A growing body of research supports the notion that individuals simultaneously hold two views of self. Members of collective cultures have stronger interdependent images of self, but less strong independent images, than do individualist groups. University students in Hong Kong (n = 271), Hawaii (n = 146), and mainland United States (n = 232) completed the Self-Construal Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and the Modigliani Embarrassability Scale. As expected, levels of independence and interdependence were related to ethnocultural group (Euro-American, Asian American, and Hong Kong Chinese). Independence and interdependence accounted for most of the variance in embarrassability attributable to ethnocultural group. Contrary to predictions based on terror management theory, there was no difference in the relation between self-construal and self-esteem across the three ethnocultural groups. Across all groups, a more independent and less interdependent self-construal predicted higher levels of self-esteem. It is concluded that similar psychological processes contribute to self-esteem and embarrassability across the ethnocultural groups in the study.

UNPACKAGING CULTURE’S INFLUENCE ON SELF-ESTEEM AND EMBARRASSABILITY
The Role of Self-Construals

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The self has been a central theme of psychologists since William James wrote The Principles of Psychology (1890/1981). Rather than waning, this interest seems on the rise, with more that 5,000 published articles relating to the self since 1987 (Banaji & Prentice, 1994). For the most part, these studies have focused on a Western conceptualization of self as bounded, autonomous, and separate from the social context (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swindler, & Tipton, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Sampson, 1989). That this conceptualization does not exemplify the experience of much of the world’s population has gained some recognition over the past decade. Numerous
scholars have depicted conceptions of self in various cultures that differ, sometimes dramatically, from those that have been the traditional focus of Western researchers (e.g., D.Y.F. Ho, 1993; Kagitcibasi, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b, 1994; Marsella, DeVos, & Hsu, 1985; Shweder & Bourne, 1984). In this study, we focus on the distinction between the independent and interdependent construals of self explicated by Markus and Kitayama (1991b), recognizing that these two images of self coexist in individuals but are emphasized and supported to different degrees in various ethnocultural groups (Singelis, 1994; Singelis & Brown, 1995). We seek to confirm the relation of culture to these two selves in a cross-cultural sample, to replicate earlier findings concerning the relation of self-construal and embarrassability (Singelis & Sharkey, 1995), and to test the hypothesis that self-esteem is related to culturally mandated characteristics (Greenberg et al., 1992; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991).

Our theoretical and methodological approach hopes to overcome the common criticism of cross-cultural studies: In such studies, one is unable to locate precisely the source of cultural differences because culture comes as a “package” containing numerous variables, any of which might account for observed differences (see Kagitcibasi, 1994; Poortinga, van de Vijver, Joe, & van de Koppel, 1987; Whiting, 1976).

**CULTURE AND SELF-CONSTRUAL**

There are, of course, many aspects of self-image that are affected by culture, but this study is concerned with two—Independent and interdependent self-construals. Self-construal is conceptualized here as a constellation of thoughts, feelings, and actions concerning the relation of the self to others and the self as distinct from others. The concept of self is important because it is not only central to an individual’s perceptions, evaluations, and communication but also strongly linked to cultural norms and values (Geertz, 1975; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Marsella et al., 1985; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Triandis, 1989). This association of culture and self-construal provides an ideal opportunity “to develop theories which link psychological processes to individual behaviors panculturally” (Bond, 1994, p. 257). To accomplish this task, we must conceptualize and measure dimensions at the culture and individual levels that can be related theoretically (Singelis & Brown, 1995). In this study, we propose that individualism-collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1990) and independent and interdependent dimensions of self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Singelis, 1994) link cultural variability and individual differences.
THE CULTURE LEVEL

Conceptualizing and defining culture has intrigued and challenged scholars for decades. Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) reviewed 164 definitions of culture; surely, many more have entered the literature since. Although disciplinary background has a strong influence on the aspect of culture that is emphasized, most scholars would agree that in some sense culture resides both inside and outside of individuals. Culture exists inside individuals in the form of shared beliefs, values, and internalized interaction patterns—subjective culture (Triandis, 1972). Outside the individual, culture consists of the shared human-made part of the environment, including religious and political institutions, educational systems, and aesthetic achievements, such as art, drama, and literary works. These two aspects of culture are certainly interrelated. Understandably, psychologists primarily have been concerned with subjective culture.

In psychology, individualism-collectivism is the most frequently researched dimension of culture (for reviews, see Triandis, 1990, 1995). Early conceptualizations of individualism and collectivism tended to emphasize the contrast between the subordination of personal goals to those of the in-group (collectivism) and the priority of personal goals over in-group goals (individualism) (e.g., Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Recently, a set of defining features for these two constructs was developed (Triandis, 1995). Additional features of collectivism include (a) defining the self as a part or aspect of in-groups; (b) an emphasis on norms and perceived duties in guiding social behavior; and (c) the importance of relationships regardless of the immediate costs they may entail. In addition to the emphasis on personal goals, individualism is characterized by: (a) self-concepts that are autonomous from groups; (b) the use of attitudes and other internal processes to guide one’s social behavior; and (c) the weighing of relationships in terms of their costs and benefits (Triandis, 1995).

