

# Emotions Experienced During Internship Applications: Does Culture Influence Bicultural Individuals' Ideal Affect?

Sophie Ye, Yun Lucy Zhang, and Jeanne L. Tsai, Ph.D.  
Stanford University

## Introduction

- Affect Valuation Theory suggests ideal affect is what people ideally want to feel and actual affect is what people actually feel (Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, 2006). Culture has a greater influence on ideal affect than actual affect.
- European Americans (EA) value excitement states more and calm states less than Hong Kong Chinese (CH) do. Bicultural individuals, who have been exposed to two cultures (e.g. Chinese Americans), value excitement states more than EA do and value calm states as much as CH do, which suggests that biculturals internalize values from both cultures.
- Past research shows that in the US, excitement states are associated with success and better leadership (Chim, Tsai, Ang, & Fung, 2013).
- Biculturals switch between cultural ways of feeling when primed with cultural icons (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000). AA are able to feel more positive and less negative than EA after being primed.
- Few studies have examined whether AA change emotions in response to cultural cues. Previously, Zhang examined whether AA adjust their positive and negative emotional expressions in response to different cultural primes. In this study, we are interested in seeing whether AA adjust their ideal positive affect (excitement versus calm states) in response to cultural cues presented in an internship application setting.

## Hypotheses

### Hypothesis 1:

Asian Americans (AA) will value excitement states more and calm states less after responding to the American internship advertisement than after responding to the Chinese internship advertisement.

### Hypothesis 2:

European Americans (EA) will not change their ideal affect after responding to the Chinese and American internship ads.

## Methods

### Participants:

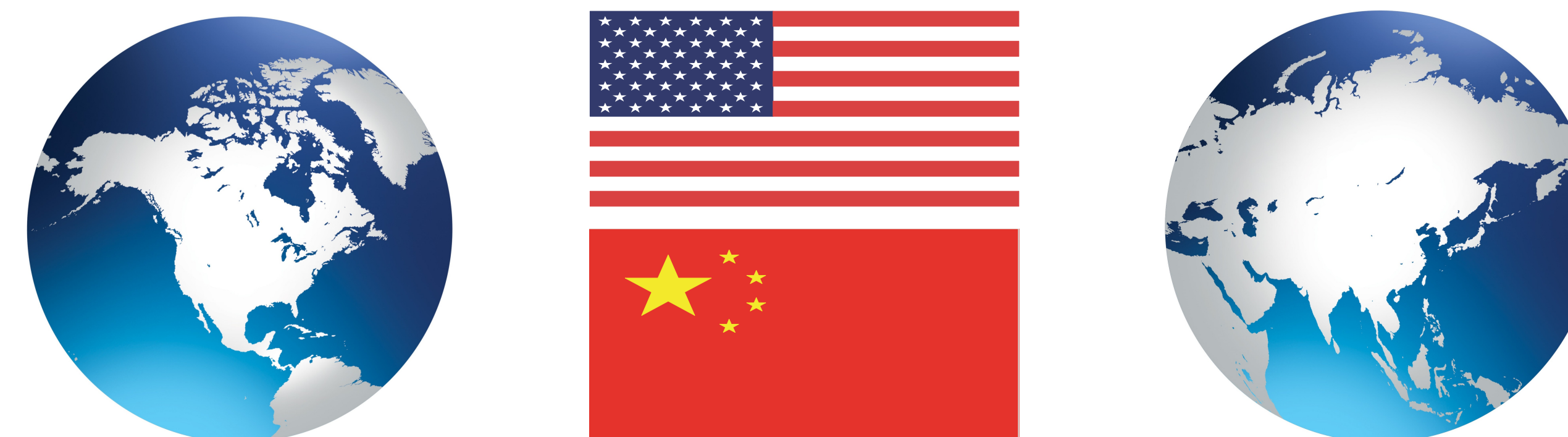
24 EAs (third generation and above) and 23 AAs (first and second generation); 55% female

### Procedure:

- Baseline measurement (online): Participants reported their actual and ideal affect.
- Time 1: Participants were randomly assigned to fill out an application for an internship at either at an American company or a Chinese company. Participants filled out a written application and recorded brief videos introducing themselves to the employer as part of the application. After completing the application, participants reported actual and ideal affect.
- Time 2: Same as Time 1 but in response to the internship ad of the other company. In addition, participants answered demographical questions.

