Japanese Control Strategies Regulated by Urgency and Interpersonal Harmony: Evidence Based on Extended Conceptual Framework

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Abstract
People use control strategies to improve their physical as well as interpersonal situations. Previous research has maintained that Japanese, compared with North Americans, are more oriented toward secondary control (changing oneself) than primary control (changing one’s circumstances). However, Heckhausen and Schulz’s work suggests dominance of primary control over secondary control across cultures. The conflicting views regarding Japanese control orientations are reconciled by considering situational variation. Based on an extended framework of primary control, two empirical studies examined the alternative hypothesis that control orientation would be affected by perceived urgency and concern about harmony maintenance. Study 1 used open-ended questions (n = 171) to validate the extended primary control taxonomy, and revealed that participants’ control orientations were influenced by their subjective urgency of control and perceived difficulty in maintaining interpersonal harmony. Study 2 (n = 246) replicated the latter results with Likert-type scale ratings. These results support the extended framework of primary control and identify two situational predictors of control orientation.

Keywords
primary control, secondary control, cultural difference, harmony

On a warm spring day, a student sitting in a classroom feels uncomfortably hot and wants to do something to change this situation. The student may switch on the air conditioner to reduce the temperature of the classroom or adopt the mentality that a little perspiration is good for one’s health. Just like the student, people may try to cope with everyday challenging situations either by changing external realities or by changing themselves. According to Rothbaum, Weisz, and

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Snyder’s (1982) seminal classification, the former type of control is termed primary control, whereas the latter type is termed secondary control.

According to Rothbaum et al.’s (1982) terminology, individuals exert primary control when they attempt to change external realities to their liking “via acts involving personal agency, dominance, or even aggression” (Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984, p. 955). On the other hand, secondary control is used when individuals adjust psychologically by accepting extant realities without changing them. Primary control is more instrumental in bolstering one’s sense of autonomy, but can be detrimental to the maintenance of interpersonal harmony. On the other hand, in secondary control, individuals attempt to control themselves without changing their realities, and thus their acts do not come into conflict with others’ interests. As a result, secondary control typically does not disrupt interpersonal harmony. The present studies were designed to advance our understandings of primary and secondary control among Japanese by (a) examining the claimed uniqueness of Japanese control strategies in terms of the use of primary control strategies within an extended framework of primary control, which is proposed by Yamaguchi (2001) and (b) testing the impact of situational factors on the use of primary and secondary control.

**Relativistic Versus Universal Primacy of Primary Control**

Two opposing hypotheses have been proposed regarding the relation between culture and control orientations. Weisz et al. (1984) argued that individuals’ preferences for control strategies are affected by the cultural dominance of values related to autonomy and interpersonal harmony. According to this view (which we refer to as the relativity hypothesis), primary control is preferred in individualistic cultures such as North American cultures where autonomy is a dominant cultural value, whereas secondary control is preferred in collectivistic cultures such as Japan where interpersonal harmony is a dominant cultural value. The association between cultural values (autonomy vs. harmony) and control orientations (primary vs. secondary) has been well accepted in cultural psychology (e.g., Heine, 2007; Morling, 2000; Oerter, Oerter, Agostiani, Kim, & Wibowo, 1996). Indeed, Gould (1999) stressed the adaptive value of secondary control, especially in Asian cultures.

However, in the literature, little empirical evidence can be found in support of the relativity hypothesis. Although Oerter et al. (1996) argued for the dominance of secondary control in Japanese culture on the basis of qualitative interviews, no quantitative evidence is provided. More importantly, no within-culture comparison has found Japanese preference for secondary control over primary control. Rather, available evidence suggests that both Japanese and Americans prefer secondary control to primary control in certain situations. Morling (2000) reported that both Japanese and Americans preferred secondary control over primary control at aerobics classes. Although secondary control was adopted by Japanese participants more often than by Americans in aerobics classes, unfortunately no statistical test was provided for within-culture differences. It remains uncertain if Japanese really prefer secondary control to primary control.

Despite the common assumption of cultural differences, it is possible therefore that both Japanese and Americans prefer primary control to secondary control, even though Americans may prefer primary control to a greater extent than Japanese. Indeed, the assumed primacy of primary control among Japanese is consistent with Heckhausen and Schulz’s (1995, 1999) universality hypothesis, which argues for the universality of the primacy of primary control across cultures. Based on their theoretical analyses of empirical research, they suggested that preference for primary control should be universal because primary control serves primary functions, while the functions of secondary control are only compensatory in any culture. Of course, when primary control is unavailable, secondary control makes an important contribution to psychological well-being (Tobin & Raymundo, 2010; Tsukahara, 2008, 2010); nevertheless, primary control
plays a cardinal role in contributing to psychological well-being (Haynes, Heckhausen, Chipperfield, Perry, & Newall, 2009; Wrosch, Heckhausen, & Lachman, 2000).

