WHY IS SELF-ENHANCEMENT LOW 
IN CERTAIN COLLECTIVIST CULTURES? 
An Investigation of Two Competing Explanations

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The purpose of the present study is to compare two alternative explanations for the low self-enhancement that characterizes collectivist cultures: (a) lack of a self-enhancement motive arising from the perceived centrality of others, and (b) cultural restrictions imposed on the self that are manifested by modesty requirements. The validity of the two explanations was investigated in two studies. Study 1 examined how self-enhancement is related to self-esteem and subjective well-being. Results from four samples showed that self-enhancement measures were significantly and positively related to self-esteem and to indices of well-being in collectivist cultures as well as independent ones, revealing the psychological benefits of self-enhancement in all tested cultures. Study 2 found that cultural differences in modesty, not the perceived centrality of others, best explains cultural differences in self-enhancement. Taken together, the results support the notion that cultural restrictions rather than the lack of a self-enhancement motive are responsible for the low self-enhancement found in certain collectivist cultures. Implications of these results for the conceptualization of the interdependent self were discussed.

Keywords: culture; self-enhancement; modesty; interdependent self; collectivism-individualism

The level of self-enhancement in East Asian countries is lower than in the West. A large number of studies have documented this difference (for a review, see Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999) with only a few empirical challenges, all of which are related to the enhancement of very specific kinds of attributes. There is, however, no consensus regarding the reasons for this difference. The common explanation is that the self-enhancement motive is not prevalent in East Asian cultures due to basic differences in their typical self-construal patterns. The independent self, dominant in individualist cultures, is autonomous and self-contained, whereas the interdependent self typical of collectivist cultures is part of a comprehensive social relationship and is partially defined by others in that relationship (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The need for positive self-regard, which has been extensively documented in Western cultures as the self-enhancement motive (e.g., Brown, 1998), was described as one of the psychological differences between the independent and the interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). It has been suggested that the self-enhancement motive, which is typically found in Western cultures that emphasize self-uniqueness and self-success, is not universal and that its incidence in East Asian cultures is very low or even absent (Heine et al., 1999). Moreover, for the interdependent self, the sources of self-esteem and subjective well-being may be other than self-success, and are based mainly on the ability to maintain harmony in the in-group and to fit in (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). According to this line of thought, the irrelevance of self-success to self-esteem and to well-being dramatically reduces the psychological benefit of self-enhancement. Such a reduction in psychological benefit makes self-enhancement psychologically unnecessary.
Other scholars have suggested that cultural restrictions on the self in collectivist cultures are strong. One of the implications of such restrictions is a low need for uniqueness (Yamaguchi, 1994). In line with this model, it was suggested that the need for positive self-regard exists in East Asian cultures as well, but its manifestation is restricted by the culture and specifically by cultural demands for modesty (Kurman, 2001; Kurman & Sriram, 2002). Several previous indirect findings have shown the relevance of cultural restrictions on the self to the manifestation of self-enhancement. Comparisons of self-enhancement levels for different types of traits have shown that when the self-enhancement of a trait does not violate cultural norms, the bias toward self-enhancing this trait increases. Self-enhancement in Singapore was found to be stronger than in Israel for communal traits, as opposed to agentic traits (Kurman, 2001), and communal traits were found to be more enhanced in Japan than in the United States (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). Another study conducted in Singapore showed that the degree of sensitivity of the self-enhancement measure to modesty norms affected the magnitude of measured self-enhancement (Kurman, 2002). Thus, the greater the sensitivity of the self-enhancement measure to self-presentation norms, the lower the measured self-enhancement level. It was also found that Japanese students described themselves less favorably in public on traits defined as self-profitable traits as compared to descriptions they gave in a private context (Harihara, Yamaguchi, & Niiya, 2000). The purpose of the present article is to examine the notion that modesty requirements, rather than the irrelevance of self-success to subjective well-being, is the main reason for the lower self-enhancement found in various collectivist cultures.

Two studies are presented here. The first focuses on the relations between self-enhancement and psychological well-being and attempts to demonstrate that positive relations between self-enhancement and subjective well-being exist even in cultures characterized by low self-enhancement. Such relations can show that the low self-enhancement prevalent in certain cultures does not result from psychological irrelevancy of self-enhancement. The second study investigates two competing mediators between culture and self-enhancement: (a) the perceived centrality of others and a weak unique identity versus (b) modesty.

