# Pancultural Self-Enhancement

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The culture movement challenged the universality of the self-enhancement motive by proposing that the motive is pervasive in individualistic cultures (the West) but absent in collectivistic cultures (the East). The present research posited that Westerners and Easterners use different tactics to achieve the same goal: positive self-regard. Study 1 tested participants from differing cultural backgrounds (the United States vs. Japan), and Study 2 tested participants of differing self-construals (independent vs. interdependent). Americans and independents self-enhanced on individualistic attributes, whereas Japanese and interdependents self-enhanced on collectivistic attributes. Independents regarded individualistic attributes, whereas interdependents regarded collectivistic attributes, as personally important. Attribute importance mediated self-enhancement. Regardless of cultural background or self-construal, people self-enhance on personally important dimensions. Self-enhancement is a universal human motive.

It is a mistake to consider the processes in social psychology as basic in the natural science sense. Rather, they may largely be considered the psychological counterpart of cultural norms. (Gergen, 1973, p. 318).

One of the necessary conditions for the formulation of universal theories and laws, whether in the natural or social sciences, is that they be phrased in sufficiently abstract form as to allow for the insertion of specific objects, cases, places, events, and times as variables. (Schlenker, 1974, p. 2)

In his classic article "Social Psychology as History," Gergen (1973) criticized the field of social psychology for its failure to appreciate that human behavior is situated in cultural (and historical) norms. At approximately the same time, Tajfel's (1972) "Experiments in a Vacuum" bemoaned social psychology's inattention to contextual (including cultural) influences on behavior. Similar lamentations have since been registered by other scholars, such as Billig (1987), Geertz (1973), Harre (1986), Sampson (1977), Shweder (1984), and Weisz, Rothbaum, and Blackburn (1984), all of whom have highlighted the relevance of culture for social behavior and the self.

The culture movement, however, did not catch on in the 1970s and 1980s. Why was the social–psychological mainstream seemingly so resistant to this chorus of critical appraisals and alternative proposals? One reason is the well-entrenched intellectual tradition of Newtonian physics and British empiricism (Kashima, 2000; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). This tradition advocates a model of scientific inquiry in which universal causal laws are axiomatized, logico-mathematical inferences are deduced, empirical hypotheses are derived, and the hypotheses are tested through experimentation, with the results either confirming or disconfirming the hypotheses. However, additional reasons are also worth considering; these have to do with the inherent weaknesses of these critical appraisals and counterproposals. The early culture movement was largely viewed as lacking theoretical coherence, methodological rigor, and heuristic value. The perception was that the movement (a) did not define or operationalize the construct *culture* in a compelling manner, (b) focused mostly on comparisons between countries rather than cultures, (c) selected comparison countries out of research convenience rather than a guiding theory, (d) was descriptive rather than generative, and (e) failed to lead to a substantial accumulation of knowledge—partly because of its overreliance on the social constructionist or post-

modernist methodology. As a consequence, the culture movement did not find itself in an ideal position to offer authoritative explanations for cultural differences, as these differences could be accounted for in terms of rival hypotheses, such as confounding constructs (e.g., baseline discrepancies in metacognitive beliefs, dysphoric affect, the accessibility of experiences brought to bear on the responses), disparate comparison standards or reference points, different meanings ascribed to narrative answers, and varying interpretations of response scales (Berry, 1969; Chang, Asakawa, & Sanna, 2001; Church, 2001; Greenfield, 1997; Ji, Schwarz, & Nisbett, 2000; Malpass, 1988; Matsumoto, 1999; McCrae, Yik, Trapnell, Bond, & Paulhus, 1998; Messick, 1998; Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997; van de Vijver & Leung, 2001).

The breakthrough came with the realization that a fruitful definition of culture would encompass a particular dimension as experienced subjectively by its members. This dimension came to be known as individualism–collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Kagitcibasi, 1997; Triandis, 1988, 1995; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990), a dimension thought to capture the deep structure of cultural differences (Greenfield, 1999). Past theoretical and methodological problems were bypassed, minimized, or overcome. Influential theories emerged, purporting to provide comprehensive accounts of the individual (e.g., self, emotion, motivation, social behavior) not as an isolated entity but rather as an integral member of a cultural system. Two such theories, with particular focus on the self, were Triandis's (1989) conceptualization of the self in cultural context and, most relevant, Markus and Kitayama's (1991a, 1991b) theory of independent versus interdependent self-construals. For the purposes of the present article, we refer rather broadly to these theoretical formulations, their follow-ups (Kitayama & Markus, 1995; Kitayama, Markus, & Lieberman, 1995; Markus & Kitayama, 1994), and their key extensions and variations (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Heine, 2001; Heine, Kitayama et al., 2001; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Kitayama & Markus, 1999, 2000; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997; Triandis, 2001; Triandis & Suh, 2002) as the *cultural-self perspective*.

## The Cultural-Self Perspective

A conceptual cornerstone of the cultural-self perspective is the notion that the cultural system encompasses norms, ideals, and values that, through societal institutions and socialization practices, shape the psychological system. In particular, culture influences self-construal through the transmission of knowledge packages termed *selfways* (Markus et al., 1997). Selfways represent cultural mandates (reflected in foundational texts, narratives, proverbs, and symbols or icons) of what it means to be an appropriate, good, moral, and accepted member of the culture. Selfways dictate how a person is expected to treat others and what the person is supposed to accomplish to achieve cultural ideals. In summary, selfways shape self-construal, which in turn affects psychological development and functioning.

It is interesting that Western and Eastern culture foster divergent selfways and self-construals (Church, 2000; Cousins, 1989; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kim & Markus, 1999; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Western culture (e.g., North America, North and Western Europe, Austra-lia) champions independent self-construals. The cultural mandate calls for independence, self-sufficiency, uniqueness, freedom from societal constraints, agency, separateness from others, and personal success (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Cahoone, 1996; Lewis, 1995; Spindler & Spindler, 1990). Eastern culture (e.g., Asia, Africa, East and Southern Europe, South America), on the other hand, nurtures interdependent self-construals. The cultural mandate calls for coordination, cooperation, group cohesion, shame and apologies, interpersonal harmony, the importance of others, and the responsibility to the group (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982; De Vos, 1985; Hsu, 1948; Leung, 1997; Uno, 1991). Western culture is individualistic, whereas Eastern culture is collectivistic.

These divergent cultural mandates, when internalized and endorsed, result in contrasting psychological bases for self-worth. Members of individualistic cultures (*idiocentrics*; Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985) derive self-worth from the "ability to express self, validate internal attributes" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b, p. 230, Table 1), whereas members of collectivistic cultures (*allocentrics*; Triandis et al., 1985) derive self-worth from the "ability to adjust, restrain self, maintain harmony with social context" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, p. 230, Table 1).[1] Idiocentrics validate their independent self-construals by pursing their own wants and desires on the road to personal fulfillment, actualization, and happiness. In contrast, allocentrics validate their interdependent self-construals by striving to meet the expectations of significant others en route to relational and group balance, rapport, and amity.

These distinct enculturation practices lead to markedly different self-evaluation motivations. At issue here is the relative prevalence in individualistic versus collectivistic cultures of the self-enhancement motive. This motive influences thinking and behaving (i.e., self-relevant judgment, information seeking, memory, and cognitive or behavioral responses to social feedback) in the direction of protecting, maintaining, or elevating the positivity of the self. The motive gears the psychological system toward affirmation and validation of the positive internal attributes of the self. The cultural-self perspective postulates that self-enhancement is highly prevalent in individualistic cultures (e.g., the United States) but practically nonexistent in collectivistic cultures (e.g., Japan). Americans, for example, regard the self positively, assert and exaggerate their perceived strengths with an eye toward surpassing other persons, and valorize the self in public while denying, discounting, or underestimating its liabilities. Japanese, on the other hand, have no motivation to elevate the positivity of the self or even perceive the self as positive. Such self-beliefs are unnecessary for and possibly detrimental to the maintenance of a socially embedded and validated identity—an identity that is suitable and responsive to the expectations, requirements, roles, and norms of a

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[1] Markus and Kitayama (1991a) used the term *self-esteem* rather than *self-regard* but advocated a broader interpretation of this term. In their own words, "esteeming may be primarily a Western phenomenon, and the concept of self-esteem should perhaps be replaced by self-satisfaction, or by a term that reflects the realization that one is fulfilling the culturally mandated task" (p. 230, footnote of Table 1). We interpret Markus and Kitayama's use of the term self-esteem to mean *identity*, *selfhood*, *self-worth*, or *self-regard*.

highly systemic social milieu. Self-discipline, perceiving the self as average (e.g., the Japanese ideal of *hitonami*, or "average as a person"; Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996, p. 888), self-denigration, and self-improvement fulfill these shared expectations (i.e., the Confucian teachings and values of role obligations), but self-enhancement certainly does not.

## A Serious Challenge to the Universality of Self-Enhancement

The cultural-self perspective challenged the universality of the self-enhancement motive (Heine et al., 1999; Markus et al., 1996; see also Pepitone & Triandis, 1987). This was an extraordinary challenge, as the universality of the self-enhancement motive is one of the longest held and most cherished intellectual and scientific traditions of Western psychological thought. This tradition, broadly defined, originated in the Greek philosophical school of Sophists (Skoyles, 1998), was propagated by the Romans (e.g., Cicero; Clayton, 2001), reemerged in the Renaissance movement of the Middle Ages in Europe (Macfarlane, 1978), was rearticulated by Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century and Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in the 18th and 19th centuries, respectively (Allport, 1954), was reflected in the United States Constitution and legal system, and gained momentum in psychology with the persuasive assertions of William James (1890), the empirical work on reinforcement principles (Dollard & Miller, 1950), and the theoretical insights of Abraham Maslow (1968). In the last 20 years alone, there have been numerous renditions of the universality tradition. For a thumbnail list of empirically oriented and recent social–psychological accounts of the universality tradition, see Baumeister (1998), J. D. Brown (1998), Dunning (1993), Epstein (1990), Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski (1997), Greenwald (1980), Ito and Cacioppo (1999), Leary (1999a), Mabe and West (1982), Sedikides (1993), Steele (1988), Taylor and Brown (1988), Tesser (2000), and Wills (1981).

