

# Cross-Cultural Generality and Specificity in Self-Regulation: Avoidance Personal Goals and Multiple Aspects of Well-Being in the United States and Japan

Andrew J. Elliot  
University of Rochester and University of Munich

Constantine Sedikides  
University of Southampton

Kou Murayama  
University of Munich

Ayumi Tanaka  
Doshisha University

Todd M. Thrash  
College of William and Mary

Rachel R. Mapes  
United States Department of Defense

The authors examined avoidance personal goals as concurrent (Study 1) and longitudinal (Study 2) predictors of multiple aspects of well-being in the United States and Japan. In both studies, participants adopted more avoidance personal goals in Japan relative to the United States. Both studies also demonstrated that avoidance personal goals were significant negative predictors of the most relevant aspects of well-being in each culture. Specifically, avoidance personal goals were negative predictors of intrapersonal and eudaimonic well-being in the United States and were negative predictors of interpersonal and eudaimonic well-being in Japan. The findings clarify and extend puzzling findings from prior empirical work in this area, and raise provocative possibilities about the nature of avoidance goal pursuit.

*Keywords:* avoidance, personal goals, well-being, culture, self-regulation

Does the pursuit of avoidance goals in daily life have the same influence on psychological well-being in different cultures? Does avoidance goal pursuit have the same effect on different aspects of psychological well-being? We addressed these questions in the present research with a concurrent and a longitudinal study of avoidance personal goals and multiple aspects of well-being in the

United States and Japan. The answers that emerged both extend prior cross-cultural research on self-regulation and well-being and challenge current wisdom on optimal modes of self-regulation.

## Avoidance Personal Goals

Personal goals, the consciously articulated and self-relevant aims that individuals pursue in their daily lives (Emmons, 1986), are essential vehicles of self-regulation. These goals can be differentiated with regard to approach and avoidance (Elliot & Sheldon, 1997). Approach goals focus on desirable prospects and guide individuals toward them (“Deepen my relationship with my partner”; “Do well at school”), whereas avoidance goals focus on undesirable prospects and guide individuals away from them (“Avoid stagnation in my relationship with my partner”; “Avoid doing poorly at school”).

Avoidance, relative to approach, personal goals (henceforth designated “avoidance personal goals”) constitute an optimal candidate for cross-cultural analysis. The approach–avoidance distinction is applicable across cultural categories (and, indeed, across phylogeny; Elliot, 1999). Personal goals are assessed idiographically, with participants unaware of the goal variable under consideration, and they are coded objectively. These procedures allow researchers to overcome several methodological problems (e.g., cultural differences in scale use, reference-group effects) that plague cross-cultural investigations (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995; Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002; Oishi et al., 2005).

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Andrew J. Elliot, Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology, University of Rochester, and Department of Psychology, University of Munich, Munich, Germany; Constantine Sedikides, School of Psychology, University of Southampton, Southampton, England; Kou Murayama, Department of Psychology, University of Munich, Munich, Germany; Ayumi Tanaka, Department of Psychology, Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan; Todd M. Thrash, Department of Psychology, College of William and Mary; Rachel R. Mapes, United States Department of Defense, Washington, DC.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Andrew J. Elliot, 488 Meliora Hall, Department of Clinical and Social Sciences in Psychology, University of Rochester, Rochester, NY 14620. E-mail: andye@psych.rochester.edu

Research in the United States has demonstrated that avoidance personal goals are detrimental to well-being, regardless of whether the goals are domain-general, domain-specific, or context-specific (for a review, see Elliot, Thrash, & Murayama, 2011). However, preliminary cross-cultural findings by Elliot, Chirkov, Sheldon, and Kim (2001) suggest a more intricate relation. Avoidance personal goals emerged as a negative predictor of well-being (e.g., positive affect, life satisfaction) in the United States, replicating prior research, but, surprisingly, these goals were unrelated to well-being in South Korea. This latter, null finding was left unexplained and remains puzzling.

### Cultural Values and Aspects of Well-Being

Culture is a potent determinant of self-construction and what it means to be a valued societal participant (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). In individualistic cultures such as the United States, the self is construed in independent terms as a unique entity, and a cultural member's main task is to "stand out" and distinguish oneself from others. In collectivist cultures such as Japan, the self is construed in interdependent terms as inextricably connected and obligated to others, and a cultural member's main task is to "fit in" and maintain social harmony (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Hofstede, 2001).<sup>1</sup> Persons across the globe desire to be good cultural members (Heine, 2005; Kluckhohn, 1962), and are presumed to appraise their well-being on the basis of the values emphasized in their culture (Oishi, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999).