When data are analyzed at the culture level, subjective features must be aggregated so that each group receives a single score representing the shared aspects of what was measured at the individual level (e.g., values). Thus, prior studies have measured features of subject culture in various groups, assigned aggregate scores to each group and then compared these group means. Such studies have shown that individualism and collectivism are opposite poles of a single continuum (Hofstede, 1980; Smith, Dugan, & Trompenaars, 1996). These studies, as well as other analyses, have shown that Hong Kong Chinese culture is more collective than that of the U.S. mainland (e.g., Bellah et al., 1985; Bond, 1986).

Although it is a part of the United States, Hawaii occupies a unique position. It is separated from the mainland by 2,000 miles of the Pacific Ocean,
and its population is predominately Asian in background. There is no doubt that the colonization of Hawaii and the economic dominance of the United States have affected the island culture strongly, yet the demographic makeup and continuation of traditional Asian festivals and holidays such as Bon indicate that the culture of Hawaii has not become totally Westernized. Perhaps, more than on the mainland United States, Asian Americans in Hawaii have retained many of their cultural values (Okamura, 1982). This may be due, in part, to the fact that Asian Americans comprise a majority in Hawaii. In addition, prior research has shown that in Hawaii, Asian Americans are more collectivist than are Euro-Americans (Singelis, 1994; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). At the same time, these Asian Americans cannot be culturally equated with members of their ethnic homelands because, clearly, they have been exposed to the U.S. political, educational, and economic systems for some time.

Therefore, on the individualism-collectivism continuum, it seems reasonable to place Asian American culture in Hawaii at a position between that of Hong Kong and the U.S. mainland, recognizing that this is subject to verification.

THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Synthesizing a broad range of previous work, Markus and Kitayama (1991b) identified two basic and relatively stable types of self-construal. The Western (individualist) “[i]ndependent] notion of the self as an entity containing significant dispositional attributes, and as detached from context,” stands in opposition to the Eastern (collectivist) self “as interdependent with the surrounding context, [where] it is the ‘other’ or the ‘self-in-relation-to-other’ that is the focal in individual experience” (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b, p. 225).

At the culture level, these two views of self fall at opposite poles of the individualism and collectivism continuum. However, at the individual level of analysis, a number of studies have shown that these concepts of self are orthogonal and coexist, to varying degrees, within individuals (Bontempo, 1993; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Singelis, 1994; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Trafinow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991; Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985). Drawing on this conceptualization of a “dual self,” we propose that these coexisting selves develop and are accessed according to the cultural environment. Although the following juxtaposes the two types of self-construal and presents extreme descriptions of each self, in practice, these two selves coexist as tendencies that influence behavior.

Independent self-construal is defined as a “bounded, unitary, stable” self that is separate from social context (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b, p. 230). The
constellation of elements composing an independent self-construal includes an emphasis on: (a) internal abilities, thoughts, and feelings; (b) being unique and expressing the self; (c) realizing internal attributes and promoting one’s own goals; and (d) being direct in communication. When thinking about themselves, individuals with highly developed independent self-construals will have as referents their own abilities, attributes, characteristics, or goals rather than the thoughts, feelings, or actions of others. Similarly, when thinking about others, these others’ individual characteristics and attributes will be focal rather than relational or contextual factors (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b).

An interdependent self-construal is defined as a “flexible, variable” self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b, p. 230) that emphasizes: (a) external, public features such as status, roles, and relationships; (b) belonging and fitting in; (c) occupying one’s proper place and engaging in appropriate action; and (d) being indirect in communication and “reading others’ minds.” When thinking about themselves or others, there is a sense that the self and others are intertwined. In addition, neither self nor other is separate from the situation but is molded by it. Harmonious interpersonal relationships and the ability to adjust to various situations are goals of the interdependent self-construal. Therefore, the interdependent self tends to communicate indirectly and to be attentive to others’ feelings and unexpressed thoughts, that is, to “read others’ minds.” Contrary to the independent self, the interdependent self depends on others, his or her relationships with those others, and contextual factors to regulate behavior. Because connecting with others and fitting in is a primary source of self-esteem, the situation and others present become “actively and continuously” integrated into the interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b).

RELATION OF CULTURE AND INDIVIDUAL LEVELS

Previously, we characterized subjective culture as shared beliefs, values, and interaction patterns and described culture level analyses as being the aggregate of individually measured scores. On one hand, aggregated, or group, scores represent the shared subjective feature that was measured (e.g., Hofstede’s, 1980, work-related values). On the other hand, they encompass or package other shared aspects of the group and its environment. So long as this cultural variability is measured at the individual level in a particular study, this is not a problem. By aggregating the independent variable, one can check to see if cultural differences do exist and if they are consistent with a priori theoretical and empirical considerations. In addition, individual-level analyses are able to confirm that the particular feature of subjective culture
that was measured is, in fact, associated with the dependent variable. Unfortunately, many studies have measured only the dependent variable of interest and used as the independent variable cultures categorized on the basis of prior empirical or theoretical considerations. In that case, one is not certain which aspect of the package is associated with the dependent variable.

Studies incorporating both individual and culture-level analyses have additional benefits. They can help us to overcome stereotyping. Although illuminating cultural differences, these studies also make clear the individual differences within cultures and remind us that not all members of a culture are represented by the prototype that may characterize a culture. In the future, when measures of external culture are included with individual measures of subjective culture, we will be able to begin explaining the relation between cultural institutions, psychological processes, and behavior.