As suggested above, the universality hypothesis does not exclude the possibility of cultural differences in control strategy preferences. It is possible that secondary control is preferred more in Japan than the United States (as shown by Morling, 2000), but universally preferred less in comparison with primary control. This view is supported by the work of Ashman, Shiomura, and Levy (2006), who found that both Japanese and North American respondents preferred primary control to secondary control, whereas Japanese respondents preferred primary control less and secondary control more as compared with their American counterparts. However, because the scale used in their study (Measurement Instrument for Primary and Secondary Control Strategies, by Wrosch et al., 2000) focused on just dispositional tendencies (e.g., “When faced with a bad situation, I do what I can do to change it for better” for primary control and “I can find something positive, even in the worst situations” for secondary control) rather than considering specific situations where different strategies can be used, further studies are needed to clarify the nature of cultural differences in control orientations in light of situational factors.

Extended Framework of Primary Control Strategies

To examine the possible primacy of primary control, we need an extended framework to understand primary control. According to Rothbaum et al.’s (1982) original definition, any attempts to change external realities (rather than the self) are considered primary control. Weisz et al. (1984), however, focused solely on a direct way of controlling realities (see also Morling & Evered, 2006), in which one acts as an agent explicitly. To illustrate the possibility of other styles of control attempts, let us examine the situation in the opening paragraph. The student in the warm classroom could walk to the air conditioner and switch it on. This is a direct control attempt in that the actor’s (i.e., the student’s) agency is made salient by taking direct action. This kind of control is termed direct personal control (Yamaguchi, 2001). On the other hand, those who highly value maintenance of in-group harmony would seldom exert such direct control, because it can cause conflicts with other people who have different opinions. Instead, those actors may seek an alternative strategy which is less detrimental to interpersonal relationships but still can change the situation.

Yamaguchi (2001) suggests several primary control strategies as alternatives to direct personal control. First, people may try to hide their intention of primary control by downplaying their agency or minimizing the appearance of personal control. For example, a student may make some indirect gestures (e.g., wiping sweat in a noticeable way), hoping that other people (i.e., instructor or classmates) would understand the indirect message and switch on the air conditioner for him or her. In this control strategy, the student does not appear to demand anything explicitly and thus can avoid conflicts with other people in the classroom. Because personal agency is hidden or downplayed, this kind of control is named indirect personal control. Second, individuals can collectively attempt to change the situation. In this type of control (termed collective control), one exerts primary control together with other people who share their goal. Depending on the explicitness of control, intention in collective control can be either directly expressed or hidden. In the classroom situation, the student may directly ask the instructor to switch on the air conditioner along with other students who feel hot (direct collective control), or the student and the other students may make indirect gestures hinting that they feel hot (indirect collective control). Third, people may prefer to ask someone else to act on their behalf, thereby hiding their personal agency. In this type of control (termed proxy control by Bandura, 1997), the student may ask a friend to switch on the air conditioner on his or her behalf. In Yamaguchi’s extended framework and in this article, all these strategies are categorized as primary control, because they are intended to influence one’s environment rather than the self. Most importantly, such alternative
primary control strategies would tend to maintain interpersonal harmony to a greater extent than direct personal control. Inclusion of these strategies must be useful in capturing individuals’ control orientations more accurately, and validation of this framework is one of the key aims of the present research.

**Secondary Control**

The concept of secondary control has been controversial as well. Originally, Rothbaum et al. (1982) defined secondary control as “attempts to fit in with the world” and to “flow with the current” (p. 8), which we interpret as changing oneself to fit well with one’s environment without changing existing realities. Heckhausen and Schulz (1995) proposed a three-dimensional model of secondary control focusing on three different action phases (i.e., expectancy, value, and attribution of secondary control), although challenged by Gould (1999; see also Heckhausen & Schulz, 1999, for their rebuttal).

More recently, Morling and Evered (2006) proposed two subcategories according to focus orientations: fit-focused secondary control (acting to fit in or adapt to the current situation) and control-focused secondary control (maintaining a sense of control for the subsequent use of primary control). Focusing on the former type of secondary control, they argued that “people exert secondary control when they adjust some aspect of the self and accept circumstances as they are” (p. 272). According to Morling and Evered, Heckhausen and Schulz (1995) and Weisz et al. (1984) have focused on different roles of secondary control: control-focus for the former and fit-focus for the latter. To complicate the situation further, Morling and Evered’s new approach is not without objection. For example, Skinner (2007) maintains that fit-focused secondary control should be classified as another related but different concept such as accommodation and thus should not be treated in control research (see also Morling & Evered, 2007, for their rebuttal).

Given the controversies in the literature, it would be most appropriate to adopt the original definition by Rothbaum et al. (1982): changing oneself to fit well with one’s environment. According to this definition, secondary control can be achieved by changing one’s cognitions, affect, or behaviors rather than existing realities. In this sense, the distinction between primary and secondary control resides in the target of control. In secondary control, the target of control is oneself, whereas in primary control its target is existing realities in the environment.

Related to the conceptual distinction between primary and secondary control, Kurman, Hui, and Dan (2012) propose a new control type that is a hybrid of primary and secondary control. In that control strategy, the control agent first aims at self-improvement (i.e., secondary control) to heighten one’s potential to make changes to the environment (i.e., primary control) in the future. For the sake of the simplicity of argument, this article will treat primary and secondary control strategies as two distinct categories of control.

