

Is There a Universal Need for Positive Self-Regard?

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It is assumed that people seek positive self-regard; that is, they are motivated to possess, enhance, and maintain positive self-views. The cross-cultural generalizability of such motivations was addressed by examining Japanese culture. Anthropological, sociological, and psychological analyses revealed that many elements of Japanese culture are incongruent with such motivations. Moreover, 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. It is argued that the need for self-regard must be culturally variant because the constructions of *self* and *regard* themselves differ across cultures. The need for positive self-regard, as it is currently conceptualized, is not a universal, but rather is rooted in significant aspects of North American culture. Conventional interpretations of positive self-regard are too narrow to encompass the Japanese experience.

People have a need to view themselves positively. This is easily the most common and consensually endorsed assumption in research on the self (e.g., Allport, 1955; Epstein, 1973; James, 1890; Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1951; Steele, 1988; Tesser, 1988). In fact, positive self-regard is thought by many to be essential for achieving mental health (e.g., Baumeister, 1993; Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Although the presumption of this need appears across research paradigms (e.g., self-esteem, self-enhancing biases, self-evaluation maintenance), the vast majority of research hinging on this assumption has been conducted in North America within a context of Western philosophical thought. No doubt, researchers have a solid understanding of self-evaluation for the average North American research partic-

ipant: He or she possesses a positive self-view (e.g., Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989; Diener & Diener, 1996), tends to enhance the positivity of his or her self-view (e.g., Blaine & Crocker, 1993; Greenwald, 1980; Taylor & Brown, 1988), and actively seeks information that maintains this positive self-view (e.g., Baumeister & Jones, 1978; Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985; Steele, 1988; Tesser, 1988). Clearly, then, the normative view of self in North America can be described as biased or skewed in terms of its valence. The center of gravity of the North American self lies distinctly above the theoretical midpoint of the self-evaluation spectrum (Baumeister et al., 1989).

Significantly less research on self-views has been conducted outside of North America, particularly in East Asian cultures. Yet the available evidence indicates that people participating in East Asian cultures do not have similarly skewed distributions of self-views (Campbell et al., 1996; Diener & Diener, 1995). The suggestion, then, is that tendencies to possess, enhance, and maintain positive self-views may not be basic to humankind, but may depend, in large part, on significant aspects of contemporary North American culture.

In this article, we review studies carried out in two cultural contexts: Japanese cultural contexts and North American¹ cultural contexts. We focus on a comparison of just two cultural contexts for the purpose of articulating how specific socialities (i.e., specific social environmental arrangements of practices and institutions), can promote and sustain particular mentalities (i.e., the psychological experiences associated with self-regard). We selected these two particular cultures because they are best represented in the self literature among East Asian and Western cultures, respectively. Other cultures likely possess similar psychological and cultural experiences to these two, and to the extent that they do, we expect

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Preparation of this article was supported by fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Japan Foundation, and the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science and by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Japanese Ministry of Education (Grants C-06610113 and 07044036), and the Hayao Nakayama Foundation.

We are especially grateful to Jonathon Brown, Jennifer Campbell, Esteban Cardemil, Adam Cohen, Anna Cooper, Lynn Cooper, Steven Cousins, Millie Creighton, Joe Greenholtz, Eugene Ide, Takahiko Masuda, Hisaya Matsumoto, Zita Meijer, Beth Morling, Dick Nisbett, John Pinel, Ed Royzman, Paul Rozin, Jim Russell, John Sabini, Marty Seligman, Michael Siepmann, Nariko Takayanagi, David Williams, and Tony Zhiyan for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

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¹ We use the term *North American* as shorthand for Canadians and Americans.

that our discussions would generalize to them. We use this two-cultural comparison to highlight how cultural variation urges us to reconceptualize what we mean when we speak of human nature.

Similar to other psychological phenomena that have been shown to be influenced and shaped by culture (for a review, see Markus & Kitayama, 1991b), we propose that self-evaluations do not exist within a cultural vacuum. At the most general level, our thesis is that human development has much to do with the individual constructing his or her own identity as a meaningful cultural entity. We argue that in North America a key component of constructing the self involves the continual self-affirmation of the individual as an autonomous agent who has functioned, is functioning, and will continue to do so effectively in future, daily social life. In Japan, a key component of constructing the self involves the continual affirmation of the relationships of which the individual is part and thus an affirmation of the self as an active, mutually validating, and validated cultural agent. We elaborate how this suspension of the self in a network of relationships renders the need for positive self-regard necessarily weak and functionally disconnected for many social and psychological processes of the Japanese person. Moreover, we suggest that affirmation of the self as an interdependent agent is achieved not by seeking positive self-regard but rather by maintaining a chronic self-critical view.

What Is Self-Esteem?

The definition of *self-esteem* is a source of perennial controversy within the field of social psychology, and as one analyzes the relation between culture and positive self-regard, the definition assumes particular importance. For the most part, "good" self-esteem and "positive" self-esteem are conflated. Good self-esteem is taken to mean positive self-esteem even though it is possible to imagine other meanings of *good* than positive.

Most often self-esteem appears to refer to the positivity of the person's global evaluation of the self. James (1890) referred to that certain "average tone of self-feeling that each of us carries about with him, and which is independent of the objective reasons we may have for satisfaction or discontent" (p. 306). Rosenberg (1979) defined self-esteem as a self-reflexive attitude that results from conceiving the self as an object of evaluation. J. D. Brown (1998) defined self-esteem as feelings of affection for oneself, and he described high self-esteem as a general fondness or love for oneself.

J. D. Brown (1998) argued that there is a basic human need to feel good about ourselves and suggested that although people across time and cultures may approach this need differently, it is universal. He quoted Becker, who wrote:

The fundamental datum for our science is a fact that at first seems banal, or irrelevant: it is the fact that—as far as we can tell—all organisms like to "feel good" about themselves Thus in the most brief and direct manner, we have a law of human development. (J. D. Brown, 1998, p. 193)

Self-esteem defined in this way is meant to refer to the way people generally feel about themselves most of the time across most situations. Yet in many empirical studies self-esteem refers to the more momentary emotional states or self-feelings that arise from particular outcomes—receiving a high score on a test of ability or a low score on a measure of social sensitivity. Such self-feelings

were labeled feelings of self-worth by James (1890) and are often considered to be a type of state self-esteem as opposed to more global, trait self-esteem. Here again positive and good are not differentiated.

Self-esteem theorists are also divided about the source of one's global attitude toward the self. Many approaches assume that people survey their feelings about their various attributes and characteristics and arrive at a summary evaluation or judgment. Coopersmith (1967), for example, described a process in which "the individual examines his performance, capacities, and attributes according to his personal standards and values and arrives at a decision of his own worthiness" (p. 7). According to this perspective, positive self-evaluations or positive self-appraisals arise from thinking, viewing, judging, and deciding and then global self-esteem is constructed from specific evaluations of self-worth in a bottom-up process (Marsh, 1989, 1990). Similarly, Seligman (1995) maintained that self-esteem is an epiphenomenon that reflects how well one is doing in life.

All of these definitions of self-esteem and most measures of self-esteem imply a particular model of the self—one in which the self is comprised of aspects or attributes that can be categorized as positive or negative. Given another model of the self—one that gives priority to social relations and social connectedness, a model we have argued is the case for Japanese—many of the commonly employed definitions of self-esteem, especially those which assume that specific evaluations of the self are monitored, added, and weighted to arrive at an overall view, and that it is a positive reading or feeling that indexes the good or preferred state, may be inadequate. Theories that assume that it is positive self-feelings that function as indicators of the adequacy and integrity of the self may be too narrow or specific in their scope to accurately characterize people from certain cultures.

If we do not commit to a model of self-esteem that assumes that good equals positive or that the self is composed of attributes or abilities or pretensions, but adhere instead to the notion that self-esteem indexes only a general feeling or regard for the self, it may be possible to define self-esteem so that it is relevant to various models of self. For example, Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (1991a), in their terror management theory, claimed that self-esteem arises from doing what is required by the cultural contexts within which one engages. This is yet another route to self-affirmation and one in which positive feelings about the self or self-affection as typically defined may not be necessary. Specifically, they wrote:

Self-esteem is made possible by the development of cultural world-views, which provide a stable and meaningful conception of the universe, social roles and specific prescriptions for behaviors that are deemed valuable, and the promise of safety and immortality to those who satisfy these prescriptions. Self-esteem is therefore a cultural contrivance consisting of two components: a meaningful conception of the universe combined with the perception that one is meeting the standards for value within that culturally contrived reality. (Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991b, pp. 24–25)

We return to the issue of the definition of self-esteem following our review of the empirical findings bearing on the links between culture and self-esteem.

Although there are differences of opinion with respect to the definition of self-esteem, there is remarkable convergence regard-

ing its importance. For example, James (1890) proclaimed that a direct feeling of regard for one's existence is basic to humanity. Maslow (1943) viewed the need for self-esteem to be the second highest category within his hierarchy of human needs. The foundation of Rogers's (1951) phenomenological theory rested on the notion that humans have a basic need to maintain and enhance the self. Carver and Scheier (1981) placed the superordinate goal of maintaining a positive self-image near the top of their hierarchy of standards for self-regulation. R. Brown (1986) described the need to maintain self-esteem as an "urge so deeply human that we can hardly imagine its absence" (p. 534). Tesser's (1988) self-evaluation maintenance model has "at its core the assumption that persons behave so as to maintain a positive self-evaluation" (p. 204). So common is this assumption in North American social psychological research that, as Solomon et al. (1991a) reminded us, "It is difficult to conceive of an area of behavior that has not been linked in some way to a need for self-esteem" (p. 107).

The aforementioned theorists are all Americans (not coincidentally, we would add), reflecting their socialization in a culture that, more than any other, celebrates individualism (Hofstede, 1980; Lipset, 1996; Sampson, 1977). It is important to note that self-esteem research, by and large, has been conducted by North American researchers at North American universities with North American participants using methodologies that were developed in North America. Whereas a perusal of the psychological literature reveals a significant concern with self-esteem among North American researchers (and to a lesser extent European and Australian researchers), such research occupies a conspicuously smaller proportion of journal space in Asia. Self-esteem as a major topic of study simply has not seemed to "catch on" in non-Western cultures, and to our minds this is telling. This strengthens our belief that self-esteem, as it is conventionally researched and understood, may be, in significant ways, a North American phenomenon.

Culture and Self

The enormous body of research on the self-concept in the North American psychological literature reflects North Americans' deep fascination with the self. The self-concept, however, being forever bound to the historical and cultural context within which it is examined (Sampson, 1977), remains a resistant target of objective study. Gergen (1973) argued that much of social psychological research is a historical undertaking with the processes under investigation best understood as psychological counterparts to cultural norms. Indeed, Baumeister (1987) noted that the self-concept as we know it today is a relatively recent historical construction, emerging in Western Europe roughly around the 16th century. The point here is that the self cannot be treated as though it were an entity existing independent of a social context—its various forms have developed to their present states through peculiar sets of historical and cultural antecedents (Kitayama & Markus, 1999).

It is perhaps most accurate, then, to view the vast amount of self research amassed over the past few decades largely as a reflection of contemporary North American culture. Unfortunately, because the cultural specificity of social psychological theories is rarely highlighted, often the implicit assumption is that these theories reflect pancultural psychological processes. To this end, Hogan (1975) suggested that "much American psychology can be plausibly described as theoretically egocentric" (p. 534). For the most

part, the extent to which our theories generalize to other times or to other cultures still remains an empirical question.

Recently, the notion that cultural context shapes the self has enjoyed a resurgence in social psychology. Cultural psychology maintains that culture and the self are inextricably intertwined and mutually constitute each other (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1997; Greenfield, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Shweder, 1990; Triandis, 1989). That is, a set of psychological processes that make up the person, and thus the human agent, is shaped by and configured through socialization such that there is a degree of attunement between the psychological system and the cultural system. This view implies that a set of biological potentials (a neonate) becomes a set of actively organized psychological processes and structures (a person or self) by incorporating or resonating itself with the attendant *selfways*.

Selfways are defined as communities' ideas about being a person and the social practices, situations, and institutions of everyday life that represent and foster these ideas (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997). Selfways include core cultural ideas and values, including understandings of what a person is and a sense of how to be a "good" or "moral" or "appropriate" person. These ideas about how to be a person are reflected in culturally significant narratives, metaphors, images, proverbs, icons, and symbols, as well as in foundational texts. Moreover, they include practices, habits, and customs that appear as subjectively "natural" ways of acting and interacting with others. Selfways are not just different ways of construing the self—they are more generally different ways of being, different ways of knowing, feeling, and acting. The assumption behind the notion of selfways is that "being a person" depends deeply on participation in particular culture-specific worlds. People do not live generally—selves are shaped through engagement in the understandings and practices of particular worlds, and selves thus developed are instrumental in reproducing and maintaining the cultural systems from which they derive.

Culture-specific ways of being should not be confused with individual selves. Selves are individuals' particular ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that are shaped by some admixture of their relevant selfways. Each self is constructed in and through the culture-specific selfways that are associated with one's various positions in society. Thus, although two North American selves will differ from one another in countless ways as will any two Japanese selves, any particularized sense of self will be grounded in some consensual meanings and customary practices and will necessarily bear some important resemblances to similarly grounded selves. An analysis of the nature of self-regard seems to require expanding the scope of focus to include not just selves but the selfways that anchor, afford, and foster these selves. When individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are consistent with the dominant selfway, they are likely to be repeated, sustained, and eventually habitualized to form a relatively autonomous psychological structure. The emerging psychological system, in turn, is likely to generate responses that resonate with, and thus reconstitute, aspects of the cultural system itself. In this way, each person's psychological processes and structures are gradually integrated into the larger cultural context. In contrast, behaviors that do not fit well with the selfway will remain cognitively unelaborated. Such behaviors are less likely to be repeated and thus less likely to become part of the person's habitualized repertoire of behavior. It is through this process of finding resonance with the cultural

system that cultures come to shape how individuals think, feel, and perceive themselves and their social worlds, and individuals likewise come to shape their cultures.

To the extent that cultures differ from one another, it follows that their associated self-concepts should be similarly disparate, and, likewise, these divergent cultural views of self should lead to differences in psychological processes that involve the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). Much of the cultural psychological literature (see, e.g., Choi & Nisbett, 1998; Cousins, 1989; Kashima & Triandis, 1986; J. G. Miller & Bersoff, 1992; M. W. Morris & Peng, 1994; Sethi, Lepper, & Ross, in press) has focused on differences between cultures with respect to various psychological processes. The extent to which individuals are motivated to possess positive self-views is one such process that could potentially vary between cultures. A difference in the "desire" or "need" for positive self-regard between cultures would be expected to the extent that the cultures differed in characteristics that were associated with tendencies to elaborate, dwell on, and enhance positive self-evaluations. In the following section, we discuss how a conventional understanding of the need for positive self-regard relates to important cultural patterns of North American and Japanese cultures.