**STUDY 1: SELF-ENHANCEMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

The relevance of self-enhancement to subjective well-being and self-esteem has been consistently demonstrated in Western cultures (see Paulhus, 1998; Taylor & Brown, 1988). The present study will try to show that this relevance also exists in cultures that are collectivist. It could be argued that the discouragement of self-enhancement in a culture as manifested by low levels of self-enhancement does not affect the relations between self-enhancement and psychological well-being. It is therefore expected that the same positive relations documented in the West between these two constructs will be found in collectivist cultures as well.

Four independent cross-cultural analyses using various measures of self-enhancement and subjective well-being were conducted to examine the hypothesized relations. In all studies, the individualist group consisted of Israeli-born, secular, urban participants. Israelis of this background are generally Western (Seginer & Halabi, 1991). They are probably less individualist than Americans or some Western Europeans, but they are positioned in the upper half of studies ranking different cultures according to their level of individualism.
(Hofstede, 1983) and related facets (see Schwartz’s [1994] ranking of affective and intellectual autonomy). The collectivist groups were of different origins. Singaporean-Chinese students were investigated in the two first studies, and Japanese students were studied in the third. Both of these groups have a Confucian heritage and are presented in the literature as collectivist. In the fourth study, a group of Israelis of Ethiopian origin was surveyed. Some of the characteristics of this less familiar group are described below.

African Jews of Ethiopian origin come from a traditional, collectivist, and agricultural background. Traditionally, they lived in small villages of 8 to 10 families headed by a religious leader. The increasing education and urbanization of the 20th century created some changes in Ethiopian society, and part of its members moved to big cities and studied in modern schools (Ben-Ezer, 1992). The Ethiopian Jews who immigrated to Israel in two large waves, in 1984 and 1991, with the help of the Israeli government came out of Zionist ideology (Rosen & Rubinstein, 1993). Since then, Ethiopian Jews have continued immigrating to Israel in small numbers. Their absorption has not been easy, and they are frequently victims of stereotypic perceptions (Schwarzwald & Tur-Kaspa, 1997). The community of Ethiopian Jews is quite isolated socially, and they tend to live in their own neighborhoods (Shuval & Leshem, 1998). Despite their exposure to Western culture, they still hold traditional attitudes and are much more collectivist than the Israeli-born population.

METHOD

Participants and Procedure

Study 1a. High school students in the 11th grade, 243 Singaporean Chinese and 227 urban and secular Israelis, were surveyed during regular school classes. The self-construals of the two groups were compared. The groups significantly differed on level of the independent self as well as on level of the interdependent self as assessed by the corresponding self-construal scales developed by Singelis (1994) in the expected directions.

Study 1b. At the beginning of the academic school year, 144 Israeli and 155 Singaporean 1st-year college students were surveyed. The groups significantly differed on their levels of individualism and collectivism, as assessed by Oyserman’s (1993) scales in the expected directions.

Study 1c. In small groups, 104 Japanese and 105 Israeli university students were surveyed. The collectivism-individualism level of the groups was not assessed in this study, but there is extensive support in the literature for the existence of a stronger interdependent self and a weaker independent self among Japanese than among Westerners (for a review, see Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Study 1d. Two groups of Israeli students were compared, one comprised of Israeli-born students (n = 80) and the other of students of Ethiopian origin (n = 64) who had immigrated to Israel when they were young children and have lived in Israel for an average of 10.02 years (SD = 3.22). The two groups were compared on their corresponding levels of hierarchical and horizontal individualism and collectivism (see Study 2), and differed significantly on all four scales in the expected directions.
MEASURES

Self-enhancement was assessed by two direct measures and by a self-enhancement mechanism.

Academic self-enhancement. In all four studies, academic self-enhancement was assessed by the effect of academic self-evaluation that was statistically controlled for the actual academic situation (the actual academic situation served as a covariate in the group comparisons and its variance was partialed out of the computed correlations). Academic self-evaluation was assessed in all four studies by the question, “How successful were you in your [relevant studies] compared to your fellow students?” Students answered this question using a 7-point answering scale ranging from 1 (not successful at all) to 7 (very successful) in the first three studies and a 6-point answering scale in the fourth. Academic situation was assessed by report card grades for high school students (Study 1a), by matriculation test results for 1st-year college or university students (Studies 1b and 1d), and by GPA for other university students (Study 1c). Academic grades were standardized for range (Milligan & Cooper, 1988). In all cases, reported grades were used. Previous data have shown that the correlation between reported and actual grades is high, and sometimes the two are almost identical (Assor & Connell, 1992; Kurman & Sriram, 1997).

