Is self-enhancement related to modesty or to individualism-collectivism? A test with four Israeli groups

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The main assertion of this study was that degree of self-enhancement is determined by the modesty requirements prevailing in a culture rather than by its level of collectivism. Four Israeli subgroups (323 11th-grade students) were compared in a two-by-two design: type of living (kibbutz versus city) and level of religious observance (religious versus secular). The two kibbutz groups were found to be more collectivist than the urban groups, and the religious groups were found to be more modest than the secular groups. Results show that self-enhancement was related to level of religious observance and not to type of living. When modesty was statistically controlled for, the effect of level of religious observance was removed. It was also found that self-enhancement measures were predicted by modesty and not by collectivism facets. Thus, the data supported the study’s main claim.

Introduction

One of the psychological factors differentiating cultures can be found in the typical tasks, characteristics, and structure defining the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994; Yamaguchi, 1994). Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that the interdependent self and the independent self are two separate self-systems, differ in their degree of autonomy from the group. These two self-systems carry different implications for emotions, cognitions, and motivations. A well-documented difference between interdependent and independent self-systems is the strength of the self-enhancement tendency they reveal. Self-enhancement is defined as the desire to enhance the positive nature of self-conceptions and to protect the self from negative information (Sedikides, 1993). It is considered a basic motivation of the self (e.g. Dunning, 1999; Osborne, 1996). Cross-cultural literature questions the universality of this self-enhancement motive. Many findings reveal low self-enhancement in cultures which are considered collectivist (e.g. Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000; Kitayama, Takagi, & Matsumoto, 1995).

Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested a theoretical explanation for these differences, and claimed that they result from differing self-motivations of the two self-systems. In contrast to the self-enhancing independent self, the interdependent self is motivated to fit in, to restrain itself, and to maintain social harmony. In their view, positive self-regard is not necessarily a basic motivation of the interdependent self (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999), so self-enhancement processes are not motivated. This study suggests an
alternative explanation for the weakened self-enhancement found in some cultures: the existence of censorship by the group of self-enhancement. It tries to show that importance assigned to group needs does not automatically affect self-enhancement level. Only active restrictions imposed on individuals reduce or even eliminate self-enhancement tendencies.

The importance of social reinforcements and punishments as antecedents of allocentric tendencies (which are the psychological counterparts of collectivism) has been presented before, by a theoretical model as well as by empirical findings (Yamaguchi, 1994; Yamaguchi, Kuhlman, & Sugimori, 1995). The existence of such social demands can lead to modesty. This construct was defined as the public under-presentation of one’s favorable traits and abilities (Cialdini et al., 1998). It reflects the social pressure to de-emphasize self-success. Since perceived self-success may nurture the perceived uniqueness of the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), reduced social attention to successes can restrict perceptions of uniqueness. Findings concerning the relations between modesty and self-enhancement are relevant to the question of self-enhancement antecedents. Harihara, Yamaguchi, and Niiya (2000) showed that in a public condition Japanese students described themselves lower than they did in a private condition in traits defined as “self-profitable” (i.e., competence). No such difference was found for “other-profitable” traits (i.e., sociability). Furthermore, when self-regard was measured implicitly by the Implicit Association Test (which is based on reaction times to associations with the self), Japanese students showed positive self-evaluations (Murakami & Yamaguchi, 2000). Also, sensitivity of self-enhancement measures to modesty was found to affect the measured level of self-enhancement in the East Asian culture of Singapore (Kurman, in press). The above findings suggest that modesty indeed had a role in lower self-evaluations found in East Asian cultures.

A relevant question is whether modesty is always a part of an interdependent attitude. A recent work (Kurman & Sriram, in press) showed that modesty is not related to horizontal collectivism. Triandis (1995) introduced the vertical–horizontal distinction, which describes the level of equality versus hierarchy prevailing in a culture. This level of equality creates different types of collectivism (and individualism): in horizontal collectivism strong identification with and strong caring for the in-group are emphasized, while in vertical collectivism the sacrifice of self-needs in favor of group needs is emphasized (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). Demands for self-restrictions seem to be inherent to the vertical collectivist main theme, while their role in the horizontal–collectivist attitude is still to be studied.

