An Exploration of Cultural Variation in Self-Enhancing and Self-Improving Motivations

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Cultural psychology concerns itself with the excavation of the cultural foundation of human nature (e.g., Markus & Kitayama 1991b; Shweder, 1990). This essay explores how culture has shaped the utility of maintaining positive or critical self-views, that is, of motivating the self through self-enhancement or self-improvement.

As labels such as "self-enhancement" and "self-improvement" tend to be broad and ambiguous and potentially shelter a variety of motivations, I first operationalize what I mean by these two terms. I define self-enhancement as the tendency to overly dwell on, elaborate, and exaggerate positive aspects of the self relative to one's weaknesses. This definition is consistent with many research paradigms, such as research on self-esteem (Rosenberg 1965), self-serving biases (Taylor & Brown, 1988), and self-evaluation maintenance (Tesser 1988). There may be other ways in which selves are "enhanced" that do not fit into this definition. To the extent that other phenomena don't fit this definition, I suggest that they represent somewhat distinct processes. Throughout this chapter, when I use the term *self-enhancement*, I am referring to processes captured by the above definition.

In contrast, I define self-improvement as the tendency to overly dwell on, elaborate, and exaggerate negative aspects of the self relative to one's strengths in an effort to correct the perceived shortcom-

ings. This definition is consistent with research conducted with East Asian populations (e.g., Heine et al., in press; Kitayama & Markus 2000), although it is a rather novel motivation within North American psychological research. There are surely other ways in which selves can be "improved"; however, the kind of self-improvement that I explore here is restricted to the above definition.

North American Self-Enhancement

The notion that people are motivated to self-enhance is perhaps the most widely shared assumption in psychology regarding the self (e.g., James 1890; Maslow 1943; Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski 1991; Tesser 1988). Roger Brown (1986) referred to this need as an "urge so deeply human that we can hardly imagine its absence" (p. 534). Indeed, a perusal of research conducted on the self-concept in North America reveals widespread evidence of self-enhancing motivations across a diverse array of paradigms.

First, measurements of self-esteem consistently find that the vast majority of North Americans tend to view themselves in unambiguously positive terms (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton 1989; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama 1999). It is relatively rare for North Americans of European descent to score below the theoretical midpoint on self-esteem scales (less than 7 percent of one large sample, Heine et al. 1999). Measures of North American self-esteem tend to reveal such a skewed distribution that what much research operationalizes as low self-esteem (e.g., by a median split) actually reflects moderately positive self-assessments. The most common view of self in North American samples is one that is viewed distinctly positively.

Further evidence for self-enhancement motivations can be found in the wide array of studies that reveal that North Americans tend not to be satisfied in just viewing themselves positively but rather tend to view themselves in *unrealistically* positive terms. This tendency to exaggerate the positive aspects of the self is evident in a diverse variety of content domains, for example, in trait evaluations (Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg 1989), attributions for performance (Zuckerman 1979), recall of past memories (Crary 1966), attitudes (Campbell 1986), assessments of the future (Weinstein 1980), assessments of one's ability to be in control (Langer 1975), evaluations of one's group (Heine & Lehman 1997a), and evaluations of one's

relationships (Endo, Heine, & Lehman 2000). These tendencies are identified so consistently in North American samples that they have been viewed as signs of a healthy, normal personality (Taylor & Armor 1996; Taylor & Brown 1988), as the products of an "intrapsychic evolution" (Greenwald 1980), or as errors inherent in the course of information-processing (Miller & Ross 1977). Moreover, these self-serving biases are evident despite the considerable interpersonal costs that are associated with maintaining them (Colvin, Block, & Funder 1995; Paulhus 1998).

Perhaps the most compelling evidence for self-enhancing motivations can be seen in studies that investigate how people respond when they are denied the opportunity to view themselves positively. When confronted with negative self-relevant information, North Americans engage in a variety of tactics to restore a positive self-view. For example, they may align themselves with winners and distance themselves from losers (Cialdini & Richardson 1980), further handicap their own performance for an excuse that protects their self-esteem (Tice 1991), rationalize their behaviors or decisions (Steele, Spencer, & Lynch 1993), sabotage the performance of a friend (Tesser & Smith 1980), engage in comparisons with those performing worse (Wood 1989), make external attributions for their poor performance (Zuckerman 1979), or discount the feedback that they have received (Heine, Takata, & Lehman 2000). The diversity of the occupants of this self-evaluation maintenance zoo is telling of the premium that is placed on having a positive self-view; when negative information about the self is discovered, whatever aspect of the situation that is most amenable to change will be rationalized in order to reinstate a positive assessment (Tesser, Crepaz, Beach, Cornell, & Collins 2000).