Above-average effect. The above-average measure was used in three studies (1a, 1b, and 1d). In the first two, participants were asked to indicate whether they consider themselves below average (coded as zero) or above average (coded as 1) in a population of the same age and gender on six traits (intelligence, health, sociability, cooperation, honesty, and generosity). A possible middle category (average) was omitted to force participants to choose between the extreme categories in Studies 1a and 1b. In Study 1d, a 9-point scale was used ranging from 1 (much below average), 5 (average), to 9 (much above average).

Relevance for self-esteem assigned to successes and to failures. The measure was used in Study 1c. It is based on a measure suggested by Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkunkit (1997) that compares the relevance for self-esteem assigned to success and failure events. Lists of 30 successes and 30 failures were used, created by a pretest from the original lists of Kitayama et al. (see Kurman, Yoshihara-Tanaka, & Elkoshi, 2003). Participants had to imagine themselves in these situations and rate the extent to which the event would be relevant to their self-esteem on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (not relevant) to 4 (very relevant). For each participant, the average rank of failures was subtracted from the average rank of successes. This difference served as a measure for a self-enhancement mechanism that can provide a fairly good estimation of the general tendency for self-enhancement.

PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

Self-esteem. The 10 items of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale (Rosenberg, 1965) with 7-point or 6-point answering scales were used in all four studies.

Positive and negative affectivity. The Positive and Negative Affectivity scales (PANAS) developed by Watson, Clark, and Tellegen (1988) were used. These scales offered 20
descriptions, 10 for positive affectivity (e.g., active, proud, strong) and 10 for negative affectivity (e.g., hostile, afraid, ashamed). For each item, participants indicated to what extent they generally felt this way. The scale ranged from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely). The measure was used in three studies (1b to 1d).

Emotional self-criticism. The Self-Criticism scale from the Depressive Emotional Questionnaire (DEQ) (Blatt, D’afflitti, & Quinlan, 1979) was used in Studies 1c and 1d. The scale includes thirteen 7-point items, loaded on the self-criticism factor for men and women. Sample items are the following: “There is a considerable difference between how I am and how I would like to be,” and “There are times when I feel ‘empty’ inside.”

Questionnaires were administered in the language of the corresponding educational system (Hebrew in Israel, English in Singapore, and Japanese in Japan). The Hebrew and Japanese versions of the original English questionnaires were translated and then back-translated by bilingual undergraduates (English-Hebrew or English-Japanese) and were checked for equivalence of content.

Internal consistencies for all scales ranged between $\alpha = .42$ and $\alpha = .91$, with an average of $\alpha = .70$ within the collectivist samples and between $\alpha = .41$ and $\alpha = .88$ with an average of $\alpha = .72$ within the individualistic samples.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In each study, the levels of self-enhancement among the collectivist and individualist cultures were compared. Table 1 shows the corresponding means, standard deviations, $F$ tests, and $\eta^2$ coefficients. The collectivist samples revealed lower self-enhancement levels than the individualist ones on all comparisons, as expected. The sizes of the effects differed; they were smaller for the within-Israeli comparison (Study 1d) and for the high school students in Israel and Singapore (Study 1a). One comparison yielded an especially large effect: relevance for self-esteem assigned to failures and successes in Israel and Japan. It may be that this result reflects not only cultural differences in self-enhancement but also a stronger

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure of Self-Enhancement</th>
<th>Individualist Culture</th>
<th>Collectivist Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1a</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic self-enhancement</td>
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<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above-average effect</td>
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<td>0.20</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.94</td>
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<tr>
<td>Above-average effect</td>
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<td>0.18</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Academic self-enhancement</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Successes-failures</td>
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<td>0.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study 1d</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic self-enhancement</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above-average effect</td>
<td>6.58</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The means are the means of academic self-evaluations controlled for grades.
* $p < .01$. *** $p < .005$. † $p < .0001$.
emphasis on failures in Japan, where children are encouraged to seek out their weaknesses and inadequacies to improve them (for further description, see Heine et al., 1999).