The cultural-self perspective shook the foundations of this universality assumption. The perspective offered a well-reasoned challenge and accompanied it with quantitative documentation. Perhaps it is not a stretch to argue, in rather prosaic terms, that the counterproposal for *relativism* of the self-enhancement motive beat the universalists in their own game. The counterproposal made the point loud and clear: Compared with Americans, Japanese do not have or wish to have a positive self-concept (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a) and do not have or wish to have high self-esteem (Heine et al., 1999; Heine, Kitayama et al., 2001). If anything, Japanese self-criticize rather than self-enhance (Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001; Kitayama et al., 1997). As Heine et al. (1999) concluded,

> the empirical literature provides scant evidence for a need for positive self-regard among Japanese and indicates that a self-critical focus is more characteristic of Japanese . . . the need for self-regard must be culturally variant . . . [and] the need for self-regard . . . is not a universal, but rather is rooted in significant aspects of North American culture. (p. 766)

## Challenging the Challenge

The cultural-self perspective disputed the universality of the *need* for positive self-regard rather than the universality of the cognitive or behavioral manifestations of that need. Whether the *need* for positive self-regard is universal is the argument, then. The cultural-self perspective asserts that this need is relative: It is present in Western culture but absent in Eastern culture.

This assertion does not square up with multiple lines of theoretical and empirical inquiry. The emergence of the self, along with the need for positive self-regard, can be traced to the evolutionary history of *Homo sapiens* (Sedikides & Skowronski, 2000, 2002). The subjective experience of self-esteem has important evolutionary advantages: Self-esteem cues the organism to subtle changes in dominance relationships (Barkow, 1980) or in social acceptance and rejection patterns (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Regardless of whether self-esteem is best conceptualized as a dominance versus acceptance/rejection internal device (Leary, Cottrell, & Phillips, 2001), the monitoring of one's standing in relation to conspecifics in the ancestral environment was essential to reproductive success. It is not surprising, then, that self-esteem has a strong genetic component (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2002b). Self-esteem has also been regarded and shown to be a universal defense mechanism against feelings of existential terror (Greenberg et al., 1997; Halloran & Kashima, 2002; Heine, Harihara, & Niiya, in press), a buffer against a host of emotional and behavioral problems (Anderson, 1999; Kurman & Sriram, 1997; Leary, 1999b; Leary, Schreindorfer, & Haupt, 1995), and a correlate of optimism, resiliency, and successful coping with adversity (Bonanno, Field, Kovacevic, & Kaltman, 2002; Stein, Folkman, Trabasso, & Richards, 1997; Taylor & Armor, 1996).

Given the relevance of self-esteem for humans, we would readily predict that the universality of the need for self-esteem is manifested in measures designed to tap the cognitive unconscious. These are implicit measures. In contrast, the cultural-self perspective predicts that idiocentrics will have highly positive implicit selves, whereas allocentrics will have neutral or even negative implicit selves. It is interesting that the evidence has arbitrated that not only idiocentrics but also allocentrics have a robustly positive implicit self-concept, as manifested by name-letter preferences in Japan (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Murakami & Yamaguchi, 2000), Thailand (Hoorens, Nuttin, Erdelyi-Herman, & Pavakanun, 1990), Singapore (Pelham, Koole, Hetts, Hardin, & Seah, 2002), and several southern European countries (Nuttin, 1987). Other implicit measures, such as birthday numbers (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997), response latencies (Hetts, Sakuma, & Pelham, 1999), and word stem completion tasks (Hetts et al., 1999), have further supported the notion that the allocentric implicit self reigns positive. Clearly, the cultural-self perspective is disconfirmed by implicit measures.

It is notable, though, that the empirical evidence in favor of relativistic self-enhancement rests mainly on explicit measures (e.g., Heine et al., 1999). How, then, can this striking discrepancy between explicit and implicit measures be reconciled? Why do explicit measures seem to portray an inflated idiocentric but a deflated allocentric self, when implicit measures depict an equally favorable self among idiocentrics and allocentrics? One resolution to this discrepancy is that the statistical relation between implicit and explicit measures of self-esteem is typically weak or nonexistent (Bosson, Swann, & Pennebaker, 2000). A more interesting and explanatory resolution, however, is suggested by the self-concept enhancement tactician (SCENT) model.

## Tactical Self-Enhancement Among Idiocentrics and Allocentrics: Asserting the Universality of the Self-Enhancement Motive

The central tenet of the SCENT model (Sedikides & Strube, 1997; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998, 2002) is that self-enhancement can range from candid to tactical. Candid self-enhancement takes the form of overt expressions of self-superiority, whereas tactical self-enhancement refers to more subtle expressions of self-love, in acknowledgement of situational, social, and societal constraints as well as the long-term ramifications of self-boasting. Indeed, candid self-enhancement is considered undesirable even in individualistic cultures and has negative repercussions for the individual, such as unfavorable impressions, mockery, or social exclusion (Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997; Paulhus, 1998; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Given, then, that unswerving self-aggrandizement can prove counterproductive, tactical self-enhancement is likely to be more widespread in both collectivistic and individualistic cultures (see Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995, for evidence documenting the automaticity of modesty among friends in the United States). Moreover, tactical self-enhancement is more persistent and pervasive on important relative to unimportant attributes, because the self-concept is tethered to important attributes (Alicke, 1985; Dunning, 1995; Sedikides & Green, 2000).

Furthermore, the SCENT endorses the notion that people are highly skilled in recognizing culturally sanctioned roles and strive to fulfill these roles (Sedikides & Gregg, in press). Moreover, people value personally the dimensions that imply successful role fulfillment and evaluate themselves positively on these dimensions (Higgins & Rholes, 1976; Martin, Abend, Sedikides, & Green, 1997). Note that, although other influential theoretical statements have also observed that people are motivated to be good cultural members (e.g., D'Andrade, 1984; Greenberg et al., 1997; Markus et al., 1997), the SCENT goes the extra step in arguing that people are motivated to play roles dictated by their own cultures, internalize these roles, and evaluate themselves unconditionally and positively on dimensions implying successful enactment of these roles.

On the basis of the SCENT model, we propose that both idiocentrics and allocentrics self-enhance (e.g., by positively differentiating the self from other group members) on personally important as opposed to personally unimportant attributes. Attribute importance (or the dimension that brings about role fulfillment) varies as a function of culture. In individualistic cultures, the relevant dimension is agency, defined as concern with personal effectiveness and social dominance. In collectivistic cultures, however, the relevant dimension is communion, defined as concern with personal integration and social connection. (For discussions of these two dimensions, see Campbell, Rudich, & Sedikides, 2002; Paulhus & John, 1998.) Idiocentrics internalize agency, whereas allocentrics internalize communion.

It follows that idiocentrics differentiate the self positively on the agency dimension, whereas allocentrics differentiate the self positively on the communion dimension. Alternatively, idiocentrics positively contrast the personal self from group members on the agency dimension, whereas allocentrics positively contrast the personal self from group members on the communion dimension. Idiocentrics enhance the personal self on agentic attributes (e.g., "I am more intelligent than the average group member"), whereas allocentrics enhance the personal self on communion attributes (e.g., "I am more agreeable than the average group member").

We wish to highlight that our reformulation of the role of self in cultural context advocates that both idiocentrics and allocentrics enhance the personal self, not the social self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2002; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001).[2] Stated somewhat differently, personal importance of the internalized self-evaluation dimension should mediate self-enhancement in both cultural contexts. In line with the opening quote by Schlenker (1974), we attempt to reinstate the universality of the self-enhancement motive by inserting the variable *personal importance of judgmental dimension* in our experimental design.

## A Research Overview

We report two studies in which we examine the universality of self-enhancement and the mediational role of personal importance. We operationalized the dimension of agency in terms of individualistic behaviors and traits and the dimension of communion in terms of collectivistic behaviors and traits. In Study 1, we tested Americans and Japanese, whereas in Study 2 we tested persons with independent self-construals and persons with interdependent self-construals.

We selected a judgmental task that involves tactical self-enhancement. Specifically, participants made better-than-average judgments in reference to a hypothetical group, under conditions of privacy and confidentiality. We chose a judgment of self-comparison with the typical (as opposed to a specific) group member in an effort to allow room for tactical self-enhancement. Indeed, better-than-average effects are more pronounced when the referent is ambiguous rather than concrete (Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, & Vredenburg, 1995). We asked participants to make judgments in private rather than in public to offset the relative proclivity of allocentrics to dwell on face saving in the presence of an audience (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1993; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1994). Finally, we devoted particular attention to the development of individualistic and collectivistic attributes, as described in the pilot study.

## Pilot Study

We relied on relevant literature (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a) to generate behaviors and traits for both individualistic and collectivistic attributes. We retained those behaviors and traits that we assigned with 100% agreement to individualistic and collectivistic attributes. Specifically, we retained 16 behaviors (8 individualistic, 8 collectivistic; see Table 1) and 16 traits (8 individualistic, 8 collectivistic; see Table 2).