In this summary, I have used the rather awkward term *North Americans* rather than the more encompassing term *people*. I do this as most research on self-enhancing motivations has been conducted in North America and, to a lesser extent, in other Western countries. This geographic quirk of the literature makes it impossible to assess whether this motivation is a human universal or a Western cultural product. Whether or not self-enhancing motivations are evident to similar degrees in people of other cultures is an empirical question that can be addressed by contrasting evidence for these motivations across cultures. I have spent much of the past decade gathering data relevant to self-evaluations from Japan.

Japanese Self-Improvement

In general, evidence for self-enhancing motivations (as operationalized by my definition above) is weak and elusive among Japanese samples. Cross-cultural studies reveal that, relative to North Americans, Japanese exhibit significantly less positive self-ratings as evident in lower self-esteem scores (Bond & Cheung 1983; Heine & Lehman in press; Yeh 1995) and larger actual-ideal discrepancies (Heine & Lehman 1999; Meijer, Heine, & Yamagami 1999); significantly weaker tendencies to exaggerate the positivity of their self-views (Heine & Lehman 1995; Heine & Renshaw 2002; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit 1997; Markus & Kitayama 1991a), and significantly weaker tendencies to try to maintain a positive self-view (Cross, Liao, & Josephs 1992; Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman 2001a; Heine & Lehman 1997b). The standard indicators of self-enhancement are much less evident among Japanese.

Different methodologies yield vastly different degrees of self-enhancement (Taylor & Armor 1996). For example, the better-than-average effect (estimates of the percentage of others better than the self, or differences in estimates of self and other) yield higher rates of self-enhancement in both Americans and Japanese (e.g., Heine & Lehman 1997a; Ito 1999; Markus & Kitayama 1991a) than other methodologies. Research with North Americans consistently reveals evidence of self-enhancement regardless of methodology, suggesting that self-enhancing motivations in that sample are robust (for a review, see Taylor & Brown 1988). In contrast, whether studies reveal self-enhancement or self-criticism among Japanese appears to hinge a lot on the methodology (e.g., Heine & Lehman 1995), sometimes revealing weak self-enhancement (Ito 1999), and sometimes pronounced self-criticism (Heine & Lehman 1999; Heine & Renshaw 2002; Heine et al. 2000; Kitayama et al. 1997; Takata 1987). This suggests that Japanese self-enhancing motivations are weak enough that the choice of methodology affects whether they are evident or not. Cultural differences in the degree of self-enhancement appear consistently regardless of methodology, however, and these appear to be protected from a few alternative explanations. They do not appear to be due to asking Japanese participants to evaluate themselves on characteristics that are not relevant to them, as the cultural differences tend to be as pronounced for characteristics that Japanese rate as

most important. (A number of studies find more self-criticism among Japanese for more important traits; e.g., Heine & Lehman, 1999; Heine et al., 2001b; Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Kitayama et al., 1997, although some investigations of the better-than-average effect reveal the opposite pattern; e.g., Ito, 1999). They do not appear to be due to Japanese having stronger group-enhancing motivations as cross-cultural comparisons reveal that North Americans exhibit at least as much, if not more, group-serving biases than Japanese (Heine & Lehman 1997a; Kitayama, Palm, Masuda, Karasawa, & Carroll 1996; although Japanese do appear to enhance their relationships to the same extent as North Americans; Endo et al. 2000). Last, they do not seem to be due to feigned modesty on the part of Japanese, as the cultural differences are at least as pronounced in studies utilizing hidden measures of self-enhancement (Heine et al. 2001b; Heine & Lehman 1997b; Heine et al. 2000).

In sum, the evidence converges on the notion that self-enhancing motivations are more pronounced in North American samples than they are among Japanese. Self-enhancing motivations thus appear to be intimately tied with Western cultural experiences. Cultural psychology maintains that culture and psyche are mutually constituted (Shweder 1990). Hence, to understand the psychological processes common within a culture, it is important to first understand the culture that sustains them. Cultural psychological explanations for the differences in self-enhancing tendencies tend to highlight various cultural practices common in the different cultures that appear to underlie them, such as rewarding excellence in American schools and self-reflection practices (*hansei*) in Japan (e.g., Heine et al. 1999; Karasawa 1998; Kitayama & Markus 2000; Lewis 1995; Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama 1997). The parallels between the cultural practices and the psychological processes are striking.

Culture can also serve as a useful tool for highlighting the psychological mechanisms underlying cultural differences. Cross-cultural comparisons allow us to test hypotheses regarding the kinds of psychological processes that would emerge if the social rules were different. To the extent that members from two cultures differ in a construct (such as independence), and independence is shown to relate to another construct (such as self-enhancement), then we can "unpackage" the cultural differences (Bond 1994; Singelis, Bond, Lai, & Sharkey 1999). That is, cultural differences can serve to isolate

the psychological mechanisms that are associated with the construct under study. In the case of cultural differences in self-enhancement, there does not appear to be just a single mechanism at work. However, a careful consideration of the cultural evidence reveals a few interrelated mechanisms that appear to sustain the difference.