Hypothesis 1: Collectivism, at the culture level, is associated with stronger interdependent self-construals and weaker independent self-construals at the individual level.

SELF-CONSTRUAL AND EMBARRASSABILITY

The concern for how one is being evaluated by others dominates explanations of embarrassment. The presence of others may be real or imagined but is a necessary condition for embarrassment (Edelmann, 1987). Focus on others’ evaluations stems from a threat to one’s public identity or social image, which is brought on by a discrepancy between one’s desired and presented role-identities (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Embarrassment results from a concern that people have about their observable behavior and a desire to conform to and please others. Goffman (1956) claimed that “the crucial concern is the impression one makes on others” (p. 256).

Researchers have contended that individuals who are sensitive to others’ views, or those who are particularly anxious about their own public image, are more susceptible to embarrassment than are those who are focused on the internal attributes of the self (Edelmann & McCusker, 1986; Miller, 1987; Modigliani, 1966). A body of literature supports this contention. In Western cultures (i.e., mainland United States and Britain), self-reported embarrassment has been correlated with relational constructs such as social anxiety, public self-consciousness, shyness, neuroticism, fear of negative evaluation, social physique anxiety, attention to social comparison, and fear of negative evaluations (Edelmann, 1987; Leary & Meadows, 1991; Miller, 1987;
Modigliani, 1968). If one assumes that the individual should be a bounded, autonomous, self-sufficient social unit independent of others, then the susceptibility to embarrassment becomes a deficiency, that is, being concerned with others’ evaluations becomes an indicator of anxiety or one’s lack of social confidence. Recently, Singelis and Sharkey (1995) argued that the association of these constructs with embarrassability unduly emphasizes the sources of embarrassability as defects or inadequacies. From another perspective, embarrassability is a sensitivity to the social context that serves a valuable social and adaptive function. Especially in collectivist cultures, embarrassability may contribute to the ability to follow group norms and function unobtrusively in groups, both of which are necessary for success.

Supporting these arguments, Singelis and Sharkey (1995) found that embarrassability was positively associated with interdependent self-construal and negatively associated with independent self-construal in a multiethnic sample of students in Hawaii. These associations held in the entire sample and within the Asian American and Euro-American groups. Based on these empirical findings and the previous theoretical discussion, we predict that:

*Hypothesis 2*: Individual-level positive associations with interdependence and negative associations with independence account for cultural differences in embarrassability.

**SELF-CONSTRUAL AND SELF-ESTEEM**

The relation of self-construal and self-esteem is relatively uncharted territory. Some studies have attempted to identify the contributors to self-esteem in different cultures or racial groups (e.g., Hoge & McCarthy, 1984; Luk & Bond 1992; Tashakkori, 1993), and numerous studies have compared levels of self-esteem across groups (e.g., Dukes & Martinez, 1994; Verkuyten, 1993). Recently, Feather and McKee (1993) attributed lower self-esteem among Japanese college students in comparison to their Australian counterparts to their differing self-construals, but they did not measure those self-construals. To our knowledge, there are no direct empirical data that bear on the relation of self-construal and self-esteem, but several theoretical arguments have been advanced. Although they focus on different processes, each of these arguments concludes that self-esteem is related to the culturally appropriate conception of self.
MAINTAINING A CULTURALLY DESIRABLE SELF

Starting with the premise that the motive to maintain a positive view of the self is universal (e.g., Greenwald, 1980; James, 1890/1981; Steele, 1988), Markus and Kitayama (1991b) proposed that “what constitutes a positive view of self depends, however, on one’s construal of the self” (p. 242). Thus, for those with an independent construal of self, the sources of self-esteem are based on the characteristics preferred for that self: being unique, expressing the self, and asserting the self. On the other hand, for those with an interdependent self-construal, self-esteem is based on belonging, fitting in, occupying one’s proper place, engaging in appropriate actions, and keeping harmony. According to Markus and Kitayama (1991b), this difference is evidenced in a variety of studies involving self-processes. For example, Americans typically feel personally responsible for their successes, explain away their failures, and try to enhance the self (e.g., Lau, 1984, Whitley & Frieze, 1985). American adults tend to rate themselves as more attractive and intelligent than average (Wylie, 1979). American students also exhibit a strong tendency toward the false uniqueness bias (Myers, 1987). On average, students in Japan rate about 50% of others as higher on a given trait or ability (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a). If anything, Japanese tend to show a modesty bias. Shikanai (1978) found that Japanese participants primarily attributed their success to the ease of the task and attributed their failure to lack of effort (see Markus & Kitayama, 1991b).

Such biases are not restricted to the Japanese. Chinese college students in Hong Kong who gave self-effacing attributions following successes were liked better than those giving self-enhancing attributions (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982). In another study, Chinese students reacted more strongly to insults directed at their group than at their personal attributes (Bond & Venus, 1991). These studies are evidence that, in some cultures, self-esteem should be related to the strength of one’s interdependent self-construal. However, it should be noted that this argument and the accompanying evidence is founded on the notion that an individual’s self-construal is either independent or interdependent. Recall that we have asserted that individuals simultaneously have both types of self, but that one may be more developed than the other due to cultural factors. The relation of culture and self-esteem is precisely what is addressed in terror management theory.

