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"Who Am I?" The Cultural Psychology of the Conceptual Self

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This study investigated whether self-concepts that arise from participation in interdependent cultural contexts, in this case the self-concepts of Japanese students, will be relatively more sensitive to situational variation than will self-concepts that arise in independent cultural contexts, in this case the self-concepts of U.S. college students. The self-concepts of 128 Japanese and 133 U.S. women were assessed in one of four distinct social situations: in a group, with a faculty member, with a peer, and alone in a research booth. Furthermore, the authors examined the hypothesis that Japanese self-concepts would differ from American self-concepts in valence, reflecting normative and desirable tendencies toward self-criticism. American and Japanese participants differed in the content, number, and range of self-descriptions. As predicted, the situation had a greater influence on the self-descriptions of the Japanese participants than on the Americans' self-descriptions, and the self-descriptions of the Japanese were more negative.

"Just be yourself" is the recommendation given to many Americans who ask advice on how to behave in an unfamiliar situation. Notably, many Japanese are also given apparently similar advice: "Behave just the way you are." These two imperatives might well be translated into each other but do they mean the same thing? Studies in cultural anthropology and more recently in cultural psychology suggest that the instruction to "be yourself" or to "behave just the way you are" may have very different meanings in the United States and Japan because these cultures collectively construct individuals in different ways and because individuals in these cultures tend to construct themselves in different ways. In other words, the referents for the words *you* or *yourself* may not be the same in the two cultures. In the United States, the self,

particularly in middle-class and educated contexts, is often understood and presumably experienced as abstract, bounded, private, and separated from others and the social context. In contrast, in Japan, the self is most typically understood as flexible, open, situation-specific, and configured by a constant referencing of the self to the situational setting or context (Ames, Dissanayake, & Kasulis, 1994; Geertz, 1975; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In this study, we examine what it means to "be yourself" or to "behave just the way you are" in cultures with different self-views: the United States and Japan. Although many theorists have described the situational and relational sensitivity of the self, whether the content of the self differs according to the nature of the social situation in which it is assessed has not yet been directly examined. Building on the idea that the self is an explicitly relational phenomenon in Japanese cultural contexts, we reasoned that Japanese respondents would be relatively more sensitive to the nature of the social context in which self-description was elicited than would

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American respondents. We hypothesized that this sensitivity would be expressed in variability of self-descriptions in different situations. Furthermore, we hypothesized that Japanese self-concepts would be relatively more negative, reflecting culturally normative and desirable tendencies toward self-criticism. To investigate these hypotheses, we examined the content of the self-concept or the conceptual self in four distinct social situations.[1]

CULTURAL VARIATION IN THE CONCEPTUAL SELF

The self is acquired through social interaction and is a product of particular sociocultural environments (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934; see Markus & Cross, 1990, for a review). In Western cultures, particularly in the United States, the self is viewed as a more-or-less integrated whole composed of abilities, values, personality attributes, preferences, feeling states, and attitudes (Geertz, 1975; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). A central goal of individuals with this view of the self, termed the "independent self-construal" by Markus and Kitayama (1991), is to "continually identify these attributes and then to insure that they are persistently expressed and affirmed" (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997, p. 3).

These attributes, abilities, and preferences are not bound to particular situations or relationships but instead are seen as transcendent and enduring. Although situations may activate different subsets of attributes in the working self-concept (Markus & Kunda, 1986), the core self-representations are assumed to be relatively invariant over time. This belief is reflected in the cultural valuing of consistency across situations. Persons whose behavior varies from one situation to another are very often viewed as waffling, immature, or hypocritical. Because one's attributes and abilities are central to self-definition, people tend to affirm and elaborate those abilities at which they excel relative to others and the attributes that make them appear relatively unique and special. In fact, the self-concepts of Americans contain 4 to 5 times as many positive attributes as negative ones (Herzog, Franks, Markus, & Holmberg, 1994).

In contrast, members of many East Asian cultures, such as the Japanese, construe the self as relational, contextual, and as constituted by important roles and relationships. This "interdependent self-construal" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) is marked by sensitivity to situations and social contexts. For these individuals, the fundamental relatedness of the self to others may be the primary unit of the self rather than abstracted and internalized attributes or attitudes. Central goals of individuals with this self-construal are to maintain harmony in one's relationships and to occupy one's proper place.

Interdependent selves are in fact often characterized as indeterminate, multiple, and moving (Kondo, 1990; Lebra, 1994; Rosenberger, 1989). Behavior is responsive to and shaped by the demands of others in a given situation. The person who does not behave according to the demands of the situation is seen as immature. It is important to note that behaving according to expectations or requirements of a role does not imply losing one's individuality.

The desire to fulfill one's proper role in a situation leads people to be sensitive to falling short of others' expectations or the desired standard in a given situation. Therefore, Japanese not only strive to identify proper ways to express attitudes, thoughts, or behaviors but they are also attentive to negative information about themselves and the ways they must improve in order to meet the expectations of a given situation or relationship (Kitayama & Markus, in press; Takata, 1987). Overt statements about one's own proficiency or ability are viewed as evidence of social ineptness (Muramoto & Yamaguchi, 1994; Yoshida, Kojo, & Kaku, 1982). For example, a study of Japanese junior high students' open-ended self-descriptions showed that the vast majority of the students first described negative aspects of themselves followed by statements about how these negative aspects could be improved (Kitayama & Wakabayashi, 1996). Whereas such self-criticism may be seen as indicative of low self-esteem among Americans, it is a valued and expected part of Japanese development and self-improvement.

THE INTERACTIVE INFLUENCE OF CULTURE AND SITUATION ON THE CONCEPTUAL SELF

Most current theories of the self assume that the content of the self-concept or conceptual self is significant because the self is thought to mediate and regulate a wide variety of behavior, performing a type of executive function (Baumeister, 1998; Markus & Wurf, 1987; Neisser, 1991). Most theories also assume that the self-concept is dynamic; at any given moment, a subset of an individual's collection of self-representations, the working self-concept, or the conceptual self of the moment, is activated (Markus & Kunda, 1986). The content of the working self-concept is determined by the social situation at a given time and by the person's current goals, affect, or motivational state. Once activated, the working self-concept orients and directs an individual's behavior so as to facilitate adaptation to a given social context. For example, if a person's focus is on an external audience, this may stimulate the desire for approval and attention (Cheek & Hogan, 1983; Hogan, 1982).