Well-being has multiple aspects (Ryff, 1989), and these aspects may vary in their relevance across cultures. For example, the measures of positive and negative affect commonly used in research on well-being focus on emotions that individuals often experience alone (e.g., "determined," "distressed"), and the measures typically used to assess life satisfaction focus on individuals' own life appraisals. These internal, private experiences and personal, introspective self-evaluations seem most relevant to individualistic cultures, and may be characterized as *intrapersonal well-being*. In collectivistic cultures, evaluation of one's behavior by the group is of paramount importance; the emphasis is on emotional experience in relational contexts (Mesquita, 2001) and external frames of reference in the self-evaluation process (Oishi & Sullivan, 2005; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). A collectivistic-friendly analog to intrapersonal well-being assessments would focus on emotions experienced in interpersonal contexts (e.g., grateful, remorseful; Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 2000; Mesquita & Karasawa, 2002) and on life satisfaction appraisals that implicate other's viewpoints (Oishi & Diener, 2001). This aspect of well-being, most relevant to collectivistic cultures, may be characterized as *interpersonal well-being*. A third aspect of well-being is eudaimonic well-being. Eudaimonia represents a deep sense of fulfillment, and is characterized by the quest to actualize human potential and realize one's *daimon* or true nature (Lent, 2004; Ryff, 1989). Two core elements of eudaimonia are vitality and self-actualization. Vitality is a sense of aliveness and energy indicating that the organism is functioning as it was intended to function (Ryan & Fredrick, 1997), and self-actualization is one's experienced development and maturing expression of the self (Jones & Crandall, 1986). Eudaimonia is grounded in basic human needs and psychological tendencies and is equally relevant

to persons across cultures (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 1998; Steger, Kawabata, Shimai, & Otake, 2008; Waterman, 1993).

We posit that the aspects of well-being most relevant to a culture's values are the most sensitive barometers of the quality of functioning within that culture. Accordingly, the effectiveness of a particular form of regulation in a given culture should be most clearly manifest in its influence on the most relevant aspects of well-being in that culture. Applied to the present research, avoidance personal goals should have their strongest influence on intrapersonal and eudaimonic well-being in the United States and on interpersonal and eudaimonic well-being in Japan. Intrapersonal and interpersonal well-being are less relevant in Japan and the United States, respectively, and this should be manifest in weaker or null relations with avoidance personal goals. It is important to note that the Elliot et al. (2001) findings are entirely consistent with this pattern, as avoidance personal goals influenced intrapersonal well-being (the only type examined) for American but not South Korean participants.

### Avoidance Personal Goals and Well-Being: Match Versus Structural Hypotheses

Independent of the strength of the relation between avoidance personal goals and well-being is the question of the directionality of this relation. Elliot et al. (2001) found a negative relation between avoidance personal goals and intrapersonal well-being in the United States, but the direction of the relation between avoidance goals and eudaimonic well-being in the United States and between avoidance goals and both interpersonal and eudaimonic well-being in Japan remains an open question. Two opposing hypotheses may be articulated in this regard, a match hypothesis and a structural hypothesis.

Match hypotheses are popular in the contemporary psychological literature. Such hypotheses come in many forms, but most posit that a match between an environmental emphasis or motivational orientation and a mode of self-regulation is optimal for psychological functioning (Caplan, 1987; Fulmer et al., 2010; Higgins, 2005; Kristof, 1996). As noted above, individualistic and collectivistic cultures have different emphases: Individualism emphasizes standing out and acquiring positive characteristics that establish or affirm one's uniqueness, whereas collectivism emphasizes fitting in and eliminating negative characteristics that help one avoid relational disruption. The individualistic emphasis seems likely to prompt approach goal regulation, whereas the collectivistic emphasis seems likely to prompt avoidance goal regulation. In support of this premise, Elliot et al. (2001) documented that individuals from a collectivistic culture (South Korea) adopt more avoidance personal goals than do those from an individualistic culture (the United States). In a collectivistic culture, avoidance goal pursuit matches the cultural emphasis, whereas in

<sup>1</sup> We use the individualism–collectivism distinction herein to represent a widely acknowledged and oft-researched set of differences in how persons define themselves in relation to others. It should be noted that some theorists have criticized this distinction as not adequately capturing cultural differences, including those between Japan and the United States (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Takano & Osaka, 1999; Voronov & Singer, 2002).

an individualistic culture, avoidance goal pursuit mismatches the cultural emphasis. Accordingly, advocates of a match hypothesis would expect avoidance personal goals to lead to efficient and effective functioning that facilitates (relevant) well-being in Japan, and would expect these goals to lead to inefficient and ineffective functioning that undermines (relevant) well-being in the United States (Kitayama et al., 1997).