TERROR MANAGEMENT

Although the theoretical arguments previously set out began with the assumption of a universal need for self-esteem, terror management theory
endeavors to explain that need (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986; Solomon et al., 1991). In citing Becker (1975), the theory posits that “cultural worldviews imbue the world with meaning, order, stability, and permanence, and by so doing, buffer the anxiety that results from living in a terrifying and largely uncontrollable universe in which death is the only certainty” (Solomon et al., 1991, p. 96). The culturally based worldview is only the first step in establishing a buffer against the anxiety that pervades human existence. The worldview must be accompanied by the belief that one is a valuable member of the meaningful, culturally constructed universe. Thus, self-esteem plays a central role in distancing one from the anxiety arising from a death without meaning. The cultural worldview includes a prescription for what constitutes “good” and “valuable” lives.

Self-esteem therefore consists of viewing oneself as a valuable participant in a meaningful cultural drama. Acquiring this sense of value requires that one both accept the standards of value as absolutely valid and view oneself as living up to those standards. To avoid the terror that would otherwise result from awareness of vulnerability and mortality, individuals’ lives are therefore focused on maintaining self-esteem, which requires both faith in some internalized worldview, and satisfaction of culturally prescribed standards of value. By meeting these standards, people can sustain a sense of their own immortality. (Solomon et al., 1991, p. 97)

Put briefly, self-esteem is seen as a culturally defined barrier that protects one from the ever-present, but usually latent, anxiety over one’s inevitable death (Greenberg et al., 1993). According to terror management theory, it is this buffering function that provides the motivation to maintain a cultural worldview and, if one is successful, self-esteem. A variety of evidence is marshaled to support this theory; only a sampling is mentioned here.

First, Solomon et al. (1991) enlisted a wealth of literature on the defense of self-esteem, such as the self-serving bias. They argued that increased anxiety and increased efforts to defend one’s self-esteem in response to threats to self-esteem supported their theory. As discussed previously, the self-serving bias is not pancultural and thus points to the possibility that self-esteem is related to culture. Second, research on conformity and the false consensus effect is interpreted as support for the theory. For example, participants whose self-esteem is threatened show a greater tendency toward false consensus (i.e., heightened cultural worldview) than do those whose self-esteem is enhanced (Sherman, Presson, & Chassin, 1984). Finally, when thoughts of mortality are made salient, there is a tendency to become more firmly ensconced in one’s cultural worldview and less tolerant of those who violate that view (Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989).
Despite the fact that cultural worldviews are central to terror management theory, little research supporting it involves members of a culture other than the mainland United States. It is clear from this theory, as well as from the arguments made by Markus and Kitayama (1991b), that self-esteem should be systematically related to culture and self-construal. Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3**: The relation of independence and self-esteem varies with culture such that the greater the individualism in the culture, the stronger the relation between independence and self-esteem.

**Hypothesis 4**: The relation of interdependence and self-esteem varies with culture such that the greater the collectivism in the culture, the stronger the relation between interdependence and self-esteem.

**METHOD**

**PARTICIPANTS**

The sample consisted of 814 undergraduate students from large universities in Hong Kong (n = 283), Hawaii (n = 257) and mainland United States* (n = 274). The breakdown of the sample by self-reported ethnic group, age, and gender is shown in Table 1.

**QUESTIONNAIRE**

The questionnaire was composed of four parts. Participants completed an early version of the Self-Construal Scale* (SCS) (Singelis, 1994). This scale was designed to measure the “constellation of thoughts, feelings, and actions” (Singelis, 1994, p. 584) that comprise independent and interdependent self-construals as separate dimensions. The independent subscale contained 13 items that tap the defining features of the construct (e.g., “I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects”). The interdependent subscale contained 12 items (e.g., “My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me”). Responses on the SCS were made on a 7-point Likert-type scale, with anchors of strongly agree and strongly disagree.

The second part of the questionnaire was Modigliani’s (1966) Embarrassability Scale. Items were modified to accommodate both genders. The 26 items on the scale (e.g., “Suppose you slipped and fell in a public place, dropping a package of groceries”) were answered on a 7-point Likert-type format, with anchors of not at all embarrassing and very embarrassing.
Participants also completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), which measures overall positive and negative feelings about the self. The scale is one of the most widely used measures of self-esteem and has satisfactory psychometric properties (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991). It is composed of 10 items (e.g., “I feel I’m a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others”) and uses a 4-point Likert-type response format, with anchors of strongly agree and strongly disagree. The final section of the questionnaire contained demographic questions to assess participants’ age, gender, and ethnocultural background.

Measures used in Hong Kong were translated into Chinese and backtranslated by a second bilingual. Discrepancies between the two versions were rectified through consultation (Brislin, 1981).

PROCEDURE

Order of the SCS and Embarrassability Scale were counterbalanced: The Self-Esteem Scale and demographic information followed them in the

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**TABLE 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Geographic Location</th>
<th>Cultural Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U.S. Mainland</td>
<td>Hawaii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro-American</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7.1)</td>
<td>(6.06)</td>
<td>(1.3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>n Men</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>97</td>
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<tr>
<td>n Women</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>160</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Age data are represented by means, followed by standard deviations in parentheses.
questionnaire. Questionnaires were completed during regular class time. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Some students received extra credit for taking part.