Clearly, there is an enormous amount of variance for any psychological dimension within any culture. The between-culture contrasts of self-enhancement and associated mechanisms reported in this chapter provide a useful tool for identifying cultural differences, although they do *not* imply that individuals from these cultures never experience the motivations and thoughts that are more pronounced in the comparison culture. Cultural differences are ones of degree, not of kind, and I focus on dichotomies of the phenomena under investigation in order to highlight broad patterns by which we can identify cultural influences.

Independent versus Interdependent Selves

Much research contrasting North Americans and East Asians has focused on differences in the self-concept. Markus and Kitayama (1991b) distinguished between independent and interdependent self-views in these two cultural groups, respectively. Some of the defining characteristics of the independent view of self are that people wish to view themselves as independent and separate from each other, as autonomous, self-sufficient, and as individuals who are complete in themselves. Such an orientation of self is cultivated by self-enhancing. It would appear to be very difficult to feel self-sufficient, independent, and complete as an individual if one does not evaluate oneself positively. Successfully realizing the cultural ideal of independence, that is, becoming the kind of person that North American culture views as normal or appropriate, would appear to necessitate feelings of self-esteem (Heine et al. 1999).

In contrast, the core of the interdependent view is that people have a fundamental need to fit in with others, to have a sense of belongingness, and to maintain interpersonal harmony (Markus & Kitayama 1991b). Such an outlook would seem to have very little to do with how positively one views oneself. Thinking of oneself as great will not serve to enhance one's relationships or one's sense of belongingness with others—if anything it would seem to highlight how

one is distinct from and *not* interdependent with others. Achieving interdependence requires the cooperation and goodwill of others; it is earned when others are appreciating the individual. To become the kind of person viewed as normal or appropriate in an interdependent culture requires that one gain the respect of others, not of oneself.

In sum, this reasoning suggests that values related to the independent self theoretically should be intimately related with self-enhancement, whereas those related to the interdependent self should be largely unrelated, or even negatively related, to self-enhancement. Heine and Renshaw (2002) conducted an empirical test of this hypothesis. They measured the self-concept of individuals using Takata's (1999) independence/interdependence scale, and they also measured self-enhancement among Japanese and American students. Self-enhancement was operationalized as the difference between how positively students evaluated themselves and how positively four of their peers evaluated them. Self-enhancement was positively correlated with trait independence within both cultures and negatively correlated with trait interdependence within the American sample (the relation within the Japanese sample was not significant). Similar relations between trait independence and interdependence and self-esteem have been found by researchers within a number of cultures (Heine et al. 1999; Heine & Renshaw 2002; Kiuchi 1996; Singelis et al. 1999; Yamaguchi 1994). The ranges of the correlations from these studies are summarized in Table 1.

Similarly, Lee, Aaker, and Gardner (2000) investigated the relations between independence and interdependence and promotion and prevention motivations. Promotion motivations are characterized by the pursuit of gains and aspirations toward an ideal, whereas prevention motivations are characterized by an avoidance of losses and of the fulfillment of obligations (Higgins 1999). Lee et al. found that those with more interdependent views of self (or those who had interdependent aspects of the self-concept made salient through an experimental manipulation) demonstrated more prevention concerns, whereas those with independent self-views (or those who had independence primed) evinced more promotion concerns. These data are consistent with the notion that a sensitivity to positive information about the self is more associated with independent selves, whereas a sensitivity to negative self-relevant information is more linked to interdependent selves.

Table 1. *Correlations between inter/independence, self-enhancement, and self-esteem within East Asian and North American samples*

	Independence	Interdependence
Self-enhancement	*rs* range from .30 ~ .31	*rs* range from -.02 ~ -.25
Self-esteem	*rs* range from .33 ~ .51	*rs* range from -.01 ~ -.38

Intrapsychic versus Interpersonal Concerns

Self-enhancement is associated with both benefits and costs to the individual. Paulhus (1998) makes the case that these benefits and costs are realized in two domains. First, benefits of self-enhancement tend to be intrapsychic in nature. That is, focusing on what is good about the self tends to be associated with subjective well-being and self-efficacy, and is negatively associated with dysphoria and depression (Taylor & Armor 1996; Taylor & Brown 1988). If individuals are considering their strengths more often than their weaknesses, they will likely experience more rewarding thoughts and warm feelings about themselves. Indeed, positive views of the self show clear and pronounced correlations with measures of positive feelings and subjective well-being (Taylor & Brown 1988; Taylor & Gollwitzer 1995). One clear benefit of self-enhancing, then, is that it feels good.

