Culture, Self-Discrepancies, and Self-Satisfaction

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In contrast to the reliable effects observed with North Americans, research with Japanese has failed to detect self-enhancing biases. The authors considered the possibility that, owing to the need to adapt themselves to others' expectations, Japanese are more critical of themselves than are North Americans. A comparison of actual-ideal self-discrepancies indeed revealed larger discrepancies for Japanese than for either European or Asian Canadians. Moreover, the magnitude of the cultural differences were larger for characteristics that participants viewed as more important, and the relation between depression scores and actual-ideal discrepancies was weaker for Japanese than for European Canadians. The data support the notions that (a) Japanese are more likely than North Americans to be dissatisfied with themselves and (b) these self-critical attitudes are less distressful for Japanese.

Research on the self in North America has had a strong focus on biases in self-perceptions. This research has demonstrated that the typical (North American) individual's self-evaluation is fraught with inaccuracies and distortions. These do not occur randomly but rather are biased systematically toward casting the self in an unrealistically positive light. These positive self-distortions have emerged across a variety of paradigms and in fact are so common that many argue that they are basic and fundamental ways of thinking, at least in North America where the bulk of this research has been conducted. These biases have been construed as information-processing errors (Miller & Ross, 1975), egocentric knowledge organizations growing out of an "intrapsychic evolution" (Greenwald, 1980), and self-protective tactics that serve to bolster the individual's subjective well-being (Kunda, 1987, 1990; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Recently, however, the utility of self-enhancement has been challenged by a number of researchers (Colvin & Block, 1994; Colvin, Block, & Funder, 1995; John & Robins, 1994), and the biases demon-

strated in these studies have been shown to be associated with psychological maladjustment and narcissism. There is thus considerable controversy over the characteristics associated with these biases, the methodologies that are appropriate to study them, and the proportion of the population embracing them. Nonetheless, across these (North American) samples there is consensus that the distortions are systematically in a positive direction (self is better than is actually the case) and that these biases are resistant to change (Krueger & Clement, 1994; Weinstein & Klein, 1995).

Despite the frequency with which self-enhancing biases are observed in the West, they do not appear to characterize the typical thinking pattern of people from Eastern cultures, particularly Japanese (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). For example, the unrealistic optimism bias, whereby individuals view negative future life events as more likely to happen to others than to themselves (see Weinstein, 1980), is clearly less pronounced for Japanese than for North Americans (Heine & Lehman, 1995a). In some cases, in fact, Japanese seem to be unrealistically pessimistic. Neither are tendencies to view oneself as better than the majority of others evident in Japa-

nese samples (Heine & Lehman 1997b; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a). And this is despite the findings that North Americans typically view themselves in this way (Campbell, 1986; Marks, 1984). Research on attributional biases has demonstrated routinely that Westerners tend to internalize success and externalize failure (for a review, see Zuckerman, 1979), yet this self-serving pattern has not been detected with Japanese (for a review, see Kitayama, Takagi, & Matsumoto, 1995). Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkunkit (1997) found that whereas Americans are likely to view their daily experiences in terms of opportunities for self-enhancement, Japanese are likely to view such experiences in self-critical terms. Furthermore, this relative reluctance to self-enhance on the part of Japanese is not merely observable at the individual level: Japanese also exhibit fewer group-serving tendencies than do North Americans when evaluating their family members, their universities, and their cities (Heine & Lehman, 1997b; Kitayama, Masuda, & Palm, 1996). Thus far, research with Japanese has consistently failed to demonstrate any reliable positive distortions in their self-evaluations.

Of importance, the obtained cultural differences in self-enhancement do not seem simply to be the result of Japanese trying to present themselves in a more modest manner than do North Americans (for a review, see Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, in press). Analyses of questionnaire data provide no evidence to suggest that Japanese or Asians more generally are feigning modesty in questionnaire studies (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995; Heine & Lehman, 1995a, 1995b; Kitayama et al., 1997). More compellingly, however, unobtrusive behavioral measures have revealed this same absence of self-enhancing and self-affirmational tendencies among Japanese (Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, Takata, & Ide, 1999; Heine & Lehman, 1997c; Heine, Takata, & Lehman, in press). The data thus are converging on the notion that Japanese are not simply saying that they view themselves less positively than North Americans—they truly seem to feel this way.

Interpreting the Lack of Self-Enhancement for Japanese

We interpret the above cultural differences in self-enhancement from the vantage point of cultural psychology. Cultural psychology maintains that the self is born of the interaction between the person and a set of culturally derived beliefs, values, institutions, customs, and practices (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1997; Greenfield, 1997; Shweder, 1990). The self and attendant psychological structures and processes are thus supported by a web of cultural meanings, and likewise, the interaction of individual selves creates and sustains the cultural environment. In this way, culture and self are seen to make each other up (Shweder, 1990).