A contrasting position is rooted in the idea that avoidance goals have inherent limitations as a function of their structure. All avoidance goals use a negative, undesirable possibility as the hub of self-regulation. As such, avoidance goals provide individuals with something to move away from, but not something to move toward that can guide behavior and inform goal progress (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Elliot & Sheldon, 1998). Furthermore, the attainment of avoidance goals only yields the absence of an undesirable outcome (e.g., relational discord, performance failure), not the presence of a desirable outcome (e.g., relational harmony, performance success); the absence of the negative merely allows one to survive, whereas the presence of the positive provides the psychological nutrients that allow one to thrive (Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997; McFarland & Miller, 1994). In addition, the incessant focus on undesirable possibilities in avoidance goal regulation evokes a host of aversive psychological processes such as anticipatory anxiety, appraising ambiguous stimuli and information as threatening, and feeling compelled to self-protect and avoid challenge (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Derryberry & Reed, 2002; Heimpel, Elliot, & Wood, 2006; Hembree, 1988; Wegner, 1994). If structurally based, these implications of avoidance goal regulation may be viewed as applicable across individualistic and collectivistic cultures. Accordingly, advocates of a structural hypothesis would expect avoidance personal goals to lead to inefficient and ineffective functioning that undermines (relevant) well-being in both Japan and the United States.

### Overview and Specific Hypotheses

The present research comprised two studies. In Study 1, we examined avoidance personal goals as a concurrent negative predictor of intrapersonal and eudaimonic well-being in the United States and Japan. In Study 2, we sought to replicate Study 1 and extend it by additionally examining the link between avoidance personal goals and interpersonal well-being. Critically, we employed a longitudinal design in Study 2, a rarity in cross-cultural research on well-being (for exceptions, see Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2003; Oishi & Diener, 2001) and a highly effective way to address the aforementioned response biases with regard to the dependent variables.

We hypothesized that avoidance personal goals would be significant predictors of the most relevant aspects of well-being for American participants, intrapersonal and eudaimonic, and would be unrelated to interpersonal well-being. Likewise, we hypothesized that avoidance personal goals would be significant predictors of the most relevant aspects of well-being for Japanese participants, interpersonal and eudaimonic, and would be unrelated to intrapersonal well-being. With regard to the direction of these relations, the hypothesis is straightforward for American participants, as both the match and structural perspectives would anticipate that avoidance goals would have a negative influence on valued well-being. For Japanese participants, the match and struc-

tural perspectives diverge, and we anticipated support for the structural perspective, such that the focal relations would be negative for these individuals as well. Finally, we expected Japanese participants to adopt more avoidance personal goals than American participants, thereby conceptually replicating the Elliot et al. (2001) finding for South Korean and American participants.

## Study 1

In Study 1, we tested our hypotheses by examining avoidance personal goals as concurrent predictors of multiple aspects of well-being in a U.S. sample and a Japanese sample.

### Method

**Participants and procedure.** Participants were 396 volunteers: 131 individuals of non-Asian descent from the United States (83 females, 48 males), and 265 individuals of Asian descent from Japan (141 females, 123 males, 1 unidentified). The samples (in this study and Study 2) from both cultures consisted of psychology students at selective private universities in urban settings. Participants (in both studies) completed a questionnaire packet (or packets) in which confidentiality was highlighted.

**Measures.** All measures used in Japan (in both studies) were translated and back-translated by native Japanese speakers fluent in English. Descriptive statistics and reliabilities for each measure are provided in Table 1. The measures focused on dispositional tendencies; no specific timeframe was provided.

**Personal goals assessment.** We assessed goals with the Personal Goals Elicitation Procedure (Elliot & Sheldon, 1998). In this procedure, personal goals are defined for participants as the goals that they typically seek in their everyday behavior, and they are instructed to list the eight personal goals that best describe their daily pursuits. Two trained coders independently categorized each goal as avoidance (i.e., “focused on a negative possibility that a person is trying to move away from or stay away from”) or approach (i.e., “focused on a positive possibility that a person is trying to move toward or maintain”) using Elliot and Friedman’s (2007, p. 117) coding scheme. Interjudge agreement exceeded 99%, and disagreements were resolved by a third trained coder. Coders were unaware of all other variables and the study objectives. Examples of avoidance goals listed by participants were “Avoid feeling lonely” and “Avoid procrastination”; examples of approach goals listed by participants were “Do the best I can in my classes” and “Seek new and exciting experiences.” We formed an avoidance goals index by summing the number of avoidance goals and dividing by the total number of goals listed. Given that avoidance–approach was coded dichotomously for each goal, this measure functionally represents avoidance relative to approach goals.