Psychologists have assumed that the functions of the self-concept (i.e., in creating an identity, in information processing and emotional regulation, and in promoting adaptation and regulating behavior) are relatively common across cultures (Baumeister, 1998). Even in cultures that construct the self-concept differently from the Western construction, we assume that situations will activate a subset of self-conceptions that will in turn direct behavior (Markus & Kunda, 1986). This assumption remains an open question but to date there are no theoretical or empirical challenges to it. Cultural meanings and practices are likely to be implicated in all aspects of this process, however, including the content of the universe of self-conceptions, the degree to which the conceptual self varies across situations, what counts as a situation, and individuals' interpretations and motivations within situations.

First, the cultural context influences the universe of self-conceptions from which the working self-concept is drawn. Several studies comparing the self-descriptions of students with North American or European backgrounds with those from Asian cultures have shown that the former participants were more likely to describe themselves in terms of inner psychological traits (Bochner, 1994; Bond & Cheung, 1983; Cousins, 1989; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995) or emotional states (Rhee et al., 1995) than were those from Asian backgrounds. In addition, individuals with North American or European backgrounds used fewer social categories such as social roles or memberships than did those from Asian cultures, who were more likely than others to report their activities (Cousins, 1989; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, 1990). All together, these studies suggest that for Asian participants, descriptions of their attributes will take more content-specific or behavioral forms. For example, rather than report "I am shy," they are more likely to say "I don't talk very much in an unfamiliar situation."

Second, culture influences the degree of variation in the working self-concept across situations. For individuals with an independent self-construal, some core self-representations are chronically activated and on-line and will be included in the working self-concept on most occasions (Markus, 1977). For example, a student may think of herself as outgoing or thoughtful both when meeting with a faculty member and when dining with a friend. In addition, the motivation to appear consistent across situations (at least to oneself) may result in the activation of a basic set of attributes and self-characterizations in different settings. Given that the working self-concept promotes adaptation to a particular situation, however, self-descriptions may vary to some extent across situations among American students.

In contrast, due to the situation- and relationship-specific nature of the interdependent self-construal, the working self-concept of Japanese students may vary considerably across situations. Consistency motives may be replaced with motives to maintain harmony in relationships and to engage in appropriate behavior (Heine & Lehman, 1997). For example, the currently activated self-representations of a student meeting with a faculty member versus lunching with friends may have very few common elements. So the content of the working self-concept may vary more across situations for Japanese than for Americans.

Cultural differences in situational variability of self-descriptions have not yet been examined empirically. Most often, inferences are made about the variability of the self-concept based on responses to self-description tasks that are completed in large group settings (such as the open-ended Twenty Statements Test, in which participants respond to the question "Who are you?" 20 times). These studies generally reveal cultural differences in content that are consistent with the hypothesized differences in self-construal (e.g., more behavioral, context-specific self-descriptions among East Asians than Americans) but they fall short of the goal of demonstrating differential sensitivity to the situation. Cousins (1989) went a step further when he asked Americans and Japanese to describe themselves without the stipulation that they think about a context followed by instructions to describe themselves in various situations (e.g., at home, at school, with friends), and indeed he found differences consistent with these divergent self-construals. Cousins, however, did not specify the differential effects of specific situations on self-descriptions (e.g., how descriptions of oneself at home differed from descriptions of oneself with friends), choosing instead to aggregate his findings across the situations. Cousins also did not evaluate self-descriptions for their valence. In this study, we examine responses to individual situations to better articulate the role of the self-construal in adaptation to a particular context.

In addition, we have manipulated the situation and used a between-subjects design, in contrast to the within-subjects design that Cousins (1989) used. Describing oneself in a hypothetical setting may bring to mind self-descriptions that are different from the on-line self-representations activated when one is actually engaged in that situation. Cultural ideals valuing consistency also may influence the extent to which Americans will describe themselves differently across situations. Finally, given the context-dependent nature of the interdependent self-construal, self-descriptions collected in impersonal large group settings (as in Cousins's study) may not elicit the dimensions of the self-concept that are most likely to direct behavior in specific relational con-

texts (such as with a friend or with a faculty member). Thus, the Cousins study represents a first step toward resolving the question of cultural differences in self-concept variability across situations, but this study goes further by experimentally manipulating the context in which participants describe themselves and by examining patterns of self-description in these different contexts.

Finally, the appropriate behavior in a context may vary depending on cultural understandings of the person and situations. Individuals with divergent self-construals will differ in the extent to which they view a situation as offering an opportunity for expressing oneself or for maintaining harmony. When American students visit a professor with questions about a class, they may see this as not only an opportunity to receive information but also as an opportunity to individuate themselves in the eyes of the professor. In contrast, Japanese students will be more likely to think about the requirements of the situation and the particular roles and statuses of students and teachers. Although in both cases the person may want to communicate the impression that he or she is a good student, the means of making this impression may vary considerably. For Americans, this will most likely entail communicating how hard they work, how good their grades are relative to others, and how they have surmounted obstacles to succeed. In other words, the working self-concept of an American student will tend to reflect positive self-knowledge and supporting past experiences.

In contrast, securing the approval of others and confirming that one is supported within a web of mutually binding social relationships results in a cultural valuing of egoistic restraint among the Japanese (Kitayama et al., 1997; Rosenberger, 1989). One makes a good impression on others, especially higher status persons such as instructors, by appearing modest and sometimes by denigrating oneself. So the working self-concept of Japanese students will reflect relatively more negative self-knowledge and past experiences than that of Americans. This difference also may depend on the situation, with a greater expression of negative self-descriptions in situations with higher status others than when one is with peers or alone.

OVERVIEW OF STUDY

In this study, we examined situational variation in self-descriptions in two cultural groups that have been shown to have divergent self-construals: U.S. college students and Japanese college students. To capture the configuration of the working self-concept, we used the Twenty Statements Test (TST) (Hartley, 1970; McPartland, Cumming, & Garreston, 1961). In this method, an open-ended probe, such as "Who are you?" is presented to participants and they respond 20 times. This method is advantageous for capturing the content of the self-concept at the moment because it allows participants leeway to describe themselves in their own words (McGuire & McGuire, 1988).