**Situations Matter**

Previous studies have suggested that individuals’ choices of control strategies are affected by situational factors as well. As described earlier, Morling (2000) found that both Japanese and Americans preferred secondary control in a particular situation (i.e., at aerobics classes), whereas Ashman et al. (2006) claimed to demonstrate universal preference for primary control based on disposition-related data. These apparently conflicting findings point to the need to consider the nature of the situational context when we discuss dominance of primary or secondary control. Morling’s method focused on an adjustment-oriented situation (i.e., keeping up with an aerobics class; Morling & Evered, 2007), whereas Ashman et al.’s self-report scale measured people’s general control orientations in daily life. Taken together, the two studies suggest that people take into consideration the nature of the situation when they choose their control strategy. Thus, even
individuals who prefer primary control in general might change to a lower level aerobics class if they cannot keep up with the harder class (rather than asking their instructor to lower the level of difficulty), as long as a lower level class is available.

Indeed, a study on conflict resolution among Japanese provides such an example. Ohbuchi, Chiba, and Fukushima (1996) showed that time pressure and the politeness of a conversation partner affected participants’ conflict resolution strategies. Specifically, one of their interesting findings was an interaction effect of the two situational factors: Participants tended to respond to the rough target with more hostility and to the polite one with more appeasement, but this difference was not observed when they had to take action immediately. Because conflict resolution can be considered a primary control strategy intended to change realities, Ohbuchi et al.’s findings suggest that the choice of control strategy depends at least partly on the nature of the situation, such as urgency of the situation and politeness of the counterpart. We therefore expected that people’s choice of control strategy would be affected by situational factors.

**Purpose of the Present Study**

The foregoing reasoning led us to focus on the effects of situational factors on individuals’ choices of control strategies. Specifically, situational urgency and concern about interpersonal relationships were expected to affect choice of control strategies.

If the situation is urgent, the potential benefit of primary control will be greater than when the situation is not pressing. In an urgent situation, individuals would tend to use the most efficient primary control strategy, which is in most cases direct personal control. Indirect control strategies may not work immediately, because the counterpart may not recognize the indirect message. It may also take time to persuade a third party (even when someone is available) to improve the urgent situation. Secondary control in particular is unlikely to change anything in the environment that is making the situation pressing.

On the other hand, when individuals are concerned about maintaining interpersonal harmony, they would hesitate to use direct personal control, in which their agency is explicit. To maintain interpersonal harmony, it must be safer to hide their agency in indirect, collective, or proxy control strategies or not to influence the external world (i.e., use secondary control).

The above expectations distinguish between direct personal control and other types of primary control strategies, thus requiring use of the extended classification of primary control (Yamaguchi, 2001). We expected that substantial amounts of Japanese primary control strategies could be classified into categories in the extended classification other than direct personal control. The validity of this expectation will be examined as a primary step to testing our expectation about the effects of situational factors.

In sum, we put forth the following two predictions, based upon an assumption that Japanese people have a wider repertoire of primary control strategies in addition to direct personal control.

**Prediction 1:** Japanese choice of control strategy would be affected by the subjective urgency of the situation.

**Prediction 2:** Japanese choice of control strategy would be affected by concern about interpersonal harmony.

Two studies examined the predictions. In addition, these studies provide indirect evidence regarding the validity of the universality versus relativity hypothesis. In Study 1, Japanese participants’ open-ended responses to fictitious situations were categorized according to the aforementioned classification of control strategies. Study 2 replicated the results of Study 1 with more controlled measures.
Study 1

Method

Participants. One hundred and seventy-one undergraduate students at Kanagawa University (32 males, 53 females) and Nara University (47 males, 39 females) participated in this study during their introductory psychology classes.

Materials and procedure. A course instructor distributed a questionnaire package in which four fictitious situations were described in random order. Participants were asked to read each of the descriptions and answer the questions about their perception of the situation and how they would most likely address the situation if they were in the protagonist’s position.

The four fictitious scenarios created were plausible everyday situations for Japanese university students, and participants were asked to come up with various control strategies accordingly. Each scenario described one of the following problem situations: (a) a lazy member of the protagonist’s sport club often skips group practices (Sport situation, hereafter), (b) a member of the protagonist’s group is not cooperating well on a class project (Project situation, hereafter), (c) the protagonist wants to borrow a notebook from a classmate to prepare for an upcoming examination (Examination situation, hereafter), and (d) the protagonist’s extracurricular club needs help from a classmate who is good at selling food to boost sales during a school festival (Festival situation, hereafter). All of these scenarios involved collective goals: winning games, completing projects, getting good grades, and selling more food, respectively, so exertion of collective control was relevant and possible in every situation. It is worth noting that at the same time, however, the focus on group situations restricts a comprehensive test of the control primacy issue (preference for primary vs. secondary) in this study (see General Discussion for more details). To explore if participants’ choices of control strategies varied with urgency of the dilemma (high urgency vs. low urgency) and concern about interpersonal harmony (high concern vs. low concern), the two factors were manipulated in every situation. Urgency of the situation was manipulated by defining importance of the given task to the protagonist (two conditions: high urgency, low urgency). As to concern about interpersonal harmony, difficulty of maintaining harmony was manipulated by defining possible disruption of the relationship when a particular action was taken (two conditions: high difficulty, low difficulty). In the Sport situation, for instance, urgency was manipulated by stating the importance of the lazy member’s participation for winning games, and manipulation of his or her willingness to be forced to do something for the team represented difficulty of maintaining harmony (see Appendix A for the full scenario). As a result, we created a total of 16 scenarios (four situations × high/low urgency × high/low difficulty). Participants were given a set of the four scenarios where the urgency and difficulty were randomly varied.