The Role of Positive Self-Views Within North American and Japanese Cultures

A nuanced understanding of the dynamics of self-functioning requires an equally nuanced understanding of the culture that sustains it (e.g., Fiske et al., 1997; Greenfield, 1997; J. G. Miller, 1994; Shweder, 1990). Understanding contemporary North American-style self-esteem requires a comprehensive grasp of a complex knot of core cultural concepts and the practices and institutions that foster and promote these concepts. These concepts, including independence, freedom, choice, ability, individual control, individual responsibility, personal expression, success, and happiness, suffuse both the large and the small moments of everyday social life, and the fundamental nature of people's commitment and involvement with them becomes particularly evident from the perspective of a different cultural framework. Understanding contemporary Japanese-style self-esteem requires a comprehensive grasp of another set of core cultural concepts, some of which are also known and can be experienced in North American contexts but typically are not emphasized or given the same pervasive societal expression as they are in Japan. These concepts include self-criticism, self-discipline, effort, perseverance, the importance of others, shame and apologies, and balance and emotional restraint. Attempting to understand Japanese practices of self-evaluation from the North American perspective, or North American practices of self-evaluation from the Japanese perspective, can evoke puzzlement, disbelief, and pejorative assessments of the other world. To highlight the respective frameworks within which self-evaluations are constructed, in the following pages we briefly sketch some elements of the cultural worlds of Japan and North America (particularly those of European North Americans), giving primary attention to Japan.

Independent Selfways

The psychological analysis of the self in North America incorporates a particular set of individualist assumptions about what it

means to be a person. These assumptions have been taken for granted for so long that they have become invisible, yet they are easily recognized. These individualist assumptions are reflected in and fostered by key institutions such as schools and courts and the media, they are enacted in everyday cultural practices such as those of child care, and they are part and parcel of much of Western social science.

Within the ontological assumptive framework of individualism, the person is assumed to be a separate and somewhat nonsocial individual who exists independently. Behavior is defined as a consequence of some properties or attributes of the individual. Historians and philosophers generally acknowledge that individualism is a critical element of Western society and that it has manifold sources including the theories of Descartes, Locke, and Kant; the doctrine of "natural rights"; and the Declaration of Independence, a document that distilled many insights of the period of the Enlightenment (Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1994a; Triandis, 1995). Descartes, for example, argued that the defining feature of personhood was a mind that was separate from the material body and from other minds. The Reformation, the industrial revolution, the scientific revolution, and the spread of capitalism and the Protestant ethic all contributed to the development and distribution of a model of the self as an agent that acts on the world (Cahoone, 1996).

Within the framework of individualist ontological assumptions, the individual has a right and responsibility, in fact a moral obligation, to become separate, autonomous, efficacious, and in control. Many formal societal institutions such as the legal system give form to these cultural ideas and serve to mark and protect the rights of each person. A raft of democratic institutions and political practices have been expressly designed to give voice to the rights and preferences of rational self-interested individuals. The idea of the agentic, separate, and unique individual is also pervasively represented and reproduced in a vast array of culturally significant social representations (Moscovici, 1984), including images, proverbs, and stories of men who are masters of their fates and captains of their ships, lone cowboys, boys who pull themselves up by their own bootstraps, squeaky wheels that get the grease, and "roads less traveled."

Contemporary mainstream North American cultural life (which reflects and fosters a set of values and practices that appear to derive primarily from middle-class, Anglo-Saxon Protestant perspectives) consistently valorizes those who do not simply follow the pack but have the courage of their convictions and can go it alone. North American children are encouraged to be independent, autonomous, and self-determining (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998). Infants are given their own beds and their own rooms to encourage and foster autonomy (Shweder, Jensen, & Goldstein, 1995). In schools and homes, caretakers and teachers progressively "individualize" and decontextualize children. The goal is to turn the dependent child into an independent person with distinct preferences and unique attributes. Most developmental markers center on autonomous activities—rolling over, sitting up, walking, and eating by oneself. North American schoolchildren are encouraged to feel special, and are praised, encouraged, and complimented. In many preschools and schools, each child gets to be a VIP or a star for a day or a week, individual birthdays are celebrated, and children are honored. Both individually and collectively, children are encouraged

to think about themselves positively as stars, as winners, as "above average," and as the repositories of special qualities (Markus et al., 1997).

Many North Americans also believe that children must leave home, find their own way religiously and ideologically, and follow their dreams (Bellah et al., 1985). Advertising, television, and films repeatedly reinforce and elaborate the importance of individual rights, positive uniqueness, and freedom from constraints imposed by rules, norms, and others' expectations (Kim & Markus, 1999). Given this type of socialization and enculturation, those selves engaged in North American cultural contexts are likely to become motivated to regard the self positively—to discover and identify positively valued internal attributes of the self, express them in public, and confirm them in private (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Shweder et al., 1998).

The North American cultural abhorrence of negative self-views is apparent when one considers the manner in which low self-esteem is characterized in North America. The subtitle of a recent book edited by Baumeister, "The Puzzle of Low Self-Regard," highlights this point. His own chapter in this book addressed the difficulty researchers have understanding the "seemingly contradictory," "irrational," and "maladaptive" nature of people with low self-esteem (Baumeister, 1993). Similarly, psychologists sometimes contrast people categorized as low in self-esteem against a group labeled *normal* (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988). To be sure, North Americans with low self-esteem are more likely to suffer from a wide range of debilitating conditions such as poor life satisfaction, poor mental health, anxiety, substance abuse, poor relationships, poor physical health, and poor school achievement (e.g., Antonucci & Jackson, 1983; Dawes, 1994; Diener, 1984; Leary, 1983; Taylor & Brown, 1988). The culturally sanctioned self-evaluation in North America is unambiguously positive, and those who diverge from this well-worn path must do so with caution. Feelings of low self-regard are particularly distressing for people participating in North American culture because such feelings carry the implication of failing to be recognized as a meaningful performer in the cultural drama. That is, feelings of inadequacy, incompetence, or dependency challenge the "self-worth" of North Americans and tend to be accompanied by considerable feelings of psychological discomfort (e.g., Heine & Lehman, 1999a; Higgins, 1989; Steele, 1988).

Interdependent Selfways

In contrast to North American independence and individualism, within Japanese culture there is a shared belief in the interdependence of the self with others (Hamaguchi, 1985; Kondo, 1990; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Triandis, 1989). This view of self is not considered to be separate and autonomous; rather it is within the contextual fabric of individuals' social relationships, roles, and duties that the interdependent self most securely gains a sense of meaning. Individuals who are raised in such cultures come to desire a sense of belongingness with their respective in-groups. Such a motivation takes precedence over discovering, actualizing, and confirming one's internal self-attributes—behaviors that could potentially threaten interpersonal harmony.

The interdependent self thus is most complete when the individual is seen as functioning smoothly within a larger, more

encompassing collective. For those participating in Japanese culture, states of relatedness and embeddedness, or having connections with others, are of paramount concern (e.g., Bachnik, 1992; De Vos, 1985; Lewis, 1995). A view of self that is commonly sustained in Japan is largely a relational entity that is made most meaningful in reference to the pertinent social relationships to which the self is part (Hamaguchi, 1985; Nakamura, 1964). Therefore, the construction of a Japanese individual's identity as a meaningful cultural entity usually involves the validation of the individual's social relationships by constantly seeking to identify and confirm shared expectations and norms, and to adjust the self to better fit in with the requirements of the relationships. The self gains meaning by being firmly suspended and supported within a web of mutually binding social relationships.² In such a self-concept, in which identity is significantly derived from the individual's relationships with others, tendencies to dwell on positive aspects of the interpersonally disengaged individual remain relatively unelaborated. Possessing, let alone enhancing or maintaining, a positive evaluation of the self disconnected from the social context is not a primary concern for Japanese. This is because a positive self-view is not required for the construction and symbolic affirmation of the identity as an active, mutually validating and validated cultural agent (Fiske et al., 1997; Kitayama et al., 1997).

Self-Criticism

Most relevant to our central thesis are discussions in the ethnographic and psychological literatures regarding the self-critical attitude that Japanese commonly maintain. A self-critical orientation is often described as a defining characteristic of Japanese (e.g., De Vos, 1985; Kashiwagi, 1986; Lewis, 1995; Roland, 1988; White, 1987). For example, Doi (1973) relates how Japanese habitually view themselves as incomplete (*ki ga sumanai*) and feel unsatisfied with their performance. Chronically viewing oneself as incomplete carries the implication that one must continue to work hard to make up for one's deficits (Stevenson, 1995). Feelings of satisfaction with oneself, on the other hand, reduce the perceived need to continue one's efforts and could signal others that one is not doing his or her utmost to work toward the group's goals. This critical orientation generalizes beyond the individual to criticisms of close others (Kitayama, Karasawa, Heine, Lehman, & Markus, 1999), one's institutions (De Vos, 1985), and one's country (e.g., Lipset, 1996; Rose, 1985).

This self-critical orientation among people participating in Japanese culture is encouraged early in life through the mechanism of *hansei* (self-reflection). *Hansei* involves the individual looking back over a particular event and focusing on what wasn't done ideally and what she or he should try to improve in the future. *Hansei* is a hallmark characteristic of the Japanese education system (Karasawa, 1998; Lewis, 1995; White, 1987; White & Levine, 1986) in which children are encouraged to search for their

² Although empirical work is lacking, there is considerable discussion of the dynamic interplay within the Japanese self between an emphasis on how the individual is *contrasted* against his or her surroundings (roughly captured by the term *honne*) and how the individual is *immersed* within the surrounds (*tatemae*; Bachnik, 1994; Doi, 1986; Johnson, 1993; Lebra, 1976). Much remains to be learned about this duality or multiplicity of the Japanese self, but it is an important distinction that needs to be considered.

own inadequacies and weaknesses—those aspects of themselves that need to be corrected. This tendency to draw children's attention to potential shortcomings stands in sharp contrast to the tactics of North American caretakers, who tend to draw attention to children's positive features by praising, encouraging, and complimenting them.

Tendencies for *hansei* are further reinforced in that Japanese are encouraged to identify socially shared images of the ideal person associated with their positions defined by age, gender, and roles. Parents and educators alike encourage children to become "*rashii*" to such images. *Rashii* means "similar to" or "prototypical of." For example, to say that someone is good-child *rashii* means that the youngster is good child-like. In contrast to North American culture, in which an assortment of relevant practices and lay theories are grounded in the assumption that there are a variety of ways to be an ideal child, Japanese culture appears to be based on the assumption that there is one widely shared standard that should be met to be a good child. As the child grows up, he or she goes through a number of developmental stages, societal roles, and positions. Yet associated with each one of them in the Japanese cultural context is a distinct consensual image of *rashii*. Eventually, Japanese individuals acquire the mental habit of identifying a relevant ideal role image and comparing the state of the self with this ideal. Because any discrepancies from the ideals are bound to be negative, Japanese self-perceptions tend to be critical and self-effacing. Yet, this self-criticism is in service of future improvement and achievement of the self.

Hansei does not stop after graduation but continues throughout Japanese adulthood (Johnson, 1993; Roland, 1988). Japanese frequently search for how they might do more—indeed, their quest for self-improvement has been likened to a national religion (Rohlen, 1976). This self-improving outlook has been argued to be behind the incessant drive of Japanese toward role perfectionism (Befu, 1986; De Vos, 1973b) and their renowned industriousness (Doi, 1973). For example, one can see this never-ending drive toward improving one's skills in common Japanese attitudes toward physical training. Former San Francisco Giant Chris Arnold had the following to say after playing baseball in Osaka for the Kintetsu Buffaloes:

I'll tell you the big difference between Japan and the U.S. In the U.S. we believe that a player has a certain amount of natural ability and with practice he reaches a certain peak point, but after that no amount of practice will make him better—because after a certain point your ability reaches its limits. But the Japanese believe there is no peak point. They don't recognize limits. (as quoted in Whiting, 1990, p. 52)

Indeed, the very nature of the seniority system that is characteristic of many aspects of life in Japan (Nakane, 1970) is based on the assumption that with age (and constant efforts to improve) one naturally approaches the collective standards of performance (i.e., one becomes better). So a sushi chef is not to be taken seriously unless he has been making sushi for at least 10 years. The prototypical martial arts masters of Japan are old men—those who have devoted their lives to training and becoming better and better. It is telling that the names of the traditional Japanese arts (e.g., tea ceremony, calligraphy, and the martial arts) include the suffix *doh*, which translates as "path." People engaged in Japanese culture appear to concern themselves more with the process of becoming better, than with "being" good. To use an increasingly common

American reflection, Japanese seem more concerned with the journey than the destination.

Hansei reflects a culturally sustained process directly relevant to self-evaluations. Rather than motivating the individual to elaborate positive characteristics of the self (i.e., to self-enhance), Japanese criteria of selfhood support the individual in elaborating and focusing on potentially negative features of the self (i.e., to self-criticize). For the view of self commonly sustained in Japan, in which the standards of performance are "externalized" to correspond to those held in a relationship of which the self is part, the individual has neither the liberty nor the inclination to inflate his or her perceptions of competence. Doing so likely would only serve to alienate the individual from others (cf. Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982). Japanese tend to be motivated to gain the esteem of others rather than dwell on their own self-evaluations (Kuwayama, 1992; Spence, 1985). Further, as long as self standards merge with those of relevant others, the esteem of the others indexes the esteem of the self and vice versa. Hence, continual effort to improve oneself is an expression of a sense of belongingness and, in fact, is something that Japanese are likely to enhance.

Within such a collectively constructed reality, it is critical for the individual to be sensitive to transgressions from the consensual standards (e.g., Creighton, 1990). Successfully maintaining relatedness, or embeddedness of selves, requires that people participating in Japanese culture develop the skills to attend to and elaborate their shortcomings with respect to the pertinent socially shared standards. Information indicating how one has fallen short of the collectively shared standards is used to improve one's actions and behaviors, to affirm one's sense of belongingness, and to promote harmony within the group (Fiske et al., 1997; Kitayama et al., 1997). Hence, Japanese are motivated to seek and discover the standards of excellence within a given context, critically assess themselves to determine what they are missing, and endeavor to eliminate the perceived deficit. This practice of self-improvement serves to promote unity in relationships and simultaneously affirms one's identity as an interdependent being committed to the shared values of the group.

Self-Discipline

One of the most common themes in ethnographic accounts of Japanese is the emphasis the culture places on self-discipline (e.g., Benedict, 1946; Cummings, 1980; De Vos, 1973a; Duke, 1986; Johnson, 1993; Kondo, 1990; Lebra, 1976; Lewis, 1995; Singleton, 1995; Vogel, 1963; White, 1987). Disciplining the self to better approximate the expectations of others is an important skill for achieving interdependence. Japanese individuals come to see the importance of restraining those internal attributes that could potentially interfere with the cohesion of the group (Hamaguchi, 1985) and make efforts to become the kind of person who best fits with the greater collective. This self-imposed, continual restraint of the individual serves to deepen interpersonal embeddedness, cultivating the interdependent self (Bachnik, 1992).

The emphasis on self-discipline is best reflected in three closely related Japanese words: *doryoku* ("effort"), *gambari* ("perseverance"), and *gaman* ("endurance"). The cultural significance of these words can be inferred by the remarkably positive connotations that they confer. For example, in at least one national survey *doryoku* ("effort") was chosen as the "most liked" word in Japan,

followed closely by *gambari* ("perseverance"; Shapiro & Hiatt, 1989). Although North Americans also clearly value hard work, effort, and perseverance in the face of obstacles, the concepts do not seem to be glorified to the extent that they are in Japan. Indeed, we expect that most North Americans would evaluate the word *effort* as less positive than the word *effortless*.