Our central point is that these cultural differences in self-enhancement exist because of the ways in which the self is served in each culture. We suggest that, for the most part, the North American self is served when the individual views himself or herself in an unrealistically positive light (e.g., as better than most others) (Taylor & Brown, 1988, but for an opposing view, see Colvin et al., 1995). That Western culture places relatively greater value on individuals being adequate, competent, and self-sufficient (Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Sampson, 1977) suggests that viewing oneself in unrealistically positive terms (i.e., as especially competent, in control, etc.) can thus be seen to bridge the gap between the individual's actual standing and the cultural ideals, thereby authenticating the individual as a meaningful member of the culture (Heine & Lehman, 1995a). Self-enhancing biases serve to bring Westerners closer to their cultural ideals of selfhood.

In contrast, the relation between self-enhancing biases and the Japanese cultural ideals of selfhood appears to be quite different. Relatively more important cultural tasks for Japanese are to fit in harmoniously with others and to gain a sense of belongingness and interdependence with others (e.g., Bachnik, 1992; De Vos, 1985; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b). We suggest that the self is served in Japan when individuals feel that they are being accepted by their groups. This emphasis on fitting in with others suggests that it does not so critically matter how individuals evaluate how well they are doing—rather, it is more important how the groups to which they belong evaluate their performance (Spence, 1985; cf. Yamagishi, 1988). Hence, feeling good about oneself, far from hinging primarily on an individual's personal feelings and self-evaluations, has more to do with the feelings and evaluations of others. For Japanese, it is crucial to strive to gain others' approval.

Performing cultural tasks associated with interdependence leads Japanese to be vigilant about how they are being evaluated by their in-group members (Heine, Lehman, et al., in press; Kitayama, Markus, & Lieberman, 1995; Kitayama et al., 1997). Japanese are encouraged to focus on how their behavior affects their relations with others and how their behavior affects the overall harmony of the group. Succeeding in interdependent cultural tasks requires the individual to change and adapt himself or herself to the needs of the group (Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984).

The Japanese psychiatrist Takeo Doi (1973) argued that a characteristic feature of Japanese is that they maintain a perpetual sense of *ki ga sumanai*, that is, a sense of dissatisfaction about themselves. This dissatisfaction indicates a perceived discrepancy between Japanese individuals' current states and their aspirations. It is crucial for Japanese to dwell on their inadequacies and

shortcomings—those aspects that render them vulnerable in terms of securing their groups' approval (Heine, Lehman, et al., in press; Kitayama, Markus, et al., 1995, 1997; see also Kashiwagi, 1986). Japanese are motivated to be keenly sensitive both to the ways in which they are interfering with or limiting their group and to the ways in which they are being negatively evaluated by their group members. Using this information, they then can act accordingly and work toward rectifying their shortcomings (see also Johnson, 1993; Roland, 1988; White, 1987).

By identifying negative aspects of the self, and by making efforts to correct these, Japanese are more likely to succeed in the process of adapting themselves to their groups' needs. So, succeeding in interdependent tasks impels Japanese to dwell on the negative aspects of their selves and to remain dissatisfied with themselves. These tendencies stand in sharp contrast to North Americans' tendencies to emphasize their positive attributes via self-enhancement (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988).

The habitual dissatisfaction with oneself that we are describing is evident throughout Japanese culture. Various interpersonal scripts get played out in everyday life whereby people communicate their personal inadequacies and limitations (Heine, Lehman, et al., in press; Marsella, Walker, & Johnson, 1973). Examples of such processes are *amae* (i.e., the notion that one indulges one's sense of dependency on others; Doi, 1973; Kumagai & Kumagai, 1986), an emphasis on shame (Benedict, 1946; Creighton, 1990; Doi, 1973; Lebra, 1983), and the widespread occurrence of apologies in Japan (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990), to name but a few. This self-critical orientation is encouraged in the child-rearing process as well. From a young age, Japanese are taught to reflect on their weaknesses and inadequacies (*hansei suru*) (Johnson, 1993; Roland, 1988). In contrast to Western caretakers who tend to draw attention to children's positive features by praising, encouraging, and complimenting them, Japanese caretakers are more likely to draw children's attention to potentially negative features that may have to be corrected for the child to fit in more with others (Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996). This self-critical stance is institutionalized in the education system (White & Levine, 1986), with the goal of diminishing a sense of self-centeredness, which can hinder the child's ability to fit in well with others. Daily conversations also reflect this self-critical nature of Japanese. Kitayama and Karasawa (1996) found that Japanese report a greater frequency of being criticized by others and a lower frequency of being complimented by others than do Americans. Such features of everyday experiences in Japan suggest that Japanese develop habitual outlooks toward negative self-relevant information.

In fact, the conceptual literature on Japanese is consistent in describing a chronic self-critical outlook. Clearly, such an outlook is at odds with the well-documented self-enhancing tendencies of North Americans. In the present study, we investigated this potential cross-cultural difference in self-satisfaction.

Comparisons of Actual and Ideal Self-Assessments

We employed the framework of self-discrepancy theory to explore the notion that Japanese feel chronically more dissatisfied with themselves than do North Americans (Canadians). One of the two basic assumptions of self-discrepancy theory is that people are motivated to bring their current state in line with their ideal state (Higgins, 1989). Actual self-assessments represent how people currently view themselves, whereas ideal self-assessments indicate how people ideally want to be. We reasoned that the discrepancy between these two types of self-assessments is one way to measure individuals' dissatisfaction with themselves.