## Methods

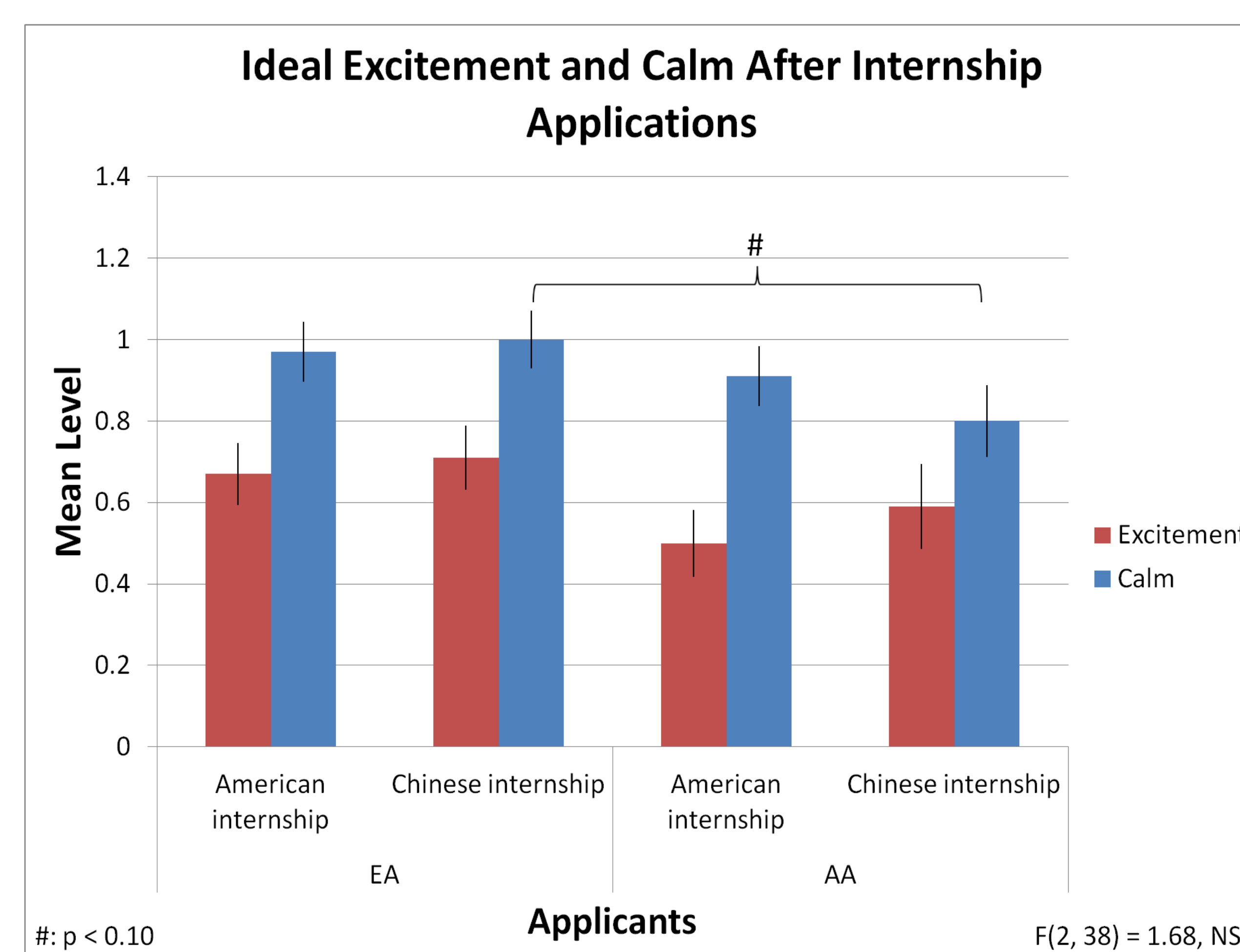
- Participants completed Time 1 and Time 2, which were two in-person surveys, in the lab at separate times within the span of one week
- Internship ads featured cultural icons (e.g. flags, country map, color, names). Other elements (i.e. job descriptions) remained the same.