However, the intrapsychic benefits that derive from self-enhancement tend to come with interpersonal costs. A number of researchers have highlighted how self-enhancers risk attracting the scorn of those around them (Colvin et al. 1995; Exline & Lobel 1999; Paulhus 1998). To put it simply, most people tend not to particularly like self-enhancers, especially over time. Paulhus (1998) found that after seven weeks of interacting with each other, self-enhancers were less likely to be viewed positively by their peers than were non-self-enhancers. Godfrey, Jones, and Lord (1986) found that people instructed to appear competent were liked less than those who did not receive these instructions. Tice, Butler, Muraven, and Stillwell (1995) reasoned that people are more self-promoting to strangers than to friends because the costs of being liked less are so much greater for friends than strangers. Although self-enhancement and self-promotional strategies may lead to some interpersonal benefits as well, such as others coming to view you as more competent (e.g., Powers & Zuroff 1988; Schlenker & Leary 1982; but see Godfrey et al. 1986 for contrary evidence), this is at the expense of being viewed as socially unattractive.

Why would self-enhancers be shunned by others? Dwelling on one's strengths would seem to have negative consequences on relationships in a couple of ways. First, self-assessments tend not to have an absolute basis, but arise from comparisons with similar others (Festinger 1954). Thus, for an individual to think that she is talented implies that she thinks she is more talented than others. It is not surprising if people react negatively to someone who believes they are better than they are. Tesser, Campbell, and Smith (1984) found that school-age children tended to prefer people who were less talented than they were in dimensions that are important to them. Associating with more talented friends, or friends who let it be known that they at least believe themselves to be especially talented, will lead individuals to suffer from being on the short side of the social comparison yardstick.

A second way of conceiving the negative relations between self-enhancement and interpersonal relations can be seen in terms of how likely one is to depend on others. The more talented and competent that one perceives oneself, the less likely one should be to depend on others. Feelings of grandiosity highlight how the individual can make it on his or her own and does not need to rely on others for guidance or support. As being dependent on someone enhances the amount of potential rewards that one can receive in a relationship (cf. Jourard 1959), gestures that indicate that one does not need to rely on others may well be interpreted as signals that one doesn't want to get too close (Clark & Mills 1979).

The costs and benefits of self-enhancement in these two domains suggests that to the extent an individual places more weight on intrapsychic over interpersonal concerns, self-enhancement would be a beneficial strategy. The positive feelings that arise from self-enhancement will be seen as worth the price of the alienation of those around one. In contrast, to the extent that individuals are more concerned about their interpersonal relationships than their intrapsychic rewards, they should benefit more by self-criticism and self-improvement. The benefits of deepening their relations with others outweigh the costs of the negative feelings associated with self-criticism and self-improvement. This logic can be extended to

cultures. Cultures that place more emphasis on feeling good should make self-enhancement a more beneficial strategy, whereas cultures that place greater relative weight on maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships should benefit more by self-criticism and self-improvement.

There is considerable evidence that Japanese and North Americans differ in the extent to which they differentially emphasize intrapsychic and interpersonal concerns. First, there is consistent evidence that North Americans report having more positive feelings than Japanese (Diener, Diener, & Diener 1995; Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa 2000; Mesquita & Karasawa 2002; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis 1998). One way to make sense of this difference is that North Americans tend to elaborate the positivity of their feelings, as these are more relevant to a successful life. Suh et al. (1998) find that the experience of positive feelings is more closely tied to subjective well-being for North Americans than Japanese (and between people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures more generally), whereas fulfillment of role expectations is more closely tied to well-being for people from collectivist cultures. Thus, intrapsychic concerns are arguably dwelled on to a greater extent by North Americans.

In contrast, the greater importance placed on maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships in East Asia relative to North America has been discussed in a variety of domains. These concerns are argued to lead to less confrontational and more compromising negotiation strategies, such as bargaining and mediation (Leung 1987), and to favoring a seniority-based system of rewards over a meritocratic system (e.g., Clark 1979; Nakane 1970), as the former is associated with less competition among colleagues.

A number of scholars have commented on the importance of *amae* in Japanese culture (Doi 1971; Johnson 1993; Kumagai & Kumagai 1986; Niiya, Yamaguchi, Murakami & Harihara 2000). *Amae* is the emotion term, unique to Japanese, that refers to an individual's indulgence upon another's kindness. It is the freedom to maintain the subjective experience of one's dependence on another. Doi (1971) describes *amae* as the mortar that holds Japanese society together. It reinforces the solidarity of the group. Experiencing *amae* is compromised if people focus on their competence and self-sufficiency. Indeed, the Japanese sociologist Chie Nakane (1970) argues that it is best if a Japanese manager is not too competent, as then he will not need to depend as much on his employees, weakening their sense of mutual dependence and the strength of the relationships. Hence, some evidence suggests that Japanese tend to emphasize interpersonal concerns more, and intrapsychic concerns less, and thus the cost-benefit ratio of self-enhancing is not as favorable for them relative to North Americans.