RESULTS

ETHNOCULTURAL GROUP

An inspection of Table 1 reveals that the diversity of ethnic background varied considerably by location. Because we were concerned with the effects of culture, we grouped participants according to their self-reported ethnocultural background. In particular, our hypotheses concern individualism-collectivism, and so our criteria for selection were based on prior research that addressed this dimension. Clearly, the Chinese in the Hong Kong sample fell into a relatively homogeneous collectivist group (Bond, 1986; Hofstede, 1980). From the mainland sample, only those identifying themselves as Euro-American were selected for the individualist group. Based on the previous discussion of Asian Americans in Hawaii, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Korean Americans, and Filipino Americans were chosen to compose an intermediate group. Culture-level scores representing ascending levels of collectivism were assigned. Euro-Americans (n = 232), Asian Americans from Hawaii (n = 146), and Hong Kong Chinese (n = 271) were used in the analysis and were assigned collectivism scores of one, two, and three, respectively; all members of a group receive the same score, representing their respective culture’s level of collectivism. These culture-level collectivism scores are used in the regressions that follow to determine the effect of culture on the dependent variables. Individuals who did not fall into one of the three categories were not used in the analyses that follow.

ANALYSIS OF SCALES

Our first consideration was the structure of the scales employed in the study. To this end, the participants from all three cultural groups (N = 649) were used for a decultured, pancultural factor analysis to determine the culture-free factors represented across all groups (see Leung & Bond, 1989). This involved: (a) standardizing item scores within participants (to remove any response biases that might be present); (b) standardizing item scores within culture (to center the scores culturally); (c) subjecting these doubly standardized item scores to a factor analysis with an oblique rotation; and (d) determining factor structures (based on scree plots and factor
interpretability). This process yielded a single factor for the self-esteem items and two factors each for the self-construal items and embarrassability items.

**Self-construal.** The 25 items on this scale produced two factors identical to other analyses of similar items (see Singelis, 1994). Independence (13 items) and interdependence (12 items) together accounted for 24.2% of the variance. Independence and interdependence factor scores were derived by multiplying the individual’s raw item scores by the item factor score coefficient and totaling across the items composing each factor. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities for the items composing the two factors were .66 for independence and .61 for interdependence. Similar internal reliabilities (see Table 2) were obtained within each of the ethnocultural subgroups.

**Embarrassability.** Past studies have produced various factor structures for this scale (see Edelmann, 1987). The current data revealed two clear factors (accounting for 21.4% of the variance). Factor 1 contained 18 items and was

### TABLE 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Cronbach’s Alpha Reliabilities for the Sample and by Ethnocultural Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Groups</th>
<th>U.S. Euro-American (n = 232)</th>
<th>Hawaii Asian American (n = 146)</th>
<th>Hong Kong Chinese (n = 271)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>5.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependence</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>5.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Embarrassability</td>
<td>7.40</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>6.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic-Embarrassability</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>3.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Esteem</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>α</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: One-way analyses of variance indicated significant effects of culture on all variables (p < .001). Different superscripts indicate significant mean differences among groups in post hoc Scheffe tests with significance level of p < .05.
labeled Self-Embarrassability. Items loading on this factor referred to the individual as the center of attention in an embarrassing situation (e.g., You fall getting on a bus). The second factor (8 items), labeled Empathetic-Embarrassability, focused on a second person as the center of attention (e.g., An actor forgets his lines) (see Miller, 1987). Factor scores for Self-Embarrassability and Empathetic-Embarrassability were derived in the same manner as were those for self-construal described previously. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities for the items composing the two factors were .85 for Self-Embarrassability and .75 for Empathetic-Embarrassability, with similar internal consistency for the various ethnocultural subgroups (see Table 2).

Self-esteem. The 10 items of the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale constituted a single factor accounting for 52.3% of the variance among those items. A factor score for self-esteem was derived in the same fashion as for the previous measures. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities for these items were .86 for the entire sample and, again, similar internal reliabilities (see Table 2) were obtained within each of the ethnocultural subgroups.

Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations of the measures for the entire sample and by group. Table 3 shows the correlations among these measures.

TESTS OF THE HYPOTHESES

Independence and interdependence. The first hypothesis states: Collectivism, at the culture level, is associated with stronger interdependent self-construals and weaker independent self-construals at the individual level. Regressing independence and interdependence on cultural collectivism revealed a strong relation between collectivism and self-construal. Collectivism was positively related to interdependence, \( F(1, 647) = 42.66, p < .001, R^2 = .06 \), and negatively related to independence, \( F(1, 647) = 94.18, p < .001, R^2 = .13 \).

