A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF SELF-VERIFICATION MOTIVES

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Self-verification theory (Swann, 1983, 1990) focuses on people's desires to be known and understood by others. It proposes that once people develop firmly held beliefs about themselves, they come to prefer that others see them as they see themselves. The research literature offers robust evidence that people do indeed make systematic efforts to obtain self-confirming feedback. In both laboratory studies (e.g., Swann et al., 1992a; Hixon & Swann, 1993) and naturally occurring settings (Swann & Pelham, 2000a), people demonstrate a preference for others who confirm their self-views. However, one limitation of existing research on self-verification theory is that thus far it has been conducted primarily with North American samples. The goal of this chapter is to assess the likelihood that self-verification is a culture general phenomenon. To this end, we first provide an overview of self-verification theory and research, and then discuss whether the roots of self-verification extend to cultures outside of North America and, if so, what form self-verification strivings would take in these cultures. Ultimately, we propose that self-verification strivings are universal, although cross-cultural differences in conceptions of the self may result in cultural variation in the ways they are pursued.

SELF-VERIFICATION THEORY

Self-verification theory proposes that people are motivated to be seen by others as they see themselves, or to obtain appraisals from others that confirm their firmly held self-conceptions. The theory enjoys over 2 decades of support. For example, research has repeatedly shown that people prefer both evaluations and interaction partners that confirm their enduring self-views (e.g., Swann et al., 1990; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 1992; Swann et al., 1992b; Hixon & Swann, 1993). Importantly, people who hold negative views of the self seek and receive self-verification, just as do people who hold positive views (e.g., Swann et al., 1989; McIver & Swann, 1994), thus demonstrating that self-verification motives may be more widespread than people often acknowledge.

EPISTEMIC AND PRAGMATIC ROOTS

Why do people seek self-verification? Self-verification theory has origins in self-consistency theory (e.g., Luchy, 1845; Festinger, 1957; Sted and Backman, 1985), but its focus is primarily on people's desire for psychological coherence in the self-concept rather than consistency per se. From the theory, people strive for verification in an effort to arrive at and maintain stable views of the self, as such enduring self-views confer a "crucial source of coherence, an invaluable asset in defining their existence, organizing experiences, and guiding social interactions" (Swann et al., 2003, p. 369). In other words, stable, coherent self-views provide a sense of order and understanding in people's lives. They reassure people that they can predict and control their future outcomes, which in turn helps them navigate their social environments. Whereas consistency cravings may lead existing self-views to be updated or even abandoned in the face of new, self-relevant information or events, the coherence strivings that define self-verification work to maintain self-views, assimilating even contradictory, self-relevant information and events into the existing self-system. Stable, coherent self-views are so crucial that people will fight to maintain them even when doing so causes them discomfort. For example, people prefer feedback that confirms their negative self-views despite the fact that such feedback arouses negative affect in the short term (e.g., Swann et al., 1987; Swann et al., 1998).

There are both epistemic and pragmatic routes to the desire for psychological coherence, and the prediction and control such coherence allows, that fuel self-verification strivings (Swann, 1990). On an epistemic level, being verified assures people that their self-views accurately reflect social reality, and thus that they can rely on their beliefs about the self to anticipate and exert control over their outcomes. Further, it is psychologically comforting for people to feel that they know themselves and to have the sense of unity and meaning that stable self-views offer. In contrast, self-disconfirmatory feedback frustrates the search for psychological coherence, and therefore can be unsettling and may even result in anxiety (Wood et al., 2003).

Epistemically speaking, self-verifying appraisals bolster people's sense of prediction and control by assuring them that others hold appropriate expectations of them and that their interactions with others will proceed smoothly. In relationships, by allowing people to maintain stable self-views, self-verifying appraisals offer
mutual predictability to relationship partners (Swann et al., 2007). Conversely, self-discrepant appraisals may invite conflict and misunderstanding, leading to decreased interpersonal harmony and perhaps relationship dissolution. Instead, self-verification processes have been shown to have significant implications for relationship satisfaction and longevity. For example, spouses and roommates who do not verify each other's central self-views are less satisfied in their relationship and more likely to end the relationship than those who do verify each other (Swann et al., 1994; Swann & Pelham, 2002a). In small groups, people experience stronger feelings of connection to the group when group members verify one another's self-views (e.g., Swann et al., 2000). Connection, intimacy, and perceptions of caring depend on feelings of understanding (Reis & Shaver, 1988), so if individuals are not verified by their relationships and group partners, negative relationship and group outcomes are likely to result.

To assess why people seek self-verification, Swann and colleagues (Swann et al., 1992a) asked people to indicate their reasons for choosing a self-verifying or a non-verifying interaction partner. Supporting the epistemic and pragmatic functions of self-verification, these researchers found that the most common reasons given were epistemic (e.g., "I'd feel more at ease with someone who can judge me for what I am") and pragmatic (e.g., "Seeing as he knows what he's dealing with we might get along better").