Internal versus External Frames of Reference

Another mechanism theoretically related to self-enhancement that differs across East Asian and North American cultures can be seen in tendencies to seek an external frame of reference: that is, to attend closely to, and to try to adjust one's behaviors in accordance with, standards that are shared by significant others. To the extent that the standards of others are viewed as more relevant for evaluating the individual than the individual's own standards, self-deceptive strategies will be rendered less functional. Self-deceptive tactics such as viewing oneself in unrealistically positive terms may work fine in convincing the individual that he or she is doing well; however, it is an entirely different matter to deceive others about one's performance relative to a consensual standard. Typical self-enhancing tactics, such as favoring positive memories over negative ones (Crary 1966), internalizing one's successes and externalizing one's failures (Zuckerman 1979), or exaggerating the extent of one's success (Taylor & Brown 1988), will not serve to enhance how *others* view the individual. If anything, given the tendency of individuals to dislike self-enhancers, maintaining positive illusions might even serve to jeopardize other's approval. Rather, others would most likely view the individual positively if he or she is meeting the standards held by others and is making overt attempts to do even better. The individual would seem to fare best by adopting a preventive outlook (Higgins 1999; Lee et al. 2000), and ensuring that their behavior is not falling short of the consensual standards for their role. Hence, an external frame of reference should foster a self-improving orientation.

In contrast, if an individual adopts more of an internal frame of reference, self-enhancement should be more beneficial. When individuals are free to determine the standards of performance by which they are satisfied with themselves, they should be able to increase the positivity of their self-views. And an emphasis on what is positive

about the individual should be associated with feelings of self-efficacy and positive self-feelings in general (Bandura 1982; Taylor & Armor 1996). Thus, when individuals dwell on their own standards, they should be able to reap more benefits of self-enhancement.

There is much evidence consistent with the notion that East Asians tend to favor external standards compared with North Americans. The Japanologist Eshun Hamaguchi states that in contrast to a perspective of the self as a subject, the Japanese self "is an object seen from the point of view of his partner" (p. 312; Hamaguchi 1985; also see Nakamura 1964). Theoretical discussions of the role of an external frame of reference in East Asia and self-evaluations is most evident in the literature on "face" (*mentsu* in Japanese or *mien-tzu* in Chinese) in East Asia. Ho (1976) defines face as "the deference which a person can claim for himself from others by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position" (p. 883). Face is not possessed by individuals so much as it is earned from others. Much literature has discussed the great importance placed on maintaining and enhancing one's face in East Asia (e.g., Ting-Toomey 1994). However, face appears to be a concept that is not elaborated much nor fully understood among North Americans. The Oxford English Dictionary finds that the expression "lose face" first entered the English language in the latter half of the 19th century, as a direct translation from Chinese. Morikawa and Heine (2000) found that Americans did not distinguish between face-loss or embarrassment situations, whereas Japanese saw a clear distinction. Face appears to be a more salient and socially relevant construct among East Asians, although little empirical research has investigated it thus far.

A concern for face makes East Asians highly sensitive to insults and negative sanctions from others (DeVos & Wagatsuma 1973; Gudykunst & Nishida 1993; Lebra 1976). When others are the arbiters of whether one has performed up to the consensual standards, individuals should be motivated to publicly present a formally impeccable self, free of any defects that might jeopardize a positive appraisal. (For a similar discussion of maintaining honor and presenting oneself positively in other cultural contexts, see Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla 1999). Indeed, Japanese culture has been characterized as having various layers of insulating rituals, such as codes of formal communication, highly conventionalized forms of greetings, rules for

posture, gesture, etc., all of which serve to prevent the exposure of potential flaws of the individual (Hendry 1993; Lebra 1983).

Empirical research confirms this theoretical difference between East Asian and North America. For example, Leuers and Sonoda (1999) compared how individuals presented themselves in photographs in Japan and the United States. Japanese tended to present themselves in rather polished terms, posing neatly in front of the camera, in a way likely to secure a favorable impression from others. Americans were more likely to reveal themselves "warts and all," with less apparent effort to ensure a positive self-presentation.

Cohen and Gunz (2002) hypothesize that one consequence of adopting an external frame of reference will lead Asians to experience the world more from the perspective of those around them. That is, Asians should view themselves in ways that are consistent with how they are viewed by others. This hypothesized "outsider perspective" has rather profound consequences on psychological experience: Cohen and Gunz find that Asian Canadians are more likely to experience third-person than first-person memories for situations in which they were the center of attention. That is, their recall of their past experiences includes much imagery of how they appeared at the time to others—imagery which was never accessible to them directly. Their heightened sensitivity to an audience leaks into their memories of themselves. In contrast, Euro-Canadians' self-memories showed significantly less of this third-person imagery. Their memories of experiences when they were at the center of attention had more imagery that was consistent with how they originally saw the event. Much cultural research on holistic thinking also suggests that East Asians are more likely to attend to contextual information than North Americans (e.g., Ji, Peng, & Nisbett 2000; Masuda & Nisbett 2001; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan 2001), further demonstrating an external frame of reference.