We conducted a pilot study with the objective of validating the 32 individualistic and collectivistic behaviors and traits. Twenty-eight University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) undergraduate students (21 women, 7 men) enrolled in an upper-level psychology course participated as part of a classroom project. Participants read descriptions (adapted from Markus & Kitayama,

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[2] We opted for the terms *personal self* and *social self* rather than *individual self* and *collective self* (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001) for reasons of expositional clarity.

Table 1

*Mean Ratings of Individualistic and Collectivistic Behaviors in Pilot Study*

| Behaviors | Ratings | |
|---|---|---|
| | Ind | Col |
| **Individualistic** | | |
| Engage in open conflict with your group | $6.39_a$ | $1.64_b$ |
| Desert your group when the group does not represent anymore | $6.21_a$ | $1.57_b$ |
| Scream at your group when you believe your decision is right and the group's decision is definitely wrong | $5.86_a$ | $1.57_b$ |
| Argue for your position and against your group | $6.36_a$ | $1.79_b$ |
| Put yourself before your group | $6.25_a$ | $1.71_b$ |
| Express open dissatisfaction with your group when you feel you are right | $6.07_a$ | $1.93_b$ |
| Disagree with your group when you believe the group is wrong | $6.18_a$ | $2.00_b$ |
| Trust your own instinct rather than the group's instinct | $6.32_a$ | $1.82_b$ |
| **Collectivistic** | | |
| Follow the rules according to which your group operates | $2.67_a$ | $6.57_b$ |
| Defend your group's decisions | $3.53_a$ | $6.39_b$ |
| Do anything for your group | $1.82_a$ | $6.25_b$ |
| Avoid open confrontation with your group | $1.61_a$ | $5.68_b$ |
| Conform to your group's decisions | $2.21_a$ | $6.61_b$ |
| Avoid conflict with your group at any cost | $2.14_a$ | $6.25_b$ |
| Engage in socially undesirable behavior that will ultimately benefit your group | $3.14_a$ | $4.86_b$ |
| Go along with your group's decision even when you believe the decisions to be wrong | $1.57_a$ | $5.71_b$ |

*Note.* Means in the same row that have different subscripts differ at $p < .05$. Ind = individualistic; Col = collectivistic.

1991a) of individualistic and collectivistic cultures and rated the extent to which each behavior and trait was descriptive of individualistic and collectivistic culture, respectively. Participants completed their ratings on 7-point response scales (1 = *not at all descriptive*, 7 = *very descriptive*).

We entered the behavior descriptiveness ratings into a 2 (dimension: individualistic, collectivistic) × 8 (behaviors: 1–8) × 2 (ratings: individualistic, collectivistic) repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA). The critical Dimension × Ratings interaction was significant, $F(1, 27) = 278.60$, $p < .001$. Participants rated the collectivistic behaviors as more descriptive of collectivistic ($M = 6.04$) than individualistic ($M = 2.33$) culture, $t(27) = 14.10$, $p < .001$, but rated the individualistic behaviors as more descriptive of individualistic ($M = 6.20$) than collectivistic ($M = 1.75$) culture, $t(27) = 15.99$, $p < .001$. A relatively uninteresting Dimension × Behaviors × Ratings interaction, $F(1, 27) = 4.07$, $p < .006$, indicated that the magnitude of the effect varied across behaviors. That is, behaviors varied in the extent to which they described individualistic relative to collectivistic culture. More important, however, the effect for each behavior was significant and in the expected direction. As displayed in Table 1, participants rated each collectivistic behavior as more descriptive of collectivistic than individualistic culture and rated each individualistic behavior as more descriptive of individualistic than collectivistic culture, in all, the results validated our selection of behaviors.

We conducted similar analyses on the trait descriptiveness ratings. The Dimension × Ratings interaction was significant, $F(1, 27) = 221.73$, $p < .001$. Participants rated the collectivistic traits as more descriptive of collectivistic ($M = 6.25$) than individualistic ($M = 3.20$) culture, $t(27) = 12.30$, $p < .001$, but rated the individualistic traits as more descriptive of individualistic ($M = 6.32$) than collectivistic ($M = 2.25$) culture, $t(27) = 16.58$, $p < .001$. As in the previous analysis, a triple Dimension × Traits × Ratings interaction, $F(1, 27) = 7.72$, $p < .001$, indicated that the magnitude of the effect varied across traits; that is, traits varied in the extent to which they described individualistic relative to collectivistic culture. Of greater importance, however, the effect for each trait was significant and in the expected direction. Participants rated each collectivistic trait as more descriptive of collectivistic than individualistic culture and rated each individualistic trait as more descriptive of individualistic than collectivistic culture (Table 2). The results validated our selection of traits.

## Study 1

In Study 1, we examined self-enhancement among American and Japanese participants on individualistic and collectivistic attributes. If self-enhancement is restricted to individualistic culture, as the cultural-self perspective advocates, we would expect to find a main effect for culture: Americans should self-enhance more strongly than Japanese on both individualistic and collectivistic attributes. However, if self-enhancement is universal, as our reformulation contends, we would expect to find a Culture × Dimension interaction: Americans should self-enhance more strongly than Japanese on individualistic attributes, whereas Japanese

Table 2

*Mean Ratings of Individualistic and Collectivistic Traits in Pilot Study*

| Traits | Rating | |
|---|---|---|
| | Ind | Col |
| **Individualistic** | | |
| Free | $6.36_a$ | $2.43_b$ |
| Independent | $6.93_a$ | $1.93_b$ |
| Leader | $5.82_a$ | $2.78_b$ |
| Original | $6.39_a$ | $2.57_b$ |
| Self-reliant | $6.50_a$ | $2.25_b$ |
| Separate | $6.07_a$ | $1.61_b$ |
| Unconstrained | $5.64_a$ | $2.21_b$ |
| Unique | $6.82_a$ | $2.25_b$ |
| **Collectivistic** | | |
| Agreeable | $3.32_a$ | $6.36_b$ |
| Compromising | $2.57_a$ | $6.57_b$ |
| Cooperative | $3.07_a$ | $6.57_b$ |
| Good listener | $3.89_a$ | $6.04_b$ |
| Loyal | $2.96_a$ | $6.64_b$ |
| Patient | $3.43_a$ | $5.82_b$ |
| Respectful | $3.82_a$ | $6.43_b$ |
| Self-sacrificing | $2.50_a$ | $5.57_b$ |

*Note.* Means in the same row that have different subscripts differ at $p < .05$. Ind = individualistic; Col = collectivistic.

should self-enhance more strongly than Americans on collectivistic attributes.

## Method

### Participants

We tested individually 40 American undergraduates (20 women and 20 men) and 40 Japanese students (20 women and 20 men) studying in the United States. The American students were enrolled in an introductory psychology course at UNC-CH and participated to fulfill partial course credit. The Japanese students had been away from Japan for 2 to 22 months ($M = 10.38$ months, $Mdn = 10.00$ months, $SD = 5.80$) and were enrolled in classes at UNC-CH ($n = 29$), Duke University ($n = 7$), or North Carolina State University ($n = 4$). The Japanese sample was obtained through campus fliers advertising for entry into a lottery. Participants were tested by male experimenters. More specifically, Japanese participants were tested by an English-speaking Japanese American experimenter, whereas American participants were tested by a European American experimenter.

### Procedure

In the first part of the procedure, we made every effort to render cultural context accessible and salient to participants through a cultural immersion exercise. Both allocentrics and idiocentrics are aware of and represent in their memory individualistic and collectivistic cultural notions (Triandis et al., 2001; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). Hence, a cultural immersion exercise is needed to bolster the theoretically relevant cognitive milieu in each group of people (i.e., a collectivistic milieu in allocentrics, an individualistic milieu in idiocentrics). Another reason for instituting this exercise is the commonality of frame switching among biculturals (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). Our Japanese sample can arguably be considered bicultural, and the intention of the exercise was to facilitate the shift to their home culture.

The cultural immersion exercise lasted for 10 min. Participants imagined being in their homeland, imbued with cultural symbolism, and provided brief written descriptions. Specifically, Japanese participants imagined themselves in Japan—walking along the streets, experiencing the sights, listening to the sounds, eating in restaurants, being with their friends, celebrating with family. American participants imagined similar situations in which they were in the United States.

Participants were asked to continue picturing themselves in their homeland and, in addition, to imagine being a member of a 16-person group (i.e., a task force) whose objective was to solve business problems. The other 15 members were described as being of the same ethnicity, age, gender, and educational level as the participant. Next, participants imagined, for 10 min, a sequence of business considerations (i.e., budgetary, personnel, advertisement, and planning issues—2.5 min each) for which they, along with the other group members, would need to strategize. Specifically, they imagined "exchanging (i.e., offering and receiving) ideas with the other group members" about each of the four abovementioned business considerations. Participants also wrote down these ideas. Finally, participants completed two dependent measures in which they compared themselves with the typical group member.

First, participants rated how likely they were, relative to the typical group member, to perform each of 16 behaviors. The behaviors were presented in one of two random orders. Half of the behaviors were collectivistic, and half were individualistic (Table 1). Participants rated the likelihood that they would perform each behavior on an 11-point scale ($-5 = $ *much less likely than the typical group member*, $0 = $ *about the same as the typical group member*, $5 = $ *much more likely than the typical group member*). Positive values reflect self-enhancement, the midpoint reflects

equality (i.e., considering the self equal to others), and negative values reflect self-effacement.