The relations between self-enhancement and subjective well-being measures were computed separately for each culture. The correlations are presented in Table 2. The table shows that in all eight subsamples, including the four collectivist subsamples, all measures of self-enhancement were positively and significantly correlated with self-esteem. Moreover, the size of the correlations between self-enhancement and self-esteem were about the same in the individualist and collectivist samples, with a slight trend toward higher correlations among the East Asian cultures and lower ones among the Ethiopian Jews. Emotional self-criticism, the other self-variable, also showed significant correlations for all tested samples, except for the relation between the above-average effect and self-criticism among Ethiopians, which was negative but not significant. In the vast majority of cases, positive and negative affectivity was related to self-enhancement measures in the expected directions. In the Japanese sample, these relations were significant in only one out of four correlations. It seems that the positive self-cognitions associated with self-enhancement were not automatically accompanied by positive affect in Japan. It may be that cultural criticism of such cognitions in Japan (Yoshida, Kojo, & Kaku, 1982) made the relations between self-enhancement and affectivity more complicated.

The hypothesis of the study seems to have been confirmed. It was shown that self-enhancement is related to better subjective well-being in all the tested collectivist cultures, which were quite heterogeneous and included an Ethiopian sample (representing an under-studied cultural group). Such relations imply that some motivation to increase self-evaluation exists in collectivist cultures as well. The question that becomes more salient, then, is what are the reasons for the consistent manifested differences in self-enhancement between individualist and collectivist cultures? The second study suggests an alternative explanation of the observed cross-cultural differences.

**STUDY 2: THE ROLE OF MODESTY IN SELF-ENHANCEMENT**

The consistent positive relations between self-enhancement and well-being in all tested samples argue against the claim that the lack of a self-enhancement motive is the main reason for low self-enhancement in certain collectivist cultures. It seems that even in cultures that reveal high identification with the in-group, strong caring for group members, and a need to keep the harmony of the group, self-success is still relevant to subjective well-being.

Study 2 tests whether cultural differences in modesty can explain cultural differences in self-enhancement. Modesty is the public underpresentation of one’s favorable traits and abilities (Cialdini, Wosinska, Dabul, Whetstone-Dion, & Heszen, 1998). It reflects individual differences in this tendency, but it also reflects social pressure to ignore self-success. Because perceived self-success may nurture the perceived uniqueness of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), it can interfere with identifying with group needs and can make the demand to relinquish self-needs in favor of group needs more difficult. Reduced social attention to successes can restrict perceptions of uniqueness and facilitate the process of identification with group needs. Previous findings have documented social criticism regarding modesty in East Asian cultures. Negative attitudes toward self-enhancers have been documented among Chinese respondents in Hong Kong (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982). In Japan, it was shown empirically that the norm of modest self-presentation is internalized between grades 2 and 5, and that social criticism toward self-enhancers increases dramatically during this
### TABLE 2
Correlations Between Self-Enhancement and Psychological Well-Being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Self-Esteem</th>
<th>Positive Affectivity</th>
<th>Negative Affectivity</th>
<th>Emotional Self-Criticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individualist Culture</td>
<td>Collectivist Culture</td>
<td>Individualist Culture</td>
<td>Collectivist Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-enhancement</td>
<td>$.23***</td>
<td>$.25†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above-average effect</td>
<td>$.31†</td>
<td>$.43†</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1b</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-enhancement</td>
<td>$.23**</td>
<td>$.45†</td>
<td>$.17**</td>
<td>$.37†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above-average effect</td>
<td>$.31***</td>
<td>$.32***</td>
<td>$.25***</td>
<td>$.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1c</td>
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<tr>
<td>Academic self-enhancement</td>
<td>$.35†</td>
<td>$.40†</td>
<td>$.28***</td>
<td>$.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successes-failures</td>
<td>$.30***</td>
<td>$.32***</td>
<td>$.22**</td>
<td>$.16*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study 1d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic self-enhancement</td>
<td>$.38***</td>
<td>$.34***</td>
<td>$.32***</td>
<td>$.38***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above-average effect</td>
<td>$.51†</td>
<td>$.28**</td>
<td>$.44†</td>
<td>$.39***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** The variance of grades was partialled out of the correlation between academic self-evaluation and affectivity variables.