**Intrapersonal well-being.** We used Brunstein’s (1993) Affect Scale to assess positive affect (4 items, e.g., pleased) and negative affect (4 items, e.g., frustrated). We used the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) to assess life satisfaction (5 items: e.g., “I have been satisfied with my life”).

**Eudaimonic well-being.** We used the Subjective Vitality Scale (Ryan & Frederick, 1997) to assess vitality (7 items: e.g., “I feel alive and vital”).

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics in Study 1

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Observed range	Possible range	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Japan					
Avoidance goals	0.236	0.187	0.000–0.875	0.00–1.00	–
Positive affect	4.30	1.15	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.80
Negative affect	4.19	1.19	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.73
Life satisfaction	3.49	1.24	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.84
Vitality	3.58	1.26	1.00–6.71	1.00–7.00	.89
United States					
Avoidance goals	0.110	0.124	0.000–0.500	0.00–1.00	–
Positive affect	5.02	0.88	1.00–6.75	1.00–7.00	.81
Negative affect	3.81	1.01	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.74
Life satisfaction	4.93	1.14	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.86
Vitality	4.79	1.06	1.00–6.86	1.00–7.00	.88

## Results and Discussion

In all analyses (in both studies), we corrected for potential statistical biases resulting from missing values by using the full information maximum likelihood method (Schafer & Graham, 2002).

**Culture as a predictor of avoidance goals.** Conceptually replicating Elliot et al. (2001), Japanese participants ( $M = 0.24$ ,  $SD = 0.19$ ) listed more avoidance goals than American participants ( $M = 0.11$ ,  $SD = 0.12$ ),  $t(394) = 7.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.71$ .

**Preliminary well-being analyses.** We assessed the cross-cultural measurement equivalence of well-being through multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (Byrne & Campbell, 1999). We evaluated the metric invariance model (where the factor loadings are constrained to be equal in the two cultures) in terms of both overall model fit and the difference in fit from the nonconstrained model (where the factor loadings are freely estimated; Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). We assessed overall model fit with the comparative fit index (CFI) and the incremental fit index (IFI; Hoyle & Panter, 1995), as well as the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). We also used differences in CFI ( $\Delta CFI$ ) to test whether the metric invariance model evidenced worse fit than the nonconstrained model (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002). We conducted separate analyses for each well-being construct. Finally, we created parcels for life satisfaction and vitality through random assignment of items to parcels (Landis, Beal, & Tesluk, 2000); positive affect and negative affect did not contain sufficient items to enable parcel use.

For positive affect, life satisfaction, and vitality, the analyses supported the metric invariance model. Overall fit indices showed a good fit to the data, CFI = 0.99–1.00, IFI = 0.99–1.00, RMSEA = .000–.076; the differences in fit were small,  $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ –0.01, indicating cross-cultural measurement equivalence. However, negative affect evidenced a relatively poor fit for some indices (CFI = 0.94, IFI = 0.94, RMSEA = .089,  $\Delta CFI = 0.04$ ), suggesting that this variable was interpreted differently in the two cultures. Thus, we excluded negative affect from subsequent analyses (Spini, 2003).

**Avoidance goals as a predictor of well-being.** In the analyses (for this study and Study 2), we followed Elliot et al. (2001) in using multiple regression to examine avoidance goals as a predictor of well-being within each country. In all analyses (in

both studies), we controlled for sex and age to ensure that results were not attributable to these variables.

**U.S. sample.** Avoidance goals were a negative predictor of intrapersonal well-being, as measured by positive affect ( $\beta = -.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and life satisfaction ( $\beta = -.21$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These results support our hypothesis and previous findings (Elliot et al., 1997, 2001). An important finding in support of our hypothesis was that avoidance goals were also a negative predictor of eudaimonic well-being, as assessed by vitality ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

**Japanese sample.** Avoidance goals did not predict intrapersonal well-being, as measured by positive affect ( $\beta = -.02$ , *ns*) and life satisfaction ( $\beta = -.01$ , *ns*). These results are consistent with our hypothesis and previous findings (Elliot et al., 2001). An important finding in line with our hypothesis was that avoidance goals were a negative predictor of eudaimonic well-being, as assessed by vitality ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Ancillary analyses.** Following an anonymous reviewer's suggestion, we had two coders independently categorize each personal goal for affiliation content using Emmon's (1999) coding system (interjudge agreement exceeded 94%), and we repeated the analyses controlling for this goal content. All results remained the same in these reanalyses, with the exception that the vitality finding in the U.S. sample that was  $p < .05$  became  $p = .05$ .