Four subgroups of the same culture, which differ mainly in horizontal collectivism and modesty, were tested. These were two groups from Israeli collective kibbutzim and two urban groups; one of each was religiously observant while the other was secular. It was hypothesized that (1) religious observance is related to requirements for modesty, so the religious groups would show more modesty than the secular, and (2) horizontal collectivism would be higher in the kibbutzim than in the Israeli urban samples. Comparisons among levels of collectivism, modesty, and self-enhancement demonstrated by the four groups could support one of the two suggested explanations for low self-enhancement. Strong effect of type of living (kibbutz versus city) would support the idea that self-enhancement is lower when strong care and involvement with the group exists; while strong effect of level of religious observance would support the idea that modesty requirements are responsible for self-enhancement level.

The assertions that religious observance is related to modesty, and that type of living is related to collectivism, were posited next. The Jewish religion is quite demanding and requires constant obedience to its commandments and norms. Self-restraint, humility, and
modesty are required not only before God but as a way of life. The demand for modesty is stressed by religious Jewish philosophers. For example, the Maharal of Prague, an important sixteenth-century Jewish philosopher, proposed modesty and humbleness as a way to achieve holiness (Pardes, 1984). Religious groups are therefore expected to be more modest than secular groups. The Israeli kibbutzim are cooperative settlements that tried to actualize the socialist ideology. A unique way of life developed, based on the principle of equality among all kibbutz members. Life on a kibbutz is highly cooperative. Kibbutz members are allocated equal resources unrelated to the contribution they make, share a communal social life, and make important decisions on a mutual basis (Infeld, 1946). A strong sense of belonging and mutual aid is expected of kibbutz members (Talmon-Garber, 1970). It might be concluded that the kibbutz is a horizontal collectivist culture, and indeed it has been presented as the prototype of horizontal collectivism (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis, 1995).

Yet self-restrictions are not very strong in the kibbutz. Anyone who joins is not asked to give up his or her freedom, individual desires, and aspirations, but is expected to try to fulfill him or herself within the community (Ben-Chorin, 1987). The community tries to help individuals reach their goals, so that distribution of personal necessities is determined by the unique needs of individuals (Rosner, 1993). Individuals are encouraged to develop their own ideas and to try to convince the group that these ideas are worthwhile. The Israeli kibbutz is a horizontal collectivist culture that does not restrain the self. As a result of the collectivist lifestyle, members of the group are occasionally asked to yield up their own interests in favor of the group, but the group is aware of this personal sacrifice and does not take it for granted. A basic modest attitude is not required by the group. It is assumed that kibbutz members will show high horizontal collectivism.

A special subgroup of the kibbutzim is those who are religiously observant. They follow the pattern of the secular kibbutz community, adopting their socialist ideology and way of life (Fishman, 1957). Equality among all members of the kibbutz remains a primary value in organizing the life of the community. Beyond these socialist values, the members of religious kibbutzim observe the precepts of Jewish law. In this study, religious identity constituted the main difference between the two kibbutz groups. Because modesty requirements are part of Jewish religious philosophy, it was hypothesized that while the religious kibbutz group would reveal the same level of horizontal collectivism as the secular kibbutz group, they would also exhibit more modesty.

In addition, two urban Israeli groups were tested. Secular, urban Israelis are generally Western in their way of life (Seginer & Halabi, 1991). Though they are probably less individualist than Americans or some Western Europeans, studies ranking different cultures according to level of individualism have placed Israelis in the upper half of the relevant dimensions: individualism and power distance in Hofstede’s (1983) study, and affective and intellectual autonomy in Schwartz’s (1994) study. Religious urban high school students in Israel were found to be quite similar to their secular counterparts in their values. Some differences were found in the emphasis on care for various ingroups, so that religious respondents emphasized the importance of ingroups more than secular ones (Sagy, Orr, & Bar-On, 1999). It was still expected that type of living would have stronger effects on horizontal collectivism than level of religious observance.