In addition, this approach is one of the least culturally biased means of assessing the self-concept. It is free from the problem of cultural differences in the interpretation of items used in structured questionnaires and has been widely used in examining cultural variation in the self-concept (Bond & Cheung, 1983; Cousins, 1989; Ip & Bond, 1995; Rhee et al., 1995). In contrast to previous research in which respondents were asked to imagine a social situation, in this study the situation was manipulated so that participants completed the TST in one of four conditions: (a) alone, (b) paired with a peer, (c) in a large group of peers, or (d) alone with a higher status partner (i.e., a faculty member). These conditions allowed us to vary two dimensions: (a) whether one was alone or with others and (b) the relative status of the others in the situation. These conditions also represent situations that are commonly experienced by students in both cultures.

We expected both cultural differences and similarities in the participants' self-descriptions. With respect to cultural differences, first, we expected to replicate the finding that Americans use more abstract and internalized expressions (such as pure psychological attributes or attitudes) to describe themselves than do Japanese students. Japanese participants were expected to use more behavioral and contextualized expressions (such as descriptions related to one's activities or social roles) than were Americans (Bond & Cheung, 1983; Cousins, 1989; Shweder & Bourne, 1984). Second, given the cultural mandate to express oneself, we expected Americans to generate a greater number of self-descriptions than the Japanese. Third, we expected American students to describe themselves in more positive terms than did Japanese students. Finally, due to the context-contingent nature of the interdependent self-construal, we expected to find greater differences in self-descriptions across conditions among the Japanese than among the American respondents. We hypothesized that the conditions would influence not only the content of the Japanese respondents' self-descriptions but also the proportion of positive and negative statements in their self-descriptions. We assumed, however, that we would find some similarities across the cultural groups in the effects of the situations on the working self-concept. For example, individuals in both cultures may construe being paired with a peer much like other get-acquainted situations. Likewise, being one-on-one with a faculty member may prime academically oriented self-concep-

tions, such as representations of one's plans and goals, in students of either culture.

METHOD

Participants

The Japanese sample consisted of 128 women from Shoin Women's College who were enrolled in introductory-level psychology courses and who participated for course credit. The U.S. sample consisted of 133 women enrolled in an introductory course in educational psychology who also participated for course credit. Although Shoin Women's College is a small private college and the University of Texas is a large, public institution, the students involved in this research were similar in many respects. At both institutions, the undergraduates are drawn largely from small towns, suburbs, and cities in the state or province. Students at both institutions come from mostly middle-income socioeconomic backgrounds and have similar educational backgrounds. The average age of the two samples were $M_{Japanese} = 18.5$ ($SD = .54$) and $M_{American} = 19.7$ ($SD = 1.31$).

Materials and Procedure

After reading and signing a consent form, students were told that the purpose of this study was to learn more about how people think about themselves. They were told that they would be asked the question "Who are you?" several times and that they should write down any response they liked. The experimenters provided examples of responses that focused on the present, past, and future.[2] Participants were asked not to repeat responses and were assured that their responses would be kept confidential. Participants were given a lined page labeled "Answer Sheet" for their responses to the TST. The first three lines began with the question "Who are you?" and these were followed by blank lines for the rest of the page. (This made it easier for participants to continue a response on the next line if necessary.) After giving the instructions, the experimenters repeated the question "Who are you?" every 45 seconds for a total of 20 responses. This was intended to make the condition (e.g., with an authority person, with a peer, etc.) more salient than it would have been had participants simply responded to written directions to complete the open-ended sentence "I am . . . " 20 times. In other words, the experimenter's repeated questions were intended to heighten the participants' awareness of the interpersonal context of the moment. The "Who am I?" question was translated and back-translated to ensure comparability across cultures. Participants were not informed of the number of times the stimulus question would be posed.

Participants signed up for the study in groups, and these groups were then randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. The first and second authors of this article served as the experimenters in Japan and the United States, respectively. These experimenters were both women, were similar in age, and were professors in the students' departments. In the authority condition, participants individually completed the task in the experimenter's office. Again, they were given the instructions for the task and the experimenter repeated the "Who are you?" question 20 times. In the solitary condition, participants completed the TST in a small research booth and the instructions for completing the task and the "Who are you?" questions were provided by audiotape.

In the group condition, the participants completed the task in groups of 20 to 50. In the peer condition, participants were paired with another participant to complete the task. One participant was randomly chosen in each pair to serve as the experimenter who would pose the "Who are you?" questions to their partner. The other members of the pairs were taken out of the room for a short time while instructions were given to the experimenters. They were asked to repeat the question "Who are you" to their partner each time the experimenter (e.g., the first or second author) indicated that 45 seconds had elapsed. Again, they were not told (neither were the respondents told) how many repetitions of the "Who are you?" question to expect. In the group, peer, and authority conditions, the experimenter was positioned so she could not read the participant's responses.

TST Coding System

We adopted a modified version of Cousins's (1989) coding system for the TST responses. Modeling his work on that of McPartland et al. (1961), Cousins used five basic categories in his coding scheme, each representing a different level of abstraction. We retained his five central categories (physical, social, attributive, global, and other) but expanded the subcategories to be as inclusive as possible. For example, social self-descriptions were categorized as either family related or friend related or as social memberships and roles. Table 1 describes the coding categories.

Following the work of Cousins (1989), our unit of analysis was the independent clause consisting of unique meaning statements. For example, the response "I am a Japanese student" was coded as two units (the ascribed identity as Japanese and the social role of student). Repeated responses were coded only once. To establish coding reliability, all of the responses were coded by two fully bilingual coders: one was a native of Japan and one was a native of the United States. Both coders were blind to the hypotheses of this study. In addition, we used two

TABLE 1:   Categories Used to Code the Twenty Statements Test (TST), Proportion of Agreement, and Percentages of Each Category by Culture