Each scenario was followed by a set of questions about participants’ likely response to the scenario (i.e., choice of control strategy) and their perceptions about the situation. The main dependent variable was choice of control strategy in each scenario, measured with an open-ended question, “How would you cope with the situation?” They were then asked to rate the subjective urgency of the situation, which was measured by asking how necessary it would be to reach the goal suggested in the scenario (e.g., for the Sport scenario, having the target member join practices more frequently) from 1 (not necessary at all) to 5 (very necessary). Second, perceived difficulty in maintaining interpersonal harmony was measured by asking how difficult it would be to maintain interpersonal harmony in the situation from 1 (not difficult at all) to 5 (very difficult).

Results

Control strategies. Participants’ choices of control strategies were classified into eight categories independently by two undergraduate students who were blind to the purpose of our study. The
categories consisted of five types of primary control (i.e., direct personal control and the four alternatives: indirect personal control, direct collective control, indirect collective control, and proxy control), secondary control, and two additional categories (relinquishment of control and undetermined). Participants’ responses were coded according to the following criteria. First, responses involving one’s intention to change the environment in any sense were classified as one of the following five primary control strategies: direct personal control when participants indicated a single actor directly influencing the target (e.g., persuading N-san to join practices more often in the Sport scenario), indirect personal control when they indicated a single actor indirectly influencing the target (e.g., emphasizing N-san’s important role to the team), direct collective control when they indicated a collective directly influencing the target (e.g., asking N-san for more participation together with other teammates), indirect collective control when they indicated a collective indirectly influencing the target (e.g., holding a group discussion about the team’s recent insufficient performance), and proxy control when they indicated someone else acting on their behalf (e.g., asking a team coach to persuade N-san). Those involving one’s intention to change himself or herself to adjust to the situation rather than influencing the circumstances were classified as secondary control. Those implying one’s intention to give up the goal in any sense were classified as relinquishment of control. The remaining responses that fit neither the primary, secondary, nor relinquished control categories were classified as undetermined.

Cohen’s (1960) kappa coefficient for the independent classifications was .91, indicating high agreement between the two coders. Disagreed responses (43 out of 622) were discarded in the subsequent analyses. Of the remaining 579 responses, nearly 90% (i.e., 520) of the responses fell into either primary or secondary control. Those in the undetermined category (i.e., only 2) were also excluded from the further analyses.

Total frequencies of the seven control strategies over the four situations are as follows: 240 for direct personal control, 124 for indirect personal control, 20 for direct collective control, 13 for indirect collective control, 12 for proxy control, 111 for secondary control, and 57 for relinquishment of control. Different from the relativity hypothesis, Japanese participants preferred direct personal control most frequently across all scenarios (41.59%). It is also noteworthy that non-prototypical primary control (i.e., indirect personal control, direct/indirect collective control, and proxy control) accounted for 29.29% of the total responses and 41.32% of primary control strategies. This result supports our proposal that non-prototypical primary control strategies, in addition to direct personal control, constitute an important part of the Japanese repertoire of primary control strategies.

For further categorical analyses, we merged categories with few counts. Specifically, direct/indirect collective control and proxy control were merged into a single category and termed joint primary control, in that all these strategies involve a third person (i.e., a proxy or someone else in the group).

Overall analyses with primary control (direct personal control, indirect personal control, and joint primary control), secondary control, and relinquishment for each situation yielded significant chi-square coefficients, $\chi^2(4)s > 60.64$, $ps < .01$, indicating that the frequency of choices varied with control strategies. More interestingly, direct personal control was significantly preferred to secondary control across most situations, $\chi^2(1)s > 11.30$, $ps < .01$, with the exception of the Festival situation, $\chi^2(1) = 1.78$, $ns$. A further analysis revealed that perceived urgency of the situation was the lowest for the Festival situation among the four situations (Bonferroni, $p < .01$).