The main assertion of the study was that modesty rather than horizontal collectivism is related to lower self-enhancement. It was therefore hypothesized that a comparison among the four groups in self-enhancement variables would show that (3) the effect of religious observance (religious versus secular) is stronger than that of type of living (kibbutz versus city) on self-enhancement measures. A different way to test this assertion is to combine the
samples and to test the relations among self-enhancement, modesty, and horizontal collectivism. It was hypothesized that (4) self-enhancement would be predicted by modesty much more strongly than by horizontal collectivism. Although the hypothesis concerned horizontal collectivism, other facets of individualism-collectivism (vertical collectivism, horizontal and vertical individualism) were tested too, to gain a fuller picture of the relations between self-enhancement and individualism-collectivism.

Assessing self-enhancement

To expand the validity of the results, this study used three distinct measures of self-enhancement. The first was based on the discrepancy between grades and academic self-evaluation. Because such self-evaluation is mainly determined by grades, it should be predicted quite effectively by them. A difference between academic self-evaluation and the predicted self-evaluation by grades (the residual score) would reflect biases in self-evaluation. A positive bias would reflect self-enhancement while a negative bias would reflect self-effacement.

The second measure was based on the “above-average” effect, which reflects the finding that in any random and sufficiently large sample, more than half of the participants will rate themselves above average on many desired traits. A self-rating of above average for more than the expected 50% indicates that there is self-enhancement in the group. The above-average effect has been demonstrated for many desired traits (Brown, 1998).

The third measure was based on the effect of failures on self-perception. Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkunkit (1997) compared the reported influence of successes on self-esteem with the reported influence of failures, using a large number of specific success and failure events. They claimed that self-criticism (emphasis on failures) is actually the opposite pole of self-enhancement (emphasis on successes). In this study the idea that self-critical cognition could be treated as the opposite of self-enhancement was adopted. A self-critical cognition questionnaire (Ishiyama & Munson, 1993) was used as an indication of low self-enhancement. A recently collected dataset showed a correlation of \( r = 0.52 \) between the measure of Kitayama et al. and the self-critical cognition questionnaire (Kurman, Yoshihara-Tanaka, & Elkoshi, 2001).

Method

Participants and procedure

The sample was 323 11th-grade high school students, grouped as follows: 76 urban secular students (50 males and 26 females), 78 religious urban students (23 males and 55 females), 83 students from a secular kibbutz school (41 males and 42 females), and 80 students from a religious kibbutz school (31 males and 49 females). The questionnaires were group administered in school classrooms.

Questionnaires

“Above-average” effect. Participants were asked to indicate whether they considered themselves “below average” or “above average” in a population of the same age and
gender on three traits (intelligence, health, sociability). A rating of “above average” was coded 1 and a rating of “below average” was coded zero. Cronbach alpha for the three traits was .70 for the total sample and ranged between .61 and .72 in the different groups.

**Academic self-evaluation.** Participants rated themselves as students on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (“I’m a very poor student”) to 7 (“I’m a very good student”).

**Reported grades.** Students reported their grades in the previous term in five subjects. Previous data show that the correlation between reported and actual grades is very high, and the two are sometimes almost identical (Kurman & Sriram, 1997; Kurman, unpublished data). Reported grades were therefore considered to be a valid criterion for actual academic achievements.

**Self-critical cognition scale.** A 13-item scale (Ishiyama & Munson, 1993) was used to evaluate self-critical cognitions. The scale measures the strength of critical cognitions concerning the self, especially after failures. For example, “When things go wrong, I tend to criticize myself quite readily before assessing the situation objectively.” Cronbach alpha for the total sample was .73, and ranged between .66 and .80 in the different groups.