Categories	Examples	Agreement	Japan	United States	F	η^2
(A) Physical	I am tall.					
	I have short hair.	.996	13.38	4.69	87.76***	.26
(B1) Relationships	I love my family.					
	I am the youngest child in my family.	.997	6.27	10.19	23.00***	.08
(B2) Social memberships and roles	I am a student.					
	I am a member of a tennis club.	.997	9.00	9.73	0.32	.00
(C1) Preferences, interests	I like to cook.					
	I like to see movies.	1.000	16.51	15.22	0.14	.00
(C2) Goals, aspirations	I want to be a nurse.					
	I would like to go to Australia.	.997	13.21	12.60	0.50	.00
(C3) Activities	I often work out at the gym.					
	I have a part-time job.	.995	10.28	6.53	17.07***	.06
(C3S) Short-term activities	I bought a t-shirt today.					
	I went to my grandfather's yesterday.	.988	3.76	0.70	24.37***	.09
(C4) Qualified traits	I am sometimes grouchy in the morning.					
	I am apt to get tense in public.	.995	1.40	4.62	33.90***	.12
(C5) Pure psychological attributes	I am outgoing.					
	I am self-centered.	.998	7.18	17.59	45.00***	.15
(C6) Attitudes	I am not a racist.					
	I am against the Japanese troops going to Cambodia.	.996	2.03	10.38	67.37***	.21
(C7) Abilities	I am good at math.					
	I am not able to play any musical instruments.	.993	2.47	3.36	3.00	.01
(D) Individuating self-references	My name is Michelle.					
	I am a human being.	.997	3.85	1.47	24.23***	.09
(I) Immediate situation	I am hungry now.					
	I am in a psychology class.	.990	6.73	1.55	30.55***	.11
(J) Others' judgments	I am considered good at sports.					
	People say that I am mercurial.	.993	0.61	0.41	1.69	.01
(O) Possessions	I am running out of money.					
	I have a driver's license.	.990	1.60	0.82	7.44**	.03
(M) Miscellaneous	I was born in April.					
	My phone number is xxxx.	.966	1.72	0.16	32.60***	.11

NOTE: $df = 253$ for all variables. The first example for each category was generated by an American student and the second example by a Japanese student. The η^2 is based on the variance explained by culture in the two-way ANOVA.
**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

approaches to reduce the likelihood that the coders would infer the participants' nationalities from the self-descriptions. First, we eliminated as many of the clues to participants' nationalities from the descriptions as were feasible. For example, the statement "I am from Austin, Texas" was transformed to "I am from XXX city." Second, we gave the coders a cover story saying that all of the data were translated and back-translated and that the typed transcripts they were given included a mixture of translated and untranslated statements. Therefore, they could not necessarily assume the participants' nationality based on the language of the self-descriptions. (When questioned after the coding was completed, the coders reported no suspicion of the cover story.) Interrater agreement on the individual categories ranged from .966 to 1.00. The proportion of agreement for each category is listed in Table 1.

To examine cultural differences in the valence of self-conceptions, participants' responses in the physical (A), qualified traits (C4), pure psychological attributes (C5), and abilities (C7) categories were coded as either positive, negative, or neutral. These categories were selected because they were the most likely to include valenced or value-laden self-descriptions. The degree to which a given attribute is seen as positive or negative is culturally defined; for example, assertiveness is viewed as a negative attribute for Japanese women but does not have a similar connotation for Americans. Therefore, two bilingual coders from Japan and two bilingual coders from the United States coded each statement. This allowed us to examine interrater agreement both within each culture and across the two cultures. (The two additional coders also were blind to the hypotheses of the study.) We also used the two approaches described above to reduce the clues to the cultural background of the participants. For the Japanese coders, interrater agreement ranged from .950 to 1.00; for the American coders, interrater agreement ranged from .950 to .999. All four coders agreed on 96.7% of the descriptions. We based the analysis of the valence of self-descriptions on this sub-

set of self-descriptions for which there was agreement among the Japanese and American coders.

RESULTS

To control for variation in the number of meaningful units generated by each person, we followed the procedure used in other recent studies employing the TST (Cousins, 1989; Rhee et al., 1995). All calculations were based on the proportion of responses in a given category given the total number of meaningful units provided by the participant. The proportions were arcsine transformed prior to analysis but the original percentages are presented in the text and tables. The effects of culture and condition were examined with two-way MANOVAs.

*Cultural Influences on
the Self-Descriptions*

Content of the TST. Our first analysis examined cultural differences in the types and number of self-descriptions. We conducted a MANOVA on the arcsine-transformed proportions with culture and condition as the predictor variables. This analysis revealed a main effect of culture, $F(16, 238) = 25.81$, $p < .001$, multivariate effect size = .63. There were significant differences between the Japanese and Americans in 11 of the 16 categories of self-descriptions. The category frequencies for each cultural group and the effect size for the cultural comparison (η^2) for each category are shown in Table 1. American respondents were more likely than the Japanese respondents to describe themselves in terms of abstract, internal attributes, such as qualified psychological attributes (C4), pure psychological attributes (C5), and attitudes (C6). In fact, American self-descriptions included 3 times more references coded into these three categories than did the Japanese self-descriptions. Americans also generated a greater proportion of references to their friends and family (B1) than did the Japanese.

In contrast, the Japanese respondents were more likely than the Americans to describe themselves in terms of physical attributes and appearance (A), activities (C3), activities at a short time (C3S), individuating self-references (D1), the immediate situation (I), and possessions (O). Japanese respondents also provided more statements than did the Americans that could not be categorized into one of these 16 categories (e.g., "My phone number is xxxx") and so were placed into the miscellaneous category. Using Cohen's (1977) guideline that η^2 of .14 indicates a large effect and η^2 of .06 indicates a moderate effect, Table 1 reveals large effects of culture for the physical category (A), pure psychological traits (C5), and attitudes (C6) and moderate-to-large effects for seven additional categories (relationships, activities, references to activities at a short time, qualified

traits, individuating self-references, references to the immediate situation, and the miscellaneous category).

To highlight both similarities and differences between the two cultural groups, Table 2 presents the categories in order from most to least frequently used. For Americans, the largest proportion of self-descriptions was categorized as pure psychological traits (C5) followed by preferences (C1), goals (C2), attitudes (C6), and relationships (B1). In the Japanese sample, the largest proportion of self-descriptions was categorized as preferences (C1), followed by physical attributes (A), goals (C2), activities (C3), and social memberships (B2). What distinguishes Japanese self-descriptions from the American self-descriptions is the frequent mention of the immediate situation, short-term activities, and physical features. As we hypothesized, the American respondents are distinguished from the Japanese by their frequent mention of internal, abstract traits and attitudes. These findings contrast with recent arguments that the degree of dispositional inference and thinking about one's own and others' behavior is similar in Western and East Asian cultures (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999) and they suggest the need for much more careful systematic analysis of how people describe their own and others' behavior.