**SELF-VERIFICATION STRATEGIES**

The desire for self-verification leads people to work to create a social environment that allows for a relatively effective, self-protecting confirmation of their self-views (Swann, 1983). That is, people gravitate toward, and strive to create, environments that foster stability in their self-views and that insulate them from disconfirming appraisals. For instance, in everyday life people often unconsciously display markers of their self-views that may be used as the basis of others' appraisals of them. Along these lines, research has shown that some characteristics (e.g., extraversion) are reliably predicted from the appearance of a person (Nussbaum et al., 2005) and the physical structure of their living space (e.g., bedroom, office; Gosling et al., 2002). In addition, people can control others' appraisals of them through their interaction style, including amount of eye contact and frequency of interrupting conversations. Finally, individuals tend to approach self-confirming partners and avoid disconfirming partners (Swann et al., 1994; Swann & Pelham, 2002a). For example, Swann (1991) showed that participants with negative self-views chose to interact with a negative evaluator over participating in another study, yet opted to be in another study rather than interact with a positive evaluator. Such interaction partner preferences should decrease the likelihood that people are faced with partners who hold disconfirming appraisals of them (Swann et al., 1992c).

Beyond efforts to create a self-confirmatory social environment, people have a number of cognitive strategies at their disposal in their pursuit of self-verification.

**MODERATORS OF SELF-VERIFICATION**

Self-verification motives are associated with a variety of other possible self-referential motives, among them self-enhancement, self-attunement, self-attunement, and self-improvement (e.g., Swann & Schneider, 1995; Taylor et al., 1995). Research has identified moderating variables that render self-verification more or less likely to be activated over other self-motives. For example, self-verification is more likely when people have the cognitive capacity to introspect (Hixon & Swann, 1993), and when they have just received feedback indicating that an evaluator views them in a manner consistent with their own self-view (Swann & Read, 1981). Other work suggests that the more committed one is to a source of self-evaluation, the more one seeks verification from this source. For instance, marital partners are more likely than dating partners to seek self-verification from one another (Swann et al., 1994). These findings could be driven by either or both a tendency to view the opinions of committed partners as more reliable and valid (i.e., epistemic concerns) or a stronger desire to maintain orderly interactions with these partners (i.e., pragmatic concerns).

Finally, self-verification is more or less likely for personally important or central self-views, as well as self-views that are held defensively (e.g., Pelham & Swann, 1994; Cless et al., 2004). For example, Swann and Pelham (2002a) showed that only college students who deemed their self-views personally important or central to them showed a preference for roommates who confirmed these self-views. The moderating impact of self-verification and certainty make sense from both epistemic and pragmatic standpoints. Highly central and highly certain self-conceptions are core to a person's identity (Pelham, 1991); thus, when they are not verified, the person's sense of knowing the self is seriously challenged, and the potential for interpersonal misunderstandings and conflicts looms large.

**CULTURE AND SELF-VERIFICATION**

Having described existing theory and research on self-verification, the vast majority of which is based on North American samples, we now turn to a
cross-cultural analysis of self-verification motives. Our analysis is grounded in two major propositions. First, we propose that the epistemic and pragmatic roots of self-verification are likely universal, implying that self-verification may be pursued across cultures. Second, however, we propose that the form of self-verification striving may differ across cultures depending on the nature of the stable self-views that are most dominant and central in a given culture. In elaborating on these two propositions, our analysis will emphasize East Asian cultures because they have been the focus of most cross-cultural research to date, thus providing the largest empirical basis on which to make predictions regarding the extent and precise nature of self-verification strivings. However, our examination of East Asian cultures may offer hints as to how self-verification motives would operate in other cultures to the extent that these cultures are characterized by similar beliefs and values. That is, our predictions regarding self-verification among East Asians are not based on East Asian cultures per se, but rather on cultural dimensions, interdependence, that characterize these cultures, and that may potentially characterize others as well (e.g., Latin American and African cultures).

Thus, East Asian cultures are the starting point for our cross-cultural analysis of self-verification motives, but ultimately we suggest that they offer a springboard for a broader analysis.

**EPISTEMIC AND PRAGMATIC CONCERNS UNDERLYING SELF-VERIFICATION STRIVINGS**

Is the desire for self-verification—for coherence and stable self-views—universal? As noted, self-verification theory assumes that the desire for confirmation of one’s enduring self-views, and the sense of prediction and control that such verification confers, has both epistemic and pragmatic roots. Our first major proposition is that these epistemic and pragmatic underpinnings of self-verification strivings are universal. We consider the possible universality of self-views in turn, and then focus on their presence in East Asian cultures.