**Modest Responding Scale (MRS)** (Whetstone, Okun, & Cialdini, 1992). The scale includes 21 items which tap the inclination towards modesty (e.g., “Telling people about my strengths and successes has always been an embarrassing thing for me”), Social desirability for modest response (e.g., “Bragging on oneself in a group is always socially inappropriate”), and disinclination for modesty (e.g., “If I’ve done something well, I like to tell others about it”). Items which tap the disinclination for modesty were reversed. Cronbach alpha was .83 for the total sample, and ranged between .78 and .85 in the separate groups.

**Collectivism-individualism.** The four scales developed by Singelis et al., (1995) were used to measure individualism and collectivism. A factor analysis replicated the four original factors,² Internal consistencies were .69 for vertical collectivism (.64 to .67 in the separate groups); .72 for horizontal collectivism (.63 – .67 in the separate groups); .73 for vertical individualism (.65 – .77 in the separate groups); and .68 for horizontal individualism (.63 – .67 in the separate groups).

Hebrew versions were created for the questionnaires, which were back-translated into English.

**Results**

**Collectivism-individualism and modesty as a function of type of living, and level of religion observance**

The first two hypotheses concerned group differences on collectivism and modesty. Group differences in collectivism-individualism was tested by a Multivariate 2 × 2 Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA). Type of living (kibbutz vs. city) and level of religion observance (religious vs. secular) were independent variables, and gender was a covariate. A significant multivariate type of living effect emerged ($F(4,309) = 11.319, p < .0001$), so that the kibbutz
groups revealed higher horizontal collectivism, lower vertical collectivism (as they emphasize equality), and lower vertical individualism. The kibbutz and city groups did not differ on horizontal individualism. A multivariate effect for level of religious observance emerged as well \((F(4,309) = 10.81, p < .0001)\), showing that the religious groups showed higher vertical collectivism, and lower horizontal and vertical individualism. Table 1 shows the F values of the univariate analyses, as well as the relevant means and standard deviations. As was hypothesized, the kibbutz groups scored significantly higher than the urban groups on horizontal collectivism. The religious groups seemed to be less individualist in both vertical and horizontal aspects and more vertical-collectivist than the secular ones. There was no significant interaction between type of living and level of religious observance in any of the dependent variables. The lack of significant interaction in vertical collectivism has important implications for the religious kibbutz. It seems that despite the equality, which is a leading principle in this group, the level of its vertical collectivism was also relatively high (the group was ranked second on vertical collectivism, higher than the secular urban group).

The second hypothesis was that the religious groups would be more modest than the secular groups. A two-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted to find the effect of type of living and level of religious observance on modesty, with gender as a covariate. The only significant effect was of level of religious observance, showing that the religious groups were significantly more modest than the secular, as hypothesized. No main effect for type of living was found, implying that the collectivist way of life, which resulted in high horizontal collectivism, was not related to modesty. Table 1 presents the relevant means, standard deviations, and F values.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kibbutz</th>
<th></th>
<th>City</th>
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<th>F(5,439) Type of living</th>
<th>F(5,439) Level of religious observance</th>
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<td>Secular</td>
<td>Religious</td>
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<td>(.74)</td>
<td>(.99)</td>
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<td>5.14</td>
<td>5.76</td>
<td>11.63**</td>
<td>24.43***</td>
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<td>(.82)</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td>(.73)</td>
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<td>Horizontal individualism</td>
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<td>5.07</td>
<td>5.49</td>
<td>5.15</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>8.67**</td>
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<td>(.94)</td>
<td>(.84)</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vertical individualism</td>
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<td>3.69</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>10.91**</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(1.01)</td>
<td>(1.03)</td>
<td>(1.12)</td>
<td>(.96)</td>
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<td>4.29</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>17.58***</td>
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<td>(.840)</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
<td>(.81)</td>
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Notes

*a* Means are adjusted for gender, which served as a covariate. Standard deviations appear in brackets.