**Summary.** These results replicate those of Elliot et al. (2001) by showing that Japanese individuals adopt more avoidance personal goals than Americans, and by documenting that avoidance personal goals negatively predict intrapersonal well-being in the United States but not in Japan. The results also extend the prior research by demonstrating for the first time that avoidance personal goals negatively predict eudaimonic well-being in both cultures.

## Study 2

The first objective of Study 2 was to examine whether the observed relations between avoidance personal goals and well-being would replicate with an adjusted and expanded set of well-being variables. We changed the measure of negative affect, given the problem encountered in Study 1, added self-esteem to the intrapersonal well-being measures, and added self-actualization to the eudaimonic well-being measures. The second objective was to



examine the relation between avoidance personal goals and interpersonal well-being. The final objective was to examine the relations between avoidance personal goals and well-being in a longitudinal design with both a U.S. and a Japanese sample. We tested the same hypotheses as those of Study 1.

**Method**

**Participants and procedure.** Participants were 466 volunteers: 270 individuals of non-Asian descent from the United States (171 females, 91 males, 8 unspecified), and 196 individuals of Asian descent from Japan (118 males, 73 females, 5 unspecified). We excluded three American participants who did not follow instructions. At the beginning of a semester-long period (Time 1

[T1]), and again at the end of the semester (approximately 3.5 months later; Time 2 [T2]), participants completed a questionnaire packet.

**Measures.** Descriptive statistics and reliabilities for each scale are provided in Table 2. At both T1 and T2, participants reported their well-being in terms of the “past few days.”

**Personal goals assessment.** We assessed personal goals as in Study 1, although here participants reported the goals that they would pursue during the semester. Two trained coders, unaware of other variables and the study objectives, independently categorized each goal as avoidance or approach. Interjudge agreement exceeded 99%, and disagreements were resolved by a third trained coder. We formed an avoidance goals index, as in Study 1.

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics in Study 2*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Observed range	Possible range	Cronbach's $\alpha$
United States					
Avoidance goals	0.113	0.125	0.000–0.750	0.00–1.00	–
Positive affect T1	4.87	1.02	1.30–7.00	1.00–7.00	.88
Positive affect T2	4.55	1.02	1.60–7.00	1.00–7.00	.85
Negative affect T1	2.88	1.07	1.10–6.60	1.00–7.00	.88
Negative affect T2	3.19	1.11	1.00–5.90	1.00–7.00	.87
Life satisfaction T1	5.41	1.23	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	–
Life satisfaction T2	5.44	1.25	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	–
Self-esteem T1	5.36	1.07	1.71–7.00	1.00–7.00	.85
Self-esteem T2	5.46	1.11	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.87
Interdependent positive affect T1	4.78	1.00	1.00–6.83	1.00–7.00	.75
Interdependent positive affect T2	4.68	1.08	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.72
Interdependent negative affect T1	2.83	1.07	1.00–6.50	1.00–7.00	.80
Interdependent negative affect T2	2.93	1.12	1.00–5.83	1.00–7.00	.74
Collective life satisfaction T1	5.82	0.81	3.20–7.00	1.00–7.00	.76
Collective life satisfaction T2	5.83	0.81	3.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.77
Collective self-esteem T1	5.15	0.84	2.50–7.00	1.00–7.00	.88
Collective self-esteem T2	5.26	0.87	2.81–7.00	1.00–7.00	.88
Vitality T1	4.52	1.31	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.91
Vitality T2	4.41	1.43	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.93
Self-actualization T1	3.50	0.48	2.27–5.00	1.00–7.00	.66
Self-actualization T2	4.63	0.49	3.00–6.33	1.00–7.00	.66
Japan					
Avoidance goals	0.186	0.164	0.000–0.750	0.00–1.00	–
Positive affect T1	3.86	1.00	1.40–6.40	1.00–7.00	.77
Positive affect T2	3.76	0.93	1.50–6.50	1.00–7.00	.77
Negative affect T1	3.39	1.08	1.00–5.80	1.00–7.00	.79
Negative affect T2	3.46	1.06	1.30–6.90	1.00–7.00	.81
Life satisfaction T1	4.32	1.41	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	–
Life satisfaction T2	4.09	1.23	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	–
Self-esteem T1	3.71	1.16	1.00–6.43	1.00–7.00	.80
Self-esteem T2	3.69	1.15	1.00–6.29	1.00–7.00	.80
Interdependent positive affect T1	3.97	1.16	1.00–6.50	1.00–7.00	.75
Interdependent positive affect T2	3.84	0.92	1.50–6.50	1.00–7.00	.78
Interdependent negative affect T1	3.88	1.30	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.63
Interdependent negative affect T2	4.07	1.14	1.33–7.00	1.00–7.00	.71
Collective life satisfaction T1	4.94	0.95	2.20–7.00	1.00–7.00	.83
Collective life satisfaction T2	4.86	0.96	1.00–7.00	1.00–7.00	.84
Collective self-esteem T1	4.41	0.79	2.44–6.44	1.00–7.00	.82
Collective self-esteem T2	4.54	0.78	2.38–6.38	1.00–7.00	.82
Vitality T1	3.83	1.35	1.00–6.67	1.00–7.00	.84
Vitality T2	3.52	1.35	1.00–6.50	1.00–7.00	.89
Self-actualization T1	2.98	0.41	1.00–4.13	1.00–7.00	.45
Self-actualization T2	2.91	0.41	1.00–4.00	1.00–7.00	.49