As a check on our a priori ordering of cultures on the individualism and collectivism dimension, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) also was performed on independence and interdependence using ethnocultural group as a categorical variable. If variance over and above that accounted for by the previous regression were captured in the ANOVA, it would call into question the a priori ordering of cultures on the collectivism dimension. In fact, the ordering seems to fit the data quite well. ANOVA results showed only a 1% increase in variance accounted for (from 6% to 7%) in interdependence, \( F(2, 646) = 26.70, p < .001, R^2 = .07 \), and no increase in variance accounted for in independence, \( F(2, 646) = 48.38, p < .001, R^2 = .13 \). Therefore, we concluded
that our a priori ordering of cultures is valid and that Hypothesis 1 is supported.

**Embarrassability.** The second hypothesis states: Individual-level positive associations with interdependence and negative associations with independence account for cultural differences in embarrassability. To test this hypothesis, it was first necessary to determine if, in fact, there were cultural differences in embarrassability. An ANOVA showed that the three groups did vary significantly on both dimensions of embarrassability: for Self-Embarrassability, \( F(2, 646) = 27.10, p < .001, R^2 = .08 \), and for Empathetic-Embarrassability, \( F(2, 646) = 24.83, p < .001, R^2 = .07 \). Although these analyses show significant effects for cultural group, an inspection of the means (see Table 2) reveals that, unexpectedly, Asian Americans scored higher on Self-Embarrassability than did Hong Kong Chinese, and the two groups were the same on Empathetic-Embarrassability.

A hierarchical regression then was used to determine if self-construal would account for these cultural differences. Independence, interdependence, culture, and the interactions of culture with independence and interdependence were entered sequentially into a regression equation. Detailed results of this regression, including changes in accounted-for variance, are shown in Table 4. As expected, independence was negatively associated with embarrassability, \( t(1, 647) = -7.84, p < .001, \beta = -.74 \), for Self-Embarrassability; \( t(1, 647) = -2.92, p < .01, \beta = -.30 \), for Empathetic-Embarrassability; and interdependence had a positive association, \( t(1, 646) = 2.80, p < .01, \beta = .24 \), for Self-Embarrassability; \( t(1, 646) = 2.01, p < .05, \beta = .19 \), for Empathetic-Embarrassability. It is noteworthy that culture contributed a small amount of additional variance explained after independent and interdependent self-construals were entered into the

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**TABLE 3**

**Correlations**

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<th>Empathetic-Embarrassability</th>
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</thead>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathetic-Embarrassability</td>
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<td>.40</td>
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</table>
| Self-Esteem    | .42                   | -.14            | -.31                        | -.19

NOTE: All correlations are significant at the .01 level (two-tailed). \( N = 649 \).
equations—$\Delta R^2 = .004$ for Self-Embarrassability, $\Delta R^2 = .006$ for Empathetic-Embarrassability—although it did reach significance in the Empathetic-Embarrassability model. Given the present data, the analysis “unpackaged” independent and interdependent self-construals, showing that they can account for most of culture’s effect on embarrassability.

For Empathetic-Embarrassability, the interactions of culture with self-construal were not significant, $t(1, 644) = 1.86, p = ns$, and $t(1, 643) = -0.07,$
However, the interaction of independent self-construal and culture did have a significant relation with Self-Embarrassability, \( t(1, 644) = 4.01, p < .001, \beta = .40, \Delta R^2 = .024 \). Interpreting this interaction requires careful analysis.

The interaction indicates that the effects associated with independence are not consistent across levels of cultural collectivism. Using only two levels of independence derived from a median split, Figure 1 illustrates the interaction. Clearly, independence is more negatively associated with self-embarrassability in the United States than in Hawaii or Hong Kong. The interaction terms, then, tell us that as an individual’s culture becomes more collectivist, independence becomes less negatively associated with Self-Embarrassability. This finding will be discussed subsequently; however, it should be noted that the interaction accounts for about 2% of the variance in Self-Embarrassability.

_Self-esteem._ The third hypothesis states: The relation of independence and self-esteem varies with culture such that the greater the individualism in the culture, the stronger the relation between independence and self-esteem. The fourth hypothesis predicts a similar interaction of interdependence and cul-
ture in predicting self-esteem. Again, a hierarchical regression was employed to test the hypotheses. The regression shows significant effects for independence, \(t(1, 647) = 3.86, p < .001, \beta = .37\), and interdependence, \(t(1, 646) = -2.09, p < .05, \beta = -.18\), but none for the predicted interactions (see Table 4). Therefore, Hypotheses 3 and 4 are not supported.

Culture is related to self-esteem. An ANOVA showed significant differences between groups, \(F(2, 646) = 28.22, p < .001, R^2 = .08\). In addition, culture had a significant effect on self-esteem after accounting for the effects of independent and interdependent self-construals, \(t(1, 645) = -3.67, p = .001, \beta = -.14, \Delta R^2 = .017\). Although much of the variance in self-esteem was accounted for by self-construals, culture contributed additional variance to this construct, and so cultural differences beyond self-construal are indicated.

DISCUSSION

At the outset, we had three goals for this study. We wanted to show that the two dimensions of self-construal are individual differences that are pan-cultural and are systematically linked to the widely researched cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism. We wanted to replicate the relation of self-construal to embarrassability in a cross-cultural sample, and we wanted to test the hypothesis that self-esteem is linked to culture. These goals generally have been accomplished. Lest some readers wonder if the results reported previously were affected unduly by the presence of the Hawaii Asian American sample in the analysis, we report the essential regression data without the Hawaii group in the appendix. When only Hong Kong and the United States are used, some of the beta weights are changed and, consequently, are significant levels, but the variance accounted for is essentially identical to that in the full analysis.