Effort. Demonstrations of one's commitment to the group by means of one's efforts aid the individual in securing the esteem of others (Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996). The paramount importance of effort is revealed in common Japanese attitudes toward achievement. Japanese are more likely than North Americans to view achievement as a function of effort (Holloway, 1988; Singleton, 1995; Stevenson, 1995; Stevenson & Lee, 1990; White, 1987). Several empirical studies, for example, have demonstrated that Japanese tend to attribute their achievements more to effort than to their abilities (Chen & Stevenson, 1995; Kashima & Triandis, 1986; Meijer & Semin, 1998; see Kitayama, Takagi, & Matsumoto, 1995, for a review). Within this set of beliefs, encounters with failure are not construed as threats to the ego that leave permanent scars, but rather tend to be viewed as calls for increased efforts (e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Hamilton, Blumenfeld, Akoh, & Miura, 1989; Holloway, 1988). The fluid, incremental sense of self characteristic of Japanese renders personal failures as obstacles that can ultimately be overcome with focused efforts. For North Americans, effort and ability often are seen as inversely related—exertions of effort can be perceived to indicate deficits in ability and may pose a threat to self-esteem (e.g., Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Holloway, 1988).

Perseverance. If the essence of the Japanese spirit had to be summarized in one word, *gambaru* (to persevere, hang on, do one's best) would likely be the choice:

Throughout the lifetime of the Japanese they are surrounded, encouraged, and motivated by the spirit of *gambaru* [directive form of *gambaru*]. It begins in the home. The school takes it up from the first day the child enters the classroom. It continues through graduation. The company then thrives on it. It engulfs every facet of society. It is employed in work, study, and even at play and leisure. *Gambare* is integral to being Japanese. (Duke, 1986, p. 122)

The philosophy of *gambari* (noun form of *gambaru*) is that, regardless of the task at hand, one should put one's entire being into it. The cultural ideal is that individuals should not give any less than their full devotion and efforts in whatever they do. Although *gambari* may sometimes be a means toward individual achievement, in a relational context it serves to maintain the cohesiveness of the group. By doing one's utmost at all times, one demonstrates that one is fully committed to the group's success. The ever-important approval of others is earned by showing how hard one is willing to work toward the group's goals. At the end of the day, when individuals return home, the standard words of parting are either *Otsukaresama* ("You all must be exhausted") or *Gokurosama* ("You all suffered hard")—reminding everyone how much their mutual *gambari* is appreciated. If an individual leaves before others, she or he will routinely apologize for not being able to continue working with the others, *Osakki ni shitsurei shimasu*. Group harmony is maintained by the understanding that all are doing as much as they can toward the group's success.

Gambari is seen to cultivate the self and strengthen moral character (Singleton, 1995). There is relatively less concern for

what one actually achieves than how hard one worked toward accomplishing it. Again, *gambari* reflects the Japanese concern with process over product (Hess & Azuma, 1991; Lewis, 1995). Individuals internalize the sense that they should always be trying hard to do more as the cohesion of the group depends on this.

Endurance. A related construct, *gaman* ("to endure or bear hardships") also has an integral role in Japanese life (e.g., Benedict, 1946; Duke, 1986; Johnson, 1993; Nitobe, 1969/1905). De Vos (1973a) suggested that "the virtues of endurance and perseverance, the capacity to put off pleasure and to endure suffering, characterize Japanese culture to a degree not paralleled elsewhere" (p. 195). *Gaman* suppresses the ego for the good of the larger collective. Such an emphasis on suffering is evident in many aspects of Japanese culture. For example, popular Japanese culture thrives on the suffering of its heroes. In contrast to the typical ending of a Hollywood movie, in which the hero succeeds in finding love or in catching the bad guy, Japanese stories tend to eschew happy endings and focus on how much pain and suffering their heroes are able to bear (Benedict, 1946; I. Morris, 1975). As Buruma (1984) put it, "one really has to suffer to be popular in Japan" (p. 31).

Many Japanese parents and educators view *gaman* as a primary means for the development of children. Such parents and educators believe that personal hardships remove self-centeredness so that a deeper awareness for the group can be cultivated (Kondo, 1992; White & Levine, 1986). Japan's notorious university entrance examinations serve not only to select students but to help the population to learn to endure suffering (Singleton, 1995). Japanese moral education (*dotoku*), the vehicle by which the cultural mandate is officially transmitted within schools, stresses the importance of *gaman*. The most common theme in *dotoku* books is perseverance in the face of adversity. Lanham (1979) noted that whereas North American educators strive to teach children self-confidence, *dotoku* teaches Japanese children the importance of discipline, perseverance, and hard work. In fact, Lanham found that North American teachers were reluctant to give students tasks that were especially effortful and challenging because teachers felt that this might hinder the development of the children's self-confidence. Japanese teachers, in contrast, believe that their students thrive the most when presented with extremely challenging tasks (Lewis, 1995).

In sum, self-discipline is a critical skill for doing well in Japanese society. To a much greater extent than in North America, success is seen to hinge on making efforts, persevering, and suffering. Self-discipline is a key component of self-improvement for Japanese.

External Frame of Reference

Another aspect of Japanese culture important for understanding the role of self-evaluations is its focus on consensual or external frames of reference (see Nakamura, 1964). Relative to the behavior of North Americans, Japanese behavior is less determined by individuals' internal attributes (e.g., attitudes, personal desires, motives) and more by cues from their social environment (De Vos & Wagatsuma, 1973; Kitayama, Masuda, & Lehman, 1999; Kuwayama, 1992; Lebra, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a). For example, Japanese are significantly more likely than Canadians to

say that their behavior is guided by social norms (Heine, Lehman, Okugawa, & Campbell, 1992). Japanese, then, tend to be particularly sensitive to social information that indicates appropriate ways to behave.

An external frame of reference leads Japanese to have a heightened awareness of their audience (e.g., Johnson, 1993; Kuwayama, 1992; Lebra, 1983; Roland, 1988). In this way, rather than being seen as subjects, they may more aptly be viewed as imagined objects in the eyes of others (Hamaguchi, 1985). This dependence on the attitudes and expectations of others makes Japanese highly sensitive to insults and negative sanctions from others—they are motivated to strive to maintain their public face (De Vos & Wagatsuma, 1973; Fiske et al., 1997; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1993; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994; Ting-Toomey, 1994). Hence Japanese tend to publicly present a formally impeccable self. The individual is protected by layers of insulating rituals—such as codes of formal communication; highly conventionalized forms of greetings; rules for posture, gesture, and so forth—all of which serve to prevent the exposure of the individual self to others (Hendry, 1993; Lebra, 1983). Efforts are made to appease an audience, or an internalized awareness of an audience, as this is the immediate source of self-evaluation.

In contrast, the behavior and attitudes of North Americans are relatively more determined by internal attributes, which, although influenced by others, are understood to be relatively free from ongoing influence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a). This can be seen to generalize to their attitudes about themselves. Because the ultimate judge of North American self-evaluations is the individual, people are relatively resistant to the opinions of others. Although constrained by the objective evidence at hand (e.g., J. D. Brown & Smart, 1991; Kunda, 1990), North Americans are often in the position of deciding for themselves how they are doing. Consequently, they are able to think they are more competent than they really are without encountering many negative consequences for holding these *positive illusions* (Taylor & Brown, 1988; but see Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995, for an opposing view). For example, Myers's (1987) observation that 25% of U.S. high school students believe that they are in the top 1% of the population with respect to the ability to get along well with others reflects how such overly positive beliefs can exist unchallenged. North Americans have developed a number of cognitive maneuvers that allow them to deceive themselves that they more closely approximate their cultural ideals than in fact is the case (Greenwald, 1980). As long as people participating in North American culture can convince themselves of their competence, they have made progress toward realizing their cultural standards of selfhood (see Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1982). This may be one of the underlying reasons why self-deceptive strategies are seen to be associated with mental health in North America (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

In the Japanese case, the process by which favorable evaluations are secured from others appears to be diametrically opposed to the process of self-enhancement. As we have argued, when the standards of excellence are externally and consensually defined, the driving force is to avoid transgressions (Creighton, 1990; Lee & Seligman, 1997) rather than to excel on one's own. Reflecting this, Kumon (1982) characterized the Japanese way of competition as *yokonarabi* ("to line up sideways"), in which the emphasis is not on surpassing others (which seems to be a strong motivation in

North America; see, e.g., Wills, 1981), but rather on not falling behind others. This concern over not transgressing shared norms, as opposed to excelling as an individual, suggests that a sense of well-being would stem not so much from a positive evaluation of the self but from the ability to actively respond to and eliminate deficits with respect to the socially shared, consensual standards of excellence (Kitayama & Markus, in press). Hence, the absence of negative features—features that potentially impeded the individual from receiving the group's approval—may be crucial for Japanese well-being.

Shame and Apologies

In her classic ethnographic account of the Japanese, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, Benedict (1946) characterized Japan as a *shame culture* in contrast to the *guilt cultures* of the West. Although the extreme nature of this assertion has been criticized by a number of researchers (e.g., De Vos, 1973b; Sakuta, 1967), most are in agreement that shame occupies a privileged position for Japanese (e.g., Creighton, 1990; Doi, 1973; Johnson, 1993; Kuwayama, 1992).

Lebra (1983) offered two reasons for the pervasiveness of shame in Japanese culture. First, she argued that because Japanese cultural norms are especially well-defined and clearly prescribe normatively appropriate ways of behaving (Heine et al., 1992), violations are readily recognized and sanctioned. Second, she contended that Japanese spend much of their lives in the presence of significant audiences, thereby making them acutely aware of any unwanted attention. Shame arises for people engaged in Japanese culture when they are unable to perform to the standards necessary to maintain harmonious interactions within the group (Creighton, 1990). Shame serves as a social barometer indicating when the individual has transgressed the standards that sustain the ever-important group solidarity. Hence, the Japanese predisposition toward shame reflects the importance of being sensitive to information indicating how the individual is not doing enough for the group.

The effort expended toward ensuring that the individual is not interfering with the harmony of the group can also be seen in the importance of apologies in Japan. An article in *The New York Times* called Japan "the most apologetic country in the world" (Kristof, 1995, p. 1). Empirical studies (e.g., Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990) have confirmed that apologies are more common in Japan than in North America; they abound in daily conversation and play an integral role in the Japanese judicial system (Bayley, 1976; Wagatsuma & Rosett, 1986). In many situations, social customs require apologies, even when the individual is not directly responsible, and failure to apologize in these situations can be met with harsh sanctions (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990). Certainly, apologetic scripts may become so habitual that apologies are offered even when they do not reflect how the individual truly feels. Nonetheless, it seems to us that habitually emphasizing one's deferential position, in contrast to habitually denying that one is to blame, will enhance an individual's sensitivity to his or her faults. Cultural conventions, therefore, can be seen to strongly encourage Japanese to take on a self-denigrating and submissive stance through apologies (Wagatsuma & Rosett, 1986).

Apologies reflect the critical self-evaluative nature of Japanese. Barnlund and Yoshioka (1990) viewed apologies in Japan

as symptoms of inadequacy. They are public admissions of an individual's faults. Wagatsuma and Rosett (1986) explained the relative lack of apologies by North Americans in terms of the high value that North Americans place on self-esteem—self-denigrating acts such as apologies are simply too costly psychologically. The habit of accepting fault, even in situations in which responsibility is clearly absent, runs directly counter to self-enhancing orientations. Apologies reflect the Japanese concern of being an imposition on others; they serve to minimize the individual, allowing for the proverbial nail to get pounded down.

Emotional Restraint and Balance

The experience of emotions is conditioned and shaped by culturally sanctioned socialization processes, suggesting that many cultural differences may exist in this realm as well. For example, in North American culture, in which the self is viewed to be largely constructed on a foundation of internal attributes, emotions are allowed to gain autonomy. Emotional experience can be seen as an important aspect of identity for the independent self. Hence, in the West the evaluative connotation of emotional experience can be seen to reflect the inner core of the self. Feeling good about oneself suggests that one is an adequate individual. In contrast, the experience of certain negative emotions can indicate that one is somehow failing to live up to the cultural imperatives of individuality. North Americans are thus likely to be highly motivated to increase and enhance subjectively positive feelings and to decrease and reinterpret subjectively negative feelings (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1994b).

In contrast, when individuals are motivated to maintain a sense of connection and relatedness with others, emotional experience is potentially a disruptive force. It is critical for individuals in Japanese culture to act in accordance with the wishes of the group, not on the basis of their own feelings. Hence, in Japan it is not functional for emotions to attain autonomy. Affect is viewed as something to be controlled, subdued, and diluted (Lanham, 1988; Lebra, 1976; Nitobe, 1969/1905). This is evident in Japanese melodramas, in which the most poignant scenes are those in which the actor quashes obviously potent emotions (Buruma, 1984). Emotional experience tends to be accepted as is or is to be moderated and restrained (Kitayama, Markus, & Kurokawa, 1999). Accordingly, in Japan there is likely to be relatively less motivation to enhance positive feelings.

These hypothesized tendencies for North Americans to enhance their positive emotional experiences and for Japanese to accept or moderate their emotional experiences suggest that North Americans will experience relatively more positive emotions than Japanese. In a study that clearly demonstrated this cultural difference, both American and Japanese students were asked to report the frequency with which they experienced a broad range of emotions (Markus & Kitayama, 1994b). Whereas Americans reported experiencing a far greater proportion of positive than negative emotions (see Brandstatter, 1991, for similar findings with Europeans), Japanese reported experiencing about the same amount of positive and negative emotions (see Tsai & Levenson, 1997, for similar findings with Asian Americans). This observed cultural difference was echoed by Diener and Diener (1995): "Life satisfaction may be

based more on positive feelings in individualistic nations, for example, feelings about the self. Conversely, in collectivist nations life satisfaction might be influenced by a more prevalent negative focus" (p. 662). Similarly, Suh, Diener, Oishi, and Triandis (1998) demonstrated that the relation between life satisfaction and positive feelings is positively correlated with individualism across nations, whereas collectivism is positively correlated with the relation between life satisfaction and adherence to norms.

Differences in attitudes regarding positive feelings are also evident in cross-cultural studies of child rearing. Caudill and Weinstein (1969) found a strong positive correlation between the frequency of American mothers' chatting with their babies and their infants' "happy vocals," whereas there was no correlation between the mothers' chatting and the babies' "unhappy vocals." The American mother thus appears to elicit and reinforce her baby's happy vocalizations. In contrast, Japanese mothers' chatting was significantly correlated with their babies' unhappy vocals but not with their happy vocals. Caudill and Weinstein argued that the Japanese mothers' chatting served to soothe their babies, rather than to reinforce their happy vocalizations. Even in infancy, then, we observe cultural differences in the encouragement of positive feelings.

Cultural differences in positive emotional experiences are particularly strong with respect to happiness. Being happy is a basic value for most Americans. The U.S. Declaration of Independence, for example, proclaims that the pursuit of happiness is a fundamental right of its citizens. Failing to be happy in America implies that one is somehow failing to realize the cultural mandate. Hence, it is not surprising that Americans report being exceptionally happy. T. W. Smith's (1979) review of national surveys from the 1940s to the 1970s revealed that the percentage of Americans reporting happiness has always been above 80%. Americans think about happiness on a daily basis and rate personal happiness as especially important (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995; Lyubomirsky, 1997).