Similar evidence is found in cross-cultural research on self-awareness. When individuals are aware of how they appear to others, they are said to be in the state of objective self-awareness (Duval & Wicklund 1972). That is, they are aware of how they appear as an object, a "me," in contrast to the experience of being a subject, an "I." It would seem that to the extent that East Asians are aware of an audience and are adjusting their behaviors to that audience, they should more likely be in a habitual state of objective self-awareness

than North Americans. If this is the case, then stimuli that enhance objective self-awareness (e.g., seeing oneself in front of a mirror) should have little effect on East Asians. Even without a mirror present, East Asians should be somewhat aware of how they appear to others. A cross-cultural study corroborates this hypothesis: Heine, Takemoto, Sonoda, and Moskalenko (2002) found that whereas Americans showed a decrease in self-esteem and an increase in self-discrepancies when they saw their reflection in a mirror (consistent with much past research on self-awareness; e.g., Duval & Wicklund 1972), Japanese self-evaluations were unaffected by the presence of the mirror (see Table 2). Moreover, American self-discrepancies and self-esteem were at similar levels to Japanese when in front of a mirror, but were much more positive when the mirror was absent. One reason that self-evaluations tend to be so much more positive for North Americans than Japanese may be that North Americans are less likely to be considering how they appear to others. When individuals are led to view themselves in more objective terms, either by seeing themselves in a mirror or taking into consideration how others are viewing them, they are not as free to engage in self-deception (also see Diener, Scollon, Oishi, Dzokoto & Suh 2000, for similar arguments in cultural differences in subjective well-being). Objectivity constrains the ability to self-enhance.

Entity versus Incremental Theories of Abilities

The utility of self-enhancement versus self-improvement will also hinge on the perceived malleability of abilities. One way of considering abilities is to view them as deriving from a set of relatively fixed, unchangeable, and consistent inner attributes. Dweck and colleagues have termed this lay understanding of abilities an *entity theory* of self (e.g., Chiu, Hong, & Dweck 1997; Dweck, Hong, & Chiu 1993; Dweck & Legget 1988; Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan 1999). If one subscribes to a theory that abilities are largely the result of innate, stable factors, then it becomes more functional to view the self and its component features in the most positive light. Viewing oneself as having the requisite capability to perform well would provide the individual with the confidence to perform at one's best. In contrast, discoveries of weaknesses of the self would be especially debilitating as they would be seen as relatively permanent inadequacies. Those

Table 2. *Self-esteem and self-discrepancies measured in the presence or absence of a mirror*

	Americans		Japanese	
	Mirror	No mirror	Mirror	No mirror
Self-esteem	30.6_a	39.2_b	32.2_a	35.3_a
Actual-ideal Self-discrepancies	1.16_a	$.86_b$	1.23_a	1.27_a

Rows with different subscripts are significantly different within a country at $p < .05$

with entity views of self should thus emphasize positive information about the self over negative information (cf. Hong et al. 1999). Moreover, possessing a positive evaluation of the self should be a more focal and central concern than efforts to work toward becoming a better self. To the extent the self is viewed to be largely immutable, any attempts to improve should yield little reward. Stable views of the self should thus be associated with greater tendencies to self-enhance and heightened feelings of self-efficacy following this enhancement.

In contrast, on the other end of the continuum one can view abilities as fluid and malleable, capable of being improved through continued efforts. Dweck and colleagues call the belief that the self is improvable an *incremental theory* of self (e.g., Chiu et al. 1997; Dweck & Legget 1988; Hong et al. 1999). To the extent that one endorses the view that achievement hinges primarily on efforts, and thus is changeable, then a motivation to improve the self increases in importance (cf., Hong et al. 1999). It would be more beneficial to dwell on the areas in which there is room for improvement than on areas in which one is already competent. By maintaining a self-critical perspective, and making corresponding efforts to correct the shortcomings that are noted, individuals with more malleable views of self should experience enhanced performance and feelings of efficacy. Hence, individuals with more incremental theories of self should be more concerned with becoming a *better* self than of evaluating the self positively: a positive evaluation of the self is relatively uninformative and inconsequential if the self is viewed as fluid and changing. Beliefs in the malleability of the self should thus be associated with more concern for self-improvement than self-enhancement.