**Urgency of situation and difficulty in maintaining harmony.** Table 1 shows mean ratings of the two factors in each condition. Participants in the high urgency condition perceived the situations as more urgent than those in the low urgency condition in the Examination and Festival scenarios, $t(161) = 5.97$ and $t(165) = 3.76$, respectively, both $ps < .001$, but the difference did not reach the significance level in the Sport and Project scenarios, $t(167) = 1.01$ and $t(166) = 0.61$, respectively, both $ns$. Likewise, participants in the high difficulty condition perceived harmony
maintenance as more difficult than those in the low difficulty condition in the Sport, Project, and Examination scenarios, \( t(166) = 6.19, t(166) = 3.82, \) and \( t(164) = 5.71, \) respectively, all \( p < .001, \) and marginally so in the Festival scenario, \( t(162) = 1.82, \) \( p = .07. \) Given the less successful manipulations in some scenarios for either urgency or difficulty of harmony maintenance, we decided to use participants’ self-rated urgency and difficulty in maintaining harmony for each scenario rather than the manipulated categories in examining the effects of situational variance on participants’ choices of control strategies. \(^2\)

Multinomial logistic regression analyses were conducted for each fictitious situation to examine the effects of perceived urgency and difficulty in maintaining harmony as well as gender difference. Because we focused on the comparison between primary and secondary control strategies, relinquishment of control was not included in the regression models. We also excluded the effect of gender, as it was not significant in any of the four situations. As summarized in Table 2, each model included individual selection of one of the control strategies as criterion variables (with secondary control as a reference category) and perceived urgency and difficulty in maintaining harmony as predictors. In all situations, each of the primary control strategies was preferred to secondary control with higher perceived urgency of the situation, with odds being greater than 1. Except for joint primary control in the Project situation (odds = 1.515), all primary control strategies were significantly preferred to secondary control with higher perceived urgency of the situation (odds > 2.352).

Difficulty in maintaining harmony increased participants’ preference for secondary control over primary control in most cases (odds < 1), except for joint primary control in the Sport situation (odds = 1.019). Indeed, secondary control was significantly preferred to most primary control strategies in the Examination and Festival situations, except indirect personal control (odds = 0.767) and joint primary control (odds = 0.496) in the Festival situation, with higher perceived difficulty in maintaining harmony (odds < 0.590), although the effect was not statistically significant in the two other situations (odds > 0.588). These results indicate that, in support of Predictions 1 and 2, participants’ choice of primary control strategies (relative to secondary control) increased when they perceived more necessity of controlling the environment, whereas their choice of secondary control (relative to primary control) increased when they were more concerned about interpersonal harmony, although the strength of such tendencies was qualified by each situation.

**Discussion**

Confirming high agreement between two independent coders on participants’ open-ended responses, the results provide sufficient validation of the extended classification covering
# Table 2. Multinomial Logistic Regression Models Predicting Primary Control Strategies Compared With Secondary Control (Study 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE B</th>
<th>Odds</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sport situation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>DPC</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.349</td>
<td>3.823</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.145</td>
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<td>0.858</td>
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<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>Difficulty in maintaining harmony</td>
<td>0.018</td>
<td>0.414</td>
<td>1.019</td>
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<td><strong>Project situation</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Examination situation</strong></td>
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<td>−1.156**</td>
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<td><strong>Festival situation</strong></td>
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<td>DPC</td>
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<td>Intercept</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.241</td>
<td>2.613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.227</td>
<td>0.590</td>
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<td>IPC</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<td>2.352</td>
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<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.522</td>
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<td>0.430</td>
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</table>

Nagelkerke $R^2 = .206$.

Nagelkerke $R^2 = .168$.

Nagelkerke $R^2 = .325$.

Nagelkerke $R^2 = .273$

Note. The reference category was secondary control. DPC = direct personal control; IPC = indirect personal control; JPC = joint primary control.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. 

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multiple types of primary control (i.e., direct personal control, indirect personal, direct/indirect collective, proxy control). Also, our participants tended to choose primary control over secondary control across all situations except for the Festival situation. As predicted, direct personal control was preferred when the situations were perceived as very urgent and maintaining harmony was perceived as manageable, with the exception of the Sport and Project situations where the frequencies of secondary control were not high enough (ns = 9 and 18, respectively) to statistically detect differences.

Study 2 aimed to replicate the findings of Study 1, particularly in terms of the two predictions, using a more controlled paradigm. Given the confirmed validity of the extended primary control strategies in Study 1, we used the same taxonomy of control categories in Study 2. Given the unsuccessful manipulations found in some of the scenarios in Study 1, we prepared a different set of items measuring perceived urgency for manipulation check and operationalized concern about harmony maintenance with a different psychological construct.

**Study 2**

**Overview**

The method was similar to that for Study 1, with a few exceptions. First, instead of open-ended questionnaires, a set of specific behaviors reflecting each control strategy was provided to participants, so that they could easily indicate how likely they would be to adopt each control strategy in the given situation. Second, we included another situation with a goal reflecting personal interests rather than a shared goal to increase external validity of the findings. In Study 1, most fictitious situations involved group goals, whereas the Examination situation tended to reflect both personal interests (i.e., getting high marks) and group interests, in that most university students would wish for academic success to some extent. Here we added another situation about playing a video game, which reflects personal interests more clearly and aimed to examine Japanese preference for each control strategy across various situations regardless of the nature of goals (i.e., personal goal or group goal). Third, content of the scenarios used in Study 1 was revised to include another factor, group size, to explore its possible effect on preferred control strategies. It is possible that people’s control preferences would vary with how many companions share their goal in such a way that, for example, joint primary control would be more preferred when others share the same problem and therefore human resources are available. Conversely, a personal goal may be less relevant to third parties, so the protagonist may be less likely to use joint primary control strategies when the goal is not shared by people around him or her.