One of our key questions was "Do Japanese view themselves to be more distant from their ideals than do Canadians?" Larger actual-ideal discrepancies for Japanese than for Canadians would be in line with the notion that Japanese focus more on their incompleteness. A large discrepancy between the way one is and the way one wants to be highlights dissatisfaction with oneself.

Higgins and colleagues (Higgins, 1987, 1989; Higgins, Klein, & Strauman, 1985) demonstrated that actual-ideal discrepancies correlate positively with depression (see also Marsella et al., 1973). Large discrepancies represent, in general, an absence of positive outcomes (i.e., the individual is not the type of person that he or she wishes to be) and are associated with dejection, sadness, and disappointment (Higgins, 1987). Such a relation between actual-ideal discrepancies and depression is consistent with the idea that large discrepancies signal individual inadequacy (see, e.g., Marsella et al., 1973).

However, if viewing oneself negatively (i.e., as further away from one's ideal self) is more a natural part of one's everyday cultural life, such feelings should be less likely to be accompanied by stress and consequent negative affect. To the extent that one's culture encourages actual-ideal discrepancies, not only should such discrepancies be more common, they should be less debilitating. As Kitayama, Markus, and colleagues (e.g., Kitayama, Markus, et al., 1995, 1997; Markus et al., 1996) have theorized, such a focus on actual-ideal discrepancies may serve, in part, as a means for Japanese to improve themselves in order to accomplish the tasks associated with interdependence. Indeed, in previous cross-cultural research (Marsella et al., 1973; Yanagida & Marsella, 1978), Japanese Americans living in Hawaii

have been found to exhibit an attenuated relation between actual-ideal discrepancies and depression, compared to Caucasian Americans. One of our present objectives was to build on this research, with samples of Japanese, Asian Canadians, and European Canadians.

Highlighting the Role of Culture

We employed two methodological devices to provide the most compelling test of the relation between culture and self-discrepancies. First, we sought to ensure that any obtained cultural differences were not due to differences in the cultural meaning of the traits that were employed to assess self-discrepancies. To avoid any imposed etics stemming from our Western orientation (e.g., Berry, 1969), we included traits that are meaningful both to Japanese and Canadians. Toward this end, we conducted a pretest to determine which traits are viewed as most important by Japanese and Canadians for succeeding in their respective cultures, and we included those traits in the actual study.

Second, to better understand the degree to which any obtained cultural differences were due to culture, and not some extraneous variable, we included a third sample that theoretically characterizes a group in between Eastern and Western cultures: Canadians of Asian descent. We collected the Canadian data in Vancouver, a city with large proportions of people of either European or Asian ancestry. This latter group, which we label Asian Canadians, although heterogeneous in terms of country of origin (the majority of this sample is of Chinese descent) and length of time/number of generations in Canada, approximates a culture falling midway between the groups of European Canadians and Japanese in terms of exposure to Western cultural values (Heine & Lehman, 1997a, 1997b; Kitayama et al., 1997). To the extent that culture mediates self-discrepancies, we anticipated that Asian Canadians would exhibit results intermediate to European Canadians and Japanese. Such a pattern would increase our confidence that any obtained differences were due to the cultural backgrounds of the participants.

METHOD

Participants

The Japanese sample consisted of 161 students (58 females, 99 males, and 4 who did not report their gender) enrolled in an introductory urban studies course at Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto. All Japanese participants were born in Japan, and all but one had Japanese parents.

The Canadian sample consisted of 268 students enrolled in introductory psychology classes at the University of British Columbia (UBC). We partitioned this sample by ethnic background to further examine cultural differences. One hundred fifty-one (111 females and 40 males) declared themselves to be of Asian heritage and formed the Asian Canadian sample. Ninety (65 females and 25 males) declared themselves to be of European heritage and formed the European Canadian sample. The remaining 27 students were of varied ethnic backgrounds (e.g., mixed ethnicities, Latin American descent, African descent, etc.) and were not included in the analyses.

Materials

Participants first were asked a number of questions about 20 personality traits. Toward ensuring that our list of traits would be deemed relevant by both Canadians and Japanese, we conducted a pretest with separate samples of Canadians and Japanese to determine which traits were viewed as important. The procedure of the pretest was as follows: First we met with several Japanese university students to discuss which traits they viewed to be most important for succeeding in Japanese culture. From this discussion, a list of 20 important traits for Japanese was constructed. Another 20 traits were chosen by us to reflect important traits for succeeding in Canadian culture. This combined list of 40 traits was then given to a class of introductory psychology students at Toyama University, Japan, and to a class of introductory psychology students at UBC (Canadian participants for this pretest were limited to those who declared themselves to be of European ancestry). Participants were asked to indicate how important they perceived each trait to be for succeeding in their own culture on a scale from 1 (*not at all important*) to 10 (*extremely important*).