In contrast, Benedict (1946, p. 192) argued that Japanese view the pursuit of happiness as somewhat of an "immoral doctrine" as it interferes with other more important cultural tasks such as fulfilling one's obligations toward others. This concern with an emphasis on positive feelings was clearly articulated by the Japanese scholar, Shozo Ogiya, after his first trip to the United States:

The scene was repeated many tens of times, and every time the first and last words of greeting were: "Mr. Ogiya, are you enjoying your American tour?" "Well, Mr. Ogiya, I hope you enjoy your plane trip from here." At first, whenever I heard the word enjoy I was struck by a feeling of strangeness. In our daily lives the word enjoy has a special position. With its meaning of "finding pleasure in" or perhaps of "being merry about" this word—at least to those of my generation—has nuances that smack of the immoral . . . There are unemployed in America. In England and Italy there are crowds of the poor. What I mean to say is that in these countries the word enjoy has firmly put down roots into people's lives whether they have money or not. It is so to speak a basic principle of their attitude toward living—this is the point I'm trying to make. (as quoted in Plath, 1964, p. 68)

The Japanese social psychologist Hiroshi Minami (1971) suggested,

It seems that feelings about happiness in life are for some reason diluted among the Japanese. The reason that the word "happiness" is not used daily is not only because the Japanese masses are not blessed with happiness in daily life but because they have cultivated a habit of hesitation toward happiness. (p. 34)

Minami further argued that "a view of unhappiness or hardship that is unique to the Japanese has become a sort of psychological tradition" (p. 49). Reflecting these different attitudes about happiness, Heine (1996) noted in a cross-cultural comparison of values that whereas Asian Canadians and European Canadians ranked happiness 1st and 2nd, respectively, in terms of its desirability among 20 traits, Japanese ranked it 18th. Clearly, the data suggest that happiness is not sought after to the same extent in Japan as it is in North America (see Lyubomirsky, 1997, for similar findings with Russians).

This hesitation toward happiness is rooted in the philosophical and spiritual traditions of Japanese culture (see Nakamura, 1964). A key characteristic of Japanese thought is a sense of balance. The good is counterbalanced by the bad, and happiness is offset by sadness. Likewise, enduring pain and hardship is recognized as a stepping-stone toward improvement; it may also invite feelings such as sympathy from others in a relationship (Kitayama & Markus, in press; Kitayama & Uchida, 1999). Moreover, Buddhism emphasizes the transience of all things, including positive feelings (Minami, 1971). Japanese tend to believe their happy experiences will soon come to an end and are often concerned that they will have to "pay" for their happiness later on to restore the sense of balance (Lebra, 1976). Indeed, an expression that one often hears in Japan (particularly among women) is "I am so happy I am afraid" (*shiawase sugite kowai*), emphasizing the fear of this payback. Japanese are thus quite hesitant to focus or dwell on positive feelings.

The cautious attitude of the Japanese toward happiness appears to extend to other Asian cultures. For example, Feather (1986) found happiness to be a less important value in China than in Australia. Diener, Suh, et al. (1995) noted that people from East Asian countries (e.g., Japan, the People's Republic of China, and South Korea) had lower subjective well-being and happiness scores than would be predicted from their per capita income. Their analysis of the data ruled out several potential artifactual reasons for the low scores of Asians (e.g., general negative response biases, efforts to appear humble, cultural norms governing the expression of emotions). Diener, Suh, et al. concluded that Asians have such low satisfaction and happiness scores because feeling and expressing positive affect is less desirable within East Asian cultures than it is in the West. Asian cultures thus do not appear to cultivate the need to experience positive feelings about the self. In North America attitudes toward happiness can be represented by a simple calculus: more is better. In Japan and elsewhere in Asia the formula appears to be considerably more complicated: it seems to encourage a careful balancing of happiness and its opposite (Kitayama & Markus, 1999, in press).

Summary

Our initial review has elaborated how various aspects of Japanese culture that impact on self-evaluations differ from those in North American culture. In contrast to North American

culture, Japanese culture does not encourage its people to seek out, enhance, and elaborate their positive characteristics. Rather, Japanese culture contains various interpersonal scripts that reflect a self-critical orientation. Having developed their sense of self as a function of the cultural system within which they grew up, the Japanese motivation for interdependence and embeddedness leads them to continually make efforts to better approximate the culturally defined standards within a given context. A succinct summary of the review so far is that whereas North Americans develop psychological systems that encourage them to focus on the ways in which (they think) they are good, Japanese develop psychological systems that focus awareness on how (in the eyes of others) they can strive to become better (for a more detailed review of these ideas and their related practices, see Bellah et al., 1985; Fiske et al., 1997; Shweder et al., 1998, for the American case and Bachnik & Quinn, 1994; Barnlund, 1975; Kondo, 1990; Lebra, 1976; Rosenberger, 1992, for the Japanese case).

Evidence Bearing on a Need for Positive Self-Regard in North America and in Japan

Whereas North American views of self focus on people's strengths, the Japanese ideals of selfhood lead to a pervasive concern with one's weaknesses. The issue of whether there is indeed a universal need for positive self-regard as postulated by so many influential theorists in psychology must, however, be evaluated with respect to the empirical evidence. In the following section, we discuss such evidence from psychological studies conducted primarily in Japan and in North America that bears on the issue of a need for positive self-regard. The studies that we review are grouped into five categories: those indicating (a) whether people possess positive self-views, (b) the relations of positive self-views to cultural values, (c) the extent of a discourse on the importance of positive self-views, (d) whether people enhance the positivity of their self-views, and (e) whether people strive to maintain a positive self-view.

Possessing a Positive Self-View

We begin our empirical analysis by examining the data most germane to our question of whether the need for positive self-regard differs between cultures: namely, the prevalence of positive self-views within North America and Japan. Within the North American psychological literature, it has become a truism that the typical self-view is a positive self-view. In a review of Western self-esteem studies, Baumeister et al. (1989) observed that, without exception, the mean or median self-esteem scores were higher than the conceptual midpoints of the scales, regardless of the measures used. Thus, the distributions of self-esteem scores are heavily skewed such that the vast majority of North Americans report having high self-esteem. For example, a typical distribution is shown in Figure 1, based on Heine and Lehman's (1999b) meta-analysis of global self-esteem scores (Rosenberg, 1965) of European Canadians. The characteristic self-evaluation for European Canadians, living in a culture characterized by independence and individualism, is unambiguously positive. Across countless studies, the skewness is so pronounced in similar distributions that most North Americans who are classified as having "low self-

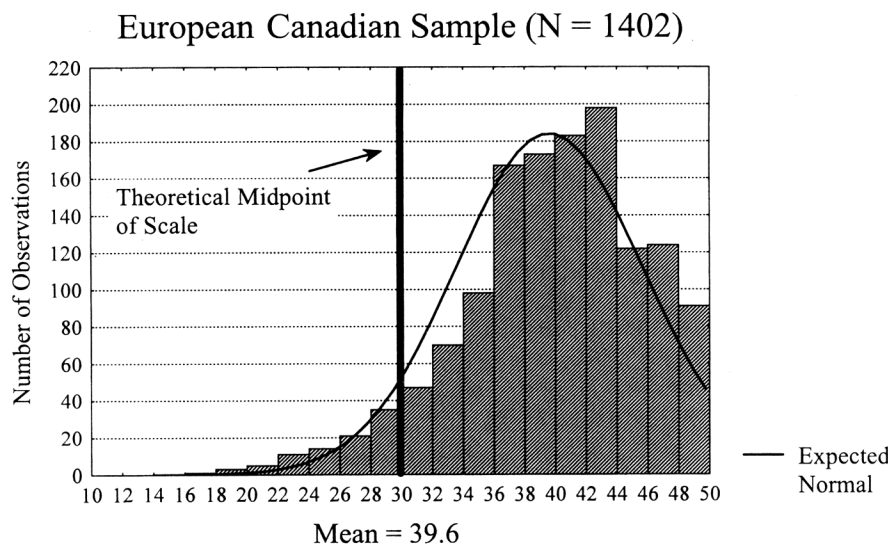


Figure 1. Distribution of self-esteem scores among European Canadians.

esteem” by means of median splits, a common classification scheme, actually have moderate self-esteem scores in an absolute sense (Baumeister et al., 1989). North Americans who tend not to endorse items about their value as an individual (i.e., who score below the theoretical midpoint on self-esteem inventories) are rare (e.g., less than 7% in Heine & Lehman’s European Canadian sample).

In contrast, such positive self-views are not as common among Japanese. Kashiwagi (1986) suggests that a “negative evaluation of the self, or strong awareness of weaker aspects of self, is sometimes pointed to as one of the general characteristics of self-concept among the Japanese” (p. 180). These negative self-views are reflected in their self-esteem scores, which consistently have been shown to be lower than those of North Americans (e.g., Bond & Cheung, 1983; Campbell et al., 1996; Mahler, 1976). And in contrast to the heavily skewed distributions found in North American studies of self-esteem, Japanese’ mean self-esteem scores approach the theoretical midpoint of the scale (Diener & Diener, 1995). A meta-analysis of global self-esteem scores (Rosenberg, 1965)³ of Japanese who have never lived outside of Japan reveals a strikingly different distribution than that of the European Canadians (Heine & Lehman, 1999b, see Figure 2). The typical self-evaluation for Japanese is *moderate* and is approximately as normally distributed as any naturally occurring phenomenon. It deserves mention that these differences in self-esteem scores between North Americans and Japanese do not appear simply to be a function of moderacy response sets (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995) or idiosyncrasies associated with the Rosenberg scale—similar cultural differences are found with open-ended response formats (Bond & Cheung, 1983; Yeh, 1995). Nor do they appear to be due to cultural differences in socially desirable responding (Diener, Suh, et al., 1995; Heine & Lehman, 1995b; Lai & Linden, 1993), an important issue to which we return below.

The notion that North American culture fosters the development of positive self-views has received additional support in recent investigations of self-concept change associated with accultura-

tion. In the aforementioned meta-analysis of global self-esteem scores, Heine and Lehman (1999b) classified over 4,000 Canadian and Japanese students on a continuum with respect to their exposure to North American culture. In increasing order of exposure they were (a) Japanese who had never been outside Japan; (b) Japanese who had spent time in a Western country; (c) recent Asian immigrants (from a number of Asian countries) to Canada; (d) Asians who immigrated to Canada several years ago; (e) second generation Asian-descent Canadians; (f) third generation Asian-descent Canadians; and, finally, (g) European-descent Canadians. This classification resulted in a remarkably clear relation between exposure to North American culture and self-esteem (see Figure 3). The longer those of Asian descent had spent participating in North American culture, the higher were their self-esteem scores, to the point that the scores of third generation Asian Canadians were indistinguishable from European Canadians.

Three recent longitudinal acculturation studies (Heine & Lehman, 1997a) provide additional evidence that engagement in North American culture fosters the development of positive self-views. In the first study, self-esteem scores (again measured by the Rosenberg, 1965, scale) of visiting Japanese exchange students collected a few days after their arrival in Canada were compared with scores collected 7 months later. The average self-esteem scores of the visiting Japanese students increased significantly by 1.8 points over this time. A complementary longitudinal study

³ We have employed Rosenberg’s (1965) scale as it measures self-esteem in terms of *global* qualities of the self (see Crocker & Wolfe, 1998), which should prevent spurious cultural differences from emerging by tapping into specific attributes that are more meaningful in one culture than the other. Sample items from this scale include: “I am able to do things as well as most other people,” “I take a positive attitude toward myself,” and “All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.” We found that Canadians had significantly more positive self-views than Japanese for all items except “I certainly feel useless at times,” for which there was no cultural difference (Heine & Lehman, 1999b).

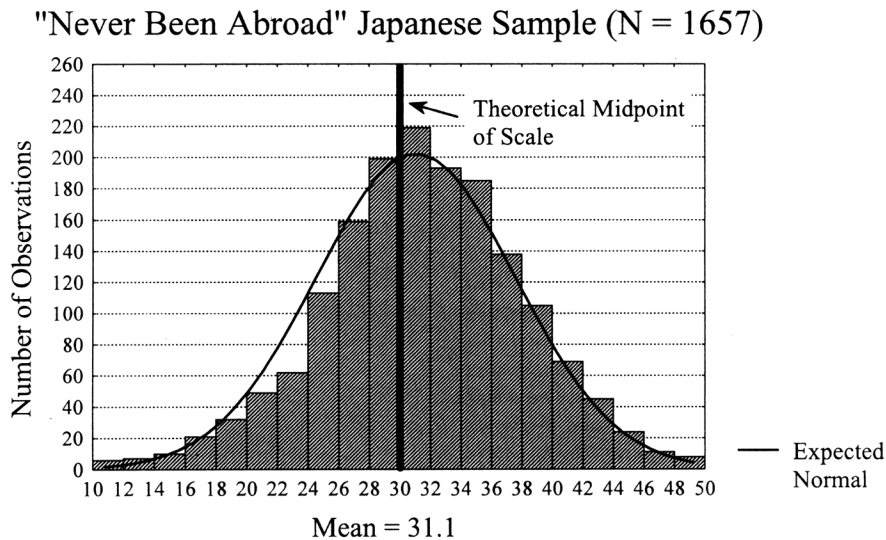


Figure 2. Distribution of self-esteem scores among Japanese who have never lived outside of Japan.

was conducted with Canadian English teachers who went to live in Japan. Their self-esteem was measured before they left Canada and then again 7 months after arriving in Japan. The Canadian teachers exhibited a significant decrease in self-esteem of 1.0 points over

this time. A third longitudinal study measured self-esteem in a second group of Japanese students before they left Japan, and then again 7 months after their arrival in Canada. In this study, Japanese exhibited a nonsignificant increase in self-esteem of 0.3 points after living in Canada. In this latter study, however, a significant correlation ($r = .32$) emerged between the students' self-esteem change and their acculturation attitudes: Those students who had assimilated and integrated the most into Canadian life exhibited greater self-esteem increases than those students who were more likely to preserve their original cultural lifestyle.

Taken together, these data suggest that individuals' evaluations of themselves are responsive to the cultural context within which they interact. It appears that participating in a North American cultural context leads Japanese (and Asians in general) to attend more to their positive features as individuals and thus increases their overall positive self-evaluations (especially for those with assimilating and integrating attitudes toward Canadian culture). In contrast, living in Japan seems to lead North Americans to experience a decrease in the positivity of their self-evaluations. Relative to that of Japan, North American culture appears to cultivate positive self-views.

It is possible that there exists a different kind of self-esteem that is more characteristic of Japanese than North Americans. That there may be such an entity as "Japanese self-esteem" distinct from "North American self-esteem" is an important consideration to which we return below.