\* p < .05, \** p < .01, \*** p < .0001

Table 1 Adjusted means, standard deviations* and univariate comparisons and collectivism-individualism and modesty scales by type of living and level of religious observance.

Self-enhancement as a function of type of living and level of religious observance

To test the third hypothesis, which dealt with effects on self-enhancement, a MANCOVA was conducted, with type of living and level of religious observance as independent variables and the three self-enhancement measures as dependent ones. Gender served as a covariate. As was hypothesized, the kibbutz groups did not differ from the urban groups in their self-enhancement level, while the level of religious observance had a significant multivariate effect ($F(3, 280) = 14.05, p < .0001$). This significant multiple effect was replicated in all three self-enhancement measures (see Table 2) in the hypothesized direction. A significant interaction was found between type of living and level of religious observance ($F(3, 280) = 3.61, p < .014$), which arose out of differences in academic self-enhancement. The differences between religious and secular groups were smaller in the kibbutz groups ($F(1, 139) = 4.26, p < .04$), than in the urban groups ($F(1, 146) = 36.74, p < .0001$). To test whether differences in level of religious observance were indeed affected by group differences in modesty, the same MANCOVA was computed with modesty as an additional covariate. In two of the three self-enhancement variables, the previously significant effects of level of religious observance became insignificant ($F(1,285) = 2.54$) for the above-average effect and $F(1,285) = 1.85$ for self-criticism. Level of religious observance remained significant for academic self-enhancement even after modesty was controlled for ($F(1,146) = 27.13, p < .0001$). Separate analyses for kibbutz and urban groups showed that the statistical control on modesty removed the effect of level of religious observance among the kibbutz group ($F(1,138) = 2.04$), but not in the urban groups ($F(1,145) = 30.65, p < .0001$).

Predicting individual differences in academic self-enhancement and in self-criticism

The last hypothesis dealt with prediction of self-enhancement. Multiple regression analyses were computed to predict academic self-enhancement, “above-average” ratings and self-criticism by individualism-collectivism facets and by modesty. Table 3 shows the correlations among the relevant variables, and Table 4 shows the relevant beta

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**Table 2** Adjusted means, standard deviations and univariate comparisons of the four groups in self-enhancement variables

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Kibbutz Secular</th>
<th>Kibbutz Religious</th>
<th>City Secular</th>
<th>City Religious</th>
<th>Type of living</th>
<th>Religious observance</th>
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<td>Academic self-</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>23.96***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enhancement</td>
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<td>(.16)</td>
<td>(.14)</td>
<td>(.16)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Above-average”</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td>.80</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>10.03**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ratings</td>
<td>(.25)</td>
<td>(.26)</td>
<td>(.25)</td>
<td>(.31)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-criticism</td>
<td>4.06</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>6.53*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.94)</td>
<td>(.94)</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
<td>(1.00)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Notes*

*Means are adjusted for gender, which served as a covariate. Standard deviations appear in brackets.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .0001$
coefficients. None of the collectivism scales evinced a significant contribution to prediction of academic self-enhancement, the “above-average” effect, or self-criticism. Modesty did make a significant contribution to all three variables in the expected direction (negative coefficients for academic self-enhancement and “above-average” ratings, and positive coefficient for self-criticism). Table 3 shows that vertical collectivism was the only collectivism-individualism facet significantly related to modesty. Higher modesty seemed related to higher vertical collectivism.

**Discussion**

*Modesty, individualism-collectivism, and self-enhancement*

The basic assertion of the study, that modesty and not collectivism is related to self-enhancement, was supported. Type of living was shown not to affect self-enhancement, while religious observance was shown to affect it. As was assumed, type of living was related to collectivism, and religious observance was related to modesty. Moreover, when modesty was controlled for, the significant effect of level of religious observance was removed. One exception was the still significant effect religious observance had on academic self-enhancement in the urban groups, implying that factors other than modesty

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affected lower self-enhancement in the urban religious group. Such factors are still to be found. A reasonable conclusion drawn from the above results is that low self-enhancement and modesty are not inherent components of the collectivist attitude. This conclusion is incongruent with the assumption that the interdependent nature of the self is related to lower self-evaluations (e.g., Heine & Lehman, 1995a).