Next, participants rated how well each of 16 traits described them relative to the typical group member. The traits were presented in one of two random orders. Half of the traits were collectivistic, and half were individualistic (Table 2). Participants rated the self-descriptiveness of each trait on an 11-point scale ($-5 = $ *much worse than the typical group member*, $0 = $ *as well as the typical group member*, $5 = $ *much better than the typical group member*). As with the trait ratings, positive values reflect self-enhancement, the midpoint reflects self-perceptions of equality with others, and negative values reflect self-effacement. At the end of the session, participants were thoroughly debriefed, thanked, and excused.

## Results

### Self-Enhancement

We entered the behavior and trait ratings, respectively, into separate 2 (culture: American, Japanese) $\times$ 2 (dimension: individualistic, collectivistic) $\times$ 2 (gender: male, female) $\times$ 2 (presentation order: individualistic behaviors first, collectivistic behaviors first) mixed ANOVAs. Culture, gender, and presentation order were between-subjects variables, whereas dimension was a within-subject variable and referred to whether the behaviors or traits were individualistic versus collectivistic. We averaged behavioral responses to form indices of individualistic ($\alpha = .80$) and collectivistic ($\alpha = .78$) behaviors. Likewise, we averaged trait responses to form indices of individualistic ($\alpha = .73$) and collectivistic ($\alpha = .82$) traits.

*Behaviors.* The culture main effect was not significant, $F(1, 72) = 0.17$, $p < .678$. Overall, Americans and Japanese gravitated toward self-enhancement to a comparable degree—a pattern that is inconsistent with the cultural-self perspective.

In contrast, a significant Dimension $\times$ Culture interaction, $F(1, 72) = 24.05$, $p < .001$, lent support to our reformulation. Culture moderated the dimension on which self-enhancement was expressed (Rows 1 and 2 of Table 3). Americans self-enhanced more strongly on individualistic than collectivistic behaviors, $t(39) = 4.55$, $p < .001$.[3] However, Japanese self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic than individualistic behaviors, $t(39) = -2.11$, $p < .05$. The interaction can be viewed from another angle. On individualistic behaviors, Americans self-enhanced more strongly than did Japanese, $t(78) = 4.17$, $p < .001$. On collectivistic behaviors, however, Japanese self-enhanced more strongly than did Americans, $t(78) = 3.79$, $p < .002$.[4]

We made no predictions regarding absolute levels of self-enhancement or self-effacement among Americans and Japanese. Indeed, the viability of our reformulation rests on comparative rather than absolute self-enhancement. Nevertheless, we proceeded with exploratory analyses. We tested each behavior index against zero (i.e., the scale midpoint, which corresponds to perceived equality between the self and the typical group member).

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[3] Simple-effects tests, which make the same comparisons but in the context in which the interaction was tested, revealed identical findings in both studies.

[4] Participants reported that they were more likely than the typical group member to enact individualistic ($M = 0.67$) rather than collectivistic ($M = 0.09$) behaviors; dimension main effect, $F(1, 72) = 6.01$, $p < .02$.

Table 3

*Mean Behavior and Trait Ratings as a Function of Culture and Dimension in Study 1*

| Culture | Dimension | |
|---|---|---|
| | Individualistic | Collectivistic |
| *Behaviors* | | |
| American | 1.28 | −0.45 |
| Japanese | 0.06 | 0.63 |
| *Traits* | | |
| American | 1.69 | 0.58 |
| Japanese | 0.92 | 1.78 |

Americans self-enhanced on individualistic behaviors, $t(39) = 5.35$, $p < .001$, but self-effaced (i.e., indicated that they were less likely than the typical group member to perform the behavior) on collectivistic behaviors, $t(39) = -2.14$, $p < .05$. Japanese, on the other hand, self-enhanced on collectivistic behaviors, $t(39) = 3.38$, $p < .01$, but neither self-enhanced nor self-effaced on individualistic behaviors, $t(39) = 0.35$, $p > .05$.

*Traits.* Contrary to the cultural-self perspective, the culture main effect was not significant, $F(1, 72) = 1.14$, $p < .289$, indicating that self-enhancement was not higher among Americans than Japanese.

In support of our reformulation, however, the Dimension × Culture interaction was significant, $F(1, 72) = 28.28$, $p < .001$. Culture moderated the dimension on which participants self-enhanced (Rows 3 and 4 of Table 3). Americans self-enhanced more strongly on individualistic than collectivistic traits, $t(39) = 3.46$, $p < .002$, whereas Japanese self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic than individualistic traits, $t(39) = -5.07$, $p < .001$. Alternatively, on individualistic traits Americans self-enhanced more strongly than did Japanese, $t(78) = 2.99$, $p < .004$, whereas on collectivistic traits Japanese self-enhanced more strongly than did Americans, $t(78) = 4.31$, $p < .001$.

We also explored whether Americans and Japanese self-enhanced versus self-effaced in the absolute by testing the two trait indices against zero, the scale midpoint. Americans self-enhanced on both individualistic traits, $t(39) = 7.82$, $p < .001$, and collectivistic traits, $t(39) = 2.64$, $p < .02$. Likewise, Japanese self-enhanced on both individualistic traits, $t(39) = 6.67$, $p < .001$, and collectivistic traits, $t(39) = 10.68$, $p < .001$.

*Does Acculturation Account for Self-Enhancement Among the Japanese?*

Although the finding that Japanese self-enhance on collectivistic behaviors and traits is inconsistent with the cultural-self perspective, it is plausible that this finding is due to acculturation. The Japanese participants had been living in the United States and therefore may have acculturated to an individualistic culture. According to the acculturation hypothesis, then, the Japanese participants developed self-enhancing tendencies during their stay in the

United States, and the longer their stay in the United States was, the stronger their self-enhancement tendencies are.

To test the acculturation hypotheses, we examined whether the amount of time the Japanese participants had been away from Japan accounted for their self-enhancement. We entered the behavior and trait ratings, respectively, into a Dimension × Time repeated measures ANOVA, in which the latter variable (i.e., time) was centered (Aiken & West, 1991).

*Behaviors.* The results for the behavior ratings were inconsistent with the acculturation hypothesis. Neither the time main effect, $F(1, 38) = 0.13$, $p < .72$, nor the Dimension × Time interaction, $F(1, 38) = 0.34$, $p < .56$, was significant. Only the dimension main effect was significant, $F(1, 38) = 4.38$, $p < .05$, indicating that Japanese self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic than individualistic behaviors, regardless of the amount of time they had lived in the United States. Consistent with previous analyses, when we controlled for duration of U.S. residence, Japanese self-enhanced on collectivistic behaviors, $t(38) = 3.33$, $p < .01$, and neither self-enhanced nor self-effaced on individualistic behaviors, $t(38) = 0.35$, $p > .05$.

*Traits.* The results for the trait ratings were also inconsistent with the acculturation hypothesis. Neither the time main effect, $F(1, 38) = 0.20$, $p < .66$, nor the Dimension × Time interaction, $F(1, 38) = 0.10$, $p < .75$, was significant. Only the dimension main effect was significant, $F(1, 38) = 25.11$, $p < .001$, indicating that Japanese self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic than individualistic traits, regardless of the amount of time they had lived in the United States. Consistent with previous analyses, when we controlled for duration of U.S. residence, Japanese participants self-enhanced on both collectivistic, $t(38) = 10.55$, $p < .001$, and individualistic, $t(38) = 6.61$, $p < .001$, traits.

*Discussion*

We examined self-enhancement proclivities among American and Japanese participants. In its advocacy of self-enhancement relativity, the cultural-self perspective predicts that Americans, being needy of positive self-regard, will self-enhance across the board (on both individualistic and collectivistic attributes) to a greater extent than the Japanese. On the other hand, our reformulation, with its focus on the universality of self-enhancement, predicted that both American and Japanese would self-enhance but that they would tactically adopt different strategies to do so: Americans would self-enhance on individualistic attributes (because these attributes are more personally important), whereas Japanese would self-enhance on collectivistic attributes (because such attributes are more personally important). The results were consistent with our reformulation. Americans self-enhanced primarily on individualistic attributes, whereas Japanese self-enhanced primarily on collectivistic attributes. Self-enhancement is a universal motive.

Our reformulation received further support following the empirical consideration of the acculturation hypothesis, which suggests that the Japanese sample developed a propensity to self-enhance during their stay in the United States. That is, the Japanese participants developed an independent self-construal as part of a more general process of adaptation to an individualistic culture. We tested the acculturation hypothesis by covarying the Japanese

participants' duration of stay in the United States. The acculturation hypothesis received no support. Regardless of their length of stay in a Western culture, Japanese participants self-enhanced more vigorously on collectivistic than individualistic attributes.

Although comparative levels of self-enhancement or self-effacement are central to the theoretical issues at stake, absolute levels are not. Exploration of absolute self-enhancement levels, however, can lead to informative, albeit post hoc, explanations. The results were somewhat mixed but generally anticipated by our theoretical thesis. Consistent with our reformulation, Americans self-enhanced on individualistic behaviors and traits, whereas Japanese self-enhanced on collectivistic behaviors and traits. Contrary to our reformulation, Americans also self-enhanced on collectivistic traits, and Japanese also self-enhanced on individualistic traits. Finally, two nondiagnostic patterns emerged: Americans self-effaced on collectivistic behaviors, whereas Japanese neither self-effaced nor self-enhanced on individualistic behaviors. Clearly, more research is needed before a satisfactory picture of absolute self-enhancement and self-effacement emerges.