Correlates of Cultural Values and Self-Esteem

Our basic premise is that the field's current conceptualization of self-esteem is a prototypic North American psychological construct. That is, North American cultural values, notably independence and individualism, bear an integral relation to self-esteem. Considerable cross-cultural research is consistent with this claim. For example, Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995) investigated the correlates of subjective well-being in a large multinational study. They found that the only variable that contributed unique variance

Self-Esteem and Exposure to North American Culture

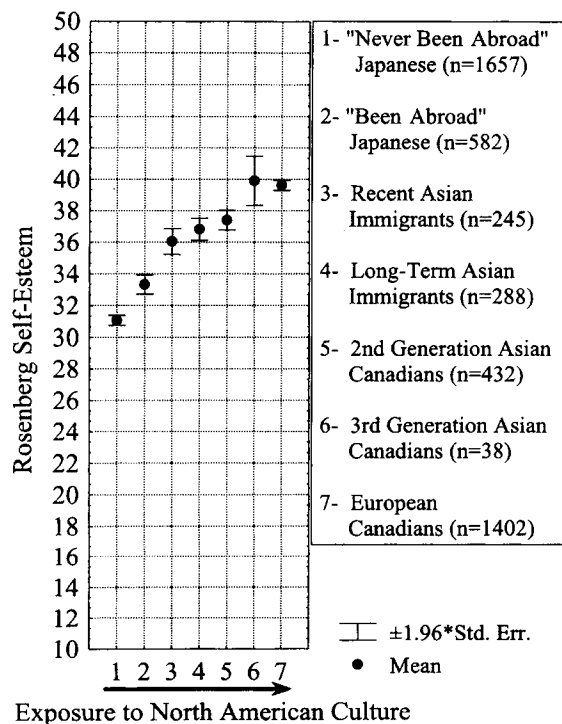


Figure 3. Global self-esteem scores and exposure to Western culture. Std. Err. = standard error.

in predicting subjective well-being (which correlates highly with self-esteem; Diener, 1984) was individualism. They concluded that "a feeling of autonomy may be important in achieving subjective well-being" (p. 863). Feather (1991) demonstrated that self-esteem is more typical of people with an independent view of self within Western cultures and that self-esteem correlates positively with values such as self-direction, achievement, and personal competence. Mickelson, Crocker, and Kessler (as cited in Crocker & Wolfe, 1998) found that the belief that success can be found through determination and hard work independent of others' help (a.k.a. John Henryism) was a strong predictor of self-esteem even when the variance from 10 other personality characteristics was controlled. Singelis, Bond, Lai, and Sharkey (1995) demonstrated that the relation between self-esteem and independence is evident in East Asian cultures as well. Moreover, Singelis et al. provided evidence that an interdependent view of self did not predict self-esteem, even in East Asian cultures (for similar conclusions, see Kiuchi, 1996; Yamaguchi, 1994).

A meta-analysis of the relations between self-esteem (measured by the Rosenberg, 1965, scale) and independence and interdependence (measured by Singelis's, 1994, Independence/Interdependence Scale) across several studies of Canadians and Japanese conducted by Heine and Lehman (1999b) also highlighted the link between Western cultural values and self-esteem. Independence was strongly positively related to self-esteem among European Canadians, Asian Canadians, and Japanese (see Table 1). Regardless of the cultural group, independence bears a clear relation with self-esteem. There appears to be something similar about saying on the one hand that one is independent, able to take care of oneself, and has one's own opinions and on the other hand that one feels like a valuable individual, and this relation exists not just in North America but in Japan as well. This strongly suggests that viewing the self as a unique, self-sufficient agent is akin to viewing the self positively.

Interdependence, on the other hand, was only weakly related to self-esteem across the three cultural groups, and what relation did exist was in the negative direction. Saying that one is interdependent with others, compromises one's individual desires to fit in better with others, seeks external norms for one's behavior, are, for the most part, unrelated to self-esteem, but if anything run counter to self-esteem. And this absence of a positive relation also holds for Japanese, for whom an important cultural value is interdependence. This finding directly challenges universalist conceptions of self-esteem. If self-esteem is truly the universal prize for doing something well that is important to oneself, as self-efficacy theories of self-esteem suggest (e.g., Bandura, 1982; Deci & Ryan, 1995; Kernis, 1995), then it follows that Japanese self-esteem

should correlate positively with interdependence (i.e., the view of self which they appear to value most). That there is no evidence for this relation, and that Japanese self-esteem, like American self-esteem, correlates positively with independence, runs counter to universalist theories of self-esteem. Indeed, these correlations suggest that the self-esteem construct hinges on an independent view of the self.

Investigators have examined relations between self-esteem and other constructs that universalist theories might predict to be more highly related to Japanese self-esteem: for example, perceived inclusiveness (Leary et al., 1995), parental treatment (Swann & Tafarodi, 1992), and satisfaction with one's relationships (Endo, Heine, & Lehman, in press). Yet correlational analyses by Heine, Endo, and Lehman (1999) have revealed that none of these constructs differed in their relations to global self-esteem (Rosenberg, 1965) or self-liking or self-competence (Tafarodi & Swann, 1996) between North Americans and Japanese. That is, self-esteem for Japanese does not appear to hinge more on interdependent-type traits than it does for North Americans. Similarly, whereas *primary control*, the dominant form for expressing control in North America, correlates positively with self-esteem for both North Americans and Japanese, the so-called *secondary* locus of control, which is argued to better characterize Japanese (Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984), is orthogonal to self-esteem (Morling & Fiske, 1999; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 1999). Cultural differences in self-esteem thus do not appear simply to be a function of self-esteem being based on different content across cultures. Rather these findings are consistent with the notion that self-esteem as it is currently operationalized is based on relatively similar constructs across cultures and is more characteristic of daily experience in North America than it is in Japan (Kitayama et al., 1997).

The Cultural Discourse of Self-Esteem

A barometer for the importance of the construct of self-esteem is how much cultural discourse there is regarding the topic. Anyone spending much time in North America, and to a lesser extent in Western Europe and Australia, has no doubt been subjected to the burgeoning discourse of the importance of self-esteem (for a review, see Seligman, 1995). Some recent examples will suffice: Since the introduction of the "California Task Force on Self-Esteem," every February in California is "Self-Esteem Month"; the mandates in many North American school systems now explicitly include building self-esteem as a major priority; Polaroid recently sponsored a "Self-Esteem Sweepstakes" in which contestants were to take pictures of self-esteem building activities; and an Internet search with the key word "self-esteem" turned up over 130,000 documents, which, among other things, advertise various self-esteem building services (e.g., camps for teens, ski retreats, fitness programs, workshops) and products (e.g., subliminal cassettes, cards, stamps, herbal products, board games, CD-ROMs, videotapes). This booming industry is not confined to the popular masses: Self-esteem remains one of the most researched constructs in psychology, with over 16,000 published studies investigating it since 1966. It appears that a significant pulse in Western (particularly North American) culture is the belief that there is not a psychological wound deep enough that a good dose of self-esteem cannot cure it. J. D. Brown (1998) declared that "self-esteem has

Table 1
Correlations Between Independence and Interdependence and Self-Esteem

Measure	European Canadians (<i>n</i> = 615)	Asian Canadians (<i>n</i> = 330)	Japanese (<i>n</i> = 597)
Independence	.42**	.43**	.33**
Interdependence	-.18**	-.14*	-.08

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

become the panacea of modern times" (p. 190). It is one of the most characteristic discourses of late-20th-century American society.

In contrast, this discourse of the importance of self-esteem is rarely heard in Japan. In a cross-cultural comparison of the content of women's magazines, Takayanagi (1995) found a much greater portion of North American articles discussing self-esteem and the pursuit of happiness than their Japanese counterparts. Although there are few empirical investigations comparing the extent of a discourse on self-esteem, casual observations of the differences between North America and Japan are striking. Bookstores in Japan do not have shelves filled with books about building self-esteem. Japanese teachers tend to encourage children to focus on what they didn't do well enough, rather than on how talented they each are (Lewis, 1995). Compared with the dominance of the topic of self-esteem among North American psychologists, relatively few Japanese psychologists have engaged in its study. And it is reasonable to speculate that the little discourse on self-esteem that one does hear in Japan is an importation of Western psychological ideas—an effort to find out what it is that those Americans are so excited about. This notion is supported by the fact that such books and discussions typically use the imported word *serufu esutiumu* (i.e., "self-esteem" pronounced with the Japanese syllabary).

That this new word, which is still not in the vocabulary of many, perhaps most, Japanese, is not indigenous to the language is telling. The indigenous words that come closest to approximating self-esteem, namely "self-confidence" (*jishin*) and "self-respect" (*jisonshin*), can have some negative connotations in Japanese.⁴ Indeed, in certain contexts the words convey the negative aspects of feeling confident in Japan, words that have a similar feel to the English words *conceited* and *arrogant*. Feeling confident about oneself indicates how one is distinct from, and not interdependent with, others—something that challenges the integrity of the collective (see Nakane, 1970). That the Japanese language uses a foreign word to express the positive qualities of thinking highly about oneself indicates the low cultural value that this construct receives in Japan. Self-confidence and self-esteem, so clearly positive and necessary determinants of success in North America, simply do not seem to be as valued in Japan (see also Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, Takata, & Ide, 1999). Such diametrically opposed evaluations of the value of self-confidence and self-esteem between cultures force us to question the universality of motivations to possess a positive self-view.

Japanese culture thus does not appear to maintain a significant discourse regarding the importance of self-esteem. This discourse may be precluded by particular cultural factors that are absent in North America. For example, Confucian concerns with modesty may render discussions of self-esteem distasteful. Or the hierarchical respect for the elderly in Japan might discourage adults from lavishing excessive praise on children. However, it is these very cultural factors that serve to shape the selfway and direct what is meaningful and what is important. The relative absence of this discourse is strongly suggestive that Japanese culture neither sustains nor accommodates the current conceptualization of self-esteem to the same extent as North American culture. If self-esteem is truly a universal need, and on average Japanese report having so much less of it than North Americans, it would seem that Japanese would be the ones more concerned about securing it. Cultural discourses as evidenced by their representation in the

media and in daily conversations are important characteristics of selfways that deserve further investigation in cultural psychology (e.g., Kim & Markus, 1999).

Enhancing the Positivity of One's Self-View

The importance of a positive self-view in North American culture is further documented in research on self-enhancement. Reviews of this literature (e.g., Bradley, 1978; Greenwald, 1980; D. T. Miller & Ross, 1975; Taylor & Brown, 1988) indicate that the typical North American's self-evaluation is fraught with inaccurate and distorted perceptions. These are not simply random errors; rather, individuals' self-perceptions tend to be systematically biased toward an overly positive view of the self. Many studies report that when evaluating themselves, people often compromise accuracy in favor of information that inflates their perceptions of themselves. For example, people seem to remember their past performance as better than it actually was (Crary, 1966), married individuals claim more responsibility than their spouses give them credit for in household tasks (Ross & Sicoly, 1979), people judge positive personality attributes to be more appropriate in describing themselves than in describing others (Alicke, 1985), and people tend to take credit for success, yet attribute failure to the situation (see Zuckerman, 1979, for a review). Such distorted self-perceptions appear so frequently and consistently in North American studies that some have argued that they are endemic to the human condition; be they information-processing errors (D. T. Miller & Ross, 1975), egocentric knowledge organizations that are products of an *intrapsychic evolution* (Greenwald, 1980), or self-protective tactics that foster the attainment of mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Recently, an important controversy has arisen regarding how common, and how beneficial, these positive illusions are (Colvin & Block, 1994; Colvin et al., 1995; John & Robins, 1994; Paulhus, 1998). We think it is fair to say, however, that the literature is consistent in revealing pronounced positive distortions in the self-views of North Americans.

The motivations of North Americans to enhance their self-evaluations can be understood within the context of cultural values. Self-serving biases augment aspects of the self (e.g., competence, adequacy) that are critical for individual North American selves to resonate with their respective selfways. Viewing oneself in overly positive terms subjectively narrows the discrepancy between reality and the cultural ideals of self-contained individuality (Heine & Lehman, 1995a, 1996). Moreover, as these self-serving biases are more apparent among North Americans with high self-esteem than those with low self-esteem (e.g., Alloy &

⁴ In a recent study (Heine, 1996) Japanese and Canadian students were compared with respect to their evaluations of the meaning of "self-confidence," a trait that is highly correlated with self-esteem (e.g., Garant, Charest, Alain, & Thomassin, 1995). Participants were asked to evaluate a list of 20 traits in terms of how important the traits were for succeeding in their cultures and in terms of how much they ideally would like to possess the traits. European Canadians rated self-confidence as the second most important trait of the 20, and as the trait that they would most like to possess of the 20. In stark contrast, Japanese rated self-confidence as the 18th most important trait, and as the trait that they would least like to possess out of the 20. The ratings for Asian Canadians fell in between (5th for importance, and 6th for desirability).

Ahrens, 1987; Campbell, 1986; Josephs, Markus, & Tarafodi, 1992), the biases are more typical of those more successfully realizing the North American cultural mandate (Solomon et al., 1991a). Such biases therefore can be seen to characterize the "normal" way of thinking of North Americans (Taylor & Brown, 1988; but for an opposing view, see Colvin & Block, 1994).

However, the value of such self-enhancement within Japanese culture is dubious (Heine & Lehman, 1995a, 1996; Kitayama et al., 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). Enhancing one's own attributes should not bring individuals any closer to cultural ideals of interpersonal harmony and a sense of belonging. If anything, calling attention to the individual in this way would weaken the solidarity of the group (De Vos, 1985; Nakane, 1970). We should thus expect that Japanese would be more concerned with being interdependent with others as opposed to being better than others. It follows, then, that Japanese should exhibit less self-serving ways of thinking than North Americans.

Indeed, this is what the cross-cultural literature indicates. For example, although the *false uniqueness bias* (i.e., the tendency to see oneself as better than most others) has consistently been observed among North Americans (e.g., Campbell, 1986; Marks, 1984), Japanese do not exhibit this same tendency (Heine & Lehman, 1997b; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a), even when they are evaluating themselves on attributes that they view as most important to succeeding in their culture (Heine & Lehman, 1999a). Similarly, whereas self-serving biases are common in the North American attribution literature, where typically success is attributed to internal factors and failure is explained away to external factors (Zuckerman, 1979), Japanese tend to attribute failures as much as successes to their own (in)abilities (Kitayama et al., 1995; Meijer & Semin, 1998).

Closely related to the self-serving bias is the tendency for people to believe they are more likely to experience positive events and less likely to experience negative events than is the average other. This has been dubbed the *unrealistic optimism bias*, one of the most robust self-serving biases documented in the North American literature (e.g., Perloff & Fetzer, 1986; Weinstein, 1980). However, Japanese do not exhibit much evidence of this bias and in some situations are unrealistically pessimistic (Heine & Lehman, 1995a). We know of no studies that have demonstrated consistent self-serving biases in Japanese. Moreover, there is little evidence to suggest that Japanese exhibit group-serving biases to the same extent as North Americans (see Heine & Lehman, 1997b, for a review), a point to which we return below.