The traits that were included in our main study were based on the ratings of the initial 40 traits in the pretest. We selected 20 of these traits: specifically, the 10 traits that were rated as most important by Japanese and the 10 traits that were rated as most important by Canadians. Three traits (getting along well with others, cooperativeness, and adaptability) were rated among the highest 10 traits for both cultures, so we also included the traits rated 11th most important for each culture and the trait rated 12th most important by Canadians to reach our initial target of 20.

These 20 traits were put into three different types of statements that participants were asked to rate in terms of their accuracy on a Likert scale from 1 (*not at all accurate*) to 6 (*completely accurate*). To reduce potential ceiling effects (a concern particularly for the ideal statements), the statements were constructed using *extremely* as a modifier. On the first page, participants were asked to indicate how accurate the statements were in describing themselves (e.g., "I am extremely attractive"). On the second page, participants were asked how accurate the

statements were in describing the type of person they ideally would like to be (e.g., "I would ideally like to be extremely attractive"). On the third page, participants were asked to indicate how accurate the statements were in describing the average student, same gender as themselves, from their university (e.g., "She or he is extremely attractive"). Next, participants were asked to indicate how important they felt each of the 20 traits were for succeeding in their culture on a 1 (*not at all important*) to 10 (*extremely important*) scale. Last, participants completed Zung's (1965) 20-item Self-Rating Depression Scale on a Likert scale from 1 (*none of the time*) to 5 (*most or all of the time*). This scale is a reliable and valid instrument for assessing depression, and it has been employed cross-culturally as well (e.g., Yanagida & Marsella, 1978; Zung, 1969).

All of the materials were originally produced in English and then translated into Japanese. Then, after an independent translator back-translated the Japanese version into English, three translators discussed and resolved any inconsistencies between the versions.

RESULTS

Comparability of Samples

A significant difference emerged in the average ages of the three samples, $F(2, 395) = 5.66$, $p < .01$. Post hoc comparisons[1] revealed that the Japanese sample ($M = 20.4$) was significantly older than the Asian Canadian sample ($M = 19.9$), with the European Canadian sample ($M = 20.1$) falling nonsignificantly in between. However, correlations within cultures between age and each of the dependent variables revealed a significant relation in only one instance, which will be discussed later. The samples differed with respect to gender proportion, $\chi^2(2, N = 398) = 51.1$, $p < .001$. Relations with gender were analyzed for all the main dependent variables. No significant Gender × Culture interactions nor significant main effects for gender were found.

Comparisons of Self-Discrepancies

Before calculating self-discrepancies, we examined how the different cultural groups evaluated themselves with respect to each of the actual self, ideal self, and average other evaluations. Participants' evaluations were summed across the 20 traits for each of the three scales. First, an ANOVA of actual self-ratings revealed a highly significant effect for culture, $F(2, 388) = 63.68$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons indicated that European Canadians rated the traits as more characteristic of themselves than did Asian Canadians, who in turn rated them as more characteristic than did Japanese (see Table 1). This finding is consistent with the notion that North Americans have more positive self-views than do Japanese

TABLE 1:   Means and Standard Deviations for Dependent Variables

	Japanese	Asian Canadians	European Canadians
Total self-ratings	71.1_a (10.8)	81.1_b (10.3)	85.9_c (10.9)
Total ideal ratings	92.5_a (11.9)	101.5_b (10.9	103.4_b (11.9)
Total other ratings	74.8_a (13.0)	82.1_b (12.2)	80.3_b (10.8)
Total actual-ideal discrepancies	1.49_a (.57)	1.25_b (.50)	1.20_b (.49)
High importance actual-ideal discrepancies	1.51_a (.62)	1.23_b (.57)	1.17_b (.58)
Low importance actual-ideal discrepancies	1.47_a (.66)	1.34_a (.58)	1.26_a (.51)
Self-other discrepancy	$-.18_a$* (.76)	$-.03_a$ (.68)	$.27_b$** (.66)
Depression	51.0_a (9.6)	48.7_a (9.5)	43.1_b (9.9)

NOTE: Standard deviations are reported in parentheses. Rows with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .02$.
*Self-ratings differ from other ratings at $p < .01$. **Self-ratings differ from other ratings at $p < .001$.

(Heine, Lehman, et al., in press). A significant cultural difference also emerged with respect to ideal self-ratings, $F(2, 391) = 34.69$, $p < .001$, and post hoc comparisons revealed that this was due to both groups of Canadians evaluating the traits as more characteristic of their ideal selves than did Japanese. This finding is interesting and suggests that Japanese may be less inclined than Canadians to desire to possess traits to an extreme degree. Cultural comparisons of participants' ratings of the average student from their university also revealed a significant effect, $F(2, 390) = 14.27$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons indicated that Japanese rated the traits as less characteristic of the average other student than did both groups of Canadians. This finding suggests that Japanese may be more critical of others than are Canadians (see Kitayama & Karasawa, 1996).