Self-enhancement among Japanese was observed in the context of an imagined task force solving business-related problems. The business setting may have primed a competitive orientation among Japanese, resulting in increased self-enhancement. This rival hypothesis, however, has its flaws. Collectivistic cultures (especially vertically collectivistic cultures, e.g., the Japanese one) emphasize respect for in-group norms (Bond & Smith, 1996), priority to in-group goals (Carpenter, 2000), and maintenance of in-group relationships in conflict situations (Ohbuchi, Fukushima, & Tedeschi, 1999). Allocentrics are more socially responsible (Watson, Sherbak, & Morris, 1998), more agreeable (Moskowitz, Suh, & Desaulniers, 1994), and more affiliative (Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, & Sugimori, 1995) than idiocentrics, especially to members of the in-group: Allocentrics harbor highly favorable attitudes toward the in-group and highly unfavorable attitudes toward the out-group (Lee & Ward, 1998). On the basis of the above literature, a competitive orientation would be expected to foster intragroup cohesiveness among Japanese rather than a movement away from the group and toward enhancement of the individual self. Indeed, mere activation of a competitive orientation in a group setting is inconsistent with what we know about collectivistic culture. If anything, a group setting should suppress Japanese (but not American) self-enhancement, something that we clearly did not observe. Finally, the rival hypothesis cannot account for why allocentrics and idiocentrics self-enhance differentially on interdependent and independent attributes. Nevertheless, this rival hypothesis and the concerns noted above are best addressed through replication.

## Study 2

Although we have found that Americans and Japanese use different tactics to enhance the self, we cannot claim to have tested adequately the cultural-self perspective and, more specifically, the theory of independent and interdependent self-construals. As Matsumoto (1999) has observed, a satisfactory test of the theory needs to establish that the two cultures are associated with the underlying self-construals and that the specified self-construals are associated with the hypothesized effect (i.e., self-enhancement). We attempt to pass these two validity criteria by examining, in Study 2, participants with chronically independent or interdependent self-construals within the same culture.

So far, we have argued that a major reason why Americans self-enhance on individualistic attributes is because such attributes are personally important to them. Likewise, a crucial reason why Japanese self-enhance on collectivistic attributes is because such attributes are personally important to them. Effectively, we suggested that attribute personal importance mediates self-enhancement. However, in Study 1 we did not assess the mediational influence of attribute personal importance, and, in fact, we did not assess directly attribute personal importance. A key objective of Study 2 was to remedy this shortcoming of Study 1.

Although we did not obtain evidence for acculturation effects in Study 1, our particular Japanese sample may have stacked the deck against the detection of such effects. The Japanese participants were exchange students who, presumably, left voluntarily their social networks and cultural system to study or live abroad. These participants may have had independent self-construals prior to leaving Japan, thus weakening our test of the acculturation hypothesis. Consistent with this possibility, Triandis et al. (2001) reported that idiocentrics are more likely to leave a collectivistic culture (because they feel oppressed in it) than are their allocentric counterparts. Hence, another critical objective of Study 2 was to control directly for acculturation influences and, more generally, for the possible confounding influence of other between-cultures constructs (Berry, 1969; Ji et al., 2000; Peng et al., 1997) by comparing the self-enhancement tactics of persons with independent self-construals (*independents*) with those of persons with interdependent self-construals (*interdependents*) on a within-culture basis (i.e., the southern United States). Finally, an additional, less prominent, objective of Study 2 was to engage in another exploration of absolute self-enhancement levels.

The cultural-self perspective predicts a main effect for self-construal: Regardless of attribute dimension, independents will self-enhance more than will interdependents. However, our reformulation predicts a different pattern. First, a Self-Construal × Dimension interaction will indicate that independents self-enhance more strongly on individualistic attributes, whereas interdependents self-enhance more strongly on collectivistic attributes—thus replicating the relevant findings for American and Japanese participants, respectively, reported in Study 1. Furthermore, a similar pattern will arise with regard to attribute importance: Independents will rate individualistic attributes as more important than collectivistic attributes, whereas interdependents will rate collectivistic attributes as more important than individualistic attributes. Finally, personal importance of attribute dimension will mediate cultural difference in self-enhancement (i.e., cultural differences in self-enhancement will be reduced when attribute importance is controlled).

### Method

Participants were UNC-CH students fulfilling an introductory psychology course option. They were tested by female experimenters. The study consisted of two sessions. During the first session, 206 participants completed Singelis's (1994) self-construal scale (SCS), among several other filler scales (Michigan Omnibus Personality Inventory; Sedikides & Green, 2000; a name-matrix distractor task; drawing a map of the way to the psychology building) and provided their phone numbers, supposedly for another study.

The SCS measures the extent to which a person possesses independent and interdependent self-construals. The independent self-construal items reflect the separateness and uniqueness emphasized in individualistic cultures (e.g., "Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me"). The interdependent self-construal items reflect the connectedness and relational interdependence emphasized in collectivistic cultures (e.g., "I should take into consideration my parents' advice when making education/career plans").

The initial pool of participants was divided into (a) a sample that scored relatively high on the independent items and relatively low on the interdependent items (i.e., independents) and (b) a sample that scored relatively high on the interdependent items and relatively low on the independent items (i.e., interdependents). From each sample, participants were drawn at random and invited to the laboratory for a second session. Specifically, 48 participants from each sample were invited back 4–8 weeks after the initial scale completion.

During the second session, participants (who were tested individually) imagined that they were members of a 16-person task force whose objective was to solve business problems. The other 15 members were described as being of the same age and gender as the participant. Participants then completed the same dependent measures as in Study 1. The behaviors and traits were presented in two random orders. Participants then rated the personal importance of each behavior and trait. The importance ratings were made on 9-point scales (1 = *extremely unimportant to me*, 5 = *neither unimportant nor important to me*, 9 = *extremely important to me*). At the end of the experimental session, participants were carefully debriefed, thanked, and excused.

## Results

### Self-Enhancement

First, we formed indices of individualistic behaviors ($\alpha$ = .82), collectivistic behaviors ($\alpha$ = .75), individualistic traits ($\alpha$ = .82), and collectivistic traits ($\alpha$ = .83). Next, we entered the behavior and trait ratings, respectively, into a 2 (self-construal: independent, interdependent) × 2 (gender: male, female) × 2 (presentation order) × 2 (dimension: individualistic, collectivistic) mixed ANOVA. The latter variable (dimension) served as a within-subject variable and coded whether the behavior (trait) was individualistic or collectivistic.

*Behaviors.* Contrary to the cultural-self perspective, the self-construal main effect was not significant, $F(1, 88) = 1.68$, $p < .198$. Self-enhancement was not higher among independents than interdependents.

However, as predicted by our reformulation, a Self-Construal × Dimension interaction, $F(1, 88) = 245.21$, $p < .001$, indicated that self-construal moderated the dimension on which self-enhancement was expressed (Rows 1 and 2 of Table 4). Independents self-enhanced more strongly on individualistic than collectivistic behaviors, $t(47) = 12.52$, $p < .001$, whereas interdependents self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic than individualistic behaviors, $t(47) = -10.62$, $p < .001$. Alternatively, independents self-enhanced more strongly than interdependents on individualistic behaviors, $t(94) = 8.47$, $p < .001$, whereas interdependents self-enhanced more strongly than independents on collectivistic behaviors, $t(94) = 16.76$, $p < .001$.[5]

Next, we explored levels of absolute self-enhancement or self-effacement by testing the behavior ratings indices against zero. Independents self-enhanced on individualistic behaviors, $t(47) = 9.53$, $p < .001$, and self-effaced on collectivistic behav-

Table 4

*Mean Behavior and Trait Ratings as a Function of Self-Construal and Dimension in Study 2*

| Self-construal | Dimension | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | Individualistic | Collectivistic |
| **Behaviors** | | |
| Independent | 1.14 | −0.50 |
| Interdependent | −0.47 | 1.39 |
| **Traits** | | |
| Independent | 0.88 | −0.23 |
| Interdependent | −0.42 | 1.22 |

iors, $t(47) = -7.60$, $p < .001$. Interdependents, however, self-enhanced on collectivistic behaviors, $t(47) = 15.18$, $p < .001$, and self-effaced on individualistic behaviors, $t(47) = -3.19$, $p < .003$.

*Traits.* The self-construal main effect was not significant, $F(1, 88) = 0.22$, $p < .638$. Self-enhancement was not higher among independents than interdependents, a pattern that runs counter to the cultural-self perspective.

The Self-Construal × Dimension interaction, $F(1, 88) = 75.61$, $p < .001$, however, backed our reformulation by showing that self-construal moderated the dimension on which self-enhancement was expressed (Rows 3 and 4 of Table 4). Independents self-enhanced more strongly on individualistic than collectivistic traits, $t(47) = 4.35$, $p < .001$, whereas interdependents self-enhanced more strongly on collectivistic than individualistic traits, $t(47) = -8.67$, $p < .001$. Alternatively, independents self-enhanced more strongly than interdependents on individualistic traits, $t(94) = 6.11$, $p < .001$, whereas interdependents self-enhanced more strongly than independents on collectivistic traits, $t(94) = 6.10$, $p < .001$.[6]

We also explored absolute self-enhancement among independents and interdependents. Independents self-enhanced on individualistic traits, $t(47) = 5.74$, $p < .001$, and evidenced no bias on collectivistic traits, $t(47) = -1.27$, $p > .05$. Interdependents, on the other hand, self-enhanced on collectivistic traits, $t(47) = 8.04$, $p < .001$, but self-effaced on individualistic traits, $t(47) = -2.86$, $p < .007$.