Note. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2.

**Intrapersonal well-being.** We used the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Tellegen, & Clark, 1988) to assess positive affect (10 items: e.g., proud) and negative affect (10 items: e.g., irritable). We used the Delighted–Terrible Scale (Andrews & Withey, 1976) to assess life satisfaction (1 item: “How do you feel about your life as a whole?”), and we used the short form of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001) to assess self-esteem (7 items: e.g., “On the whole, I am satisfied with myself”).

**Interpersonal well-being.** We used Stephan, Stephan, and Cabezas de Vargas’ (1996) measure to assess interdependent positive affect (6 items: e.g., sympathetic) and interdependent negative affect (6 items: e.g., apologetic). We used the Social Appraisal Scale (Suh, Diener, & Updegraff, 2008) to assess collective life satisfaction (5 items [1 item answered from the perspective of 5 close others], “How do you think each person feels about your life in general?”). Finally, we used the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) to assess collective self-esteem (16 items: e.g., “Overall, belonging to social groups is an important part of my self-image”).

**Eudaimonic well-being.** We used the Short Subjective Vitality Scale (Bostic, Rubio, & Hood, 2000) to assess vitality (6 items: e.g., “I nearly always feel alert and awake”) and the Short Index of Self-Actualization (Jones & Crandall, 1986) to assess self-actualization (15 items, e.g., “I feel that people are essentially good and can be trusted”).

## Results and Discussion

**Attrition analysis.** One hundred ninety-six Japanese and 270 American participants completed both the T1 and T2 assessments. Multivariate analysis of variance with the T1 well-being variables and avoidance goals as dependent variables showed no significant differences between those who completed and did not complete the study.

**Culture as a predictor of avoidance goals.** As in Study 1, Japanese participants ( $M = 0.19$ ,  $SD = 0.16$ ) listed more avoidance goals than American participants ( $M = 0.11$ ,  $SD = 0.13$ ),  $t(464) = 5.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.51$ .

**Preliminary well-being analyses.** We used multigroup confirmatory factor analysis to assess the cross-cultural measurement equivalence of well-being, as well as the measurement equivalence at the two time points. We evaluated the full metric invariance model in terms of overall model fit and the difference in fit from the nonconstrained model. We conducted separate analyses for each well-being construct, allowing the residuals associated with indicators of the same items in T1 and T2 to correlate (Bollen, 1989). Finally, we formed parcels for all multiple-item variables.

The results supported the full metric invariance model for each well-being construct. The fit indices showed a good fit to the data, CFI = 0.91–1.00, IFI = 0.91–1.00, RMSEA = .000–.076, and differences in fit were small,  $\Delta CFI = 0.00$ –0.01. Measurement equivalence was present for all variables across cultures and time points.

**Avoidance goals as a predictor of well-being.** As in Study 1, we followed Elliot et al. (2001) in using multiple regression analysis to examine avoidance goals as a predictor of well-being within each country. We controlled for the corresponding T1

well-being variable to enable a longitudinal examination of the focal relations.

**U.S. sample.** Avoidance goals were a significant predictor of longitudinal change in intrapersonal well-being: They predicted a decrease in positive affect ( $\beta = -.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ), life satisfaction, ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and self-esteem ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and an increase in negative affect ( $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Moreover, avoidance goals significantly predicted a longitudinal decrease in eudaimonic well-being, as measured by vitality ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and self-actualization ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

It is important to note that avoidance goals were not significant predictors of longitudinal change in interpersonal well-being as measured by interdependent negative affect ( $\beta = -.03$ , *ns*), collective life satisfaction ( $\beta = .00$ , *ns*), and collective self-esteem ( $\beta = -.05$ , *ns*). The one result that ran contrary to expectations was that avoidance goals were a significant negative predictor of interdependent positive affect ( $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ). All other results were consistent with our hypotheses.