The consistent pattern of cultural differences from the scale totals compels us to consider that Japanese may be less likely than Canadians to view traits as characteristic of any individual. Conceiving of people as a collection of traits may not be as characteristic for Japanese as it is for North Americans (e.g., Cousins, 1989; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995). As well, that the Japanese responses are consistently closer to the midpoint of the scales raises the possibility that moderacy response sets are driving the Japanese results more so than for either group of Canadians (Stening & Everett, 1984; Zax & Takahashi, 1967). The cultural differences reported here, however, are far larger than those typically observed due to such response styles (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995). The pattern of results of the scale totals, then, does not lend itself to an unambiguous interpretation.

Following the suggestions of Hoge and McCarthy (1983) and Marsella et al. (1973), actual-ideal self-discrepancies were operationalized as the absolute difference between participants' ratings of their actual and ideal selves. Absolute difference scores reflect the magnitude of the discrepancy between the ways participants view themselves and the ways that they ideally would like to be, irrespective of the direction of the difference. That is, those instances in which participants rated their actual self more positively than their ideal self (e.g., a person may view himself or herself as being too honest or too tolerant) were treated the same as the more common discrepancies in which the actual self was rated more negatively than the ideal self. Both kinds of discrepancies reflect individuals' dissatisfactions with their current selves. Hoge and McCarthy (1983) demonstrated that this treatment of actual-ideal discrepancies correlates the highest with global self-esteem.

Reliability tests for the 20 traits were conducted for the actual-ideal discrepancy measure within each cultural group. Cronbach's alphas, ranging from .83 to .85, indicated that participants generally viewed the discrepancies similarly regardless of the specific trait under question. The discrepancies for the 20 traits were averaged to form a composite measure for analysis.

An ANOVA of actual-ideal discrepancies revealed a significant main effect for culture, $F(2, 380) = 9.50$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons indicated that the magnitude of the actual-ideal discrepancy was significantly larger for Japanese than it was for both Asian Canadians and European Canadians. As predicted, Asian Canadians fell between the other two cultural groups (although they were not significantly different from European Canadians). In support of the notion that Japanese are chronically less content or satisfied with themselves, Japanese viewed their actual selves as being further away from their ideal selves than did both groups of Canadians.

Actual-Ideal Discrepancies as a Function of the Importance of the Traits

We examined whether the perceived importance of the traits was associated with the magnitude of the actual-ideal discrepancies. We divided the list of traits into groups of high and low importance for each participant depending on whether the traits' importance ratings were above or below participants' own mean importance rating (traits with importance ratings equal to the mean were not included). The magnitude of the average actual-ideal discrepancies for each culture was compared between traits of high and low importance with a repeated-measures ANOVA. A significant Importance × Culture interaction emerged, $F(2, 372) = 3.22$, $p < .05$. Simple-effect analyses revealed a highly sig-

nificant cultural difference for traits of high importance, $F(2, 372) = 12.20$, $p < .001$. Post hoc analyses revealed that Japanese had larger actual-ideal discrepancies for high importance traits than did both groups of Canadians. A significant effect for culture also emerged for the traits of low importance, $F(2, 372) = 3.61$, $p < .03$, although it was considerably smaller in magnitude. Post hoc analyses failed to reveal any significant differences between the different cultural groups. In sum, cultural differences in self-satisfaction as evidenced by actual-ideal discrepancies are more pronounced for those aspects that participants rated as most important for succeeding in their respective cultures.[2]

Self-Enhancing Biases

Participants' evaluations of the average student from their university were subtracted from their self-ratings as a means of assessing self-serving biases or self-enhancement (i.e., the tendency to view the traits as more characteristic of oneself than the average other student). A significant effect for culture emerged with respect to these difference scores, $F(2, 380) = 11.34$, $p < .001$.[3] Post hoc analyses revealed that European Canadians exhibited more self-enhancement than did either Asian Canadians or Japanese. t-test analyses revealed significant self-enhancing biases for European Canadians (i.e., their self-ratings were significantly more positive than their other ratings), $t(84) = 3.81$, $p < .001$, no biases for Asian Canadians, $t < 1$, and significant self-effacing biases for Japanese, $t(155) = -3.02$, $p < .01$. Past cross-cultural studies of the false-uniqueness bias (Heine & Lehman, 1997b; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a) have also revealed significant differences between Japanese and North Americans; however, these studies compared participants' estimates of the percentage of the population that was better than them with respect to certain traits. That we obtained a similar pattern employing a different measure of self-enhancement increases our confidence in the validity of this cross-cultural difference.

Relations With Depression

Participants' total scores on Zung's (1965) Self-Report Depression Inventory were compared across cultures via an ANOVA. A significant main effect emerged for culture, $F(2, 376) = 16.71$, $p < .0013$. Post hoc comparisons revealed that European Canadians reported significantly lower depression than either Asian Canadians or Japanese. Although Asian Canadians fell between the other two cultural groups, they were not significantly different from Japanese. The cultural difference between European Canadians and Japanese corroborates cross-cultural differences in depression found between Americans and Japanese (Atkinson, 1988; Hymes & Akiyama, 1991; Zung, 1969).