Maintaining a Positive Self-View

Further testimony to the importance of positive self-views in North American culture is found in research on self-evaluation maintenance. This literature documents the variety of compensatory self-protective responses that are elicited when people encounter threats to their self-esteem. For example, Tesser and his colleagues have demonstrated that people try to maintain a positive self-view by engaging in either reflection or comparison processes with a successful close other, depending on the relevance of the dimension at hand to their self-concept. When a close other outperforms one on a highly relevant task, Tesser (1988) argued that this amounts to a threat to one's self-esteem. To counter this threat and to preserve a positive self-evaluation, individuals must manip-

ulate whatever aspects of the threatening situation are most amenable. For example, they may create greater interpersonal distance between themselves and a successfully performing other (Pleban & Tesser, 1981), sabotage a friend's successful performance (Tesser & Smith, 1980), perceive a friend's performance less positively (Tesser & Campbell, 1982), or devalue the relevance of the task (Tesser & Paulhus, 1983). Above all else, the individual's positive self-view must be maintained.

Several other self-protective strategies have been identified in the literature—for example, self-affirmation (e.g., Steele, 1988), compensatory self-enhancement (e.g., Baumeister & Jones, 1978; J. D. Brown & Smart, 1991), basking and blasting (Cialdini & Richardson, 1980), downward social comparison (see Wills, 1981; Wood, 1989, for reviews), compensatory responses to embarrassment (e.g., Apsler, 1975), motivated reasoning (e.g., Kunda, 1990; Lehman & Taylor, 1987), self-handicapping (e.g., Berglas & Jones, 1978; Tice, 1991), dismissing the importance of a poorly performed task (J. D. Brown, Dutton, & Cooke, 1998), dismissing the accuracy of negative feedback (Shrauger, 1975), and defensive pessimism (Norem & Cantor, 1986). That such a wide variety of self-esteem maintenance tactics exists highlights the importance of maintaining a positive self-evaluation, at least within North American culture.

These various compensatory responses to self-esteem threat can be viewed as mechanisms by which North Americans adhere to their cultural imperatives. Presumably, negative information about the self is incompatible with the view emphasized by the North American selfway of being independent and self-sufficient. Perhaps when North Americans are made aware of negative aspects of their selves, the discrepancy between the cultural ideal and their perceived shortcomings becomes painfully evident. When this occurs, some form of action is necessary to reinstate a self-view that more closely approximates the North American cultural criteria.

For people engaged in Japanese culture, in contrast, approximating the cultural ideals of selfhood does not require individuals to dispel thoughts of their own inadequacies. As we have maintained, negative information about the self serves to indicate deficiencies that require remedying for the individual to better harmonize with the group. Instilling a positive view of the self through any of the aforementioned compensatory means should not serve to bring Japanese individuals' self-assessments any closer to cultural ideals of belongingness. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that Japanese would not exhibit as strong a need to maintain a positive self-view and they would engage in fewer self-protective responses to self-esteem threat than would North Americans.

Indeed, we are unable to find clear and consistent evidence of any self-esteem maintenance strategies within the Japanese psychological literature. The only program of research in Japan that we are aware of that purports to show clear self-evaluation maintenance strategies among Japanese is Isozaki and colleagues' (Isozaki, 1994; Isozaki & Takahashi, 1988, 1993) replication of a study by Tesser, Campbell, and Smith (1984). Tesser et al. investigated students' distortions of their own and their close friend's performance in class. Specifically, they found that whereas American students overestimated their own performance in relevant activities compared to a benchmark measure, they tended to overestimate the performance of a close other in irrelevant activities.

That is, American individuals appear motivated to bolster their performance in self-relevant domains and to associate themselves with competent others in self-irrelevant domains.

Following the basic outline of this procedure, Isozaki and colleagues conducted several studies in Japan and found an analogous pattern to that of the Americans with respect to students' evaluations of themselves and their friends. However, a closer scrutiny of the data reveals considerable cross-cultural differences in distortions of the self and others. The most important divergence occurred when students' own ratings were compared with a benchmark measure—in this case, the actual grades in the relevant school subjects. Overall, the Japanese students overestimated both their own and their close other's performance (the overestimation of own performance is evidence for some self-enhancement in this study). However, the overestimation tended to be most pronounced when the target was a close other. Thus, there is no compelling evidence for Tesser's self-evaluation maintenance model. Instead, Japanese individuals appear to be motivated to enhance others, especially if these are close others (also see Endo et al., in press).

It is difficult to compare the results of studies conducted in different cultures as they may differ with respect to a number of key methodological issues. The most direct test of the existence of cultural differences in any psychological process is by controlled cross-cultural experiment. However, there has been a paucity of cross-cultural research investigating tendencies to maintain positive self-views.

A cross-cultural investigation of self-affirmation and dissonance by Heine and Lehman (1997c) is consistent with the notion that Japanese do not strive to maintain their self-esteem. Self-affirmation theory (e.g., Steele, 1988) posits that dissonance reduction serves as a means to restore self-integrity, but that it only occurs when people have no other means available to view themselves positively. Canadians and Japanese participated in a standard free-choice dissonance paradigm (Brehm, 1956) modeled after Steele, Spencer, and Lynch (1993). Participants made a choice between two desirable alternatives (compact discs) and evaluated these both before and after they made their choice. Typically, North Americans have been found to rationalize their decisions by changing their postdecision evaluations of the two alternatives (Steele et al., 1993): That is, they tend to evaluate their chosen alternative more positively, and their rejected alternative more negatively, after they have made their decision. In an attempt to manipulate their affirmational resources, participants in two experimental conditions received either negative or positive feedback about their personalities, whereas a control condition received no feedback. Of importance, the personality feedback addressed interdependent traits to ensure that it would be relevant to the Japanese sample. The Canadian results replicated Steele et al.'s findings with Americans. In the control condition Canadians exhibited significant dissonance reduction (i.e., they rationalized their decisions). Rationalization was even more pronounced in the negative feedback condition, whereas it was virtually absent in the positive feedback condition. Japanese, in contrast, exhibited no evidence of dissonance reduction (i.e., they did not systematically change their evaluations of the alternatives) or self-affirming behaviors in any of the three conditions, even when they received personality feedback that directly threatened interdependent aspects of themselves. The Japanese were also significantly less likely to discount the negative personality feedback than were

Canadians. There are strikingly few successful replications of any of the dissonance paradigms within Asian cultures in general (for a review, see Heine & Lehman, 1997c), and these results are consistent with our suggestion that Japanese do not strive to maintain a positive view of self.

A recent cross-cultural investigation of compensatory self-enhancement further indicates an absence of self-protective ways of thinking among Japanese. Baumeister and Jones (1978) demonstrated that American participants compensated for negative self-relevant feedback by inflating their assessments of themselves in another domain. In a conceptual replication of this finding, Heine, Kitayama, and Lehman (1999) provided Canadian and Japanese participants with success or failure feedback on a bogus creativity test and then asked the participants to evaluate themselves on dimensions unrelated to creativity. Results indicated that Canadians exhibited no difference in their self-evaluations of unrelated traits following success or failure feedback regarding their creativity, whereas Japanese showed a significant decrease in their self-evaluations after failure. That is, Japanese exhibited a reverse compensatory self-enhancement effect. That the Canadian data did not replicate Baumeister and Jones's results with Americans leaves open the possibility of key methodological differences between the two studies. However, the strong tendency for Japanese to respond in the opposite direction of Baumeister and Jones's American participants demonstrates that negative feedback is responded to differently by Japanese. Moreover, whereas Canadians tended to discount the importance and accuracy of the test in the face of failure feedback, Japanese were more likely to discount the importance and accuracy of the test when they received success feedback.

The above studies merely provide evidence that Japanese do not exhibit two of the many different kinds of self-protective tactics documented in the literature. Consequently, we are cautious about concluding that Japanese do not strive to protect their selves in other ways. At present other self-protective ways of thinking have not been investigated in cross-cultural experimental designs, and more research is necessary to draw firmer conclusions.

Evidence for Self-Critical and Self-Improving Orientations Among Japanese

The preceding review highlighted that empirical evidence of tendencies to dwell on positive aspects of the self is indeed lacking among Japanese. Instead, we have contended that Japanese are motivated to maintain self-critical and self-improving orientations as means to pursue the cultural goals associated with interdependence. Several other psychologists have discussed how self-critical tendencies better characterize the Japanese experience (e.g., Doi, 1973; Johnson, 1993; Kashiwagi, 1986; Roland, 1988). Recently a growing body of empirical research supports these claims.

Implicit within a self-critical orientation is the notion that the individual is falling short of her or his understandings of societal expectations or standards of selfhood. This sense that one is not doing as well as one ideally should has been argued to be characteristic of Japanese and can be seen to fuel their drive toward self-improvement (e.g., Bifu, 1986; Doi, 1973; Fiske et al., 1997; Markus et al., 1997). This hypothesized orientation can be investigated empirically by examining the extent to which individuals are satisfied with their current states relative to their ideals. Heine

and Lehman (1999a) investigated whether a self-critical orientation could be identified among Japanese by comparing their actual-ideal discrepancies with those of Canadians. Actual-ideal discrepancies reflect how far one is from the type of person that one ideally wants to be. To the extent that Japanese are self-critical and dwell on their inadequacies, we would expect that their actual-ideal discrepancies would be greater than they would be for (self-enhancing) North Americans. Indeed, this is what Heine and Lehman found—Japanese participants' actual-ideal discrepancies were significantly larger than those of either European Canadians or Asian Canadians. Moreover, actual-ideal discrepancies were significantly less related to depression for Japanese than they were for European Canadians, suggesting that there are fewer negative consequences for Japanese of perceiving oneself as falling short of one's ideals. The notion, culled from the anthropological and psychological literatures, that self-critical orientations are more elaborated within Japanese culture therefore gains plausibility.

Additional evidence for self-critical tendencies among Japanese has been observed in a cross-cultural laboratory study by Heine, Takata, and Lehman (in press). Canadians and Japanese participated in an identical laboratory experiment in which they were asked to determine whether their performance on an intelligence test was better or worse than that of the average student from their universities. Japanese participants were more easily convinced that they performed worse (rather than better) than their peers. In contrast, Canadians exhibited the opposite pattern: They were reluctant to conclude that they had performed worse than their classmates. In sum, it appears that Japanese are more sensitive to information indicating that they are doing worse than others than they are to information indicating that they are doing better than others.

The active nature of self-critical perceptions among Japanese was demonstrated in recent research by Kitayama et al. (1997). They asked American and Japanese undergraduates to freely describe as many situations as possible in which their own self-esteem either increased or decreased. Then, situations were randomly sampled from both samples and posed to separate groups of American and Japanese undergraduates. Note that participants within each culture were thus presented with situations that were generated by either Japanese or American students. Participants were asked the extent to which they felt their self-esteem would be affected by each situation, as well as whether the situation would cause their self-esteem to increase or decrease. A number of relevant findings emerged. First, Japanese were more likely to perceive failure situations than success situations to be relevant to their self-esteem, whereas Americans exhibited the opposite pattern. Japanese, then, were especially sensitive to self-critical situations, whereas Americans were more oriented toward self-enhancing opportunities. Second, the extent of estimated self-esteem decrease for Japanese in failure situations was greater than their extent of estimated self-esteem increase in success situations, indicating that the self-critical motivation was stronger than the self-enhancement motivation. Again, the opposite pattern emerged for Americans. Finally, the situations generated by Japanese were more self-deprecating and the U.S.-generated situations were more self-enhancing for both cultures. That is, everyday life in Japan appears more replete with opportunities for self-esteem decreases, whereas typical experiences in the U.S. are more likely to lead to increased self-esteem.

Further evidence that daily life in Japan encourages self-criticism is apparent in a recent sampling of conversations in Japan, the U.S., and Canada by Kitayama, Karasawa, et al. (1999). Respondents were asked to indicate how many days it had been since their last conversation that involved a compliment or criticism. Although respondents from all countries reported that complimenting interactions were more frequent than criticizing ones, Japanese reported a greater frequency of criticisms, and a lesser frequency of compliments, in their conversations than did North Americans. Hence, social interactions themselves appear to be forums within which cultural imperatives relating to self-enhancement and self-criticism are expressed.

A recent cross-cultural investigation of intrinsic motivation (Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, et al., 1999) is perhaps the most clear in demonstrating self-improving tendencies among Japanese. Canadians and Japanese were told that they either succeeded or failed on a bogus creativity test and were then left alone in the room with a related task while the experimenter ostensibly was away trying to locate a computer file. The experimenter observed the participants through a hidden camera and timed how long they persisted on the second task. Results indicated that Canadians persisted significantly longer on the second task when they had been led to succeed on the first task than when they had been led to fail. In stark contrast, it was when Japanese had been led to fail that they persisted significantly longer. This study is strongly suggestive that Japanese are motivated to correct their shortcomings, whereas North Americans are motivated to dwell on their successes.

The above experiments converge on the notion that self-criticism and self-improvement are significant motivations for Japanese. We suggest there are three mutually interrelated reasons why the Japanese selfway sustains self-critical psychological tendencies. First, these self-critical tendencies are likely to have adaptive consequences within this cultural system because they are embedded in a collectively shared and sustained practice of self-improvement. Second, these tendencies are premised on one's acceptance of whatever standard of social unit is used to derive a critical evaluation for the self. Self-critical tendencies, therefore, serve as symbolic markers of the self's commitment to the social unit and the self's identity as an interdependent agent. Third, within a construction of self within Japanese culture, self-critical tendencies in the form of negative self-evaluations may also be directly associated with good feelings for the self. How can this paradoxical state of affairs exist? Kitayama and colleagues (Kitayama et al., 1997; Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Kitayama & Uchida, 1999) have suggested that an interpersonal, emotional script of sympathy is highly elaborated in Japanese selfways and, as a consequence, is often appropriated intrapersonally into one's experience of the self. Within such a culturally constructed emotional dynamic, one may experience warm feelings, love, benevolence, and care for the self when the self is found to be lacking or in need or in distress.

Although empirical research on the topic of self-criticism and self-improvement among Japanese is a recent venture, a variety of experimental paradigms have demonstrated pronounced tendencies for Japanese to dwell on their shortcomings to a greater extent than North Americans. Further studies are required to more fully understand the ways in which these self-critical orientations emerge and the functions they serve.

Alternative Explanations

The data that we have reviewed converge on the notion that Japanese do not have the same kind of need for positive self-regard as North Americans. It is important to note, however, that cross-cultural comparisons are fraught with difficulties in interpretation and various methodological limitations challenge whether we can interpret the data at face value (e.g., Berry, 1969; Greenfield, 1997; Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997; Smith & Bond, 1993; Triandis, 1972). In the following sections, we consider alternative explanations that arise from the methodologies that have been used.

What "Self" Is Being Enhanced: The Independent or the Interdependent?

One methodological consideration that warrants discussion is the nature of the self that is being evaluated. The majority of the studies reviewed above focused on how Japanese and North Americans evaluate their individual selves—a view of self conceivably more meaningful to those from North America (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). Perhaps Japanese also would self-enhance when evaluating a view of self more meaningful to them. For example, it may be that the interdependent self is enhanced when the group to which that person belongs is cast in a positive light. If so, this would suggest that indeed there may be a universal need to view the self positively, but people in collectivist cultures, such as Japan, focus more on maintaining positive evaluations of their groups. To the extent that Japanese self-enhance their group selves and North Americans self-enhance their individual selves, the cultural differences described above would be quite prosaic in their consequences, merely reflecting differences in the target of evaluation, not in the underlying processes.