**Universality of Epistemic Needs**

Wide-ranging theory and research suggest that the epistemic need for psychological coherence may be universal (Pope, 1965; Guindon & Lint, 1985; Swann, 1990; Heise et al., 2005). Basic social cognition research clearly implies the universal importance of meaning making (e.g., Heider, 1944, 1958; Bruner et al., 1955), even if the nature of meaning making processes differ across cultures (e.g., Nisbett et al., 2001). In addition, theories of human psychological needs have often emphasized the intrapersonal importance of having a sense of stability and coherence. For instance, the universal importance of maintaining a sense of order and predictability in the world is suggested by the need for security in Maslow (1954) motivational hierarchy, and Epstein (1990) need for self-concept consistency. Other examples of motives related to epistemic needs for coherence include the need for closure (Kruglanski, 1990), or the desire to avoid ambiguity, and the need for structure (Neuberg & Newman, 1993), or the desire to cognitively structure the world in ways that reduce complexity. Although the need for closure and need for structure are thought to vary across individuals, research has demonstrated such individual variations in not only North America, but also in, for example, countries in Eastern and Western Europe, as well as in Australia, Korea, and China, suggesting that these motivational constructs are meaningful cross-culturally.

Researchers have also highlighted the fundamental need for psychological coherence—for a sense of prediction, order, and understanding—in the self-concept specifically. Early thinking about the nature of the self-concept, James (1890) suggested that although individuals hold different selves across relationships and roles, a sense of unity in the self-concept is crucial. Later, Erikson (1965) argued that during identity development individuals search for a “sense of continuity and sameness” (p. 281). More recently, Vignoles et al. (2005) have suggested that the motivations to maintain continuity and meaning in the self-concept are universally important, although culture may shape how these motivations are satisfied. As a final example, the narrative approach to identity (McAdams, 1985, 1991, 2001) is strongly rooted in the assumption that individuals derive coherence in their self-concept. Specifically, identity is thought to take the form of a story that integrates self-relevant experiences into a unified, meaningful form. People’s identity stories are influenced by the norms and values of their specific social environment (Thurber, 2000; McAdams, 2001). Thus, there may be cultural differences in the nature of people’s stories, but all seek to construct a coherent and meaningful identity.

**Universality of Pragmatic Needs**

As noted, beyond satisfying epistemic needs, self-verification is desired because it addresses pragmatic, interpersonal concerns. Namely, by providing interaction partners with mutual predictability, self-verification fosters harmonious interactions and lasting relationships. To the extent that relationships play a fundamental role in human functioning, this pragmatic facet of the desire for self-verification may well be universal. Indeed it has long been argued that the need to maintain relationships with others is of primary importance for human beings. For instance, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973) suggests that we rely on others for comfort and support in order to be able to survive in the world. More recently, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and cognitive experiential self-discrepancy (Epstein, 1990) have proposed that a feeling of connectedness to others is universally essential for well-being and optimal psychological functioning. Similarly, both Maslow (1954) and Baumrind and Leary (1995) argue that humans have a fundamental need to belong, suggesting that harmonious relationships with others are a necessary condition for human beings to thrive. Finally, from an evolutionary perspective, the mutual predictability that self-verification provides would have helped to maintain social bonds (e.g., mate relationships, coalitions) that were crucial to survival and that reap reproductive
Research supports the assertion that humans need healthy social bonds for optimal physical and psychological functioning. Being embedded in healthy social relationships is a key determinant of subjective well-being (Ryan & Deci, 1995; Diener & Seligman, 2002). For example, Diener and Diener (1997) report that life satisfaction is linked to relationship satisfaction in many cultures, such as Australia, Brazil, Korea, South Africa, and the United States. In addition, social support has positive physical implications in terms of the cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems (Uchino et al., 1996). Conversely, the negative psychological consequences (e.g., abnormal emotional and social behavior) of lacking healthy social bonds have been demonstrated in, for instance, both socially isolated animals (Smith & Harlow, 1972) and human infants who receive inadequate nutrition (Belsky, 1990).

Epistemic and Pragmatic Concerns in East Asian Cultures

The above theory and evidence suggest that the epistemic and pragmatic roots of self-verification strivings may be universal, but how well does this first proposition hold up in cultures outside of North America? More specifically, are the epistemic and pragmatic concerns driving self-verification applicable to members of East Asian cultures? This cultural group is a particularly interesting one to explore in terms of self-verification strivings because East Asians are thought to value face, and are often characterized by, facelessness or a seeming lack of consistency (e.g., Feng & Nisbett, 1999; Chua & Choi, 2002; Su, 2002). Indeed, East Asians' theories about personality characterize traits as malleable (Chua et al., 1997), and their self-reported emotions vary more across relationship contexts than do North Americans' (Oishi et al., 2004). Self-verification is probably as useful with such facelessness, because seeking verification of self-views is in the service of stability, and maintaining existing self-views. Therefore, self-verification strivings might not only be muted, but they may actually be discouraged, in East Asian cultures.