Cultures appear to show much variability with respect to beliefs

that the self is fluid or stable. In particular, there has been much literature consistent with the notion that Japanese view themselves and their abilities in more incremental terms than North Americans. First, this distinction is evident in the ways that making efforts have been moralized in Japanese culture. For example, the terms *gambari*, *doryoku*, and *gaman* have remarkably positive connotations compared to their English equivalents of perseverance, effort, and endurance, respectively. Indeed, *doryoku* and *gambari* have been identified as the two most liked words in the Japanese language (Shapiro & Hiatt 1989) and cultivating *gaman* has been viewed as an important aspect of education (Duke 1986). Similarly, tendencies to identify shortcomings in oneself has been institutionalized in the school system in the practice of *hansei* (literally, self-reflection). Many classes have *hansei* time at the end of the day where they review what mistakes were made and how one can improve (Lewis 1995). Furthermore, malleability of the Japanese self is evident in a diverse ethnographic literature that focuses on the importance of adjusting the self to different situations (Bachnik & Quinn 1994; Hamaguchi 1985; Lebra 1976; Rosenberger 1992).

Much evidence for greater fluidity of the self among Japanese (and other East Asian groups) has also come from the psychological literature. For example, East Asians have been shown to have a more malleable sense of self than North Americans in the sense that they (a) are more likely to report feeling differently about themselves across situations (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus 2001; Suh in press); (b) are more likely to view achievement as a product of efforts (e.g., Heine et al. in press; Holloway 1988; Stevenson & Stigler 1992); (c) are less likely to make dispositional attributions (Choi & Nisbett 1998; Morris & Peng 1994); (d) are more likely to make unstable attributions about their performance (Kashima & Triandis 1986; Kitayama, Takagi, & Matsumoto 1995); (e) are more likely to try to change themselves than change their environment (Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto 2002; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn 1984); and (f) are less likely to view people as having innate differences in abilities (Tobin, Wu, & Davidson 1989). The degree of beliefs in the incremental nature of abilities can be seen quite clearly when participants are asked to estimate the percentage of intelligence that is due to efforts. European Americans estimated that 36% of intelligence comes from one's efforts, Asian Americans estimated 45%, and Japanese 55% (Heine et al. 2001b).

Culture has an impact on the perceived malleability of the self (but see mixed evidence on cultural comparisons of Likert scale measures of malleability; e.g., Heine et al., 2001b; Hong et al., 1999; Norenzayan, Choi, & Nisbett, 2002).

There is also evidence demonstrating that the greater malleability of the self is related to cultural differences in self-enhancement. First, whereas much past research finds that North Americans tend to have greater motivation to persist on a task after doing well on it than after doing poorly (Baumeister, Hamilton, & Tice 1985; Feather 1966, 1968; Pyszczynski & Greenberg 1983; Shrauger & Rosenberg 1970), research with East Asians finds the opposite pattern: namely, after failure East Asians demonstrate more motivation to work on a task (and to view the task as important and diagnostic of ability; Heine et al. 2001b) than they do if they have succeeded (Hoshino-Browne & Spencer 2000; Oishi & Diener 2001; cf. Blinco 1992; Fujinaga 1990). An awareness of weaknesses appears to be directly linked to efforts to correct the perceived shortcomings.

Second, tendencies to persist after failure are significantly correlated with measures of incremental theories (Heine et al. 2001b; Hong et al. 1999) for members of both East Asian and North American cultures. Furthermore, experimental manipulations of incremental theories of abilities corroborate the cultural differences (Heine et al. 2001b). Leading Japanese to believe that performance on an experimental task is enhanced by effort has no impact on their persistence after failure relative to a control group; they apparently endorse this belief in the absence of the manipulation. In contrast, leading Americans to believe that performance on a task is enhanced by effort leads to significantly greater persistence after failure than a control (see Figure 1). Apparently, this manipulation provides novel information for Americans. The opposite pattern holds when participants are led to believe that the experimental task measures innate, stable abilities: that is, Japanese persist significantly less after failure when informed that the task is based on innate abilities (indicating that this is novel information to them), whereas Americans' persistence is unaffected by this information (suggesting that they already possessed this belief). Being sensitive to weaknesses and working at correcting them is only a beneficial strategy if one believes that the weakness is correctable.