However parsimonious this perspective may be, there is little empirical evidence to support it. Cross-cultural comparisons of collective self-esteem (CSE; measured by the Collective Self-Esteem Scale; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) have not found that CSE is more characteristic of Japanese than North Americans (Heine & Lehman, 1997b). On the contrary, North Americans had higher CSE than Japanese on three of the four subscales of the Luhtanen and Crocker measure (Membership, Public, and Private CSE; the fourth subscale, Identity CSE, did not differ cross-culturally). That is, in this study North Americans felt that they were more valuable members of their groups, had more positive appraisals of their groups, and felt that others also viewed their groups more positively than did Japanese. Likewise, Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, and Broadnax (1994) found that European Americans scored higher than Asian Americans on Membership and Private CSE, Asian Americans scored higher on Identity CSE, and there was no difference on Public CSE.

Research on group-serving biases is also inconsistent with the notion that Japanese self-enhance by viewing their groups positively. A few studies have found evidence for group enhancement among Japanese and other Asians (Hewstone, Bond, & Ward, 1983; Muramoto & Yamaguchi, 1997; Muramoto, Yamaguchi, Kim, Kosaka, & Yu, 1997), but just as many have failed to detect such evidence or have found evidence for group effacement (Heine & Lehman, 1997b; Hewstone & Ward, 1985; Kitayama, Palm, Masuda, Karasawa, & Carroll, 1996). Research indicates that Japanese do not consistently enhance their groups. And, in stark

contrast, there is a wealth of studies demonstrating pronounced group-serving tendencies among North Americans (see Heine & Lehman, 1997b, for a review). To the extent that attaining a favorable self-evaluation is of paramount importance for North Americans, such individuals ought to be motivated to enhance a variety of self-attributes, including those relating to their group memberships (J. D. Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Cross-cultural studies of Japanese and North Americans have not found evidence for greater group-serving tendencies among Japanese. Kitayama et al. (1996) measured perceptions of vulnerability to earthquakes in two high-risk cities both in Japan and in the United States. Results indicated that Americans from both cities demonstrated a group-serving tendency by stating that the other city was slightly more vulnerable to earthquakes than their own, whereas Japanese respondents from both cities reported that their own city was significantly more in danger than the other. Heine and Lehman (1997b) found that Canadians exhibited more pronounced positivity biases when evaluating their family members and their universities than did Japanese. Similarly, international surveys have revealed that Japanese have less positive views of their country than do Americans of theirs (Lipset, 1996; Liu et al., 1997; Rose, 1985).

North Americans thus are not just more likely than Japanese to exhibit self-serving biases; they are also more likely to view their groups positively. Although a relatively small number of groups have been examined at present, the consistent pattern obtained reduces the plausibility of this alternative explanation. The evidence does not support the notion that Japanese compensate for their less-than-positive self-views by more strongly enhancing their collective self-regard.

North American Biases in the Selection of Questions

Another potential limitation of many of the studies reviewed above is that they used methodologies that, for the most part, were developed by North Americans. It is possible that North American biases in the selection of attributes may have obscured Japanese self-enhancement: That is, researchers may have failed to ask the questions that really matter to Japanese. For example, although North Americans may more readily than Japanese report that they are more intelligent and more independent than their peers, these differences may be owing to North Americans' evaluating intelligence and independence more positively than Japanese. If we asked questions about the characteristics most important to Japanese, they might then exhibit the self-enhancement that has been so elusive.

Empirical evidence for this hypothesis is also lacking. Heine and Lehman (1999a) demonstrated that even for those characteristics viewed as most important for succeeding in their cultures Japanese still viewed themselves as further away from their ideal state than did North Americans. For example, although Japanese viewed persevering in difficult situations and getting along well with others as particularly important, they nonetheless tended to report that they needed to persevere more and to try harder to get along better with others (Heine, 1996). Japanese exhibit less evidence for unrealistic optimism for interdependent events than they do for independent events (Heine & Lehman, 1995a; also see Yik, Bond, & Paulhus, 1998, for comparable differences in self-enhancement

for communal and agentic traits among Hong Kong Chinese). And Kitayama et al. (1997) demonstrated that it was the failure situations that Japanese generated that they were most likely to view as relevant to their self-esteem.

We also note that the correlations between self-esteem and other variables are remarkably similar across cultures. Japanese self-esteem is not more closely related to those characteristics that are particularly valued in their culture. For example, relationship satisfaction, perceived inclusiveness, interdependence, and secondary control all correlate approximately the same with self-esteem for Japanese as they do for North Americans (Heine, Endo, & Lehman, 1999; Heine & Lehman, 1999a; Morling et al., 1999). And, most telling, those characteristics that are commonly viewed as especially integral to the typical Japanese self (e.g., interdependence, secondary locus of control) are largely orthogonal to self-esteem, further underscoring the North American cultural foundation of self-esteem.

Are Japanese Hiding Their "True" Feelings of Positive Self-Regard?

Considerable discussion has focused on whether people from more "modest" cultures, such as Japanese, exhibit more modest response styles in their questionnaire responses than North Americans (Heine & Lehman, 1995a, 1995b; Kitayama et al., 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). Distinctions between what is private and what is public exist in every culture, even in North America, where consistency is moralized. Where Japanese and North American cultures may diverge is with respect to a stronger emphasis in Japan on adjusting oneself and being responsive to others. What is called *modesty* is elaborated in Japan as it is crucial for realizing important cultural goals regarding interpersonal harmony. Whereas modesty in North America may largely be dismissed as matters of self-presentation, modesty may serve an important self-defining role in Japan.

One characteristic frequently attributed to Japanese is the important distinction they make between their public presentation (*tatemae*) and their private feelings (*honne*; Bachnik, 1994; Doi, 1986; Johnson, 1993; Lebra, 1976). Saying one thing (*tatemae*) while truly believing or feeling something quite different (*honne*) apparently arouses less dissonance among Japanese than it does for North Americans (Heine & Lehman, 1997c). This may be the case in part because the speaker assumes, if only implicitly, that the audience shares the assumption that what he or she is saying may possibly be an instance of *tatemae* as opposed to one of *honne*. With this assumption, saying something that is *tatemae* may be seen by both the speaker and the audience alike as an extremely indirect and hence nuanced, yet mutually agreed-upon way of conveying one's *honne* without having to say it. Clearly, saying one thing while believing otherwise can carry very different meanings depending on whether the pertinent cultural community entertains the idea of *tatemae*. Where this notion is inscribed in daily communicative practices, as in Japan, this act is neither hypocritical nor untruthful—or, simply, it is not a "lie" as this notion is commonly understood within the Grician canon of communication; rather, it can signify the very competence of the person as a communicator in the cultural community.

Moreover, many public situations in Japan require modest self-presentations. Individuals stand to lose the respect of their peers if

they do not present themselves in a modest, self-effacing manner (cf. Bond et al., 1982). Indeed, a number of Japanese have questioned our thesis because they have frequently experienced occasions in which they must present themselves more modestly in public than they truly feel. Such experiences, of course, are not foreign to North Americans either, but it is possible that because they are much more frequent in Japan they exert an influence unknown to North Americans. This distinction between *tatemae* and *honne* may be such an integral part of Japanese individuals' lives that they have difficulty expressing their private thoughts, even anonymously in questionnaires. Perhaps privately Japanese are just as self-enhancing as North Americans but are reluctant to express such thoughts in psychological studies because of social concerns regarding modesty.

Likewise, perhaps the obtained cultural differences in self-report measures of self-regard are due to North Americans' demonstrating more false bravado than Japanese. That is, it may be that North Americans' questionnaire responses are distorted by attempts to impress psychologists with their bold self-confidence, or even to convince themselves that they really are competent and valuable (cf. Baumeister et al., 1989; Colvin et al., 1995; Shedler, Mayman, & Manis, 1993).

Questioning the validity of self-report measures represents a particularly challenging alternative explanation. Were such a conclusion warranted, virtually all questionnaire studies would have to be interpreted with similar caution. We focus here on the possibility that Japanese self-report measures are compromised by feigned modesty. Whether Japanese questionnaire responses can be interpreted at face value is an extremely difficult question to answer directly—no single study can definitively resolve it. However, data available from a variety of experimental paradigms allow us to evaluate this hypothesis with respect to the convergent evidence.

First, the hypothesis that Japanese are feigning modesty in questionnaires can be examined in the way that it is conventionally assessed in the West. Feigned modesty is assumed to be an effort to gain approval from others. Hence, to the extent that Japanese disguise their responses on anonymous questionnaires in a modest direction more so than North Americans, we would expect that they would also score higher on socially desirable response measures (Paulhus, 1991). Cross-cultural studies of socially desirable response sets, however, have failed to detect even a trend of cultural differences (Heine & Lehman, 1995b; Lai & Linden, 1993). Socially desirable response set evidence thus does not support the feigned modesty account.

Second, feigned modesty can be assessed by examining the patterns of self-evaluation questionnaire responses. That is, to the extent that Japanese are hiding their true feelings behind a modest facade, we should expect larger cultural differences for items that more directly call for modest answers (e.g., items that ask individuals to compare themselves directly with others or to express satisfaction with aspects of themselves for which they are directly responsible) than items that assess self-enhancement more indirectly (e.g., items that involve indirect comparisons such as those used in between-groups designs, or evaluations of aspects for which one is not directly responsible). However, Diener, Suh, et al. (1995) and Heine and Lehman (1995a) have noted that indirect evaluations by participants have yielded larger cross-cultural differences than direct ones.

Third, if Japanese individuals' self-critical tendencies are due to feigned modesty, we would expect Japanese to be more self-critical when evaluating themselves than when evaluating their peers. Kitayama et al. (1997) presented participants with everyday situations and asked them to estimate how much their self-esteem would increase or decrease in these situations. In one study participants answered for themselves, and in another they answered for how they felt the average student from their university would respond. Both studies revealed equally self-critical responding, thus further challenging the feigned modesty account.

Fourth, it seems reasonable to assume that if participants truly could be assured of their anonymity, they would no longer feel compelled to be modest. Kitayama (1999) constructed an elaborate scenario in which participants completed questionnaires in an empty room, did not write any identifying information, and deposited their questionnaires in a box mixed with other similarly unidentifiable questionnaires, thereby ensuring that their responses could not be traced back to them. Participants' responses were still self-critical, despite this reassurance.

Taken together, the evidence from questionnaire studies explicitly examining whether Japanese disguise their questionnaire responses more so than do North Americans is inconsistent with the feigned modesty account. We are not aware of any evidence that supports the notion that Japanese questionnaire responses are less veridical than those of people from other cultures.

The most compelling evidence to challenge the feigned modesty account, however, comes from studies that measure self-evaluative tendencies using hidden behavioral measures, thus precluding the possibility of socially desirable corrective responses. If participants are unaware that what they are doing is observable or even meaningful, then there is no conceivable reason for them to feign modesty. Recent research in support of the feigned modesty account has found that although Asian Americans show lower explicit self-regard than European Americans, they do in fact show similar levels of implicit self-regard in comparisons of their reaction time in associating themselves with unpleasant words, such as *vomit* and *poison*, and pleasant words, such as *happy* and *sunshine* (Farnham & Greenwald, 1998). However, because this implicit measure correlates only modestly with explicit self-esteem ($r = .20$), the validity of this measure remains to be demonstrated. Moreover, it is unclear the extent to which the Asian American results can be generalized to the Japanese case. Another investigation of implicit self-regard that explored how positively people viewed numbers associated with their birthdays found that Japanese viewed their birthday numbers significantly less positively than did Americans (Blass, Schmitt, Jones, & O'Connell, 1997; Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997).

Other approaches to obtaining hidden behavioral responses of self-enhancement with Japanese have not revealed any evidence for feigned modesty. Laboratory investigations of social comparison (Heine et al., in press; Takata, 1987) have demonstrated that self-critical behaviors are evident among Japanese even when they are unaware that their behaviors are being observed. As we have noted earlier, Japanese also do not exhibit self-affirmation through dissonance reduction, a behavior that occurs below participants' level of awareness (Heine & Lehman, 1997c). Finally, using a hidden camera to measure behaviors in an elaborate deception study (Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, et al., 1999) revealed that, in contrast to North Americans, Japanese exhibited greater intrinsic

motivation following failure than following success. These studies are compelling demonstrations that the absence of self-protective or self-enhancing tendencies among Japanese goes well beyond self-presentation.

The Search for Japanese Self-Regard

The notion of a universal need for positive self-regard as it is currently conceptualized rests on two erroneous, implicit assumptions: (a) The self-concept is the same across cultures, and (b) positive self-regard is the only kind of "good" self-regard. Conventional theories of self-esteem are based on a North American individualized view of self that is motivated to achieve high self-esteem. In contrast, the most characteristic view of self in Japan (and elsewhere) is different from its North American counterpart in the variety of ways that we have articulated. It is maintaining a self-critical outlook that is crucial to developing a worthy and culturally appropriate self in Japan.

These two important cultural differences directly challenge our current understanding of the universality of positive self-regard. The evidence reviewed in this article demonstrates that positive self-regard, as it is currently conceptualized, operationalized, and measured, is not as prevalent, significant, sought after, discussed, functional, elaborated on, or desired in Japan as it is in North America. The need for positive self-regard as it is conventionally understood is culturally variable. And, indeed, it must be—for the two cornerstones of self-regard, self and regard themselves, vary importantly across cultures.

We stress the importance of the realization that our current conceptualization of the need for self-esteem is not pancultural. The assumption of self-esteem as a fundamental human need reflects an ethnocentric inertia that characterizes many psychological theories. Empirical studies documenting that Japanese tend to have significantly less positive self-views have been around for decades (e.g., Mahler, 1976; Zung, 1969), but such earlier results were not discussed in theoretically meaningful terms. The hesitance to explore this cultural difference likely stems from a reluctance to discuss how one culture is relatively bereft of what has traditionally been seen as a universal, unambiguously good thing (viz., individual self-esteem). In contrast, we argue that such a kind of self-esteem is not as valued or as functional in Japanese culture as it is in North American culture. The lack of self-esteem-enhancing tendencies among Japanese does not mean that Japanese are abnormal or that Japanese culture is dysfunctional—conclusions that logically would follow from an assumption of a universal self-esteem motivation. When we ask Japanese, they tell us quite clearly that they do not wish to be self-confident (Heine, 1996)—to a certain degree, positive self-evaluations appear to impede the success of the individual in Japanese culture (Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, et al., 1999). To say that an individual is self-confident has negative connotations because it reflects how self-confidence gets in the way of interdependence, or it reveals one's failure to recognize higher standards of excellence and thus to continue to self-improve, or both. The motive for individual self-esteem, it seems, is incongruent with motives to achieve connection and interpersonal harmony with others and even with those for personal achievement. It is a motivation that is not culturally sustained in Japan to the extent that it is in North America.