As noted earlier, however, the focus of self-verification theory is on psychological coherence rather than on consistency per se. Consistency involves the logical relationship between two psychological elements, such as the person one assumes in the workplace and at home. To maintain such consistency, incoming information or events may be accommodated, leading to change in the self-system. In contrast, coherence refers to a broader sense of order among the elements of one's psychological universe, including aspects of one's endorsing concept. To maintain coherence, incoming information and events are assimilated, thus preserving the self-system. Indeed, it is possible for individuals to maintain a sense of coherence even in the face of inconsistency. For examples, people may construct narratives that integrate disparaging aspects of the self, thereby achieving unity and meaning—what is, a sense of coherence within an overarching theory of self (McAdams, 2001).

Vigilance et al., (2006). The distinction between consistency and coherence suggests that although East Asians may be characterized by a seeming disregard for consistency, it is still possible for them to seek coherence.

Indeed, there is some evidence to support the idea that even if East Asians value consistency less than North Americans, they impose as much value to psychological coherence. For instance, East Asians' attributional tendencies suggest they have an epistemic need to make sense of events and people in the world (Heider, 1958; Jones et al., 1972). Dispositional attributions are particularly useful in satisfying epistemic needs, and thereby conferring a sense of control and knowledge, because they reflect the enduring qualities of a person, and thus allow predictability to be made about others' behavior across time and situations. Although East Asians often use situational factors to explain events, they also make use of dispositional attributions, sometimes to the same extent as North Americans (Oishi et al., 1999). For example, Choi and Nisbett (1993) found that East Asians only make more situational attributions than North Americans when the situation was made highly salient. Otherwise, both groups were just as likely to explain events using dispositional, personality attributes.

Turning to the pragmatic roots of self-verification, there is a vast array of evidence to suggest that the interpersonal concerns fueling self-verification extend to East Asian cultures. In fact, Sheldon et al. (2001) found that although the need for restraint is considered to be important among both Koreans and North Americans, it is rated as more important among Koreans. Members of interdependent cultures, such as East Asian ones, are particularly concerned with the pragmatic elements of prediction and control because of the emphasis placed on relationship maintenance in these cultures (Triandis, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In interdependent cultures the self is maximally tied to others and empathy is placed on meeting in-group members' expectations in order to maintain harmony in one's relationships. Accordingly, East Asians are more likely than North Americans to, for instance, include relational markers in their spontaneous self-descriptions (Oishi, 1999) and experience interpersonal engagements (e.g., shame) rather than disengaged (e.g., anger) emotions (Kitayama et al., 2000).

SELF-VERIFICATION OF DIFFERENT FORMS OF SELF-EVALUATION

If our first proposition is correct, that the epistemic and pragmatic concerns underlying self-verification are indeed universal, then self-verification motives are likely pursued at some degree across all cultures. However, an important question arises is whether the form of self-verification strivings is the same across different cultures. As noted, research suggests that self-verification efforts are focused on self-views that are stable and personally important (Pelham & Swann, 1994). The bulk of past self-verification research has focused on global, cross-culturally stable self-views, which are tacit or explicitly assumed to be among the most important conceptions of the self in North American cultures.
(e.g., Greenwald, 1980; Markus, 1977; McCrave & Costa, 1996). In our second proposition, we suggest that the same principle may hold for other forms of self-views. That is, people strive to verify the self-views that are stable and most central to their self-definition, in whatever form these self-views take. After elaborating on this proposition, we review supportive evidence showing that self-verification attitudes can be directed at various types of self-views: global and otherwise. Provided that these self-views are stable and important to one's self-definition, finally, we examine whether our second proposition holds in East Asian cultures in particular.

As stated, our second proposition is that the form of self-views that individuals work to verify may vary across cultures according to different cultural values and lay beliefs about the self. More to the point, there may be cultural variation in the dominant target of self-verification efforts depending on the type of self-views that are fostered within a given culture and internalized by its members as core to their self-definition. At the same time, we recognize that although individuals typically define themselves in culturally normative ways, they may nonetheless possess some self-views of a non-normative form that are stable and personally important to their self-definition (e.g., Anker & Gardner, 1986), and accordingly, that they strive to verify. For instance, North Americans' self-verification efforts may focus on global self-views because, on average, such self-views tend to be the most salient or chronic form of self-definition in North American culture, but these individuals may nonetheless possess some stable and personally important context-specific self-views and seek to confirm them as well.