TABLE 2:   List of Traits and Standardized Importance Ratings

	Japanese		Asian Canadian		European Canadian		Difference
1. Considerate	$-.10_a$	(1.05)	$-.20_a$	(1.00)	$.09_a$	(.90)	$F(2, 373) = 2.22$, ns
2. Intelligent	$-.13_a$	(.95)	$-.05_a$	(.86)	$-.05_a$	(.81)	$F < 1$, ns
3. Attractive	$-.07_a$	(.89)	-1.05_b	(1.31)	-1.31_b	(1.28)	$F(2, 373) = 41.40$, $p < .001$
4. Tolerant	$-.32_a$	(.87)	$-.28$	(.92)	$-.10_a$	(1.07)	$F(2, 373) = 1.52$, ns
5. Persevere in difficult situations	$.26_a$	(.85)	$-.13_b$	(.88)	$.21_a$	(.71)	$F(2, 373) = 8.98$, $p < .001$
6. Honest	$-.92_a$	(1.18)	$-.04_b$	(1.07)	$-.11_b$	(.98)	$F(2, 373) = 27.48$, $p < .001$
7. Get along well with others	$.75_a$	(.85)	$.72_a$	(.74)	$.51_a$	(.81)	$F(2, 373) = 2.73$, ns
8. Self-motivated	$-.24_a$	(.83)	$.30_b$	(.74)	$.40_b$	(.67)	$F(2, 373) = 26.18$, $p < .001$
9. Patient	$.36_a$	(.82)	$.02_b$	(.77)	$-.04_b$	(.87)	$F(2, 373) = 9.33$, $p < .001$
10. Determined	$.06_a$	(.74)	$.21_{a, b}$	(.74)	$.37_b$	(.79)	$F(2, 373) = 4.55$, $p < .05$
11. Cooperative	$.34_a$	(.74)	$.49_a$	(.72)	$.36_a$	(.68)	$F(2, 373) = 1.62$, ns
12. Sensitive to others	$.35_a$	(.82)	$-.12_b$	(.88)	$-.08_b$	(.93)	$F(2, 373) = 12.56$, $p < .001$
13. Dependable	$.50_a$	(.77)	$-.06_b$	(1.05)	$.07_b$	(.85)	$F(2, 373) = 15.17$, $p < .001$
14. Self-confident	$-.52_a$	(.98)	$.29_b$	(.77)	$.42_b$	(.75)	$F(2, 373) = 46.50$, $p < .001$
15. Adaptable	$.45_a$	(.72)	$.26_{a, b}$	(.84)	$.07_b$	(.90)	$F(2, 373) = 6.14$, $p < .01$
16. Competent	$-.09_a$	(.90)	$.14_a$	(.74)	$.13_{a, b}$	(.82)	$F(2, 373) = 3.67$, $p < .05$
17. Creative	$-.09_a$	(.94)	$-.58_b$	(.95)	$-.81_b$	(.92)	$F(2, 373) = 18.35$, $p < .001$
18. Hardworking	$.18_a$	(.89)	$.39_a$	(.77)	$.33_a$	(.78)	$F(2, 373) = 2.64$, ns
19. Decisive	$.05_a$	(.76)	$-.35_b$	(.73)	$-.35_b$	(.79)	$F(2, 373) = 12.49$, $p < .001$
20. Happy	$-.81_a$	(1.01)	$.03_b$	(1.20)	$-.11_b$	(1.09)	$F(2, 373) = 23.75$, $p < .001$

NOTE: Rows with different subscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$. For Item 5, read for the first stem, "I always persevere in difficult situations." For Item 7, read for the first stem, "I get along extremely well with others."

Past research on self-discrepancies (Higgins, 1989; Higgins et al., 1985; see also Marsella et al., 1973) has revealed significant positive correlations between actual-ideal self-discrepancies and depression (rs ranging from .5 to .7; see, e.g., Higgins, 1987). In the present study, significant correlations emerged between these two variables for each of the three cultural groups, rs = .53, .36, and .30 for European Canadians, Asian Canadians, and Japanese, respectively. Comparisons of the correlations between cultures revealed that European Canadians exhibited a significantly stronger correlation than did Japanese, $t = 2.00$, $p < .05$, with the Asian Canadians' coefficient falling nonsignificantly between the other two cultural groups. Hence, although Japanese feelings of depression also were related to how far they felt they were from their ideals, this relation was less pronounced than it was for European Canadians. This smaller relation is in line with the findings of past cross-cultural research comparing Japanese Americans and Caucasian Americans (Marsella et al., 1973; Yanagida & Marsella, 1978) and is in line with the notion that actual-ideal discrepancies are less distressing for Japanese than they are for European Canadians.