### Measures:

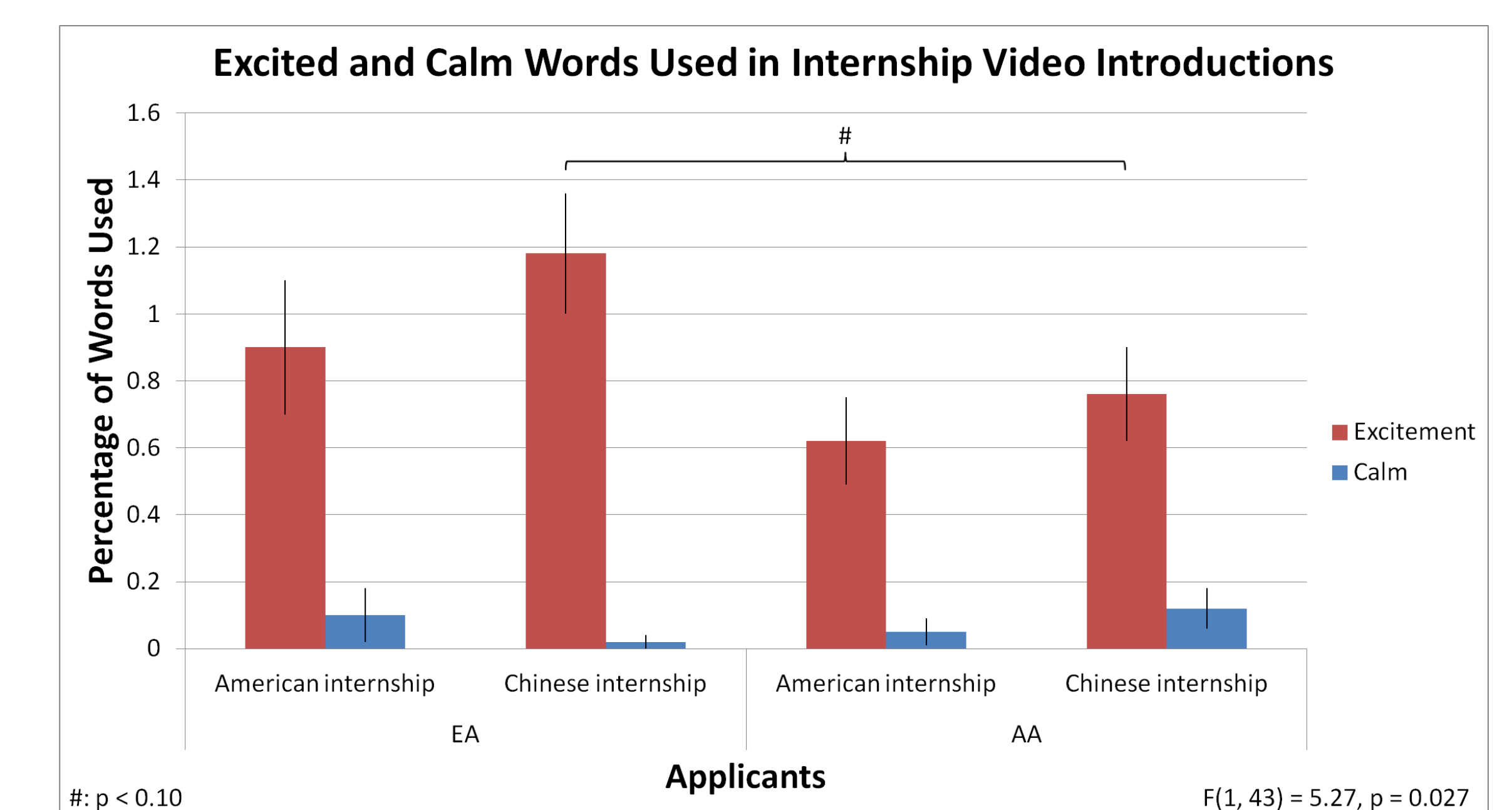
- Self-reported ideal emotions measured using Affect Valuation Index (AVI) "Over the course of a typical week, I ACTUALLY feel/would IDEALLY like to feel..."
  - Excitement states:** elated, energetic, enthusiastic, excited
  - Calm states:** calm, peaceful, relaxed, serene
  - $\alpha = 0.81-0.89$
- Video transcriptions analyzed for frequency of excitement and calm words using Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)

## Data Analysis and Results: Self-Reported Ideal Emotions



- Both EA and AA did not change in ideal affect after applying for both internships
- EA valued calm states marginally more after applying to the Chinese internship than AA did
- Both EA and AA did not have significantly different levels of ideal excitement and ideal calm states at baseline

## Data Analysis and Results: Video Transcriptions



- EA and AA did not use a significantly different number of excited and calm words during the American and Chinese internship applications
- EA used marginally more excited words during the Chinese internship application than AA did
- Main effect: AA used significantly fewer excited words during both internship applications than EA did

## Conclusions

- Hypothesis 1 not supported: unexpectedly, AA did not change in ideal affect after applying to the American and Chinese internships
- Hypothesis 2 supported by self-reported data: as predicted, EA did not change in ideal affect after applying to the American and Chinese internships
- Bicultural AA, like EA, do not switch ideal excitement and calm states when primed with cultural cues during internship applications. They also do not switch in the usage of excitement and calm words; however, they do use different emotion words.

### Implications and Future Directions:

- AA may not show changes in ideal positive states because these may be difficult to express or capture in audio transcripts; however, there is evidence that AA switch in positive and negative emotional expression during internship applications
- Applying for internships can induce stress, which may explain the higher ideal calm states after responding to the internship ads
- Future research may focus on the ability of bicultural individuals to adjust depending on factors such as education and degree of acculturation

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Lucy Zhang, Prof. Jeanne Tsai, my fellow research assistants, and the Culture and Emotion Lab for all of their help and support. I would also like to thank the Psych-Summer program for generously giving me the chance to intern in the Department of Psychology this summer.

### Citations:

Chim, L., Tsai, J.L., Ang, J., & Fung, H.H. (2013). Cultural differences in perceptions of leadership: The role of ideal affect. Manuscript in preparation.  
 Hong, Y., Morris, M., Chiu, C., & Benet-Martínez, V. (2000). Multicultural minds: A dynamic constructivist approach to culture and cognition. *American Psychologist*, 55, 709-720.  
 Tsai, J.L., Knutson, B., & Fung, H.H. (2006). Cultural variation in affect valuation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, 288-307.