A comparison of the number of meaningful units generated by each participant also revealed a main effect of culture. American respondents produced more self-descriptions than did the Japanese respondents ($M_{Americans} = 33.49$, $SD = 9.95$; $M_{Japanese} = 30.50$, $SD = 10.31$), $F(1, 253) = 6.11$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$. The two cultural groups also differed in terms of the breadth of their responses. We calculated the number of categories represented at least once in each participant's protocol. This revealed that the Japanese participants used more categories to characterize themselves ($M = 9.64$, $SD = 2.12$, range = 5 to 15) than did the American participants ($M = 8.74$, $SD = 1.75$, range = 3 to 13), $F(1, 253) = 12.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Therefore, although Americans tended to write a bit more in describing themselves, the Japanese students used a wider range of characteristics in their self-descriptions.

Analysis of the positive-negative dimension. Four categories (physical attributes [A], qualified attributes [C4], pure psychological attributes [C5], and abilities [C7]) that could be judged for their valence were reanalyzed in terms of the positivity or negativity of the attributes used. The proportions of positive, negative, and neutral statements were computed on the basis of the total number of responses in the category. Repeated-measures ANOVAs on each category separately (with valence as the repeated measure and excluding the neutral items) revealed significant Culture × Valence interactions for all of the categories: physical (A), $F(1, 200) = 19.67$, $p <$

TABLE 2:   Categories of Self-descriptions Ordered by Frequency

	Japanese					United States		
	Categories	Mean %	% of Respondents	Order		Categories	Mean %	% of Respondents
(C1)	Preferences, interests	16.51	90.60	1	(C5)	Pure psychological attributes	17.59	93.20
(A)	Physical	13.38	93.80	2	(C1)	Preferences, interests	15.22	87.20
(C2)	Goals, aspirations	13.21	82.00	3	(C2)	Goals, aspirations	12.60	86.50
(C3)	Activities	10.28	88.30	4	(C6)	Attitudes	10.38	80.50
(B2)	Social memberships	9.00	85.20	5	(B1)	Relationships	10.19	88.00
(C5)	Pure psychological attributes	7.18	65.60	6	(B2)	Social memberships	9.73	77.40
(I)	Immediate situation	6.73	60.90	7	(C3)	Activities	6.53	75.20
(B1)	Relationships	6.27	76.60	8	(A)	Physical	4.69	63.90
(D)	Individuating self-reference	3.85	76.60	9	(C4)	Qualified traits	4.62	59.40
(C3S)	Short-term activities	3.76	52.30	10	(C7)	Abilities	3.36	60.20
(C7)	Abilities	2.47	44.50	11	(I)	Immediate situation	1.55	25.60
(C6)	Attitudes	2.03	30.50	12	(D)	Individuating self-reference	1.47	30.80
(M)	Miscellaneous	1.72	37.50	13	(O)	Possessions	0.82	20.30
(O)	Possessions	1.60	36.70	14	(C3S)	Short-term activities	0.70	12.80
(C4)	Qualified traits	1.40	28.90	15	(J)	Others' judgment	0.41	9.80
(J)	Others' judgment	0.61	14.10	16	(M)	Miscellaneous	0.16	3.80

NOTE: The number in the center column for each group shows the mean percentage of statements in that category. The value in the right column shows the percentage of respondents who referred to each category at least once.

.001, η^2 = .09; qualified traits (C4), $F(1, 106) = 7.18$, $p <$ .01, η^2 = .07; pure psychological attributes (C5), $F(1, 202) = 73.70$, $p < .001$, η^2 = .27; and abilities (C7), $F(1, 127) = 19.86$, $p < .001$, η^2 = .14. We then conducted the simple effects tests within category and valence. As Table 3 indicates, and consistent with our prediction, American respondents were more likely to generate positive statements in each of these categories than were Japanese respondents. Japanese students generated more negative statements than did the Americans.

The Interactive Influence of Culture and Situation on the Conceptual Self

Situational influences on the content of self-descriptions. We hypothesized that there would be more variation in self-descriptions across situations among the Japanese students than among the American students. The MANOVA on the transformed proportions revealed a main effect of condition, $F(48, 720) = 2.38$, $p < .001$, η^2 = .14, and a significant Culture × Condition interaction, $F(48, 720) = 2.09$, $p < .001$, η^2 = .12. In addition, two-way ANOVAs were conducted separately on the total number of unique self-descriptions and on the range of categories used by participants. For the number of statements generated, there was a significant effect of the conditions, $F(3, 253) = 4.41$, $p < .01$, η^2 = .05, and a significant Culture × Condition interaction, $F(3, 253) = 5.17$, $p < .01$, η^2 = .05. For the range of categories used, there was a significant Culture × Condition interaction, $F(3, 253) = 6.78$, $p < .001$, η^2 = .07. We limited our subsequent analyses to the categories that were mentioned by at least 40% of the participants in either group; this excluded three very low frequency categories (others' judgment,

TABLE 3:   Percentage of Positive and Negative Descriptors

Categories	Japan	United States	t	d
(A) Physical				
Positive	3.12	8.84	4.65***	.58
Negative	19.34	8.41	1.83*	.24
(C4) Qualified traits				
Positive	11.36	31.41	2.38**	.37
Negative	71.77	49.26	2.93**	.46
(C5) Pure psychological attributes				
Positive	34.10	67.01	7.96***	1.09
Negative	47.63	19.78	7.88***	1.01
(C7) Abilities				
Positive	41.05	71.03	4.32***	.58
Negative	55.19	24.86	4.42***	.58

NOTE: For convenience, the percentage of the statements categorized as neutral was omitted from this table. Group *n*s for each category are as follows: Category A: Japan *n* = 120, U.S. *n* = 82; Category C4: Japan *n* = 33, U.S. *n* = 75; Category C5: Japan *n* = 83, U.S. *n* = 121; and Category C7: Japan *n* = 56, U.S. *n* = 73.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$ (one-tailed).

possessions, and miscellaneous) from the analyses. The effects of the situation on self-description were examined with one-way ANOVAs conducted separately within culture on each of the categories and on the total number and range of self-descriptions. These analyses revealed significant variation in at least one of the cultural groups in the proportions of nine categories; the frequencies of these categories by condition are presented separately for Japanese and Americans in Tables 4 and 5.

