06	.43
Maintain relationship	-.04	-.04	-.28
Achieve goal	.12	.11	.73
Express self	.18	.18	1.24
Experience	-.08	-.10	-.67

Note. Higher scores indicate greater likelihood of occurrence.
* $p < .001$.

iance (ANOVA) on the response preference measure. Similar analyses were used to examine ethnic and situational differences in experience, self-efficacy, and outcome expectancies. The analyses were specifically designed to test for possible cultural differences in certain domains as identified by social learning theory.

Results

Cross-Cultural Applicability of a Social Learning Analysis

Table 1 summarizes the regression analysis performed on the total sample. There was a significant association between self-reported assertive responding and the predictor variables, namely, self-efficacy, outcome expectancies, and experience, ($R = .70, p < .001$). Self-efficacy proved to be the strongest predictor when controlling for outcome expectancies and experience. After we entered self-efficacy expectancies collectively into a hierarchical analysis, outcome expectancies collectively still accounted for a significant amount of variance ($R^2_{\text{change}} = .12, F_{\text{change}} = 5.78, p < 0.001$), which suggested that outcome expectancies were important determinants of assertion responding independent of self-efficacy expectancies. An inspection of the partial correlations indicated that once the effects of the other predictors were controlled, the only other significant predictors besides self-efficacy expectancies were outcome expectancies concerning anxiety and personal expression. Separate analyses for each of the nine situations produced similar patterns of relationships among predictors and self-reported assertion.

Tables 2 and 3 present summaries of the separate regression analyses conducted for the Asian and Caucasian samples, respectively. Essentially, the predictor relationships for both ethnic groups were similar to those found for the total sample. Again, self-efficacy was the strongest predictor of self-reported assertion, followed by anxiety outcome expectancy and personal expression outcome expectancy for both Asians and Caucasians. The latter two expectancy variables only approached significance, but this was probably due to the reduction in sample size.

Group Comparisons

Gender differences. A series of two-way (Sex \times Ethnicity) ANOVAs were conducted on all variables described in the

following sections. There were no significant main effects or interactions involving the gender factor. Subsequent analyses collapsed across this factor.

Experience. Only a significant main effect for situation was found for experience. Newman-Keuls comparisons ($p < .05$) revealed that subjects more frequently encountered situations involving strangers ($M = 4.33$, $SD = .70$) than those involving intimates ($M = 3.76$, $SD = .85$) or acquaintances ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .94$). Subjects indicated that the situation assessed had occurred with occasional frequency ($M = 3.89$, $SD = .67$). It appears that the behavioral-analytic procedures were successful in identifying assertion-relevant situations that were familiar to subjects.

Response preference. With respect to self-reported assertion responding, significant main effects for both ethnicity and situation were qualified by a significant interaction between these two factors, $F(2, 126) = 3.48$, $p < .05$. As shown in Table 4, simple main effects analyses indicated that only in situations involving strangers did Asians report behaving significantly less assertively than Caucasians, $F(1, 127) = 10.13$, $p < .01$. No ethnic differences in self-reported assertion were found for situations involving intimates or acquaintances.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy results tended to parallel those found for response preference. There were significant main effects for ethnicity and situation, but there was also a significant interaction between these two factors, $F(2, 126) = 3.85$, $p < .05$. Tests of simple main effects indicated that Asians expected to be significantly less effective than Caucasians when performing an assertive response in interactions involving strangers (see Table 4). In situations involving acquaintances or intimates, there were no ethnic differences in self-efficacy.