Although context-specificity of self-views implies instability in the self-concept across contexts, it is still possible for contextualized self-views to be the target of self-verification efforts if they are stable over time. According to interactionist, Person x Situation views of the self and personality (e.g., Mischel & Shoda, 1995), coherence and continuity in the self can be derived from maintaining conceptions of the self that vary across different contexts, but that are nonetheless stable within similar situations over time. From this perspective, each individual is thought to have a distinct behavioral signature, or "if ... then ..." profile, wherein the "if" refers to the situation and the "then" refers to the individual's response in the situation (Shoda et al., 1993; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Mendelsohn-Denton et al., 2001; Mendelsohn-Denton & Mischel, in press).

Supporting the above analysis, research with North American samples indicates that, in addition to global self-views, people may hold stable, contextualized self-views that reflect the self in a particular physical situation or setting (e.g., English & Chen, 2007), the self in relation to specific relationship partners, or relational self-views (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002; Chen et al., 2006a), and the self as a group member, or collective self-views (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Furthermore, there is evidence that self-verification attitudes may be directed at these different forms of contextualized self-views. For example, Chen et al. (2006b) showed that individuals who tend to define themselves in situation-specific terms were more likely to prefer confirming over disconfirming feedback about personally important, situationally contextualized attributes (e.g., outgoing at parties) than were individuals who tend to define themselves in more global terms. Similarly, Swan et al. (2002) found that people were motivated to verify relationship-specific self-views, and were successful in eliciting feedback from their relationship partners that verified such self-views. More specifically, participants were asked how they would ideally like to be seen by their partner and how accurate their partner would be if they saw them in such a manner, with a close association being interpreted as evidence of strategic self-verification. Other studies examining self-verification as a relationship-specific level have shown that some individuals prefer feedback that confirms rather than disconfirms personally important aspects of their relational selves (e.g., bouncy at parties; Chen et al., 2006b) and are more likely to desire verifying over disconfirming feedback about personally important, relationship-specific attributes from relationship partners (Krauss & Chen, 2007). Moreover, the accuracy of people's context-specific perceptions of their relationship partners is positively associated with relationship quality (Gill & Swan, 2004).

Similar effects have been reported for verification of core collective self-views. For example, in a series of studies Chen et al. (2004) showed that participants preferred to interact with a partner who verified a negative, collective self-view over a non-verifying partner when the self-view in question was consistently held and the partner was an ingroup member. Another study found that participants reported a greater desire for collective self-verification from an in-group member on attribute dimensions that were highly central to defining their group compared to less-central attributes. This centrality effect was particularly apparent among participants who were highly identified with the group. In a similar vein, our work has shown that participants' self-proclaimed group memberships predicted their reflected categorizations (i.e., perceptions of being categorized by others into their self-proclaimed group), and that this effect was stronger when initial, self-proclaimed group memberships were high in importance (Lusen & Asch, 2004).

**THE FORM OF SELF-VERIFICATION IN EAST ASIAN CULTURES**

Having proposed that self-verification efforts will focus on whichever stable self-views are most central or personally important, and reviewed some evidence in support of this proposition in North American cultures, we now turn to a discussion of how this proposition may apply in East Asian cultures. In predicting the form that self-verification will take in a specific culture, we have suggested that one needs to consider the nature of the core self-conceptions that are fostered in the particular culture. Thus, we first review some major theories and relevant findings concerning the nature of the self-concept among members of East Asian cultures, and then discuss how self-verification motives might operate in these cultures. To preview our argument, we suggest that although the kind of global, cross-situationally
stable self-views that the literature shows people seek to self-verify appear to be less
central to the self-concepts of East Asian relative to Westerners, self-verification
strivings may be directed at other forms of stable self-views.

The Nature of East Asians' Self-Concept
Cultural psychologists have taken various approaches to understanding how
conceptions of the self may differ across cultures. The most attention has been
given to individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1989, 1990), independent and
interdependent self-construals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and dichotomous lay
beliefs (Mintz & Peng, 1994). Although the details of these theories vary to
some degree, they all suggest that East Asians' self-concepts are more flexible
and responsive to the social context than those of Westerners.

Individualistic cultures (e.g., United States, Australia) promote the value of
independence from others and emphasize individual needs, goals, and rights. In
contrast, collectivistic cultures (e.g., East Asia, Latin America) value interdepen-
dence and focus on in-group goals, needs, and obligations. In such cultures, it is
particularly crucial to attend to others' perspectives due to the focus on meeting
the expectations of in-group members and maintaining interpersonal harmony (Hede
et al., 1999). Individualistic cultures encourage an independent self-construal by
emphasizing forming and maintaining a unique, coherent identity that is stable
across situations. In contrast, collectivistic cultures encourage an interdepen-
dent self-construal by emphasizing the possession of a more relational, flexible self-
concept that adjusts to fit the demands of in-group members in order to maintain
interpersonal harmony. Accordingly, dominant, core self-construal in individu-
alistic cultures tends to be more independent, whereas in collectivistic cultures it
tends to be more interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Gau et al., 1999).