### Importance Ratings

The previous analyses revealed that self-construal interacts with attribute dimension to influence self-enhancement. The current analyses examine whether self-construal is related to the personal

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[5] A main effect for presentation order showed that self-enhancement was stronger in the first ($M = 0.49$) than in the second ($M = 0.18$) order, $F(1, 88) = 9.60$, $p < .003$.

[6] The Self-Construal × Dimension × Gender × Order interaction was significant, $F(1, 88) = 4.07$, $p < .05$. The interaction, however, does not qualify the comparisons of interest. Although the magnitudes of the simple effects varied, the directions of the simple effects for the Self-Construal × Dimension interaction were consistent across gender and order.

importance assigned to attribute dimensions. We averaged importance ratings to form importance indices of individualistic behaviors ($\alpha$ = .81), collectivistic behaviors ($\alpha$ = .82), individualistic traits ($\alpha$ = .79), and collectivistic traits ($\alpha$ = .88). Next, we entered the importance ratings for the behaviors and traits, respectively, into a 2 (self-construal: independent, interdependent) $\times$ 2 (gender: male, female) $\times$ 2 (order) $\times$ 2 (dimension: individualistic, collectivistic) mixed ANOVA. The latter variable (dimension) served as a within-subject factor and coded whether the behavior (trait) was individualistic or collectivistic.

*Behaviors.* A dimension main effect, $F(1, 88)$ = 4.94, $p$ < .03, indicated that participants rated the collectivistic ($M$ = 5.65) behaviors as more important than the individualistic ($M$ = 5.32) behaviors. The culture main effect was not significant, $F(1, 88)$ = 1.40, $p$ < .240. This main effect, however, was qualified by a significant Self-Construal $\times$ Dimension interaction $F(1, 88)$ = 138.55, $p$ < .001.

The interaction revealed that self-construal moderated the personal importance of the behavioral dimensions (Rows 1 and 2 of Table 5). Independents rated as more important the individualistic than the collectivistic behaviors, $t(47)$ = 8.05, $p$ < .001, whereas interdependents rated as more important the collectivistic than the individualistic behaviors, $t(47)$ = 8.67, $p$ < .001. Viewed from an alternative angle, the individualistic behaviors were more important to independents than to interdependents, $t(94)$ = 88.49, $p$ < .001, whereas the collectivistic behaviors were more important to interdependents than to independents, $t(94)$ = 93.76, $p$ < .001.

*Traits.* A dimension main effect, $F(1, 88)$ = 10.46, $p$ < .002, showed that participants rated as more important the collectivistic ($M$ = 5.70) than the individualistic ($M$ = 5.08) traits. The culture main effect was not significant, $F(1, 88)$ = 0.89, $p$ < .347. This main effect, however, was qualified by a significant Self-Construal $\times$ Dimension interaction $F(1, 88)$ = 101.58, $p$ < .001.

The interaction revealed that self-construal moderated the personal importance of the trait dimensions (Rows 3 and 4 of Table 5). Independents rated as more important the individualistic than the collectivistic traits, $t(47)$ = 4.59, $p$ < .001, whereas interdependents rated as more important the collectivistic than the individualistic traits, $t(47)$ = −9.89, $p$ < .001. The interaction can be viewed from another angle. The individualistic traits were more important to independents than to interdependents, $t(94)$ = 8.56,

$p$ < .001, whereas the collectivistic traits were more important to interdependents than independents, $t(94)$ = 7.85, $p$ < .001.

## Importance as a Mediator of Cultural Differences in Self-Enhancement

We wanted to find out whether self-construal influences self-enhancement through attribute importance. More specifically, we tested whether attribute importance mediates the effect of self-construal on self-enhancement. Importance is considered a mediator of the effect of self-construal if (a) self-construal predicts self-enhancement, (b) self-construal predicts attribute importance, and (c) the effect of self-construal on self-enhancement is reduced when the effect of importance is controlled (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The analyses we have reported thus far provide support for Requirements a and b.

To examine Requirement c, we contrast coded self-construal (1 = independent, −1 = interdependent) and conducted a simple and a multiple regression analysis. In the simple regression analysis, we regressed the behavior (trait) ratings onto self-construal. In the multiple regression analysis, we simultaneously regressed the behavior (trait) ratings onto self-construal and importance.[7] We conducted these analyses separately for the individualistic and collectivistic behaviors and traits. To preface our findings, each set of analyses indicated that importance partially mediated the effect of self-construal on self-enhancement.

*Individualistic behaviors.* As displayed in Table 6 (Rows 1 and 2 of Column 1), the effect of self-construal on self-enhancement ($B$ = 0.81) was reduced significantly ($B$ = 0.35, $Z$ = 4.89, $p$ < .0001) when the effect of importance ($B$ = 0.49) was controlled.

*Collectivistic behaviors.* As shown in Table 6 (Rows 1 and 2 of Column 2), the effect of self-construal on self-enhancement ($B$ = −0.95) was reduced significantly ($B$ = −0.72, $Z$ = −3.97, $p$ < .0001) when the effect of importance ($B$ = 0.28) was controlled.

*Individualistic traits.* As displayed in Table 6 (Rows 3 and 4 of Column 1), the effect of self-construal on self-enhancement ($B$ = 0.65) was reduced significantly ($B$ = 0.29, $Z$ = 3.73, $p$ < .001) when the effect of importance ($B$ = 0.35) was controlled.

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[7] As recommended by Kenny (2001), we used the following version of Sobel's (1982) test to determine whether the effect of self-construal was significantly reduced when the effect of importance was controlled:

$$Z = \frac{ab}{\sqrt{b^2 s_a^2 + a^2 s_b^2 - s_a^2 s_b^2}} \qquad (1)$$

In the formula, $a$ represents the unstandardized regression coefficient for the independent variable (e.g., self-construal) on the mediator (e.g., importance), $b$ represents the unstandardized regression coefficient for the mediator on the dependent variable when the independent variable is controlled for, and $s_a$ and $s_b$ represent the standard error of $a$ and $b$, respectively. Furthermore, we replicated the Baron and Kenny (1986) procedure for testing mediation with the more recently developed $Z$ prime procedure (MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, & Sheets, 2002), which uses a different version of the Sobel formula and a different sampling distribution for the critical value. All of our tests satisfied the necessary criteria for establishing mediation according to both procedures.

Table 5

*Mean Personal Importance Rating for Behaviors and Traits as a Function of Self-Construal and Dimension in Study 2*

| | Dimension | |
|---|---|---|
| Self-construal | Individualistic | Collectivistic |
| *Behaviors* | | |
| Independent | 6.26 | 4.85 |
| Interdependent | 4.39 | 6.46 |
| *Traits* | | |
| Independent | 6.10 | 4.80 |
| Interdependent | 4.07 | 6.59 |

Table 6

*Unstandardized Regression Parameters From Variables Predicting Self-Enhancement Ratings on Individualistic and Collectivistic Behaviors and Traits in Study 2*

| | Dimension | |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Predictors | Individualistic | Collectivistic |
| **Behaviors** | | |
| Self-construal | | |
|   Construal | 0.81** | −0.95** |
| Self-construal and importance of dimension | | |
|   Construal | 0.35* | −0.72** |
|   Importance | 0.49** | 0.28** |
| **Traits** | | |
| Self-construal | | |
|   Construal | 0.65** | −0.72** |
| Self-construal and importance of dimension | | |
|   Construal | 0.29* | −0.17 |
|   Importance | 0.35** | 0.63** |

*Note.* Self-construal is contrast coded (1 = independent, −1 = interdependent).
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

*Collectivistic traits.* Finally, as illustrated in Table 6 (Rows 3 and 4 of Column 2), the effect of self-construal on self-enhancement ($B = -0.72$) was reduced significantly ($B = -0.17$, $Z = -5.33$, $p < .001$) when the effect of importance ($B = 0.63$) was controlled.

### Discussion

Study 2 yields strong support for our reformulation. The study conceptually replicates Study 1 in demonstrating that independents self-enhance on individualistic attributes, whereas interdependents self-enhance on collectivistic attributes. It is interesting that this was a within-culture demonstration. As such, Study 2 took compelling steps in ruling out alternative explanations that pertained to the influence of acculturation, culture-specific constructs (e.g., metacognitive beliefs), or culture-specific response biases (e.g., scale interpretation).

Study 2 also shows that independents consider individualistic attributes as personally important, whereas interdependents consider collectivistic attributes as personally important. These findings set the stage for the second major accomplishment of Study 2: establishing the mediational role of attribute importance. Specifically, the study demonstrates that personal importance of the judgmental dimension (i.e., individualistic vs. collectivistic) partially mediates self-enhancement ratings: When attribute importance was controlled, the influence of self-construal (or, more broadly, culture) on self-enhancement was reduced. Stated alternatively, both independents and interdependents are likely to self-enhance on dimensions that are personally important to them. In effect, what matters is not as much the dimension per se but rather whether the dimension is tethered to the personal self.

Additionally, Study 2 continued to explore absolute self-enhancement. The findings are consistent with our reformulation. Independents self-enhanced on individualistic behaviors and traits, whereas interdependents self-enhanced on collectivistic behaviors. Relatedly, independents self-effaced on collectivistic behaviors, whereas interdependents self-effaced on individualistic behaviors and traits. (Independents showed no judgmental bias on collectivistic traits, a rather nondiagnostic pattern.)