Outcome expectancies. For anxiety, the two-factor ANOVA yielded significant main effects for the ethnicity, $F(1, 127) = 7.21$, $p < .01$, and situation, $F(2, 126) = 35.15$, $p < .001$, factors, but the interaction was not significant. Asians ($M = 57.10$, $SD = 19.41$) expected to be more anxious than did Caucasians ($M = 47.35$, $SD = 21.13$) following the performance of an assertive response. To interpret the situation main effect, we made Newman-Keuls comparisons ($p < .05$). They indicated that situations involving strangers ($M = 43.24$, $SD = 22.20$) were less anxiety provoking than those involving either acquaintances ($M = 53.73$, $SD = 23.44$) or intimates ($M = 57.54$, $SD = 24.30$). Similar results were

Table 4

Assertive Responding, Self-Efficacy Expectancies, and Outcome Expectancies to Different Types of Interactions

Situation	Asian		Caucasian		<i>t</i> (127)*
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Assertive responding					
Intimate	11.24	8.07	12.67	11.11	-.81
Acquaintance	19.02	13.72	22.14	15.90	-1.16
Stranger	27.41	15.58	37.01	17.86	-3.18**
Self-efficacy					
Intimate	31.23	15.70	34.37	16.89	-1.08
Acquaintance	45.56	21.06	48.99	20.21	-.93
Stranger	55.08	18.87	66.99	16.35	-3.83**
Guilt					
Intimate	68.70	22.00	61.31	25.35	1.73
Acquaintance	43.83	23.99	33.73	22.37	2.46*
Stranger	20.91	20.30	16.90	18.84	1.16
Maintain					
Relationship					
Intimate	33.75	19.14	32.16	18.70	.47
Acquaintance	46.30	17.03	45.32	17.96	.31
Stranger	33.60	16.01	41.59	17.11	-1.01
Anxiety					
Intimate	63.48	22.01	53.12	25.11	2.44*
Acquaintance	58.03	22.06	50.54	24.07	1.81
Stranger	49.79	21.74	38.38	21.40	2.97**
Goal achievement					
Intimate	72.91	19.52	67.55	18.03	1.61
Acquaintance	55.91	17.39	58.18	18.11	-.72
Stranger	73.93	16.26	75.95	14.12	-.75
Personal expression					
Intimate	64.45	22.83	68.04	21.99	-.90
Acquaintance	60.12	16.67	64.37	19.59	-1.30
Stranger	68.67	18.95	72.97	18.52	-1.29

Note. Higher scores indicate greater likelihood of occurrence.

* *t* tests involve comparisons between the two ethnic groups.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

found for guilt, with the ANOVA yielding only significant main effects for ethnicity and situation. Asians ($M = 44.48$, $SD = 19.09$) reported feeling more guilty than did Caucasians ($M = 37.31$, $SD = 18.85$), $F(1, 127) = 4.51$, $p < .05$, following assertive responding. With respect to the significant main effect for situation, $F(2, 126) = 268.10$, $p < .001$, Newman-Keuls comparisons indicated that assertive interactions involving intimates ($M = 64.46$, $SD = 24.17$) elicited more guilt than did interactions involving acquaintances ($M = 38.03$, $SD = 23.52$), which elicited more guilt than did assertive interactions with strangers ($M = 18.16$, $SD = 19.50$). Even though Asians expected to feel more anxious and guilty than did Caucasians across all situations, they only reported less assertiveness in situations involving strangers.

Outcome expectancies for goal achievement were both situational and ethnic-specific, as indicated by the significant two-way interaction, $F(2, 126) = 3.43$, $p < .05$. Tests of simple main effects revealed that there were significantly different outcome expectancies for goal achievement across situations for both Asians, $F(2, 126) = 36.08$, $p < .001$, and Caucasians, $F(2, 126) = 40.61$, $p < .001$. Although no significant simple main effects were found for ethnicity on outcome expectancies for goal achievement in different situations, the pattern of ethnic differences obtained at each level of situation factor

Table 3

Summary of the Multiple Regression Analysis on Assertive Responding for Caucasians

Variable	β	Partial <i>r</i>	<i>t</i>
Self-efficacy	.50	.52	4.90*
Anxiety	-.29	-.23	-1.90
Guilt	-.14	-.12	-.95
Maintain relationship	-.10	-.11	-.93
Achieve goal	.09	.08	.64
Express self	.21	.22	1.81
Experience	.09	.11	.93

Note. Higher scores indicate greater likelihood of occurrence.