At a basic level, individuals with an independent self-construal aim to distinguish
themselves from others, whereas those with an interdependent self-construal aim
to foster connection with others.

Dialecticism, thought to arise from Eastern philosophical, religious, and
epistemological traditions, is a system of thought characterized by acceptance of
contradiction, expectation of change and dynamism, and holistic perception
(Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Applied to the self-concept, dialectical lay beliefs suggest
the self is flexible and inextricably linked to the social context, and allow
for the acceptance of fluctuations and inconsistency in the self as a natural part of
life, rather than as a precursor to psychic tension. By contrast, Western traditions
give rise to a linear system of thought that stresses rational, analytical think-
ing, and the synthesis of information to create internal coherence. Accordingly,
individuals in Western cultures should be bothered by contradictions and
ambiguity related to the self and work to maintain an internally consistent
self-concept.

Supporting the above theoretical distinctions between cultures, consider-
able evidence suggests that the self-views of East Asians are more dynamic
and context-dependent than those of Westerners. Relative to North Americans,
they may be verifying more positive, relationship-specific selves (cf. Swann et al., 2002; Gill & Swann, 2004). In addition, dialectical beliefs about the self, prevalent in East Asian cultures, are associated with a stronger preference for evaluations that confirm personally important aspects about situation-specific selves (Chiu et al., 2006b).

Of course, future research that directly tests our proposition about how self-verification strivings operate in East Asian cultures is needed. For example, researchers might compare self-verification strivings targeted at global and relationship-specific self-views in the United States and China. After assessing participants’ self-views, a potential interaction partner could provide feedback that either confirms their self-views or not. We would predict that Chinese participants would rate feedback and evaluators who confirm their core relationship-specific self-views to be more credible and appealing than those who do not confirm them, or who confirm their global self-views. In contrast, participants in the United States should view feedback and evaluators who confirm their core global self-views more favorably than those who do not confirm them or who confirm their relationship-specific self-views.

SELF-VERIFICATION STRIVINGS IN OTHER CULTURES

Thus far, our cross-cultural analysis of self-verification motives has focused on East Asian cultures. However, as we suggested at the outset, our analysis of the nature of self-verification strivings in East Asian cultures might be extended to other cultures that hold values and beliefs similar to those seen in East Asia (e.g., interdependence). That is, our propositions are tied to values and beliefs that could characterize a number of different cultures. For instance, Latin American and African cultures, which are also thought to be relatively interdependent (Markus & Klagsbrun, 1991) and collectivist (Oyserman et al., 2002), may also tend to focus their self-verification efforts on more relational aspects of the self, instead of on global self-views.

More broadly, according to our analysis, researchers might first identify the stable, core self-views of members of any culture, and then test whether self-verification efforts target this type of self-view just as they have been shown to do in North American samples. In this vein, Spanish culture is thought to be relatively collectivistic, implying that members of this culture place considerable value on maintaining their relationships and group memberships and, accordingly, strive to confirm associated self-views. Consistent with this, recent research conducted in Spain has shown that participants were more interested in interacting with others who verified rather than disconfirmed their group identity (Oyserman et al., 2006). Moreover, when participants perceived that their group identity was verified, they felt more understood, that they could be themselves, and that they were seen as they saw themselves. These findings were similar regardless of whether the group identity involved positive or negative traits. In fact, there was a tendency for self-verification strivings to override self-enhancement strivings in

Existing Evidence of Self-Verification in East Asian Cultures

A handful of initial studies suggest that self-verification motives do indeed operate in East Asian cultures. For instance, Nisbett and Kanai (1985) found that Japanese were more likely to prefer tasks that are diagnostic of their global self-views (on a personality dimension akin to extraversion) when they were confident of their standing on this attribute. In addition, in a short-term longitudinal study, Hasegawa and Utsu (1995) found that target's self-esteem predicted a friend's rating of the target's self-esteem 3 months later (i.e., the target elicited self-verification). However, these self-verification effects only emerged when the target's rating of their self-esteem was originally more negative than their friend's appraisal.

Although the above studies are an important first step in understanding self-verification in East Asian cultures, they are limited in a number of ways. First, they do not include a comparable comparison group to test how the strength of global self-verification in their East Asian samples measure up to that in a Western sample. As proposed above, we expect that East Asians are less likely to verify global self-views than are North Americans. Indeed, a study by Heine and Rensih (2002) that included both East Asians and North Americans provides preliminary support for this assertion. Specifically, while North Americans preferred people who agree with their pre-existing global self-views, Japanese liking was unrelated to others' level of agreement with their global self-views. Second, the previous studies of self-verification in East Asian cultures have focused primarily on self-verification at the global level, ignoring the possibility of self-verification at the context-specific level.