CULTURE AND SELF

This study adds to the growing evidence that independent and interdependent self-construals are not culture-specific phenomena, but rather that they coexist in individuals regardless of culture (see also Gudykunst et al., 1996; Singelis, 1994; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995; Trafimow et al., 1991). The link substantiated here between self-construals and individualism-collectivism is especially useful to researchers. With this connection and other yet-to-be established ties between culture and
individual processes, researchers and scholars can begin to build a theoretical and empirical framework for explanation of social behavior that includes cultural differences rather than ignoring them (see Smith & Bond, 1994, chap. 11). Due to its effects on individual behavior as well as its relation to the clear and potent cultural dimension of individualism-collectivism, self-construal promises to be an important variable in linking culture to behavior.

Although this study has added support for this relation, other studies in other cultures are needed to increase our confidence in this association. Furthermore, our measures at both the individual and culture levels need improvement. The internal consistency of the independent and interdependent dimensions in this study could be sharpened. Reliable and valid measurement in various cultures is one of the hurdles that cross-cultural researchers must conquer in their quest to meet Bond’s (1994) challenge to find pan-cultural psychological processes. The Self-Construal Scale used here continues to undergo revision and improvement. Nonetheless, this study provides evidence that self-construal is linked generally to embarrassability and self-esteem, at least in the three samples it incorporated.

SELF AND EMBARRASSABILITY

Embarrassability is an important focus of attention because it is an emotion, common to all social groups, that has social and evolutionary significance (Miller & Leary, 1992). Embarrassment is an important factor in socialization, in that it helps enable children to acquire cultural norms for accepted behavior by providing mild sanctions that regulate public behavior (Miller, 1996). The results reported here support the assertion that embarrassability and self-construal are related in similar ways across cultural groups, yet there are several interesting differences found here that were not evidenced in previous explorations of embarrassability and self-construal (Sharkey & Singelis, 1995; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995). First, two distinct dimensions of embarrassability emerged in our pan-cultural factor analysis. We can have only limited confidence in this finding because previous analyses of the Modigliani (1966) scale have found various factor structures (Edelmann, 1985; Edelmann & McCusker, 1986; Modigliani, 1966). Nonetheless, the two factors found in this study, empathetic and self, are consistent with previous theoretical assertions (Miller, 1987). Furthermore, the two types of embarrassability were related to independence and interdependence in a theoretically consistent manner. Independence was more strongly associated with Self-Embarrassability than with Empathetic-Embarrassability, and interdependence was equally correlated with each.
SELF-ESTEEM

Contrary to our hypothesis, self-esteem was not differently related to self-construal across cultures. In fact, the relation seems to be quite consistent in the three different cultural environments of this study. This result complements the finding that in Hong Kong, Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem scores are related to the big five personality factors in exactly the same fashion as in the United States (E.K.F. Ho, 1994). On the other hand, the lack of support for the hypothesis that self-esteem is related to self-construal differently across cultures presents a quandary.

There are basically three possibilities to explain the lack of support for the hypotheses concerning self-esteem. The first is simply that the theory is wrong. Self-esteem may not be socially constructed but rather may be a universal phenomenon that stems from the motivation for personal survival, independent of culture. Although this is certainly possible and should not be ruled out at this point, the arguments for cultural influence on self-esteem are sound, and other evidence (cited previously) suggests there is support for these hypotheses. We feel it is too early to accept this explanation without further consideration of other possibilities.

Another possibility is that the Rosenberg (1965) scale is an imposed emic and does not measure self-esteem in Hong Kong, among Asian Americans in Hawaii, or among either. This possibility hinges on the conceptualization of self-esteem. If self-esteem means feeling the self is a valuable entity, then the Rosenberg scale would have to be considered valid. The questions have strong face validity and are pitched to allow respondents to determine for themselves the sources of esteem—for example, “I feel I am a person of worth”; “On the whole I am satisfied with myself.” Note that these questions do not limit the reasons for worth or satisfaction to personal accomplishments or attributes. A person may believe he or she is worthy due to personal abilities or good relationships with others. Thus, the scale does not restrict respondents to those sources of self-esteem that might be called independent. Indeed, both independent and interdependent self-construals predict self-esteem in groups included in this study.