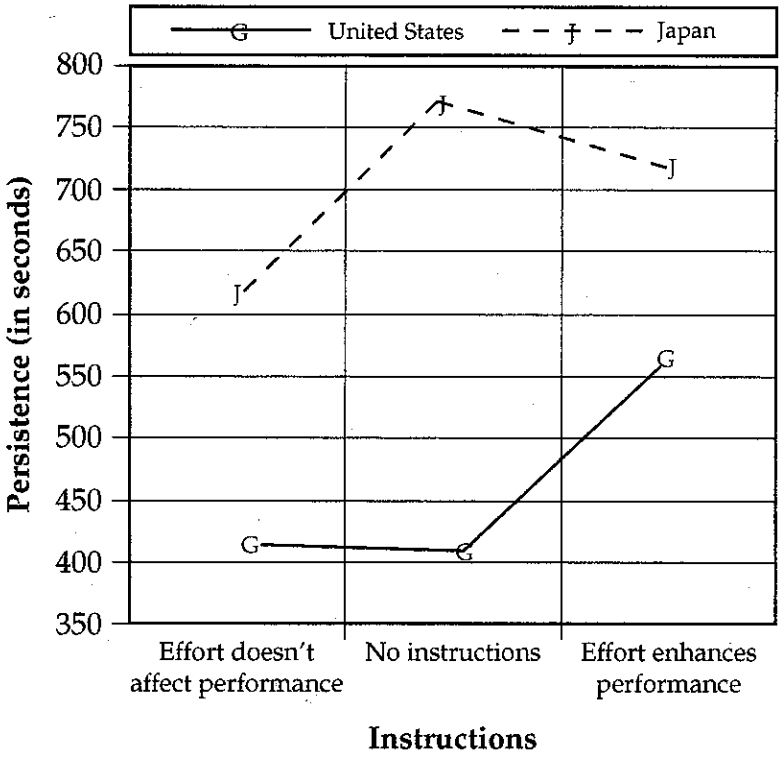

Figure 1. Persistence after failure with varying experimental instructions.

Conclusion

As noted above, there are a few constructs that appear to diminish the utility of self-enhancement: interdependent selves, weighing interpersonal concerns more relative to intrapsychic ones, maintaining an external focus of awareness, and believing that abilities are malleable and improvable. The relations of these constructs to self-enhancing and self-improving motivations are shown in Table 3. The pronounced cultural differences that have been observed in measures of self-enhancement and self-improvement are evident for a reason. Individuals adopt strategies that are perceived to be functional within their cultural environment. North American culture encourages the processes described in the left-hand side of Table 3, and these render self-enhancement more functional. In contrast, Japanese culture

Table 3. *Relations of constructs to self-enhancing and self-improving motivations*

Increases self-enhancing motivations ←	→ Increases self-improving motivations
An emphasis on independence	An emphasis on interdependence
Greater weighting of intrapsychic concerns	Greater weighting of interpersonal concerns
Internal frame of reference	External frame of reference
Stable views of ability	Malleable views of ability

elaborates on the processes described in the right-hand side of Table 3, and these render self-improvement a more beneficial strategy.

The four constructs in Table 3 appear to represent a rather diverse collection of psychological processes, yet they are all theoretically and empirically related to self-enhancement, and they are all more identifiable in Japanese samples than in North American ones. Are these four constructs related in any way?

A consideration of these constructs together reveals some important linkages. The interdependent self, in contrast to the independent self, is characterized as placing a greater emphasis on interpersonal relationships with significant others (Iyengar, Lepper, & Ross 1999; Markus & Kitayama 1991b; Triandis 1989). To the extent that those with interdependent views of self are especially sensitive to maintaining the harmony of their interpersonal relations, it follows that they should weigh interpersonal concerns more than those with independent self-views. Moreover, those with interdependent selves should also be more sensitive to how their actions might impact upon others, thereby heightening an external focus of awareness and a concern with face. When individuals are concerned about how others are viewing them, they will likely adjust their behavior to accommodate the expectations of others. And if an individual's behavior must be adjusted to meet the consensual standards shared by others, it is necessary that the individual see that his or her abilities are malleable enough to be able to meet these standards. Hence, the four constructs reviewed above do appear to be connected.

Cultural psychology can serve not only to reveal how different cultural systems sustain different psychological processes, but also as a tool to isolate the psychological mechanisms that underlie the cultural differences. Learning about another culture can inform us much about our own. Knowing about the cultural differences that appear

in self-enhancement allows us to consider the relevant psychological mechanisms that differ between cultures. Cultural differences allow us to test hypotheses of the specific costs and benefits that are associated with various psychological processes. Indeed, it is unlikely that the processes associated with self-enhancement that were explored in this article would have been evident if research outside of North America had *not* been considered. A culturally informed psychology provides a new perspective from which to view human nature.

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Rethinking the Value of Choice: Considering Cultural Mediators of Intrinsic Motivation

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> Accordingly, in our theory, an intentional action would be said to typify human agency only to the extent that it is self-determined. Behavior that is initiated by external or internal prods and coercion lacks a sense of volition or choice and would not be said to represent true agency, even though it is intentional.—Deci & Ryan, Nebraska Symposium on Motivation

> When a conflict arises between personal and group goals [in individualist cultures], it is considered acceptable for the individual to place personal goals ahead of collective goals. By contrast, in collectivist cultures social behavior is determined largely by goals shared with some collective, and if there is a conflict between personal and group goals, it is considered socially desirable to place collective goals ahead of personal goals.—Triandis, Nebraska Symposium on Motivation

Over a decade ago, these two perspectives on motivation—Deci and Ryan's 1991 theory of self-determination and Triandis's 1990 cultural theory of individualism-collectivism—were presented at the Nebraska Symposium on Motivation as discrete areas of inquiry in psychology. The consecutive presentation of these perspectives was