Significance tests revealed change in four categories among the Japanese but only two among the Americans.

TABLE 4:   ANOVAS of Category Frequencies by Condition, Japanese Sample

	Condition (%)				F	η^2
Categories	*Group* (n = 24)	*Authority* (n = 28)	*Peer* (n = 39)	*Solitary* (n = 37)		
(A) Physical	16.57	10.18$_a$	11.34$_{a, f}$	15.89$_c$	3.81*	.08
(C1) Preferences, interests	16.95	17.43	17.07	14.96	0.33	.01
(C2) Goal, aspirations	14.01	14.45	12.64	12.36	0.21	.01
(C3) Activities	10.32	11.35	7.30	12.60	2.54†	.06
(C5) Pure psychological attributes	10.58	8.92	4.40$_{b, c}$	6.61	2.79*	.06
(C6) Attitudes	.91	3.72	2.13	1.37	2.25†	.05
(C7) Abilities	1.01	1.97	2.21	4.06$_{a, c, f}$	3.11*	.07
(D) Individuating self-reference	2.87	2.94	4.46	4.53	2.58†	.06
(I) Immediate situation	5.25	3.01	12.13$_{a, e, g}$	4.81	7.08**	.15
Number of statements	25.50	34.46$_b$	31.21$_a$	30.00	3.56*	.08
Range of categories	8.50	10.29$_b$	10.00$_b$	9.51	3.85*	.09

NOTE: $df = 3, 124$. The subscripts indicate the following differences among the means: (a) the mean differs from the group condition, $p < .05$; (b) the mean differs from the group condition, $p < .01$; (c) the mean differs from the authority condition, $p < .05$; (d) the mean differs from the authority condition, $p < .01$; (e) the mean differs from the authority condition, $p < .001$; (f) the mean differs between the peer and solitary condition, $p < .05$; and (g) the mean differs between the peer and solitary condition, $p < .001$.
†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

TABLE 5:   ANOVAS of Category Frequencies by Condition, American Sample

	Condition (%)				F	η^2
Categories	*Group* (n = 27)	*Authority* (n = 33)	*Peer* (n = 29)	*Solitary* (n = 44)		
(A) Physical	4.72	3.70	5.07	5.16	0.61	.01
(C1) Preferences, interests	16.30	10.32	24.67$_{a, e, g}$	12.00	6.89***	.14
(C2) Goals, aspirations	12.23	17.63$_a$	8.16$_e$	11.97$_c$	4.78**	.10
(C3) Activities	6.89	6.06	5.31	7.47	0.72	.02
(C5) Pure psychological attributes	17.25	18.99	14.85	18.56	0.56	.01
(C6) Attitudes	11.12	10.49	8.74	10.93	0.25	.01
(C7) Abilities	3.20	3.70	2.95	3.47	0.21	.01
(D) Individuating self-reference	1.75	0.68	2.49	1.23	2.02	.05
(I) Immediate situation	1.28	1.01	2.67	1.38	1.85	.04
Number of statements	35.55	36.12	27.34$_{b, e, f}$	34.30	5.44**	.11
Range of categories	9.30	8.94	7.76$_{a, d, f}$	8.91	4.58**	.10

NOTE: $df = 3, 129$. The subscripts indicate the following differences among the means: (a) the mean differs from the group condition, $p < .05$; (b) the mean differs from the group condition, $p < .01$; (c) the mean differs from the authority condition, $p < .05$; (d) the mean differs from the authority condition, $p < .01$; (e) the mean differs from the authority condition, $p < .001$; (f) the mean differs between the peer and the solitary condition, $p < .01$; and (g) the mean differs between the peer and the solitary condition, $p < .001$.
**$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Focusing on effect sizes, the Japanese results revealed six categories with effect sizes (η^2) at least as great as .06, whereas there are only two categories with effect sizes of this magnitude among the Americans. Furthermore, there was almost no overlap in the categories whose proportions varied across conditions for each group. The two categories that varied proportionally by condition among the American participants (preferences [C1] and goals [C2]) did not vary among the Japanese. For the Japanese participants, the conditions affected the frequency of statements in the following categories: physical (A), activities (C3), pure psychological attributes (C5), attitudes (C6), abilities (C7), individuating

self-reference (D), and statements related to the immediate situation (I) (see Table 5). In addition, the conditions affected the number of statements generated and the range of categories used by both Japanese and American participants (see Tables 4 and 5).

To investigate the effects of the conditions, we conducted post hoc comparisons among all the conditions. For the Japanese, the participants in the peer condition responded the most divergently from the other conditions. As shown in Table 4, the participants in the peer condition made fewer references to pure psychological attributes (C5) than did the participants in the group and authority conditions. But they made more refer-

ences to the immediate situation (I) than did participants in the other conditions. Participants in the peer and authority conditions generated fewer physical self-descriptions than did those in the group and solitary conditions. In addition, the Japanese participants wrote more about their abilities in the solitary condition than in the other conditions. Participants in the peer and authority conditions used a greater number and range of self-descriptors than did the participants in the group condition, who, in general, wrote the least and used the smallest range of self-descriptors of any group (although they were not significantly different from the solitary condition). Using the group condition alone could not have captured this variability in self-descriptions among the Japanese participants.

For the Americans, respondents in the authority condition generated more statements reflecting their goals than did participants in the other conditions, whereas those in the peer condition wrote more about their preferences than did other participants (see Table 5). The respondents in the peer condition also generated the fewest statements overall and the smallest range of statements.