*p < .1, **p < .05, ***p < .005, †p < .0001.
period (Yoshida et al., 1982). It has been claimed that a variation in cultural demands for modesty may create a parallel variation in self-enhancement manifestation.

The two competing explanations for self-enhancement, cultural restraints on one hand and the perceived centrality of others (reducing the psychological benefits of self-enhancement) on the other hand, may represent the endpoints of two discrete components of collectivism, which are known in the literature but have not been sufficiently explored. The distinction between vertical and horizontal collectivism and individualism (Triandis, 1995) may be relevant to the two discrete components. This distinction refers to the level of equality versus hierarchy prevailing in a culture, and claims that this level produces different types of collectivism and individualism. On the individual level, the difference between horizontal and vertical collectivism resembles the two described components: Horizontal collectivism emphasizes strong identification with and strong caring for the in-group, whereas vertical collectivism implies the necessity to sacrifice self-needs in favor of group needs. Implications of horizontal and vertical individualism on the individual level place emphasis on unique self-identity in horizontal individualist cultures and on competition in vertical individualist cultures (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995).

The notion that self-enhancement is less relevant to the self in collectivist cultures due to the importance of relationships with others is best captured by the horizontal facets. According to the self-relevance thesis, it should be expected that horizontal collectivism, which reflects relatedness and group centrality, will positively mediate the relations between culture and self-enhancement, whereas horizontal individualism, which reflects striving for uniqueness and individual identity, will negatively mediate these relations. The competing explanation for low self-enhancement is related to the level of self-restraint demanded by the culture. This level is expected to be related to the hierarchical dimension of collectivism, and particularly to norms of modesty and social criticism of favorable self-presentation. The main purpose of Study 2 is to test whether modesty, which we believe to be an integral part of vertical collectivism, mediates cultural differences in self-enhancement. The mediation process will be examined in two different cross-cultural analyses. Study 2a compares Singaporeans and urban-secular Israelis, and Study 2b investigates two Israeli subgroups, Israeli-born students (urban and secular) and Israeli students of Ethiopian origin.

**METHOD**

**Participants and Procedure**

*Study 2a.* Eleventh-grade high school students from Israel (n = 147) and Singapore (n = 130) participated in the study. The groups were compared on their level of vertical and horizontal individualism-collectivism, and revealed significant differences on all four facets. Israelis scored higher on the individualism scales, and Singaporeans scored higher on the collectivism scales (p < .0001 for all four comparisons).

*Study 2b.* Participants of Study 1d filled in the questionnaire package of the present study. The differences between the groups on the collectivism-individualism scales as well as on the self-enhancement measures are reported in Study 1d.
MEASURES

Self-enhancement measures. The above-average effect and academic self-enhancement are described in Study 1.

Modesty Responding scale (MRS). The MRS was developed by Whetstone, Okun, and Cialdini (1992). It consists of 21 items that tap the inclination toward modesty (e.g., “Telling people about my strengths and successes has always been an embarrassing thing for me”) and the perceived social desirability of modest responses (e.g., “Braging on oneself in a group is always socially inappropriate”). It also includes reversed-scored items reflecting the propensity to brag (e.g., “If I’ve done something well, I like to tell others about it”). The answers were on a 7-point scale in Study 2a and a 6-point scale in Study 2b.

Collectivism-individualism. The four scales of Singelis et al. (1995) were used to measure vertical and horizontal individualism and collectivism in the two studies. Each scale had eight items and a 7-point (Study 2a) or 6-point (Study 2b) answering scale. Sample items are as follows: for horizontal collectivism—“To me, pleasure is spending time with others,” “I feel good when I cooperate with others”; for horizontal individualism—“I often do ‘my own thing,’” “Being a unique individual is important to me”; for vertical collectivism—“I usually sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group,” “It is important to me that I respect decisions made by the group”; and for vertical individualism—“Winning is everything,” “It annoys me when other people perform better than I do.”