Also, we manipulated concern about harmony maintenance as perceived distance (or closeness, conversely) to the target other, which was different from Study 1. While close relationships would be considered more important than distant ones, maintaining harmony would be of greater concern when one is trying to influence distant targets because of the increased necessity of emphasizing politeness in less stable relationships (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Behaving politely toward distant others may help to maintain the other person’s positive social image, or face, which functions to maintain interpersonal harmony (Lin & Yamaguchi, 2011). By contrast, one would be less concerned about maintaining harmony with a close target because their robust relationship decreases the necessity of avoiding face-threatening strategies such as direct personal control. Thus, we expected that participants’ preference for primary control would be greater when they think about a close other (as compared with a non-close other), especially for direct personal control (Prediction 2). Also, we again expected that participants’ preference for primary control would be greater when they perceive high urgency for control exertion, particularly for direct personal control (Prediction 1).
Method

Participants. Two hundred and forty-six students at the University of Tokyo (44 males, 16 females) and Saitama University (127 males, 57 females, two unknown) voluntarily participated in the study.

Materials and procedure. As stated above, we added a Game situation where the protagonist wished to play a shared video game, which was currently in use by another dormitory resident. The goal of this situation was more relevant to personal interests rather than a group goal. A total of five scenarios were revised or created, so that each of them included the following three factors: (a) urgency of the situation (high urgency vs. low urgency), (b) the protagonist’s closeness to the target person (close vs. non-close), and (c) group size involved in the situation (group vs. pair). They were presented in random order across questionnaires (see Appendix B for a sample scenario).

The main dependent variables were participants’ intentions to exert each of the six control strategies in the context of each situation. Specifically, for each control strategy, participants were asked on a 5-point Likert-type scale about how likely they would be to adopt the strategy, from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). In addition, to hide our intention for the manipulation check, instead of directly asking, manipulation check items were modified. Specifically, urgency of the situation and closeness to the target person were measured with (a) how dissatisfied they would be with the described situation and (b) how important their relationship was with the target person, respectively, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). With greater dissatisfaction, one would consider it more urgent to control the situation. As to relational importance, one perceiving more closeness to the target person would perceive the relationship as more positive (e.g., Endo, Heine, & Lehman, 2000), and he or she would therefore regard a close relationship as more important. Therefore, a successful manipulation check would demonstrate that a close relationship was considered more important than a non-close relationship. A more important (i.e., close) relationship would represent lower concern for interpersonal harmony in a given scenario. As mentioned earlier, because a close relationship is more stable, the choice of control strategy in any one interaction would pose less risk to interpersonal harmony, which is conducive to less concern about interpersonal harmony.

Results and Discussion

Manipulation check. We averaged dissatisfaction scores and relational importance scores respectively across situations, based on high reliabilities across the five situations (Cronbach’s αs = .79 and .74, respectively). Participants in the high urgency condition reported that they were more dissatisfied with the situation than those in the low urgency condition, $M = 3.87$ versus $M = 2.65$, $t(216) = 13.03, p < .001$. Also, those in the close condition reported that the relationship with the target person was more important than those in the non-close condition, $M = 4.17$ versus $M = 3.88$, $t(217) = 3.05, p = .003$. Put differently, this perceived difference in relational importance between the two conditions was due to participants’ perceived closeness to the target person, with more closeness meaning low concern about interpersonal harmony in the given scenario because of the stability of the relationship. In sum, participants in the close condition reported less concern about maintaining harmony than those in the non-close condition, showing successful manipulation of the relational factor.

Intention for control strategies. Mean scores of intention to exert each of the six control strategies in each situation are presented in Table 3. Based on sufficient reliabilities of participants’ responses across the five situations (Cronbach’s αs ranged from .67 to .77, mean α = .74), we
averaged the intention scores for each type of control across situations. A 6 (type of control: within-participant factor) × 2 (urgency) × 2 (closeness) × 2 (group size) × 2 (gender) MANOVA on the average intention score yielded a significant main effect of type of control (Wilks’s Lambda = .48), $F(5, 191) = 40.92$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .52$. Consistent with the findings in Study 1, a Bonferroni post hoc test confirmed that participants intended to exert direct personal control the most, followed by indirect personal control. Three first-order interaction effects (i.e., type of control × urgency, type of control × closeness, type of control × group size) and two second-order interaction effects (i.e., type of control × urgency × group size and type of control × urgency × gender) were also significant, $F(5, 191)s > 3.03$, $p_s < .05$. No other effects were significant.

Given the rather complex interaction effects, we focused on figuring out how the main effect of type of control was qualified by other variables. For this purpose, we examined only the first-order interaction effects. Specifically, we repeated MANOVAs three times, each time with two relevant variables included as independent variables (i.e., the type of control and one of the three other variables: urgency, closeness, and group size). In each analysis, Bonferroni post hoc tests (with the significance level set at .05) were used. First, with regard to the Type of control × Urgency interaction effect (Wilks’s Lambda = .78), $F(5, 207) = 11.81$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .22$, supporting Prediction 1, participants intended to exert direct personal control, direct collective control, and proxy control significantly more in the high urgency condition than in the low urgency condition (4.11 vs. 3.50, 3.15 vs. 2.86, 2.76 vs. 2.48, respectively), whereas the opposite pattern was found for secondary control (2.86 vs. 3.40). Although not significant, indirect personal control and indirect collective control showed the same patterns as the other primary control strategies (3.43 vs. 3.24 and 2.91 vs. 2.83, respectively).