**Japanese sample.** Avoidance goals were not a significant predictor of longitudinal change in intrapersonal well-being, as measured by positive affect ( $\beta = -.12$ , *ns*), negative affect ( $\beta = .05$ , *ns*), life satisfaction ( $\beta = -.06$ , *ns*), and self-esteem ( $\beta = -.07$ , *ns*). Avoidance goals were a significant or marginally significant predictor of a longitudinal decrease in eudaimonic well-being, as measured by vitality ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $p = .07$ ) and self-actualization ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

It is important to note that avoidance goals were a significant or marginally significant predictor of a longitudinal decrease in interpersonal well-being, as measured by interdependent positive affect ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ), interdependent negative affect ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p = .06$ ), collective life satisfaction ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and collective self-esteem ( $\beta = -.12$ ,  $p < .05$ ). All of these results were consistent with our hypotheses.

**Ancillary analyses.** As in Study 1, we had two coders independently categorize each personal goal for affiliation content (interjudge agreement exceeded 93%), and we repeated the analyses controlling for this goal content. All results remained the same in these reanalyses.

**Summary.** The findings replicate Study 1 by showing that Japanese individuals adopt more avoidance personal goals than Americans, by documenting that avoidance personal goals are a negative predictor of intrapersonal well-being in the United States but not in Japan, and by documenting that avoidance personal goals are a negative predictor of eudaimonic well-being in both cultures. The results extend Study 1 by expanding the indicators of intrapersonal and eudaimonic well-being to include self-esteem and self-actualization (respectively), by establishing that avoidance personal goals are a negative predictor of interpersonal well-being in Japan but not in the United States, and by demonstrating all of the aforementioned relations between avoidance personal goals and well-being in longitudinal fashion.

## General Discussion

An important impetus for the present research was the puzzling finding of Elliot et al. (2001) that avoidance personal goals are more prevalent in a collectivistic culture (South Korea) than an individualistic culture (the United States), but that these goals only predict well-being in the individualistic culture. The present re-

search conceptually replicates this finding and extends it in ways that solve the puzzle, advance our understanding of self-regulation and well-being across cultures, and raise provocative possibilities about the nature of avoidance goal pursuit.

Critical to our research was the differentiation of well-being into three aspects: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and eudaimonic. Our results showed that avoidance personal goals were significant predictors of the most relevant aspects of well-being in each country, intrapersonal and eudaimonic for American participants and interpersonal and eudaimonic for Japanese participants. Avoidance personal goals were unrelated to interpersonal well-being in the United States and were unrelated to intrapersonal well-being in Japan. Elliot et al. (2001) only examined intrapersonal well-being in their research, which, it may now be seen, is the reason that avoidance personal goals were significant predictors of well-being only in the U.S. sample. The vast majority of cross-cultural research on well-being likewise focuses exclusively on intrapersonal well-being (for exceptions, see Kitayama et al., 2000; Mesquita, 2001; Oishi et al., 1999; Suh et al., 1998). We think casting a broader well-being net and attending carefully to the differential relevance of various aspects of well-being across cultures promise to yield considerable dividends in future work in this area. Subsequent research could even take the issue of well-being relevance a step further by incorporating indigenous well-being constructs (Adair & Diaz-Loving, 1999; Christopher, 1999).

In terms of the direction of the observed relations, we found consistent support for the structural hypothesis over the match hypothesis. Avoidance personal goals were negative predictors of the most relevant aspects of well-being in each culture. The U.S. findings are mute regarding the structural versus match hypotheses, but, given that avoidance goals match the Japanese emphasis on fitting in and eliminating negative characteristics, the finding that avoidance goals are detrimental for well-being in this culture runs contrary to the match hypothesis and favors the structural hypothesis. Most extant data supportive of a match hypothesis focus on relatively low-level, (social)-cognitive matches in specific task situations (for a review, see Higgins, 2005). In our work, we focused on a relatively high-level, value-based match with regard to everyday self-regulation. Matches are presumed to be beneficial because they increase the value of outcomes, thereby increasing strength of engagement (Higgins, 2000). With cultural values and personal goals, outcome value and strength of engagement are not in need of bolstering, and any additional benefits accrued by an avoidance–avoidance match are likely outweighed by the inherent limitations and aversiveness of avoidance goal regulation.