Cultural differences in positive and negative self-descriptions across conditions. Finally, we examined the cultural differences in the proportion of positive and negative expressions within each condition. We summed the positive and negative statements separately across the four categories used for this analysis. Then we calculated the ratio of positive to negative expressions (i.e., the numerator was the sum of the positive expressions and the denominator was the sum of the negative expressions). A two-way ANOVA revealed only a main effect of culture, $F(1, 228) = 65.64$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .22$. The means were 3.38 ($SD = 3.23$) for the American respondents and 0.73 ($SD = 1.16$) for the Japanese respondents. Although the two-way ANOVA revealed no main effect of condition or interaction, we explored the condition effects with one-way ANOVAs within culture. Among the American respondents, there were no significant differences across the four conditions. In contrast, in the Japanese sample, the one-way ANOVA revealed a significant effect of condition, $F(3, 105) = 3.01$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$. As we expected, the Japanese students presented themselves the most negatively with a faculty member compared to the other situations (see Table 6). In contrast, they wrote more positive things about themselves when they were alone than in the other conditions.[3]

DISCUSSION

People living in middle-class, American cultural contexts are encouraged and are afforded opportunities to develop an independent view of the self—to be unique,

TABLE 6:   Ratio of Positive to Negative Expressions by Culture Group and Condition

	Condition					
Culture	Group	Authority	Peer	Solitary	F	η^2
Japan	0.50 (20)	0.35 (25)	0.69 (31)	1.19 [a, b] (33)	3.01*	.08
United States	3.30 (27)	3.77 (31)	3.26 (28)	3.22 (41)	.20	.01

NOTE: Values in parentheses are cell sizes. Subscripts a and b indicate that the percentages differ from those in the group condition and authority condition, respectively; a differs at $p < .05$, and b differs at $p < .01$.
*$p < .05$.

to express the self, and to realize their own thoughts, feelings, and capacities. Through the broad manifold of formal and informal practices that configure the episodes of everyday social life, American students become sensitive to their self-defining attributes and come to think of themselves in terms of autonomy and independence from others and from the situation (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). In contrast, people living in cultural contexts characterized by practices that emphasize similarity to others, relatedness, and interdependence with others will be sensitive to how they fit into the contours of a given social situation. People engaged in such cultural contexts are likely to experience themselves in terms of the immediate situation or social relational context (Fiske et al., 1998; Markus et al., 1997).

We examined these two ways of understanding the self in American and Japanese students. In response to the open-ended question "Who are you?" American respondents wrote more about themselves and were more likely to use unqualified psychological attributes (e.g., I am friendly) to characterize themselves. In contrast, Japanese respondents wrote less about themselves and were less likely to describe themselves with psychological attributes. Observational studies in American and Japanese homes and schools provide some compelling and likely explanations for these differences. In American homes, caretakers encourage children to speak up and use words to explain themselves and their feelings; classroom exercises promote the clear expression of one's thoughts and feelings (Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998; Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Japanese caretakers, in contrast, often say, "We can understand you even without you saying anything" and encourage children to understand not their own but rather others' intentions, emotions, and motivations and to be aware of others' expectations of them (Lewis, 1995).

When we examined the range of categories used by the two groups of students, an interesting contrast emerged. Although American students generated more units of self-description than did the Japanese students, these units encompassed a narrower range of conceptual categories. The self-descriptions of the Japanese stu-

dents were more varied than were those of the American students. If Japanese selves are realized in specific contexts (in contrast to the internal, stable self that transcends contexts for Americans), then self-descriptions are indeed likely to be more varied. Japanese self-descriptions are contingent on the particular nature of the individual's relations to the social world and include self-related information about the immediate or short-term situation (e.g., I bought a t-shirt yesterday; I am running out of paper).

Although our Japanese respondents did not invoke many pure psychological attributes to describe themselves, they did describe themselves in terms of their preferences (e.g., "I like to swim") and goals (e.g., "I am planning to be married soon"). They did so, in fact, at twice the rate of the Japanese respondents in Cousins's (1989) earlier study. The Japanese students in our study also tended to write about themselves in behavioral forms. Describing oneself in terms of behaviors or actions (e.g., "I laugh a lot during conversations") may be a result of bringing to mind specific situations instead of context-free, internalized traits (e.g., "I am cheerful"). In short, the Japanese respondents tended to reflect on themselves in terms of actions and behaviors rather than dispositions.

American and Japanese respondents were similar in the number of social membership self-descriptors they generated. American students, however, made more references than did the Japanese students to their families and friends. The American students may view themselves as independent from many types of social influence but their relationships with their families and friends appear highly salient in their thoughts about themselves. Although these findings are similar to other studies (e.g., Bond & Cheung, 1983), this finding differs from Cousins (1989) and others who have reported that Japanese are more likely to describe themselves in terms of social relations than are Americans. Differences in the samples may account partially for these findings. Our sample was composed of women only, whereas Cousins's sample included both men and women. Although women in Western cultures are likely to be more independent than Japanese women, they have been described as more relational than American men and therefore more likely to describe themselves in terms of specific others (Kashima et al., 1995; see Cross & Madson, 1997, for a review).

Given a theoretical context that assumes that cultural environments and selves make each other up, it is quite possible, and perhaps likely, that Japanese and American relational self-descriptions are not identical in their meanings. Although it cannot be discerned from this TST data, it is possible, for example, that Americans individualize their relationships and think of relationships as something they "have," whereas Japanese respondents may be describing their participation in or share of a relationship. Furthermore, for the Japanese, one's relationship with one's family is considered very private, and private matters are not to be exposed to public scrutiny (Takeuchi, 1995). In contrast, social roles and memberships (e.g., "I am from Osaka" or "I am in the tennis club") are not such private matters and may be openly discussed. This nuanced sense of the importance of close interpersonal relations may be reflected in these Japanese students' manner of referring to very close relationships (e.g., family and friends) less frequently than more distant relationships (e.g., social memberships).

The Japanese and American students' self-descriptions were strikingly different in the proportion of positive and negative responses generated. American respondents tended to characterize themselves in positive terms, whereas the Japanese were more likely to describe themselves in negative terms. Although other researchers have identified a similar cultural difference in global positivity of self-descriptions (e.g., Bond & Cheung, 1983), none have closely examined the content of these differences or the influence of the situation on positive versus negative self-descriptions (see below for further discussion of the effects of the situation). Kitayama and his colleagues (Kitayama, 1997; Kitayama et al., 1997) have suggested that the Japanese tendency to appraise the self critically is in the service of improving the self vis-à-vis socially shared standards of excellence. It is most likely that in any given instance a person will not be able to realize the cultural ideal or meet the standard of appropriate behavior. Moreover, part of realizing the cultural ideal is to reflect on one's self modestly and to be very sensitive to the expectations of whatever ingroup is constituted by the immediate situation. Therefore, Japanese people often will focus on negative aspects of themselves and their behavior in social situations.