For the Type of control × Closeness interaction effect (Wilks’s Lambda = .91), $F(5, 207) = 4.03$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, participants intended to exert direct/indirect collective control and proxy control significantly more in the non-close condition than in the close condition (3.15 vs. 2.85, 3.04 vs. 2.70, 2.84 vs. 2.40, respectively). For direct/indirect personal control and secondary control, unexpectedly, the intention was not significantly different between the two conditions (3.69 vs. 3.89, 3.37 vs. 3.30, 3.17 vs. 3.11, respectively). That is, inconsistent with Prediction 2, participants were no more likely to use direct or indirect personal control in the close condition than in the non-close condition, nor were they more likely to use secondary control in the non-close condition. However, they intended to exert primary control strategies involving others to a greater extent in the non-close condition than in the close condition.

Finally, with regard to the Type of control × Group size interaction effect (Wilks’s Lambda = .77), $F(5, 207) = 12.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .23$, participants intended to exert direct/indirect collective control and proxy control more in the group condition than in the pair condition (3.32 vs. 2.71, 3.01 vs. 2.74, 2.81 vs. 2.44, respectively), whereas the opposite pattern was found for direct personal control.
personal control (3.60 vs. 3.96); for indirect personal control and secondary control, the intention was not significantly different between the two conditions (3.22 vs. 3.43, 3.11 vs. 3.16, respectively). That is, primary control strategies involving others were chosen to a greater extent in the group condition than in the pair condition. The significant difference in control intention for joint control strategies suggests that those types of control may be especially useful when one shares the same problem with someone else who can act as a control agent on his or her behalf or with other people who can support one’s collective agency.

**General Discussion**

**Extended Conceptual Framework of Primary Control**

In Study 1, we validated the new taxonomy of primary control covering not only the prototypical type (i.e., direct personal control) but also non-prototypical types based on Yamaguchi’s (2001) theoretical argument. In both studies, indirect personal control was the most dominant category from the extended framework and accounted for a significant ratio of people’s control repertoire. This validation suggests possible oversimplification in previous categorizations of control strategies, which looked at direct personal control as the only way of exerting personal agency in changing one’s circumstances (e.g., Rothbaum et al., 1982; Weisz et al., 1984). The current study provides empirical evidence supporting Yamaguchi’s taxonomy of control orientations, primary control particularly, and shows more complexity in control orientations than formerly assumed.

**Urgency of Situation and Concern About Interpersonal Harmony**

We predicted that situational urgency and concern about interpersonal harmony would be associated with Japanese preference for primary control. As to situational urgency, overall results showed the predicted patterns in both Studies 1 and 2. That is, primary control, direct personal control in particular, was preferred more with a greater extent of subjective urgency. On the other hand, the results were not straightforward regarding concern about interpersonal harmony, and a complex pattern of results was found for primary control strategies involving others. Direct/indirect collective control and proxy control were preferred more with non-close than close others, while no differences were found between close and non-close relationships in intention to use direct/indirect personal control or secondary control in Study 2, where the factor was operationalized as perceived interpersonal distance. The relational factor may be a more complicated factor than previously assumed, possibly because closeness has an impact on concern about face as well as the importance of maintaining positive relationships. For example, direct personal control may be considered more face-threatening than other types of primary control, resulting in more preference for strategies involving third parties in affecting non-close targets, as shown in Study 2. In contrast, direct personal control may be less face-threatening with close others, and tactful exertion of direct personal control may enhance rather than harm close relationships. This question awaits future investigation. Taken together, both studies provide reasonable support for the expectation that Japanese control orientations are affected by situational variation.

**Primacy of Direct Personal Control**

The two studies demonstrated that Japanese did prefer primary control to secondary control like other cultural groups (e.g., North Americans), consistent with the universality hypothesis that primacy of primary control is prevalent across cultures. This indicates that primary control is preferred among Japanese despite the risk of disrupting interpersonal harmony or threatening other people’s face, pointing to the importance of autonomy among Japanese people just like
Westerners. Given that one’s agency would be the most veiled in proxy control where someone else acts as an agent, the finding that proxy control was the least preferred among primary control strategies in the two studies may also support Japanese agency in social contexts.

The current findings imply that cultural differences in values are not categorical (i.e., Western autonomy vs. Japanese interpersonal harmony). Differences may rather reside in their relative strength, such that autonomy is valued to a greater extent in the West, whereas interpersonal harmony is valued to a greater extent in Japan. Accordingly, preferences for primary control compared with secondary control seem stronger in North America than in Japan. In addition, as the current research showed, this tendency is qualified by situational variation. Perhaps the accumulated cross-cultural findings that Japanese are oriented toward secondary control more than North Americans may reflect very relative differences between the two cultures in association with the situation imagined or used in respective studies (e.g., aerobics class in Morling, 2000).