Comparisons of Trait Importance

Finally, we examined how participants from the three cultural groups rated the importance of each of the 20 traits included in the study. We first standardized participants' importance ratings of the traits within each participant and then averaged the standardized scores across the whole sample. ANOVAs were conducted between cultures for each of the 20 standardized traits, and a number of significant cultural differences emerged (see Table 2). Some of the differences were in the direction expected by our current understanding of Japanese and North American cultural values. For example, Japanese rated self-confidence as much less important than did either group of Canadians, and Japanese rated patience and being sensitive to others as more important than did either group of Canadians. However, some of the cultural differences that emerged run counter to our cultural conceptions; for example, Japanese rated creativity and decisiveness as more important than did either group of Canadians, and ability to get along well with others and cooperation were rated as equally important across the three cultural groups. These seemingly odd findings are intriguing and some may construe them as problematic for cultural psychology theory. However, as Peng, Nisbett, and Wong (1997) have recently argued, cross-cultural comparisons of values and attitudes may be inherently confounded and should be interpreted with extreme caution. Peng et al. (1997) maintain that two processes can confound such cultural comparisons: (a) one culture may be relatively deprived of a particular value and hence view it as more important than people from a culture in which the value is common (e.g., Chinese rate individual freedom as more important than Americans, although American culture provides more opportunities for individual freedom than China), and (b) people from different cultures

base their importance ratings on different reference groups (e.g., Japanese rate cooperation with respect to how they observe it in a Japanese context, whereas Canadians rate it with respect to how they observe it in a Canadian context). Moreover, importance ratings also may reflect self-enhancing and self-critical tendencies. For example, Heine et al. (1999) found that whereas Canadians rate creativity as more important for succeeding in daily life when they succeeded on a creativity task than when they failed, Japanese exhibited the opposite pattern, rating creativity as significantly more important after they failed. Cross-cultural comparisons of values and attitudes thus may be heavily confounded, and Peng et al. (1997) suggest that more valid results can be obtained by comparing behaviors across cultures.

DISCUSSION

In line with the notion that Japanese cultural experience implicates a greater tendency for people to be dissatisfied with themselves (Doi, 1973), we found that Japanese exhibited a larger gap between how they currently view themselves and how they ideally want to be than did either European Canadians or Asian Canadians. The personal goals to which individuals aspire remain further away for Japanese than they do for Canadians, at least for students from the two universities in which the present data were collected. Our data echo the arguments of Markus and Kitayama (Kitayama, Markus, et al., 1995; Markus et al., 1996) that Japanese are more likely to focus on their inadequacies and shortcomings in attempts to better fit in with their in-groups. We suggest that such tendencies on the part of Japanese to dwell on their inadequacies enable them to focus on improving themselves to secure others' approval and to demonstrate their commitment to their groups (Spence, 1985). Continual efforts toward self-improvement aid in maintaining group harmony and in deepening the relationships so critical to the interdependent view of self.

Across a wide range of previous studies, Japanese have not been found to exhibit the classic Western self-enhancement bias of viewing themselves as better than average. The present data suggest that this may be due, in part, to Japanese being chronically dissatisfied with themselves. In contrast to the tendencies of Westerners to focus on the end stage of being competent, we suggest that Japanese tend to focus on the process of becoming competent. Such a process of perpetual self-dissatisfaction and self-improvement appears necessary to ensure that the individual is continually adapting himself or herself to the needs of the group. The emphasis is on efforts toward achievement rather than on the final product of achievement itself (Holloway, 1988).

Our study also revealed that actual-ideal discrepancies were not as strongly related to depression for Japanese as they were for European Canadians. The strength (and quality) of such a relation, then, also may be culturally constructed (see also Marsella et al., 1973; Yanagida & Marsella, 1978). Viewing oneself as distant from the type of person one wants to be appears to have more threatening overtones for Westerners. In fact, the magnitude of the actual-ideal discrepancy may represent, in general terms, the distance that one is from the culturally defined Western self in terms of being a complete and autonomous individual who is able to take care of himself or herself.

In contrast, our position is that Japanese culture places more emphasis on viewing oneself as inadequate (e.g., as further away from one's ideal). With this as a backdrop, it makes sense to reason that actual-ideal discrepancies would not bring with them as much of a threatening sting. In fact, this kind of self-relevant information is important for Japanese to highlight the areas on which they need to work toward improving themselves to secure the group's approval, and thereby maintain their interdependence with others. It is important to note, however, that although the obtained relation between depression and actual-ideal discrepancy was significantly smaller for Japanese than for European Canadians, the Japanese correlation was still significant, suggesting that viewing oneself as less than ideal seems to hold some negative consequences for Japanese as well.

That the present study employed traits that a pretest indicated were important to Japanese and European Canadians increases our confidence in the validity of the obtained cultural differences: Japanese did not evaluate themselves less positively than North Americans simply because they did not value the traits under consideration. Rather, Japanese viewed themselves as even more distant from their ideals than did both groups of Canadians for the characteristics they viewed as most important for succeeding in their cultures. Perhaps Japanese think of themselves as more deficient with regard to important characteristics, in part because this serves to motivate them to work harder at correcting these shortcomings and ultimately to do better on what really matters to them (Heine et al., 1999).

Furthermore, the finding that, in general, Asian Canadians exhibited results intermediate to those of European Canadians and Japanese underscores the role of culture in actual-ideal self-discrepancies. The gap between the type of person one feels one is and the type one wants to be appears to decrease alongside exposure to Western culture (see also Heine & Lehman, 1997a, 1997b; Kitayama et al., 1997). This finding suggests that Western culture may provide a relatively greater emphasis for individuals to view themselves as complete in order to approximate the cultural ideals of adequacy, competence, and self-sufficiency. Japanese (and perhaps

people from Asian cultures more generally), in contrast, seem to focus more on their inadequacies in an effort to work toward becoming more complete.