We acknowledge the inconsistencies between the two studies on the issue of absolute self-enhancement levels. In particular, Japanese in Study 1 neither self-enhanced nor self-effaced on individualistic behaviors; however, interdependents in Study 2 self-effaced on those behaviors. Furthermore, Americans self-enhanced on collectivistic traits in Study 1; however, independents neither self-enhanced nor self-effaced on such traits in Study 2. While acknowledging these rather unwieldy result patterns, we also ponder the possibility that the results of Study 2 (which were unequivocally supportive of our reformulation) were cleaner than those of Study 1. As a reminder, in Study 1 we assessed ethnicity but not self-construal. This practice may have added method variance, as a portion of Japanese participants likely had independent self-construals, whereas a portion of American participants likely had interdependent self-construals. Additionally, it is worth noting that self-effacement in Study 2 only occurred on dimensions of low personal importance for both Japanese and Americans. This clever strategy is not particularly harmful to the self. Conceding "pockets of incompetence" (Taylor & Brown, 1988, p. 203) not only preserves a positive self-regard but also boosts credibility in one's assertions of superiority on other (i.e., personally important) dimensions.

## General Discussion

Culture is relevant. The point was made energetically by the culture movement and articulated expertly with the work of researchers pioneering the cultural-self perspective. Indeed, we fully and wholeheartedly endorse the notion that culture is germane to the development of psychological theory (Cohen, 2001; McCrae, 2001; Miller, 1999; Poortinga & van Hemert, 2001). We wish to debate, however, the level at which culture is relevant to theory development.

McCrae et al. (1998; see also McCrae et al., 2000) expressed the core issue of this debate in an intentionally simplified but nevertheless straightforward manner. They pointed out that some researchers believe that culture influences psychological functioning (e.g., the self, language, emotions, behavior) in fundamental and unique ways (e.g., Nisbett et al., 2001). Individuals are the product of their culture (Heine, 2001). As such, a different science of psychology is needed for each cultural system (Ho, Peng, Lai, & Chan, 2001). Other researchers, however, believe that culture can be understood as a persistent source of social influence, alongside other critical sources of influence (e.g., social class, educational level, occupation). Individuals negotiate their personal identities in the midst of a nexus of social influences—cultural, social structural, organizational, or situational. As such, a universal science of psychology suffices to understand, describe, and (most important) explain parsimoniously human thinking, feeling, and behaving

(D. E. Brown, 1991; Buss, 2001; Higgins & Kruglanski, 1996; Pinker, 1997; Sedikides & Gaertner, 2001a, 2001b).

We endorse the universal, metatheoretical framework. We believe that a universal science of psychology is possible, plausible, and, indeed, desirable. Such a science would consider social influences and individual responses to these influences as variables (Schlenker, 1974), with an eye toward generalizability. It is this framework that guides the present investigation. Within this framework, we focus on a particular principle: the self-enhancement motive.

## Summary of Findings

The cultural-self perspective advocates the relativity of the self-enhancement motive. People have a need for positive self-regard in Western culture but not in Eastern culture (e.g., Heine et al., 1999). We contend that the self-enhancement motive is universal. Specifically, we have put forward the following proposals: (a) People in all cultures have a need to enhance the self, (b) people self-enhance on dimensions that they consider personally important (i.e., personal importance mediates self-enhancement), and (c) idiocentrics or independents consider (and internalize) individualistic attributes as personally important, whereas allocentrics or interdependents consider (and internalize) collectivistic attributes as personally important; hence, (d) idiocentrics or independents self-enhance on individualistic attributes, whereas allocentrics or interdependents self-enhance on collectivistic attributes. In two studies, we obtained good support for our proposals and, consequently, for the thesis that the self-enhancement motive is universal. We have demonstrated not just that both idiocentrics and allocentrics self-enhance but also when they are more likely to self-enhance (i.e., idiocentrics self-enhance on the agency dimension, whereas allocentrics self-enhance on the communion dimension) and, finally, why they self-enhance (i.e., culture imbues the agency and communion dimension with meaning and renders them personally important and internalized). In summary, we have revealed the signature of a universal process that is differentially expressed across cultures.

Recently, Kurman (2001) has also reported findings that are consistent with our thesis. She assessed the self-enhancement tendencies (i.e., above-average ratings) among members of an individualistic culture (i.e., Jews) and members of a collectivistic culture (i.e., Singaporeans). Across two studies, Jews tended to self-enhance more on agentic than communal traits, whereas Singaporeans self-enhanced more on communal than agentic traits. Furthermore, in Study 2, independent self-construals predicted self-enhancement on agentic traits, whereas interdependent self-construals predicted self-enhancement on communal traits.[8] This research, however, is open to criticism on methodological grounds: The communal and agentic traits were not pretested, trait personal importance was not measured, and, consequently, the mediational role of personal importance was not assessed. We elaborate on these issues below.

## The Matter of Personal Importance

Study 2 documents that attribute personal importance mediates self-enhancement. Indeed, attribute personal importance mediated all four self-enhancement indices. Nevertheless, a close inspection of the results reveals that mediation was complete in one case (i.e., collectivistic traits) but partial in the other three (i.e., collectivistic behaviors, individualistic behaviors, individualistic traits). However, we do not necessarily regard this pattern as impugning our universality argument. Indeed, the evidence for partial mediation, although not unimpeachably supportive of our reformulation, is certainly disconfirming of the cultural-self perspective.

Why did we obtain partial instead of complete mediation? Although we are unaware of relevant work (e.g., a meta-analysis of the relative prevalence of partial vs. complete mediation), we venture to suggest that complete mediation is the exception rather than the rule. One reason for this likely state of affairs is the accessibility of peripheral constructs that are correlated with the focal construct at the time judgmental responses are assessed. The automaticity of the self-construal–behavior link constitutes one example of a peripheral construct, with personal importance being the focal construct. Interdependents may chronically engage in collectivistic behavior (because of the personal importance of such practice), whereas independents may chronically engage in individualistic behavior (again, because of personal importance). Frequency of behavioral conduct can result in automaticity of the relevant self-construal–behavior link (see Knowles, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 2001). Hence, the automaticity of that link may account for additional variance on top of that accounted by personal importance.

Another reason why complete mediation is likely the exception rather than the rule is imperfect measurement. In Study 2, we measured attribute personal importance using a single rating scale (i.e., 1 = *extremely unimportant to me*, 9 = *extremely important to me*). Participants completed this scale 32 times—once for each behavior and trait. We adopted the practice of a single rating scale to avoid or minimize participant malaise and fatigue. Had we assessed attribute personal importance with multiple rating scales, such as 3 (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999), 4 (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000) or 10 (R. Brown, Condor, Matthews, & Wade, 1986) scales, and had we also obtained relatively error-free measures of independent and interdependent self-construal, we would have increased the probability of obtaining complete mediation on all indices of self-enhancement.

Despite the imperfection of our assessment of personal importance, we believe that we have made headway over past treatments and assessments of the construct. To begin with, our investigation is the first in the literature to treat attribute personal importance as mediator of self-enhancement. Past literature has reported only zero-order correlations between personal importance and self-enhancement indices. Second, we have devoted particular care to the development of individualistic and collectivistic attributes. Relevant past research has implicated a relatively small set of individualistic and collectivistic attributes and often has not made it clear whether these attributes are, indeed, individualistic or

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[8] Kurman (2001) tested an additional cultural group, Druze, believed to be collectivistic. The self-enhancement results based on this group were mixed across the two studies, a pattern that Kurman attributed to the distinctive religion of the Druze and the substantial cross-study differences in the samples.

collectivistic, respectively. For example, the individualistic attributes in a study reported by Heine and Lehman (1997) consisted of five adjectives: *attractive*, *interesting*, *intelligent*, *confident*, and *independent*. At least two of these items (*attractive*, *interesting*) may not qualify as individualistic attributes, and a third item (*intelligent*) is also questionable. Regardless, our more general point is that neither the five individualistic nor the five collectivistic items in this study (and others; Kurman, 2001) were selected on the basis of pretesting. Finally, we operationalized the construct of attribute personal importance directly rather than in terms of proxies such as severity of life events (Heine & Lehman, 1995) or relevance of a skill for success in life (Heine, Kitayama et al., 2001).

Perhaps the lack of laborious pretesting, the use of limited and imprecise indicators of individualistic and collectivistic attributes, the implication of proxies rather than direct assessments of personal importance, and the testing of participants in groups rather than on a person-by-person basis combined to produce somewhat mixed results regarding the relation between attribute personal importance and self-enhancement in the scant relevant literature. Indeed, the above methodological issues notwithstanding, some studies provided correlational evidence strongly supportive (T. Ito, 1999, cited in Heine & Renshaw, 2002) of our reformulation, whereas other studies reported correlations that are inconsistent with our reformulation (Heine, Kitayama et al., 2001; Heine & Lehman, 1999; Heine & Renshaw, 2002). Future research will need to pin down the locus of these inconsistencies.

## Counterculture Evidence

The prevailing view in the literature is that easterners do not self-enhance. We argue that the evidence is not fully congruent with this view. Instead, the evidence attests to substantial self-enhancement on the part of easterners (or allocentrics; Kurman, 2001). We believe that this new look at existing data points to a convergence of empirical findings toward the principle of universality of self-enhancement.