Internal consistencies for all scales ranged between $\alpha = .59$ and $\alpha = .92$ with an average of $\alpha = .73$ in the collectivist cultures and between $\alpha = .65$ and $\alpha = .88$ with an average of $\alpha = .75$ in the individualistic cultures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First, the groups were compared on their modesty level. It was found that both collectivist groups revealed higher levels of modesty than the corresponding individualist groups ($p < .007$ in both studies). Correlations between modesty and individualism-collectivism scales were computed and are summarized in Table 3. As assumed, the vertical facets were significantly related to modesty in both studies. These results support the assumption that modesty is an inherent component of vertical collectivism, and show that vertical individualism discouraged modesty. The vertical facets were also significantly related to self-enhancement, but the relations were smaller than the ones between modesty and self-enhancement, supporting the decision to prefer modesty rather than vertical facets as the measure of a cultural characteristic relevant to self-enhancement. The results show that horizontal collectivism was also related to modesty to a lesser extent. As horizontal collectivism was not related to self-enhancement, these relations might be mediated by vertical collectivism.

Next, the ability of modesty and horizontal individualism and collectivism to mediate the relations between culture and self-enhancement was tested. Table 3 shows that culture was significantly related to modesty and vertical collectivism and individualism, as well as to the predicted self-enhancement variables in both studies. These relations meet the first two requirements presented by Baron and Kenny (1986) for the existence of a mediation process. The third requirement, that the inclusion of the mediator in the regression equation reduces the predictive ability of the predictor, was tested by hierarchical regression analyses. As a first step, self-enhancement was predicted by culture, and in the corresponding second steps
modesty or horizontal individualism and collectivism scales were included in the equations. Table 4 shows the corresponding coefficients for the different measures of self-enhancement in the two substudies. The results in both studies indicated that the standardized regression coefficients of culture decreased when modesty was included in the equation. Sobel tests (Sobel, 1982) were conducted to test the significance of these decreases (see also Ehrlinger & Dunning, 2003). In three comparisons, the difference was significant ($Z$ values ranged between 1.98 and 2.06). The fourth comparison that tested the mediation of modesty between culture and the above average effect in the second study was only marginally significant ($Z = 1.77, p = .07$). The corresponding changes in the regression coefficients of culture when horizontal collectivism and individualism were included in the equation were minimal and insignificant. Moreover, the horizontal individualism and collectivism scales were not significantly related to self-enhancement.

The findings of two independent studies, conducted on quite different collectivist cultures for two different age groups, show that modesty, rather than relatedness to the group or unique self-identity, mediated the relations between culture and self-enhancement. It seems that at least in the tested samples cultural restrictive demands are responsible for low self-enhancement in some collectivist cultures.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

The findings of the current study indicate that self-enhancement is relevant to self-esteem and subjective well-being in four heterogeneous samples of collectivist cultures. Moreover, two independent cross-cultural analyses that included quite different collectivist samples show that modesty is a better predictor of self-enhancement than the relative centrality of self
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study 2a</th>
<th>Study 2b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Above Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>Academic Self-Enhancement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predictor</td>
<td>β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Modesty</td>
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<td>H-C</td>
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<tr>
<td>H-I</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Grades was included in the regression equations that predicted academic self-evaluations as an additional predictor to control for its variance. 

H = horizontal; C = collectivism; I = individualism.

**p < .05, ***p < .005, †p < .0001.
and others. Taken together, these findings suggest that cultural restrictions on the self (or their absence), and not a lack of self-enhancement motive, can explain the well-documented cross-cultural differences in self-enhancement level.

This conclusion is in line with some findings reported in this article’s introduction, as well as with findings that show high implicit self-enhancement in Japan. Two studies that use the Implicit Association Test (IAT) (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995), which tests the positivity of self-perception by comparing reaction time in self-positive and self-negative association, showed that when measured implicitly, Japanese participants revealed positive self-regard but when measured explicitly they did not (Kitayama & Uchida, in press; Murakami & Yamasuchi, 2000). The notion of a true merger of self-interests and others-interests resulting from early socialization is quite optimistic and suggests that once this merger exists, there is no need for strong self-restraints, and consequently there is no need for continuing cultural demands for such behavior. The relations between modesty and self-enhancement, as well as the relations between well-being and self-enhancement, show this is not the case, and that ongoing efforts on the part of the individual and the society are needed to maintain low self-enhancement. The differences between implicit and explicit self-presentation among Japanese support the same conclusion. Although not hypothesized, the opposite process seems to be valid as well: Vertical individualism was strongly related to self-enhancement, whereas horizontal individualism was not. It would be interesting to see whether this difference is reflected on the group level as well, and to investigate whether vertical individualist cultures reveal higher self-enhancement than do horizontal individualist ones.