* $p < .001$.

was different (see Table 4). Thus, the presence of an overall interaction effect was mainly due to the significant simple main effect for the situation factor, and the variations of ethnicity differences at different levels of situation factor.

Only a significant main effect for the situation factor was found for the outcome expectancy of maintaining the relationship, $F(2, 126) = 28.27, p < .001$, and personal expression, $F(2, 126) = 12.17, p < .001$. Newman-Keuls indicated that subjects expected a greater likelihood of maintaining the relationship in assertive interactions with acquaintances ($M = 45.74, SD = 17.51$) than in those with strangers ($M = 40.31, SD = 16.65$), which in turn, had a greater likelihood than in those with intimates ($M = 32.84, SD = 18.83$). Newman-Keuls comparisons also indicated that the perceived likelihood of personal expression was greater when one was assertive with strangers ($M = 71.14, SD = 18.75$) than with either intimates ($M = 66.51, SD = 22.33$) or acquaintances ($M = 62.56, SD = 18.45$).

Discussion

This study compared ethnic differences in self-reported assertiveness and examined the usefulness of a social learning analysis for understanding and conceptualizing cultural differences. Social learning theory appears to be valid for Asians as well as for Caucasians. Situational differences were found for each of the five outcome expectancies. Situational differences were found for each of the five outcome expectancies. This is consistent with Mischel's (1973) observation that such expectancies typically become highly discriminative in nature because social outcomes tend to vary across situations. As predicted by the theory, self-efficacy and outcome expectancies were the strongest predictors of self-reported assertiveness for both Asians and Caucasians across all situations. Even after controlling for the self-efficacy effect, outcome expectancies were still significant predictors of assertive response preference, reflecting the importance of both types of expectancies, which is also predicted by social learning theory. The results suggest that the cultural differences in assertiveness are not a matter of different social learning processes that underlie assertiveness. Rather, ethnic differences in assertion are situational, with Asians reporting less assertion and feeling less self-efficacious than Caucasians, but only in situations involving strangers.

The findings offer some insight about which variables operate, or do not operate, in assertiveness among Asians. First, the cultural explanation that Asians are less assertive because of inhibitory anxiety or guilt is not supported. Despite their greater anxiety and guilt in making assertive responses, Asian Americans, nevertheless, report performing as assertively as Caucasians in situations involving intimates and acquaintances. The results also fail to support cultural explanations regarding Asians' desire to maintain interpersonal harmony or lack of experience in situations that may require assertive responses. Second, only ethnic differences in self-efficacy corresponded with differences in self-reported assertion. This suggests that self-efficacy is the important cultural variable to consider with respect to Asians, as well as other cultural factors

that influence the self-efficacy expectations. Finally, these results can account for the discrepant findings between studies based on self-reports (e.g., Johnson & Marsella, 1978) documenting Asian nonassertiveness and studies based on behavioral role-plays, which find no ethnic differences in assertion (e.g., Sue, Ino, & Sue, 1983). Brief role-plays usually reflect the person's assertion capability and not the individual's actual assertive responding in the natural environment (Linehan, Goldfried, & Goldfried, 1979). Asians may possess the requisite skills to behave as assertively as Caucasians, but because of lower self-efficacy expectancies they are less assertive, particularly in the presence of strangers. Future investigations could focus on the issue of why perceived self-efficacy (and, hence, assertiveness) varies from situation to situation for Asians. Hsu (1970) has speculated that Asians may be more influenced by situational factors than non-Asians, but it is still unclear why interactions with strangers evoke less assertiveness from Asian than Caucasian Americans.

Asians experienced greater anxiety and guilt relative to Caucasians across all types of situations. Given the pervasive nature of this effect, it may reflect important differences in cultural values. Fukuyama and Greenfield (1983) found ethnic differences reflecting the greater value placed on preserving harmony in relationships within Asian culture. Asians may feel more anxious and guilty because situations that require assertion usually involve some sort of social conflict and would constitute a threat to interpersonal harmony, regardless of whether the person is assertive or not.