Support for the structural hypothesis herein raises the intriguing question of whether avoidance personal goal pursuit is always problematic for culturally valued well-being. Stated most provocatively, has our research uncovered a pancultural relation? We do think that our findings are consistent with this bold premise, and that a plausible conceptual case can be marshaled in support. The approach–avoidance distinction is unquestionably important across cultures (Elliot & Covington, 2001), the personal goal construct seems well positioned (neither too abstract, nor too concrete; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005) to carry a psychological universal, and arguments regarding the inherent limitations of avoidance goal regulation have intuitive appeal. Nevertheless, it is far too early to make strong claims on this front, as further research

using diverse methods, measures, and cultural samples is needed, and restraint is called for in this controversial arena (Shweder, 2000). Our research is best construed as providing a hint at a pancultural relation that now warrants sustained and systematic empirical examination.

Even if avoidance personal goals prove deleterious for valued well-being across the globe, this would not mean that all avoidance goal regulation is problematic or that avoidance goal regulation undermines all outcomes. On the contrary, some situations seem to require avoidance regulation (e.g., those in which danger is clearly present, such as when the weather is bad and one must drive a car) and some tasks seem ideally suited for avoidance regulation (e.g., those in which effective performance requires detecting errors, such as accounting). In these instances, avoidance goal pursuit would undoubtedly be beneficial (for relevant empirical work, see De Dreu, Bass, & Nijstad, 2008; Friedman & Förster, 2010; Koch, Holland, & van Knippenberg, 2008). It is important to add, however, that even when avoidance goal pursuit has benefits, these benefits may come with costs (Murayama & Elliot, 2009; Roskes, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2011). For example, avoidance goal regulation may promote performance on a task in the short-run while simultaneously evoking aversive processes that undermine interest and jeopardize well-being in the long-run (e.g., air traffic controlling, which is an inherently avoidance-based occupation and has a high burnout rate). In short, there are certainly tasks and situations in which avoidance goal pursuit can be beneficial to a degree, but, all considered, it seems best to use avoidance goals only when necessary (Elliot, 2006). This summary statement may be particularly pertinent with regard to personal goals that guide individuals' ongoing behavior and with regard to phenomenological outcomes such as well-being.

Our findings suggest that the core cultural values embraced in Japan give rise to a form of self-regulation detrimental to the well-being of its citizenry. Given the provocative nature of this aspect of our findings, we hasten to place them in broader interpretational context. First, our findings call into question a particular practice that tends to emerge from a value set, not the value set itself. Collectivism in Japan obviously fosters many practices that are of great benefit to its cultural members (Plaut & Markus, 2005); it is only the functionality of pursuing avoidance personal goals that is being called into question by our data. Second, it is important to bear in mind that all cultures foster some practices, including modes of self-regulation, that have maladaptive implications (Edgerton, 1992; Suh, 2007). The individualistic emphasis in the United States, for example, may not only foster initiative and creative striving, but also narcissism and self-centered striving that can have negative implications for social connection and overall health and well-being (Morf, Horvath, & Torchetti, 2011; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, Elliot, & Gregg, 2002; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Third, avoidance personal goal pursuit may emerge naturally out of the avoidance-based motivation integral to collectivism, but it is neither inevitable nor necessary that collectivism prompt avoidance regulation. Other personal goals, such as those focused on improvement, also seem a nice fit to collectivistic values (Heine et al., 2001; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992), and likely have a more beneficial influence on valued well-being for those in Japan.

The present research is one of the first to use a longitudinal design in cross-cultural work on well-being, and it is the first to

document a comparable pattern of findings across concurrent and longitudinal designs. It should be noted, however, that even longitudinal data are correlational in nature and, therefore, causal statements regarding the relations observed in this research are not warranted. Our research documented that avoidance personal goal pursuit predicts change in well-being; future research is needed to test the alternative (albeit not mutually exclusive) possibility that well-being predicts change in avoidance personal goal pursuit. An additional limitation of our research, already alluded to above, is the exclusive focus on the United States and Japan. It remains to be seen whether the relations documented herein generalize to other Western and East Asian countries and other individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Identifying the psychological factors that influence well-being in different cultures is a task of great conceptual and practical importance. Some research has revealed factors that have a similar influence on well-being across cultures, whereas other research has revealed factors that differentially influence well-being across cultures (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Heine, 2005; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). The present research is unique in identifying a factor exhibiting both cross-cultural generality and cross-cultural specificity—generality with regard to the negative influence of avoidance personal goals on valued well-being, and specificity with regard to which aspect of well-being is valued and, therefore, is sensitive to the inimical influence of avoidance goal regulation. The cross-cultural literature is moving toward an integration of universal and culture-specific explanations of psychological functioning (Cai et al., 2011; Lalwani, Shrum, & Chiu, 2009; Matsumoto, 2007; Smith, Spillane, & Annus, 2006), and our work illustrates how this interplay may occur with regard to self-regulation and well-being.

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