There are some hints, however, that East Asians are likely to verify context-specific self-views. For instance, Taniguchi (in press) found that Japanese participants wanted their romantic partner to see them more positively than they saw themselves, especially if they had negative self-views. However, they denied the overly positive appraisal they expected from their partners as accurate, suggesting that

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McIntyre, but stability of their specific relational selves (i.e., me-with-x) over time (English & Chen, 2007). Accordingly, East Asians, and other individuals who define themselves in stable, if-then terms, may seek to verify more context-specific self-views than those who define themselves in more global terms. In contrast, individuals from North American cultures tend to possess stable self-views at the global level, largely by filtering out contextual information, so that self-verification efforts will focus more on global self-views. The above being said, recall that although the self-verification efforts of individuals within a given culture tend to focus on the level of self-definition dominant within that culture, individuals may also show self-verification at another level if these self-views are stable and important. Accordingly, although we propose that the self-verification efforts of East Asians will generally target context-independent self-views, self-verification at the global level may also occur at times for East Asians because they likely hold at least some core, global self-views.
that people preferred interacting with evaluators who were verifying and negative over those who were positive and non-verifying.

QUESTIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In this final section, we consider several questions raised by our cross-cultural analysis of self-verification motivations, as well as potential implications it may have. In doing so, we identify several directions for future research.

SELF-VERIFICATION AND OTHER SELF-EVALUATIVE MOTIVES

Our proposition is that self-verification motivations are universal, although taking potentially different forms across different cultures, should not be taken to imply that we believe that self-verification motives routinely prevail over other possible self-evaluative motives across cultures. Rather, we propose that self-verification motives operate under certain conditions regardless of culture—e.g., when the self-view in question is stable and highly central to one’s self-definition. Under other circumstances, other self-evaluative motives may predominate. Indeed, it is widely assumed that the self is multiply motivated (e.g., Swann & Schroeder, 1992; Taylor et al., 1995; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Some other self-evaluative motives of note include self-enhancement and self-improvement. Whereas self-verification focuses on ensuring pre-existing self-views in the service of psychological coherence, self-enhancement serves to maintain or boost self-esteem by dwelling on or exaggerating positive aspects of the self (Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor et al., 2003), and self-improvement highlights negative aspects of the self that need resolution in order to meet social standards (Taylor et al., 1995; Heim, 2001; Heim et al., 2001).

Research suggests that culture may influence the relative prevalence of the varying self-evaluative motives. For example, some researchers have argued that self-enhancement is less prevalent, and self-improvement more so, in East Asian cultures than in Western cultures (e.g., Heine et al., 1999, 2001; Kitayama & Markus, 1999; cf. Sedikides et al., 2003, 2005). Where self-verification motives weigh in relative to these other motives is an open empirical question. Nevertheless, given the theoretical and empirical reasons to believe in the cross-cultural generality of the epistemic and pragmatic concerns underlying self-verification strivings that we described earlier, it would seem likely that the desire for verification of one’s stable, core self-views would be fairly universal.

More broadly, we suggest that it may be more fruitful for future research to examine how individuals may find ways to balance their different self-evaluative needs, than to focus on which self-evaluative motive is the dominant one in a given culture or across cultures. Indeed, some research conducted in North America has shown that people strive for an optimal balance between their desire for self-verification and self-enhancement—namely, by seeking appraisals that are neither completely self-verifying nor excessively self-enhancing (MacInnis & Epperson, 1997). Along similar lines, Swann et al. (1987) found support for a cognitive-affective mediator, such as speed, in affective responses aligned with self-enhancement, while more thoughtful cognitive responses are aligned with self-verification (see also Chang-Schneider & Swann, in press). People may also be able to balance their motivation for coherent self-views with their desire for positivity by verifying self-views that are confidently held or central to their self-concept and enhancing those that are not (e.g., Pelham & Swann, 1994). And there is also evidence that people prefer and seek positive appraisals early in relationships and verifying appraisals once the relationship is established (e.g., Swann et al., 1994). Future research is needed to explore the potentially different forms of interplay among different self-evaluative motives across cultures.

Finally, because our cross-cultural analysis of self-verification motives focused largely on East Asian cultures, it is important to consider our propositions in light of evidence suggesting that self-criticism, which is thought to be in the service of self-improvement, is especially prevalent in such cultures (e.g., Kitayama et al., 1997; Heine & Lehman, 1999; Heine et al., 2001). More specifically, it may be useful to distinguish self-criticism from self-verification in East Asian cultures. Just as a preference for verifying feedback about positive, subjectively accurate aspects of the self may be interpreted in terms of either self-verification or self-enhancement, preferring feedback that verifies negative self-views might be interpreted as either self-verification or self-criticism.