Although the findings support the usefulness of applying social learning theory to the investigation of cultural influences on behavior, the promising aspects of this approach must be considered within the context of the study's limitations. The investigation relied on self-report measures. Self-report measures of assertion often have not demonstrated close correspondence to actual behavioral responding (Galassi & Galassi, 1978; Twentyman & Zimering, 1979). The situational specificity of assertion is commonly acknowledged, but most self-report indexes have tended to sample broad classes of behaviors. In contrast, this study had college students report on assertion in specific situations directly relevant to the college experience. McFall and Lillesand (1971) used a behavioral-analytic methodology similar to the one used in the present investigation. They found significant correspondence between self-reported assertion and actual assertive behaviors. Nevertheless, it is important that future investigations determine if actual *in-vivo* behavioral differences in assertion do occur between Asians and Caucasians. Most of the Asian subjects were acculturated, American-born students. With few foreign-born students, the present study may have constituted a conservative test of social learning theory's cross-cultural applicability. It is possible that with less acculturated samples, greater behavioral differences in assertion would be found. Additional investigation is needed to determine whether or not such assertion differences are related to different Asian subgroups (e.g., Filipinos), varying levels of acculturation, or both.

The results pose several interesting implications for counseling Asians on assertiveness issues. It seems that the role of anxiety and guilt may be overemphasized in nonassertion

among Asians. In certain situations Asians report that they can behave as assertively as Caucasians despite greater anxiety and guilt. Moreover, ethnic differences in anxiety and guilt occur regardless of whether or not Asians report being less assertive than Caucasians. It may be more appropriate to place the intervention's focus on changing the individual's confidence in performing the assertive behaviors. The use of mastery experiences to increase self-efficacy expectations may prove to be more effective or at least more efficient for this clientele than anxiety management techniques.

It should be noted that this is not a recommendation against the use of anxiety management but a cautionary comment about its application with Asian clients. Most anxiety management programs assume that anxiety has an irrational or maladaptive learning basis to it and that once these basically false premises (e.g., I must be loved or accepted by everyone) are exposed, challenged, or extinguished, anxiety reduction will occur. However, it is questionable whether or not these assumptions hold for anxiety resulting from cultural conflicts. Sue (1983) has noted that cultural conflicts involve two equally valid sets of values that are pitted against one another. Because both cultural stances are justifiable and valid, efforts to expose the false premises through convergent, rational thinking are futile. The meaningful task is to engage in divergent reasoning whereby the paradoxical nature of cultural conflicts is recognized and a number of diverse, limited solutions are used (cf. Rappaport, 1981). Thus, greater anxiety and guilt among Asians in assertion-relevant situations may be a natural aspect of bicultural functioning. Anxiety management programs must clarify the cultural values underlying these interventions so that Asians can be more assertive in certain situations without having to choose one set of cultural values over another.

Problematic situations often require both the *initiation* and *maintenance* of an assertive response if an effective solution is to be achieved. Bandura (1977) notes that the amount of effort expended to maintain a particular response depends on the strength of self-efficacy beliefs. The study found that Asians had lower self-efficacy beliefs than did Caucasians in the presence of strangers. Under these conditions, a self-efficacy analysis would predict ethnic differences in the maintenance of assertive behavior that presumably would affect the likelihood of obtaining a satisfactory outcome. The distinction between initiation and maintenance is important because most assertion interventions have emphasized the former but not the latter. Consideration of this distinction may facilitate the development of more refined assessment and treatment strategies for Asian clients with assertiveness problems.

Many Asian-American students want to become more assertive (Sue, 1977). Counselors can help these students understand that experiencing emotional feelings such as anxiety and guilt need not inhibit assertive responding. Students also may accept prevailing stereotypes about their group (e.g., unassertive and passive), and fail to appreciate the situationality of their behaviors. By having them reexamine their assumptions, counselors can help Asian-American students develop more realistic self-images and a better understanding of the cultural roots for situational responding.

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