The results of the present study have implications for our understanding of the interdependent self. It seems that the distinction between vertical and horizontal collectivism creates different emphases on relevant self-construals. The interdependent self would seem to be best presented by two different facets. One is strong group identification that can be expressed by strong relational and collective self-identity, and the other is the need for self-restraint. This distinction is in line with reported works that showed a distinction between collectivism and relatedness (Kashima et al., 1995); between individualism-authoritarianism and active collectivism, which describes closeness versus withdrawal from a group (Gelfand, Triandis & Chan, 1996); and between relational and hierarchical collectivism (Kagitcibasi, 1997).

Could it be claimed that these two components are independent? Taken to an extreme, the logical conclusion would be that strong identification with the group will eventually lead to the necessity for self-restraint, so it is difficult to picture a person who has strong group identification but is not willing to make some sacrifices for the group’s sake. Yet in all the intermediate ranges, the interdependent self can take very different forms, because one of the suggested dimensions is emphasized more than the other. An example of a low emphasis on the need to self-restrain is the Israeli kibbutz, which is characterized by high relatedness and yet still nurtures the uniqueness of its members (Infield, 1946). On the other hand, horizontal collectivist cultures are quite rare. Hofstede’s plot of countries along the dimensions of individualism and power distance (see Hofstede, 1980, p. 223) shows that no countries are characterized by low power distance and low individualism. These considerations call for a better conceptualization of self-construals and the relations among them. It should be noted that the construct of the independent self has been studied even less than the interdependent one. The suggested separate emphases within this construct on uniqueness and on competition should be studied empirically. Theoretical and empirical stabilization of the component of both the interdependent and the independent self could also contribute to a better understanding of the
relations between individualism and collectivism (for a discussion in this question, see Kagitcibasi, 1994).

The main caveat of the reported studies is that they are purely correlational. This is more of a problem with the second study, which claims that modesty requirements lead to low self-enhancement. Theoretically, it is possible that a third factor affected modesty and self-enhancement. In fact, it could be argued that modesty is an inverse measure of self-enhancement. To show this is not the case, it is important to repeat the study’s result with a somewhat different construct that will emphasize the perceived requirements for modesty prevailing in the culture in addition to the modesty level itself. If the same relations would be documented, the idea that cultural restrictions affect the low level of self-enhancement will be strongly supported. A more technical caveat of the study is the relatively small size of the Ethiopian sample. It is reassuring that the same pattern of results was obtained in the various cross-cultural analyses conducted in both studies. Despite these caveats, the results of the study are quite strong. They indicate that self-enhancement is related to subjective well-being in heterogeneous collectivist cultures, a relation that reveals the psychological benefit of self-enhancement to the interdependent self; and that modest attitudes, rather than the perceived centrality of others, mediate the relations between culture and self-enhancement.

NOTES

1. Enhancement of the quality of one’s personal relationships (Endo, Heine, & Lehman, 2000) and self-enhancement of communal traits (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003) have been documented as stronger in collectivist than in individualist cultures.

2. Israelis are less individualistic than other Western cultures, making it more difficult to show cross-cultural differences for the relevant variables (interdependent and independent self and self-enhancement); thus, the validity of the conclusions concerning cross-cultural differences is not threatened.

3. The names of the questionnaires devised by Oyserman (1993) and Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand (1995) describe characteristics of cultures, but the contents of the items in both questionnaires refer to self-construals and concentrate on reported attitudes and behaviors at the individual level.

4. Table 3 shows that the correlations between horizontal and vertical collectivism and between vertical and horizontal individualism were of intermediate size and ranged between .20 and .48, implying that facets of the same construct are not independent but are definitely separable.

5. The study manipulated the context in which self-evaluations were obtained, claiming that low explicit self-evaluations of Japanese are obtained only in the context of close relationships, as they get strong support from close friends concerning their difficulties. They support this claim by the fact that Americans also rated themselves below a close friend. Yet the difference was larger for Japanese, supporting the idea that modesty requirements may have affected the explicit reaction of the Japanese.

REFERENCES


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