Self-Enhancement, Self-Improvement, and Cultural Authentication

We have argued that self-enhancement and self-improvement are processes that differ between cultures. Although the significant role that culture plays in shaping psychological processes is being further acknowledged in psychology (e.g., Cousins, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Morris & Peng, 1994; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Triandis, 1989), at some levels surely there must be basic psychological processes that are pancultural (cf. Triandis, 1996). We suggest that one culturally universal motivation is to view oneself as an "authentic" member of one's culture (D'Andrade, 1984). That is, people have a need to view themselves as good and meaningful members of their cultures (Heine, Lehman, et al., in press; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991). North American social psychological theory has consistently maintained that one way in which this is accomplished is by viewing oneself positively (e.g., James, 1890/1950; Maslow, 1943; Rogers, 1951; Taylor & Brown, 1988). We agree that thinking about oneself in an unrealistically positive manner typically serves to authenticate North Americans by bringing them closer to their cultural ideals of independence (Heine & Lehman, 1995a).

One of our major points, however, is that thinking highly of oneself does not seem to be nearly as important for those raised in Japan. Japanese are motivated to secure a sense of belongingness with their in-group members, and this requires them to ensure that others are satisfied with their contributions to the groups. Hence, we suggest that Japanese are more significantly culturally authenticated when they focus on their inadequacies and limitations, making efforts to improve themselves. Self-enhancement and self-improvement, then, appear to be qualitatively different paths that North Americans and Japanese take in striving for their respective cultural goals.

Limitations and Future Directions

Our contrast of Japanese and Canadians in no way means that we construe these two cultures as monolithic or as having nonoverlapping distributions. To the contrary, there is much in common between the two cultures, and as our results indicate, there is a great deal of overlap between the cultural groups in our findings—indeed the similarities between the cultures are as striking as the differences. We have conducted analyses that focus on the differences between the cultural groups because such differences highlight the role that culture plays both in shaping the self-concept and in the ways in which individuals evaluate themselves. Certainly, it remains a challenge for the field of cultural psychology to develop methodologies that better illuminate cultural processes by employing means other than binary cultural comparisons of university students.

We have suggested that the obtained cultural differences in actual-ideal self-discrepancies represent evidence that Japanese are less satisfied with themselves than are Canadians. We view this greater tendency on the part of Japanese to identify their inadequacies as a necessary step in correcting these inadequacies for the good of the group. However, the data in the present study only address the first step (i.e., dissatisfaction with oneself) of this self-improvement process. They do not speak to the correction phase.

The link between self-dissatisfaction and the need for self-improvement can profitably be examined in future research. For example, we have recently begun an investigation of the self-corrective phase in which we are examining self-improving behaviors in the lab (Heine et al., 1999). Results show that Japanese persist longer on a task following failure, whereas North Americans persist longer following success. This provides further evidence that dissatisfaction with the self is a motivating force for Japanese. The construct of self-improvement has received scant attention in cultural psychology thus far, and future research efforts are needed to shed light on this important motivational force.

NOTES

1. All post hoc comparisons were conducted with Tukey's HSD for unequal *n*s.

2. Comparable analyses also were conducted by comparing the within-participant correlations between the magnitude of the actual-ideal discrepancy and the perceived importance of the traits across cultures. An ANOVA revealed a main effect for culture in the average magnitude of these within-participant correlations between actual-ideal discrepancies and importance, $F(2, 355) = 7.62$, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparisons revealed that the only difference among the three groups was that European Canadians (r importance, discrepancy = –.10; these correlations resulted from r-to-Z-to-r transformations) (see McNemar, 1962) and Asian Canadians (r importance, discrepancy = –.06) exhibited a stronger negative relation between these two variables than did Japanese (r importance, discrepancy = .04). t tests were conducted to test whether the average magnitude of the correlations was significantly different from 0. Although the correlations were very small for each cultural group, the powerful nature of this design resulted in the correlations being significant for both European Canadians, $t(77) = –3.13$, $p < .01$, and Asian Canadians, $t(133) = 2.45$, $p < .02$, and marginally significant for Japanese, $t(145) = 1.80$, $p < .08$. Both groups of Canadians thus exhibited slight tendencies to view themselves as closer to their ideals as the perceived importance of the traits under question increased. In contrast, Japanese did not exhibit this pattern and in fact showed a marginal tendency to view themselves as further away from their ideals alongside an increase in perceived importance. The small magnitudes of the correlations necessitate caution in interpreting these results, but at the very least, the pattern casts doubt on the notion that Japanese strive to view themselves as especially positive in the domains that are most important to them.

3. A significant correlation between age and depression emerged for European Canadians, $r(87) = –.23$, $p < .05$. Controlling for age via an

ANCOVA, however, did not affect the magnitude of the cross-cultural difference, $F(2, 375) = 16.84$, $p < .001$.

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