The pronounced cultural differences in self-esteem have significant implications for how we think of issues regarding mental health, well-being, adjustment, coping, therapy, and intervention. These have all been developed within the cultural framework of how North Americans view what is good, healthy, and normal. Indeed, many of the markers of poor mental health in North America (e.g., depression, pessimism, anxiety) are more pronounced in Asian cultures (e.g., Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998; Hymes & Akiyama, 1991; Lazarus, Tomita, Opton, & Kodama, 1966; Ono, 1985; Zung, 1969) and among Asian Americans (e.g., Chang, 1996; Marsella, Walker, & Johnson, 1973; Okazaki, 1997; Sue & Sue, 1974; Uba, 1994). Our review suggests that what contributes to mental health may vary importantly across cultures, and this cultural variance may well extend beyond self-esteem to other characteristics of psychological well-being that have been identified in the Western literature (e.g., self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations, purpose in life, personal growth, and autonomy; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). To the extent that culture shapes what we view to be a "healthy mind," diagnoses and interventions that emerge from a North American conceptualization of well-being may miss the mark when applied in other cultures (Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998; Kitayama & Markus, in press; Ryff & Singer, 1998). For example, it may be that Asians acculturating to North America exhibit what appear to be signs of psychological distress not so much because of the difficulties inherent in the acculturation experience, as is often assumed (e.g., Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Taft, 1977), but because of baseline cultural differences in conceptions of adjustment and well-being. The cultural construction of mental health itself is a difficult yet important question to ponder.

At What Level Is a Need for Self-Regard Universal?

The evidence reviewed in this article converges on the notion that a need for positive self-regard is not universal. However, it is important to consider whether our analysis has pitched self-regard as an imposed *etic*—a construct meaningful, tangible, and important in North America, where the majority of its research has been conducted, but relatively meaningless, intangible, and unimportant in Japan. Perhaps our current conceptualization of self-regard is too "North American," thereby precluding consideration of the kinds of self-regard that might characterize the Japanese experience. That is, the level of analysis that we have adopted to question the existence of a universal need for positive self-regard may be too shallow: Perhaps we need to step back and examine the larger picture, one that can incorporate both the conventional North American conceptualization and a hypothesized Japanese conceptualization of self-regard. In this section we consider a number of possibilities to extend our understanding of self-regard to include the Japanese case. This section is speculative—clearly, we are moving beyond our empirical and theoretical understanding of self-regard. In fact, whether the labels *self-regard* or *self-esteem* are appropriate for these new conceptualizations is indeed questionable. We consider five possible ways in which the concept of self-esteem may be extended to include the Japanese experience. This list obviously is not exhaustive; there are no doubt other possible candidates for the basis of Japanese self-regard.

1. *Relationship esteem.* Any consideration of an analog for individualistic self-esteem that might emerge in the interdependent

environment of Japanese culture should include relationship esteem (e.g., Endo et al., in press; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997). That the Japanese self often is described as an individual suspended in a web of relationships (e.g., Hamaguchi, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b) suggests that relationships are more self-defining for Japanese, and that Japanese are more motivated to secure a sense of belonging. Viewing one's relationships positively and harmoniously may be a means for Japanese to affirm their sense of belongingness and enhance their selves. Such motivations are not unknown to North Americans (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996), although the motive may be stronger for Japanese given its centrality to an interdependent view of self.

Recent studies have suggested that feelings of relationship esteem exist at comparable levels for Japanese and North Americans (Endo et al., in press; see also Kwan et al., 1997, for similar findings with Hong Kong Chinese). That is, both Japanese and North Americans view their relationships as closer, more supportive, and more understanding than those of their peers (Endo et al., in press). Therefore, although cross-cultural studies of self-enhancement have revealed pronounced differences between Japanese and North Americans, when the focus of the evaluation shifts from what is inside individuals to what is between them, the cultural differences vanish.

It is important, however, to consider whether the similar levels of relationship esteem between Japanese and North Americans are based on similar motivations or cognitions between cultures. For example, Japanese may engage in relationship esteem as this is the most direct way for them to enhance feelings of positive self-regard (it is the only domain in which consistent significant positive distortions among Japanese have been found; Endo et al., in press). North Americans, on the other hand, may view their relationships as just another extension of their individual selves for them to enhance—the same way that they view their groups, futures, abilities, and friends in unrealistically positive terms. The similarities in the levels of relationship harmony between cultures might thus obscure important differences for why they are esteemed. Indeed, Japanese appear to view their relationships in unrealistically positive terms because of the qualities of their relationship partners, rather than of themselves, a pattern not consistently observed among North Americans (Endo et al., in press; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998). That is, Japanese relationship enhancement has a significant other-enhancing component (Karasawa, Kitayama, & Lehman, 1997; Meijer & Semin, 1998; Yamauchi, 1988)—Japanese appear to evaluate their relationships so positively because they have aligned themselves with such wonderful partners (cf. Weisz et al., 1984). This suggests that satisfaction with one's relationships may be independent of satisfaction with oneself—indeed, relationship esteem has been found to be orthogonal to self-esteem across cultures (Endo et al., in press; Kwan et al., 1997). Whether relationship esteem in an interdependent context serves a comparable function to self-esteem in an independent context is an intriguing possibility, but at present our understanding of relationship esteem is not developed enough to support such a conclusion.

2. *A need for "face."* We have maintained that self-improvement serves Japanese in their endeavors to secure the esteem of others. This external orientation of Japanese is associated with a heightened awareness of an audience and a preoccu-

pation with concerns about public face (De Vos & Wagatsuma, 1973; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1993; Hwang, 1987; Ting-Toomey, 1994). Indeed, there is considerable discussion of the concept of face in the Asian psychological literature, and the concept is similar to self-esteem in important ways (e.g., Lebra, 1976; Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994). Both concepts reflect a concern for a positive evaluation of the individual but differ in terms of who is doing the evaluating: the self or others. Although efforts to secure self-esteem and face appear to involve two distinct motivations, self-enhancement and self-improvement, respectively, perhaps these two motivations should be viewed as reflecting the same underlying need. That is, it may be that both North Americans and Japanese are equally concerned with being viewed positively and it is only the identity of the evaluator, the self or others, that differs between cultures.

A reasonable case could be made, then, that the Japanese desire for face is comparable to the North American desire for positive self-regard, and this is a research question worth pursuing. However, simply saying that desiring positive self-regard is the same process as desiring face obscures fundamental differences between the different motivations that these entail. Although the two motives appear similar on the surface, our review shows that there are real-life consequences associated with efforts to secure a positive self-view or to maintain positive face (viz., self-enhancement and self-improvement, respectively). To a certain extent, people have some control over how positively they view themselves—negative information about the self can be countered by engaging in any of the self-esteem maintenance strategies listed above. However, the maintenance of face is largely in the hands of others. People can work toward regaining face only by trying to impress others with their face-enhancing behaviors. The Japanese concern for face is an important topic of discussion (e.g., Morisaki & Gudykunst, 1994), but as yet there has been no experimental research to investigate either its psychological antecedents or consequences.

3. *A need to gambaru.* Given its cultural significance to Japanese and its ubiquity throughout Japanese culture (e.g., Duke, 1986; Lebra, 1976; Lewis, 1995; Singleton, 1995), another potential candidate worth considering as an analog to the need for esteem is a need to do one's best (roughly captured by the term *gambaru*). Similar to how self-esteem is viewed in North America, in Japan *gambari* is generally believed to be a key to success across a wide array of life tasks, is inculcated in the schools, and is valued and encouraged throughout the life span.

This is a decidedly different way of conceptualizing self-esteem, but we believe that it warrants consideration. We have contrasted the North American desire to be competent with a Japanese desire to become more competent as a critical difference underlying self-enhancement and self-improvement. We think this reflects an important distinction that characterizes the two cultures: a concern for product versus a concern for process, respectively. Perhaps it is the case that engaging in the process of *gambari* and striving to become better provides Japanese with a feeling of worthiness and value akin to what North Americans feel when they are engaged in thoughts of being good. This might suggest that people from both cultures have a comparable desire for something like positive self-regard, yet the basis for these positive views and the ways they strive to attain them are markedly different. The drive to *gambaru* might thus reflect a motivational constellation that is analogous to North American motivations for positive regard and could provide

comparable psychological benefits and warm feelings toward the self (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997).

4. *Temporal or situational differences in self-enhancement.* Research on the Japanese self suggests that it is fundamentally contextual and situational in nature (Campbell et al., 1996; Cousins, 1989; Hamaguchi, 1985). For example, a study by Kanagawa, Cross, and Markus (1998) investigated the context sensitivity of the self by asking Japanese and American college students to complete the Twenty Statements Test (Hartley, 1970) in one of four different social contexts: alone, with a friend, in a classroom with other students, and in a professor's office. They found that to a significantly greater extent than the American participants, the Japanese participants gave different types of self-descriptions in the different contexts. For example, in the authority condition, Japanese participants generated substantially more self-related information (e.g., "I am egoistic," "I don't study hard") than in the peer condition, and as well they used more negative terms to describe themselves in this former condition. Japanese students were most likely to focus on positive aspects of themselves in the condition where they were alone and relatively free from others' immediate evaluation.

It may be the case that in situations in which Japanese are in positions of leadership or near the top of a hierarchy they may self-enhance and be motivated to believe that they have the requisite skills and abilities to fulfill their roles and to take care of their subordinates. Thus, we might expect that seniors at school would demonstrate more self-enhancement than freshmen, full professors more than assistant professors, and older sisters more than younger brothers. Likewise, we may find that there are phases in life in which one is more likely to be in positions higher in the hierarchy: namely, old age, and this period may be associated with more self-enhancement and less self-criticism. All of the studies reviewed here have been conducted with undergraduates, and the relative lack of self-enhancement among the Japanese may reflect their lower position in the hierarchy due to their youth. That a cardinal tenet of Confucianism is to respect the elderly suggests that Japanese gain esteem from others as they age. Japanese youth may be making payments in humility and effacement until they reach the age that they can retire from self-criticism and finally accrue feelings of esteem and respect from others. Thus, Japanese self-improving motivations to become better may reflect a comparable desire for positive self-regard, and this desire is satisfied by knowing that one is working toward securing this regard in the future. On the other hand, this emphasis on process over product, on becoming rather than being, on looking for how one could do better might characterize Japanese throughout their lives. Certainly, corresponding data from the elderly would be highly informative.

5. *A need to be a good cultural member.* Another level at which to consider a universal need for self-regard is at the level of being a "good" or "authentic" cultural member (cf. D'Andrade, 1984; Kluckhohn, 1962; Markus et al., 1997). That is, feeling, thinking, believing, and acting in ways that resonate with the dominant selfways of one's culture are likely to lead not only to an understanding that one is a meaningful, morally good, and productive member of his or her culture but also to an active, mutually satisfying, and "natural" engagement with the surrounding social relations and worlds (Kitayama & Markus, in press; Solomon et al., 1991a).

Typically, in the psychological literature, a variety of needs are conceptualized as psychological in nature and are thus considered to produce a subjective drive toward a certain goal state. Yet, it is also possible to suppose that the need to be a good cultural member exists not so much as a psychological desire or demand, but rather that it represents a sociocultural, ecological, and even biological requirement for one to survive and live in a culturally appropriate way. To be a person necessarily involves participation and engagement in a specific sociocultural community (there are no generic cultures), and, as such, it entails a requirement to attain an attunement or coordination of one's way of thinking, feeling, and acting with the community's selfways. Once theoretically broadened in this way, the sociocultural need or requirement to be a good cultural member may well be a common defining characteristic of all cultures (cf. Solomon et al., 1991a).

As we have maintained, having and expressing high self-esteem is one significant element of a North American way of being, whereas holding and elaborating self-critical attitudes is an integral part of a Japanese selfway. "Goodness" of being can thus be very different from the "goodness" or "positivity" of self-relevant cognitions and evaluations. Whereas the "good" mode of being in North American contexts incorporates the act of thinking that the self is good, the "good" mode of being in Japanese contexts does not. Instead of focusing exclusively on the reflected appraisal of the self as good, Japanese may monitor the goodness of their mode of being by focusing on features or characteristics that reside outside of the self, yet that are associated with it, such as the perceived embeddedness of the self in a relationship, the amount and sincerity of appreciation and recognition received from others, or, more generally, positive affect and support provided by significant others. Further, although at an initial analysis the North American mode of being might appear entirely individual and interpersonally detached, on closer scrutiny it becomes clear that this socially detached mode of being is itself a culturally constructed mode of participation in a social and interpersonal context. Hence, having and expressing high self-esteem may well be both a consequence and a prerequisite for meaningful social engagement in North American selfways (Leary et al., 1995).

In sum, perhaps attuning psychological tendencies with cultural selfways serves to authenticate the self and can thereby define the central elements of both objective and subjective well-being. With such a formulation we may have reached the level of abstraction where we can speak of something akin to a "universal need." We emphasize, though, how divergent the cultural mechanisms are by which people realize this sociocultural requirement. Self-enhancement within North American contexts may serve a similar purpose of authenticating the self as self-improvement does within Japanese contexts, yet these two processes each come bundled with highly distinct cognitions, emotions, and behaviors that warrant investigation in their own right.

Concluding Remarks

As is evident, each of the five conceptualizations discussed above is a considerable trek from the ways psychologists have conventionally viewed self-regard (e.g., J. D. Brown, 1998; Coopersmith, 1967; James, 1890; Rosenberg, 1979). Perhaps we can view a need for self-regard as universal, but it is unclear at this time what precise form this universal quality would take. The five

candidates for Japanese self-esteem that we discussed are distinct, and at present there is little empirical evidence to support any of them. Furthermore, we have only discussed how a universal theory of self-esteem would have to be modified in order to incorporate an indigenous sense of Japanese self-esteem. It is likely that other cultural manifestations of self-esteem would vary from both the North American and Japanese cases in important ways as well.

Moreover, even if a consensus on its form could be reached, it is important to consider how meaningful such a conception of a universal self-regard would be. The evidence presented in this article reveals that the psychological processes involved in self-enhancement and self-improvement are distinct and lead to pronounced differences in many of the phenomena that we study. In many respects, the ways psychologists currently conceptualize self-esteem diverge significantly from the five processes that we discussed above. Consideration of these processes from a horizon distant enough that they begin to look similar loses the very kind of detail that psychologists are typically interested in studying in the first place. And we must question whether, simply because these conceptualizations are similar to self-esteem in terms of their importance for succeeding in Japanese society, in the extent of a cultural discourse sustaining them, or in their general feel, the labels *self-esteem* or *self-regard* are the most appropriate for describing them. Can tendencies to search for negative self-relevant information (i.e., self-criticism) be reasonably called "esteeming the self?"

The possibility that there is an indigenous kind of "Japanese self-regard" is an important issue to consider. At this point there is little focused dialogue on this topic, and hence we are unable to state with confidence what such self-regard would look like. We feel that this topic warrants continued discussion and research.

Whether the need for positive self-regard is viewed as a cultural universal we think depends on the level of analysis that one pursues. At some level, Japanese surely are motivated to view themselves positively—be it with respect to the quality of their relationships, their public face, feelings of *gambari*, their esteem in old age, their feelings of living as a good Japanese, or some other kind of indigenous manifestation of a desire for self-regard. Whether the conceptual umbrella of self-esteem can be opened wide enough to shelter such potential meanings without tearing its functionality as a construct is a question that we leave open for debate. We believe, however, that the analysis we have presented underscores an idea that is central to virtually all theories of the self—that the self is both a social product and a social process. Moreover, our analysis argues for a sociocultural perspective of selves in their specific cultural contexts, those that have not yet been the focus of systematic study as well as the more heavily studied North American ones.

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Received May 8, 1998

Revision received October 27, 1998

Accepted February 16, 1999 ■