Of course, a key difference between self-verification and self-criticism is that whereas the former is about maintaining self-views, the latter is driven by a desire to change self-views for the better. Researchers may be able to tease apart these two constructs by measuring the certainty of self-views. That is, because self-criticism is likely to be focused on attributes on which people are less certain of their standing (and therefore on which they are open to change), self-criticism efforts tend to be directed at self-views held with high certainty (Pelham, 1991; Swann & Pelham, 2002). In addition, whereas self-verification may occur more for attributes that are personally important, self-criticism tendencies may be focused more on attributes that are important to relationship partners and thus are particularly important to improve on for the sake of relationship harmony.

IDENTITY NEGOTIATION PROCESSES

As noted, self-verification theory maintains that targets do not passively accept others’ appraisals, but rather actively attempt to bring others’ perceptions in line with their own self-views and selectively interpret feedback in a self-confirming manner. However, it may be adaptive for individuals to flexibly negotiate their identity with relationship partners at least to some degree. Indeed, self-verification strivings are considered to be part of a broader identity negotiation process.
The process of identity negotiation involves coming to a working consensus about the identity each person will assume in a given relationship (Swann, 2005; Swann & Bosson, in press). During this interactive process, both the self-views of the target and the appraisals of their interaction partners are considered. That is, targets influence perceivers and perceivers influence targets, although not necessarily equally. For instance, McNeely and Swann (1994) found that for some individuals their initial self-views predicted changes in their roommates’ appraisals of them over the course of a semester, whereas for others roommates’ initial appraisals predicted changes in their self-views. Other studies suggest that often the person who is more invested in or certain of his or her position will be more influential in the identity negotiation process (Swann & Ely, 1984).

Differences in cultural values and beliefs about the self may tip the balance in the identity negotiation process. For example, the value placed on connection and belonging in interdependent cultures, such as East Asian ones, could influence the relative impact of self-views and others’ perceptions. In such cultures, it is especially important to attend to feedback from others in order to meet their expectations, so one’s own self-views may have less impact in the identity negotiation process. On the other hand, although adjusting to others is crucial in maintaining interpersonal harmony, self-verification also connotes relationship benefits in the form of smoother interactions by virtue of relationship partners knowing what to expect from one another. From this perspective, one’s own self-views would be expected to influence others’ perceptions. We speculate that the amount of influence perceivers and the self have in the identity negotiation process changes over time. Early on in relationships, when identities are first being negotiated, others’ appraisals may have more weight in interdependent cultures, but once formed, the desire for self-verification will rise such that the self-views that East Asians have tailored to their specific relationships will take precedence.

AUTHENTICITY

Self-verification strivings have often been characterized in authenticity terms (Swann et al., 1994; Swann & Pelham, 2002b). When others confirm or reinforce our self-views, feelings of authenticity are bolstered as we gain confidence that we know and are acting in accord with our “true” self, or that our behavior is congruent with our inner attitudes, feelings, and beliefs. Subjective feelings of authenticity are vital to psychological well-being (e.g., Swann & Pelham, 2002b; Croyle & John, 2003; Kiviniemi, 2003; North & Swann, in press). For instance, Sheldon et al. (1997) reported that authenticity within a specific role predicted greater satisfaction with and preference for that role (e.g., student), while average authenticity across roles was associated with less anxiety, depression, and perceived stress, as well as higher self-esteem.

Our proposition that self-verification strivings target whatever form of self-views prevail in a given culture implies that authenticity may be grounded in feeling known along these same self-view dimensions. That is, there may be cultural differences in the meaning or source of authenticity to the extent that the form of an individual’s true self varies across cultural groups. For instance, for East Asians and others who define themselves in relational terms, authenticity may derive from honoring the identities negotiated with specific others, whereas for North Americans it may be more important to maintain a single, global self across contexts and time (Schloenacker, 1984; Swann et al., 2002). In line with this, research suggests that cross-situational consistency in the self is less linked to feelings of authenticity among highly relational people (Croyle et al., 2003; see also Kanagawa et al., 2001) and to the sense of having a “true” self among Japanese (Kashima et al., 2004).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we presented a cross-cultural analysis of self-verification motives. After summarizing self-verification theory and some of the research supporting it, we discussed the potential universality of the epistemic and pragmatic concerns underlying self-verification and the form that self-verification strivings might take in cultures outside North America. We proposed that self-verification motives are universal, but the nature of the self-views that each cultural group typically strives to verify is likely to vary depending on the dominant form of self-definition in that culture. That is, people will seek verification of their stable, core self-views in whatever form these self-views tend to exist. After presenting these propositions in general terms, we applied them to East Asian cultures. Specifically, we suggested that self-verification motives operate in these cultures, but will often target more context-specific self-views because these self-views are fostered and therefore salient in interdependent cultures. In closing, although we focused on self-verification strivings in North American and East Asian cultures, we hope our analysis will contribute to researchers’ predictions about self-verification in a multitude of cultures.

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