The argument in favor of relativity of self-enhancement has been anchored on three indicators of the motive. One indicator is *inflated self-beliefs*. It has been claimed that westerners have highly positive self-views, whereas easterners have neutral or negative self-views. This claim derives from a perceived prescriptive norm in Eastern culture (Bond, 1991; Bond et al., 1982; Yoshida, Kojo, & Kaku, 1982). When evidence is taken into account, however, the picture becomes considerably murkier. On the one hand, some studies report that easterners (i.e., Japanese and Chinese), compared with westerners, describe themselves less positively or even negatively (Kanagawa et al., 2001; Kitayama et al., 1997; Takata, 1987; Wang, 2001; Yik, Bond, & Paulhus, 1998; Yu & Murphy, 1993) and report lower levels of self-esteem (Heine et al., 1999). Other studies, however, tell a different tale. Chinese schoolchildren self-enhance on the dimension of competence (Falbo, Poston, Triscari, & Zhang, 1997; Leung, 1996), and Taiwanese employees rate themselves higher on job performance than do their employers (Fahr, Dobbins, & Cheng, 1991)—perhaps because of the personal importance of the corresponding dimensions to the two samples. Paralleling this interpretation, Japanese may show no strong signs of dissonance reduction (Heine &

Lehman, 1997) because they are more apt to attribute behavior to external than to internal causes (Knowles et al., 2001) and, consequently, less likely to feel personally responsible for attitude–behavior inconsistencies (cf. Insko, Worchel, Folger, & Kutkus, 1975). Furthermore, Chinese university students self-efface on some personality dimensions but not others (Yik et al., 1998), whereas self-ratings among Chinese and English on personality scales do not differ significantly (McCrae et al., 1998), and neither does the propensity of Japanese to display the hindsight bias compared with a Canadian sample (Heine & Lehman, 1996). Japanese appear to display self-reported (i.e., explicit) self-esteem levels that, when visually inspected, drift toward positive skewness (Heine et al., 1999, Figure 2, p. 777). Finally, Japanese are more likely than Americans to exit from a group, a response that represents an individualistic solution to the free rider problem (Yamagishi, 1988; see also Parks & Vu, 1995). In summary, the evidence favoring Western self-enhancement and Eastern self-effacement is far weaker than previously thought, a pattern consistent with the failure of the current investigation to obtain a main effect of culture on self-enhancement.

Another self-enhancement indicator on which the prorelativity argument has been based is *optimism and pessimism*. Westerners have been thought to exhibit rather readily unrealistic optimism (Helweg-Larsen & Shepperd, 2001; Weinstein, 1980), whereas easterners are pretty frugal in their expressions of optimism and, in fact, are pessimistic about the future (Heine & Lehman, 1995). Specifically, Heine and Lehman (1995) argued that Japanese were more pessimistic than Canadians in their predictions of positive and (independent and interdependent) negative life events for self versus other. However, Chang et al. painted a more textured portrait of between- and within-culture variability in perceptions of optimism and pessimism. Compared with Japanese, Americans expected positive life events to be more likely to happen to themselves than to others but negative events to be less likely to happen to themselves than to others. However, both Americans and Japanese expected negative life events to be more likely to occur to others than to themselves; that is, members of both cultures manifested the optimistic bias. Nevertheless, Americans did not expect positive life events to be more likely to occur to themselves than to others, thus failing to manifest the optimistic bias. Finally, Japanese estimated positive events as more likely to occur to others than to themselves, a sign of pessimism. In all, the evidence favoring Western optimism and Eastern pessimism is substantially weaker than previously thought, as both cultures manifest rather complex patterns of optimistic and pessimistic beliefs.

The third indicator on which the universality of self-enhancement argument is predicated involves the *self-serving bias*: Westerners are eager to take personal (e.g., ability-related) credit for positive outcomes but either deny responsibility or blame external circumstances (e.g., situations or other persons) for negative outcomes (Arkin, Cooper, & Kolditz, 1980; Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Mullen & Riordan, 1988). It is interesting that different attributional patterns are observed in the East. Easterners are less likely to display the self-serving bias, do not manifest it at all, or reverse it (Anderson, 1999; Kashima & Triandis, 1986; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; for a review, see: Kitayama, Takagi, & Matsumoto, 1995). This is, indeed, an area in which consistent

cross-cultural differences have been observed. We attribute these differences to excessive concerns in the East with face saving and the avoidance of embarrassment (De Vos & Wagatsuma, 1973; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1993; Ho, 1976; Holtgraves, 1997; Hwang, 1987) and, more generally, to the relative prevalence in the East of avoidance personal goals (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001). Such internalized goals likely play out behaviorally in terms of causing one to refrain from accusing others (even in private settings) of a collective failure. Our analysis predicts that easterners will be more unwilling to blame others for their failures than willing to take credit for their successes (because a disinclination to blame others is more personally important) and that the magnitude of this discrepancy will be higher in the East than the West—clearly, a testable proposition.

The weight of evidence, then, across the three indicators points to a substantial degree of self-enhancement among easterners, a conclusion certainly warranted by our universality principle. This principle is further bolstered by empirical findings across several related domains. When the ratio of inputs to outputs in relationships (e.g., parents, siblings, cousins, close friends, acquaintances, strangers) is assessed in both individualistic (e.g., the United States, the Netherlands) and collectivistic (e.g., Hong Kong, Turkey) countries, strong evidence is obtained for the exchange canon: Willingness to provide for others is strongly related to reciprocal expectations, regardless of culture (Finjeman, Willemsen, & Poortinga, 1996). The strength of seniority culture within organizations in Japan (Nakane, 1970) provides additional evidence for the potency of the exchange canon, arguably an egoistic canon, in Japan.

Strong evidence also points to the cross-cultural generality of fundamental human needs for self-efficacy. For example, the relation between attributional style and psychological health (i.e., depression and loneliness) was found to be very similar in individualistic (United States) and collectivistic (China) cultures (Anderson, 1999; Kurman & Sriram, 1997). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) posits universal, intrinsic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These needs were rated consistently high by both individualistic (United States) and collectivistic (South Korea) samples (Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). If we track these findings, an autonomy–supportive occupational context predicts satisfaction of these needs, which in turn predicts task motivation and psychological adjustment in both an individualistic (United States) and a collectivistic (Bulgaria) culture (Deci et al., 2001). Indeed, across 55 nations, Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995) found that only individualism correlated persistently with subjective well-being, even when other predictors were controlled.

It is important to note that the universalist orientation is reflected in additional spheres of human functioning. Cross-cultural generality has been reported in regard to the Big Five personality structure (De Raad, Perugini, Hrebickova, & Szarota, 1998; Katigbak, Church, Guanzon-Lapena, Carlota, & del Pilar, 2002; McCrae & Costa, 1997), values (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987), the relation between cognitive structure (i.e., implicit theories) and judgment (i.e., dispositional attribution; Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997), the secure base phenomenon in mother–child interactions (Posada et al., 1995), emotion (Russell, 1991), sex differences in mate preferences (Buss, 1989), in-group bias and distrust of out-group

members (Brewer, 1979; Islam & Hewstone, 1993; Insko, Schopler, & Sedikides, 1998), intragroup hierarchical structures (Barkow, 1989), and developmental processes (Rowe, Vazsonyi, & Flannery, 1994). More relevant to the cultural-self perspective, self-esteem (as mentioned previously) is subject to strong genetic influences (Neiss, Sedikides, & Stevenson, 2002a; Neiss et al., 2002b). Although the self-esteem samples in this research were derived from Western culture, there is no reason to expect substantial deviation in Eastern samples. In fact, heritability estimates for traits correlated with self-esteem (e.g., neuroticism, agreeableness) are remarkably similar in Western (German, Canadian) and Eastern (Japanese) samples (Jang et al., 2001).

## Epilogue

We wish to reiterate that the objective of this article is not to undermine the role of culture in human behavior. We believe that culture exerts profound influences on human functioning. As a case in point, culture prescribes the evaluative dimension (i.e., agency vs. communion) that members consider personally important and internalize. Nevertheless, we do advocate an alternative conceptualization of culture.

Our take on culture bears similarities to the position taken by Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (1992). These culture researchers adopted a universalist viewpoint. They argued that cultural characteristics result from the interplay between the individual and the cultural context. As such, cultural characteristics are constrained rather than arbitrary. We extend this argument. Given commonalities in the human evolutionary background (Buss, 2001; Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997), cultural constrains are marked by universalities rather than relativities. These constraints become identifiable when the level of analysis is upgraded. Our proposition can be expressed in an alternative manner. Although occasionally between-cultures differences are observed, these differences most likely result from somewhat distinct cultural influences working through common psychological pathways. Commonalities in the psychological pathways (e.g., the role of personal importance in self-enhancement) are more easily uncovered when individuals feel somewhat liberated, even briefly, as was the case in our laboratory setting, from contextual constraints. Relaxing contextual influences (e.g., making above-average judgments in reference to an abstract target and under private and confidential conditions) can reveal a different and, we believe, a more authentic and generalizable side of the human motivation to assert the self.

We have focused on the pancultural principle of self-enhancement: People in all cultures strive to maintain and achieve positive self-regard. Humans use different tactics to do so, but their goal remains the same. In a similar vein, both individualistic and collectivistic cultures permit self-enhancement, but they do so through different norms. In the West, it is accepted or tolerated to flaunt one's successes. In the East, it is accepted or tolerated to expect reciprocity relying on the seniority rule. Regardless, the acknowledgement of the relevance of self-enhancement by both cultures becomes evident when the level of analysis is upgraded. Both in the West and in the East, self-enhancement is sanctioned through upward mobility, status seeking, forms of artistic expression, and, as our research indicates, the promotion of the self on dimensions that matter. Both in the West and in the East, people

self-enhance tactically, strategically, and opportunistically by making the culture work for them—a feat that deserves to be seen as a tribute to human resourcefulness, flexibility, and adaptability.

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