There is some evidence that vertical collectivism is related more to self-enhancement than to horizontal collectivism. First, vertical collectivism was related to modesty which was further related to self-enhancement. Second, the modest religious kibbutz group revealed relatively high vertical collectivism. The latter finding is interesting, since the religious kibbutz is not a vertical society, but a society in which equality is endorsed and practiced in everyday life. This finding may suggest that the construct of vertical collectivism includes perceived self-restrictions, so that when the self is restricted (for reasons other than the vertical structure of the culture), vertical collectivism is measured. If this is indeed the case, relations between vertical collectivism and self-enhancement do not necessarily represent the absence of a self-enhancement motive in collectivist cultures.

The universality of the self-enhancement motive

The idea that self-enhancement is a result of modesty requirements and not of collectivism is relevant to the question of the existence of a self-enhancement motive in the interdependent self. Since strong commitment to the group did not diminish self-enhancement level in this study, the notion that self-considerations are not very relevant to the interdependent system was not supported. It may be that self-enhancement is lowered only when social restrictions are imposed on individuals. These restrictions could serve various goals of the culture. Humility might be required to uphold religious observance, as was shown in this study, or to sustain the hierarchical structure of the culture, as may happen in hierarchical collectivist cultures (Kurman & Sriram, in press). The lower self-enhancement found in some collectivist cultures should be explained by cultural demands that restrict the development of a unique, self-enhancing self, and not by the lack of a self-enhancement motive.

Previous considerations (Heine et al., 1999) presented the idea that the need for positive self-regard is not universal. Among other things, they claimed that modesty did not play any part in the relatively low self-evaluations found among Japanese. Since this conclusion contradicts that of this study, the grounds for Heine et al.’s conclusion are examined. They presented four kinds of findings to support their notion: (1) indirect self-evaluations of Japanese were no more positive than direct ones (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995; Heine & Lehman, 1995a); (2) in extremely anonymous conditions, the self-evaluations of the Japanese did not increase (Kitayama, 1999); (3) Japanese did not have higher social desirability scores than Westerners (Heine & Lehman, 1995b); and (4) Japanese rated relevance of failures to self-esteem similarly for themselves and for their friends (Kitayama et al., 1997). The first two findings are not exclusive. The measure’s sensitivity to modesty was indeed shown to affect self-enhancement level in an East Asian culture (Kurman, in press), and public condition was shown to affect self-reports of Japanese (Harihara et al., 2000). These incongruent results suggest that for now we do not know for sure how publicity and sensitivity of the measure to modesty affect level of reported self-evaluation. The third finding, lack of cultural differences in social desirability, hardly supports the assertion that modesty does not play a role in self-evaluation of Japanese. The relevant question should be which characteristics are socially desired, not merely what is the social desirability level. It is theoretically possible that modesty is socially desired in Japan while...
positive self-presentation is desired in the West, yet both groups demonstrate the same social desirability level. The fourth finding relates to a general critical attitude of the culture. In Kitayama et al.’s (1997) study, Japanese respondents seemed to emphasize the importance of failures when they evaluated themselves and others. The relevant question from the point of view of the existence of motivation for positive self-regard is how this critical attitude was created. The idea that requirements for modesty create an internalized critical attitude seems plausible. This critical attitude is not necessarily proof of lack of a self-enhancement motive. It may imply that active restrictions are needed to achieve the desired self-restraints, which are not an automatic outcome of strong care for and strong identification with the group.