**Limitations and Future Directions**

There are some limitations and suggestions for future research. First, whether the present classification can be applied to other cultures (e.g., Western cultures) awaits empirical examination. Promisingly though, some studies suggest that other primary control strategies than direct personal control may exist in any society but in subtly different forms and degrees. For example, American students more or less use irony (i.e., one form of indirect personal control) in conversations to exert primary control (Gibbs, 2000). Cultural differences probably reside there in relative terms. That is, Japanese (or more broadly, East Asians) would be more oriented toward these less obtrusive types of primary control than Americans (or Westerners). Also, note again that indirect personal control was the most preferred type among the extended primary control strategies, which awaits further investigation in other cultures. Thus, future studies should examine Japanese and other cultural members’ choice of control in equivalent situations.

Second, the current research used situations involving shared goals for the most part. Thus, generalizability of our findings may be limited, especially to situations where group interests are at stake. Although two situational variables were put to empirical examination in our two studies, other situational variances would likely also regulate individuals’ control orientations. As Morling’s (2000) example showed, people would prefer to adopt secondary control when the principal goal of control is more oriented to personal achievement. Hence, this kind of situational factor (i.e., personal achievement as opposed to interpersonal influence) may play an important role in control orientations, which awaits future investigation. Other possibilities include manipulating situational goals (shared goal vs. personal goal, as mentioned above) as well as hierarchical relationships among the members (horizontal relationships vs. vertical relationships) as the current studies involved only horizontal relationships. Determining the situational factors that account for the greatest variance in control orientations promises to be a challenging task for scholars.

Third, participants in our studies selected their control strategies in hypothetical scenarios. For this reason, the participants’ responses may represent their ideal choice rather than actual choice. Thus, there remains a possibility that Japanese actually use secondary control strategies more frequently than primary control strategies in their real life, despite their preference for primary control. Hence, future research needs to examine Japanese control choices in their real life with varying degrees of urgency of the situation and levels of concern about interpersonal harmony.

In conclusion, the current work suggests that individuals’ choices of control strategy would be affected by situational urgency and concern about interpersonal harmony. In future control research, it is important to understand various forms of primary control across cultures. It is also important to identify specific conditions under which individuals’ control orientations are actualized.
Appendix A

Sport Scenario Used in Study 1

You are a member of a university sport club. Winning at this sport requires good teamwork among team members. N-san, the same age as you, also belongs to the team and is in a very important (high urgency condition)/moderately important (low urgency condition) position in the team. Despite an upcoming game, N-san has recently tended to skip practices, so every member of the team wants him or her to attend practices more often. However, N-san is a person who does not like to be forced to do things by others. So even if N-san was strongly persuaded and joined more practices, it would disrupt relationships with N-san (high difficulty condition). If persuaded, N-san would readily join more practices (low difficulty condition). In this situation, you and other members are considering whether it is possible to have N-san join practices more often.

Note. N-san denotes Mr. N or Ms. N. Manipulated portions of the scenario are underlined, with conditions in parentheses.

Appendix B

Project Scenario Used in Study 2

You are working on a group (group condition)/pair (pair condition) project in your class. You are very close (close condition)/not that close (non-close condition) to S-san in your group/pair. Recently, S-san does not participate in the shared work well for some reason. So, you are in much trouble because the work is not going smoothly and getting more demanding (high urgency condition). Although the work has been OK so far, you are now considering if you could have S-san make more efforts for the efficiency of the project (low urgency condition).

Direct personal control: . . . Showing your intention, you clearly tell S-san that you want him or her to do more of the shared work.

Indirect personal control: . . . Hiding your intention, you hint to S-san that you want him or her to do more of the shared work.

Direct collective control: . . . You, together with other classmates, clearly tell S-san that you want him or her to do more of the shared work.

Indirect collective control: . . . You, together with other classmates, hint to S-san that you want him or her to do more of the shared work (e.g., by discussing some work-related topics with him or her).

Proxy control: . . . You ask someone else in your class to have S-san do more of the shared work.

Secondary control: . . . You try to change your own thoughts and behaviors rather than trying to influence S-san.

Note. S-san denotes Mr. S or Ms. S. Manipulations are indicated by underlined parts, with conditions in parentheses.

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Notes
1. An overall chi-square test with situation and type of control as independent variables revealed different patterns across situations, $\chi^2(12) = 67.78$, $p < .01$. Post hoc tests showed the following significant differences at the $p < .05$ level: (a) direct personal control was selected more in the Project scenario and less in the Festival scenario, (b) indirect personal control was selected more in the Sport scenario and less in the Festival scenario, and (c) secondary control was selected less in the Sport and the Project scenarios and more in the Festival scenario.

2. We note that results reported in the following paragraphs were essentially the same in more inclusive multinomial logistic regression models, which added the two experimental conditions. For readability and understandability, and also because of stronger effects of the self-ratings, the reduced models using only the two self-rated variables as predictors are reported in the subsequent paragraphs.

3. Collective control is available even when others are not involved in the situation and do not share the common goal with the agent, as long as they can understand the problem and are willing to help the agent to cope with it.

References