The third possibility is both the most intriguing and appealing. It may be that global self-esteem is not the monolith conceptualized by Western psychologists. If people in both the East and West have two types of self-construal, as the evidence increasingly shows, then might it not be possible that there are two corresponding types of self-esteem: independent self-esteem and interdependent self-esteem. Although the Rosenberg (1965) scale allows one to focus on various sources of self-esteem, as pointed out
previously, it, nonetheless, is focused on the independent self. It asks about one’s personal sense of worth and focuses on the bounded autonomous self that defines the independent self-construal. Could there not be self-esteem that focuses on the interdependent self-construal—an interdependent self-esteem? This type of self-esteem would consider the unit to be the self-in-relation-to-other rather than the bounded self. It would concern itself with the feeling of worth placed not solely on the self, but rather the worth of family, relationships, and associations (i.e., interdependencies). Interdependent self-esteem would not view these interdependencies as a source of self-esteem for the individual, but would rather see these interdependencies as the unit to which the worth or value accrues. Examples of items that might measure interdependent self-esteem are: “My family ties are satisfying,” “On the whole, my relationships are satisfying,” and “Keeping good feelings between people is useless at times.” These bear some resemblance to the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES) (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). The CSES is a well-thought-out and carefully developed instrument based on the assertion that “individuals vary in the extent to which they evaluate their social groups positively, just as they vary in the extent to which they evaluate themselves positively” (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992, p. 316). It may be that the CSES captures some of what might be termed interdependent self-esteem. However, the CSES stresses the stature of one’s group rather than the interdependencies between the group and the self. Interdependent self-esteem might more specifically tap the satisfying nature of the relationship of the individual to others (separately or as groups). We applaud the expansion of the self-esteem conceptualization in the CSES and offer the notion of an interdependent self-esteem as another possibility to be explored in the future. Furthermore, research employing a wider variety of self-esteem measures such as the CSES may yet show that self-esteem does stem, in fact, from different types of self-construal in various cultures, as hypothesized by terror management theory.

In a study conducted subsequent to the one reported here, Kwan, Bond, and Singelis (1997) proposed a new construct, relationship harmony. Although not exactly a form of interdependent self-esteem, relationship harmony was hypothesized as a contributor to satisfaction with life. In addition, they proposed that relationship harmony mediated the effects of interdependence on satisfaction with life, and self-esteem mediated the effects of independence on satisfaction with life. In a sample of Hong Kong Chinese and Euro-Americans from California, relationship harmony and self-esteem did mediate the effects of self-construal as hypothesized. Furthermore, they
found that the relative importance of relationship harmony to self-esteem in predicting life satisfaction was greater in collectivist Hong Kong than it was in the individualist United States.

CONCLUSION

Inherent in human existence is a duality created by the perception of self as both a separate entity that is different and isolated from others as well as a social entity that is but a part in relationship to a larger whole (Koestler, 1967). The research reported here supports the coexistence of these two self-conceptions in three cultural milieus. Prior cross-cultural research has focused on mean differences without consideration of the processes that are associated with these differences. The use of multiple regression analyses here has allowed cultural differences to be associated with specific psychological processes that exist across and within the cultures sampled. Such analyses allow researchers to locate precisely the source of cultural differences and to extract theoretical explanations that then can be applied to other cultures. This type of analysis and the insights gained here should serve researchers well in formulating theories that relate culture to individual differences and hence to behavior through the agency of specified processes. Clearly, much work needs to be done in mapping the domains and effects of self-construal, but this study makes at least a step in the direction of identifying pancultural processes that explain cultural differences in important social phenomena.
APPENDIX

U.S. Euro-American and Hong Kong Chinese Samples Only:
Hierarchical Multiple Regression of Independence,
Interdependence, and Cultural Group on Self-Esteem,
Self-Embarrassability, and Empathetic-Embarrassability

Hierarchical Entry of Variables

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<th>p</th>
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<th>ΔR²</th>
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<td>.19</td>
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Model for Empathetic-Embarrassability

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Model for Self-Esteem

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NOTE: df (5, 502); p < .001. Regressions include only those participants in the Hong Kong and mainland United States cultural groups (see Table 1). Standardized parameter estimates (β), t values, and p values are from the full model. ΣR² and ΔR² are sequential according to the hierarchical entry of the independent variables.

NOTES

1. Since this study was conducted, Kwan, Bond and Singelis (1997) collected and published data concerning the relation of self-construal, self-esteem, relationship harmony, and life satisfaction. This study is considered in the discussion section.
2. Data were collected at two sites in the mainland United States—Oregon and Ohio. T tests comparing the two sites revealed no differences on the variables, and so the data were combined.
3. An updated version of the Self-Construal Scale can be obtained from the first author.
REFERENCES


Theodore M. Singelis is an associate professor of psychology in northern California. In previous lives, he was (in this order) a hippie at Yale University, an entrepreneur in Aspen, Colorado, an ESL teacher in Korea and Japan, and a graduate student in the Program on Cultural Studies at the East-West Center in Honolulu. At the East-West Center, he presented original materials for summer workshops on cross-cultural coursework development and training for diversity. His research interests span cultural influences on self-conceptions, emotions, and communication, although lately he has become interested in the aging process.

Michael H. Bond is a White Anglo-Saxon psychologist (WASP) of Canadian extraction who practices social psychology. He attempts to use the methodological structures of the scientific method to counterbalance possible biases in his work on culture, which he has been carrying forward at the Chinese University of Hong Kong for the last 24 years. For inspiration, he reads the poetry of Roger White, swims the freestyle, and listens to Bill Evans play piano.

William F. Sharkey’s main research interests focus on intentional embarrassment and embarrassability in interpersonal relationships. He is also interested in studying communication patterns between deaf children and hearing parents and between blind and sighted interactors. Additionally, he has worked with others who focus on cross-cultural communication.

Chris Siu Yiu Lai was a psychology major at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who undertook this research as his undergraduate thesis at the Chinese University in the early 1990s. He now works as an insurance agent for an American multinational company.