**Limitations of the study**

Two major issues will be discussed: self-enhancement measures and implications of the fact that the Israeli kibbutz is a society in change. The self-enhancement measures used in this study have some problems. Academic self-enhancement relates to a specific area (though quite important for school students); the “above-average” effect is perfectly valid for comparisons of groups but may be too crude at the individual level; and self-criticism is not exactly the same construct as self-enhancement. The correlations among the measures were quite low, a fact that could be attributed to differences among them in respect of the trait–state continuum. (While academic self-enhancement involved a specific academic situation, self-criticism reflected a more consistent tendency. The above-average effect can be ranked in the middle, as it related to various specified traits.) The fact that the same pattern of relations with modesty and collectivism-individualism facets was replicated for all three self-enhancement measures is reassuring.

Some ongoing changes in the kibbutz weaken its highly collectivist nature. This trend does not threaten the validity of the above conclusions, as kibbutz members did reveal higher horizontal collectivism than urban Israelis. It may be that the specific samples contributed to this result. The surveyed high school students of the kibbutz live together with their peers in what is called an “educational institution,” in which they are highly exposed to the kibbutz ideology, which has not changed (Shaleski, 1997), and to a communal way of life. As a result, their collectivist attitude may be strengthened.

A related problem is that changes in the religious kibbutz occur more slowly than those in the secular kibbutz. This difference may confound the effect the level of religious observance had on self-enhancement. Again, results show that this was not the case. First, both kibbutz groups show very similar levels of horizontal collectivism. Second, the control over modesty removed most effects of religious observance on self-enhancement. Thus, modesty, which is required by religious observance, and not collectivism affected self-enhancement differences.

An important advantage of the comparison among the four groups in this study is that the members of all of them were subgroups of the Israeli culture, speaking the same language, and studying for the same matriculation tests. It is safe to assume that the groups differed mainly on the specified characteristics of horizontal collectivism (arising from the collectivist lifestyle of the kibbutz), and religious requirements, including that for modesty. The idea that endorsement of modesty rather than group interdependence is related to lower self-enhancement level was supported, reinforcing the theory that the motive for self-enhancement is universal. The strength of this study may be seen as its weakness as well,
since the uniqueness of the kibbutz as a collectivist society may raise a problem concerning the generalization of the findings.

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**Notes**

1. Note that in a skewed distribution, more than 50% are indeed above average. Still, the percentages of “above-average” responses are much higher that 50%. Moreover, the effect was documented using the median (Klar & Giladi, 1997).

2. Four forced factors explained 11%, 9.7%, 9.1%, and 8.1% of the total variance. A cutting point for inclusion in a factor was set at .35 based on content analysis. The factors corresponded to the horizontal collectivism, vertical individualism, vertical collectivism and horizontal individualism scales, respectively. Two items loaded on two factors and were included in their original scales. One item, which was defined as part of the vertical collectivism scale but loaded on the horizontal collectivism factor, was omitted.

3. Proportions of males to females were different in the various groups, and gender was included as a covariate in all analyses. Note that Ns are different in different analyses, since missing data was handled by pairwise method.

4. A reasonable explanation is that extra curricula obligatory in religious schools, which is demanding and valued, can create extra pressure which may lower academic self-evaluations in the group. This kind of pressure seems to be largely moderated in the religious kibbutz school.

5. A closer look at the relevant studies show that Harihara et al. (2000) manipulated the public conditions (public vs. private) while Kitayama tried to create extremely private conditions. He allowed respondents to fill in anonymous questionnaires in an empty room, and put them in a box. As anonymity is the rule for most studies, the manipulation of privacy may not have been strong enough to alter the level of self-evaluations. Kurman’s study was designed to measure the effect of directness of the self-evaluation measure on self-enhancement, while the studies cited by Heine et al. were designed to test subjective well-being and unrealistic optimism, which may be related to self-enhancement but are different constructs. Thus, it seems that the supportive findings of the importance of modesty for self-enhancement are stronger than the non-supportive ones.

6. It was found (Kuman & Sriram, in press) that vertical individualism was related to more academic self-enhancement and also to more self-criticism.

**References**


being: Why do they occur? Social Indicators Research, 34, 7–32.