Americans, however, did not completely ignore negative aspects of themselves. The category with the greatest proportion of negative statements by far was qualified traits (C4), which included statements such as "I am grumpy in the morning" (see Table 3). When describing negative self-views, Americans seemed more willing to relegate them to specific situations or domains rather than to view them as global or pervasive (e.g., "I am impatient").

Cultural Differences in
Sensitivity to the Situation

This study goes beyond existing studies of cultural differences in the self-concept to show more directly the contextualized, situation-specific nature of Japanese conceptual selves. As anticipated, Japanese self-descriptions varied across situations more than the American

self-descriptions, although the Americans showed some sensitivity to the nature of the situation. Among the Japanese students, the content of the self-descriptions provided by the participants in the peer condition was most at variance with the other conditions; they tended to write less about their pure psychological attributes and more about the immediate situation than did the other participants. Students in the peer and authority conditions wrote more about themselves and used a greater variety of types of self-descriptions than did those in the group condition. Students who were engaged in contexts that emphasized relatedness (i.e., in the peer and authority conditions) appeared most sensitive to the evaluations or anticipated evaluations of others. If selves are importantly defined and realized in relation to situation-specific others, then, in many senses, these specific others become the immediate arbiters of the ongoing self; one's esteem or evaluation is in the eyes of specific others and based on their immediate appraisals. For example, describing one's self as attractive (a physical attribute) or kind (a pure psychological trait) would be inappropriate because such determinations should not be made by the individual himself or herself but instead should be conferred by those with whom one is interacting.

In the Japanese peer condition, the very high proportion of responses coded into the immediate situation category (e.g., "I am hungry now" or "I am running out of answers") could be interpreted as indicating that these participants were not paying attention to the task or might be viewed as nonresponses. Instead, these responses may be seen as further evidence that the Japanese students in this situation were including into their self-views the nature of the implied relationship and the anticipated evaluations of their partner. Currently, among Japanese youth, to be overly serious is to risk being branded as depressive (*kurai*) and to be rejected or isolated from the group (Kuramitsu, 1993). These statements about the immediate situation indicate the Japanese participants' concern with showing how easygoing, laid-back, ordinary, and similar to others they are. This pattern of responses in the peer condition suggests that the most sure way to allow a relationship to develop may be to characterize one's immediate situation or state and to avoid naming or reifying the self (e.g., by using pure psychological attributes or physical descriptors).

The conditions also influenced the valence of the Japanese participants' self-descriptions. As expected, the Japanese described themselves the most negatively when with a faculty member. When Japanese participants were alone, they appeared most willing to include their abilities in their self-description and to characterize themselves in positive terms. In this condition, there is presumably no one with whom one must fit in or harmonize;

therefore, the person need not attend so closely to negative aspects of the self or to ways in which one should improve. Although other studies have shown that Japanese are more likely to describe themselves modestly or self-critically than are Americans, these results show that the extent of this effect is a function of the situation. When they are alone, Japanese students describe themselves relatively positively, compared to the other situations. The Japanese self seems to include an articulated awareness and understanding of a private or personal self that is likely to be manifested when alone and an official self that is more likely to be experienced in relation with others. Markus and Kitayama (1998) suggest it is the process of maintaining harmony between the personal and the official aspects of self that is central to the functioning of the Japanese self.

Although there were fewer effects of the conditions on the Americans' self-descriptions, they were not completely impervious to the demands of the immediate social situations. For example, participants in the authority condition described themselves in terms of their goals and aspirations more often than did participants in the group condition but generated fewer statements about their preferences and interests. It seems that an unstated question such as "What do you want to do when you finish college?"—certainly a frequent topic among faculty and students—may have framed the situation for participants in the authority condition. In the peer condition, the Americans generated fewer statements overall and fewer categories of self-descriptions than did the members of the group condition. Participants may have framed this situation as similar to other initial interactions with unfamiliar peers, such as when meeting one's classmates on the first day of the semester. At the beginning of the acquaintance process it may be critical not to offend, resulting in cautious self-disclosure that is focused on relatively innocuous statements such as one's likes and dislikes (e.g., the preferences and interests category).

Some critics have argued that the variability in the self-descriptions of the Japanese is primarily due to self-presentational concerns and that the Japanese in these situations are not expressing their real selves. Considering these findings in terms of self-presentation is not, however, at odds with our basic assumptions about these culturally constructed conceptual selves. Self-presentation is itself one of the regulatory functions of the self-concept that facilitates social adaptation. What matters here is whether different social situations will activate different configurations of the working self-concept so that individuals can adapt to a given situation. If the working self-concept has this adaptive regulatory function, individuals' responses are expected to be in line with the interpersonal grammar of the situation

(i.e., what people think is appropriate or correct behavior in a given situation).

Our findings showed that the participants from both countries generated responses consistent with the sociocultural demands of the situation. For the Japanese, different audiences may evoke different strategies for harmonizing or fitting into the situation, such as considering oneself more negatively when with particular others than when alone. For Americans, these different audiences also may prompt self-presentational concerns but they may be fairly similar across situations—that one should present oneself as unique, independent, self-directed, and in a positive light. In fact, the very notion of self-presentation and concern with it may hinge on a Western view of the self as internal and containing private attributes, preferences, and wishes that are free from the situation or context. From a Western perspective, presenting the self differently in two different situations is assumed to be strategic or tactical. Yet describing one's self similarly in different situations also may be a matter of self-presentation in the sense of characterizing the self in culturally afforded and prescribed ways (i.e., as consistent and stable). If one frames the self in terms of an interdependent self-construal that is based on fitting in and being a good occupant of a particular role, then role-related or situation-specific behavior is as reflective of the real self as is private behavior.

Finally, this study has bearing on the issue of whether the dispositional/situational dichotomy often employed in research with Western populations is the best way to understand Japanese behavior. The TST format allows participants to describe themselves comprehensively and in their own terms. Using a highly detailed coding scheme, we were able to carefully examine the precise contents of the self-concept and to question whether Americans and East Asians who participate in social worlds that are organized and practiced quite differently from one another indeed parse behavior in similar ways. All other studies have collapsed self-descriptions into just a few categories and have primarily concluded that East Asian respondents use more group, situational, or concrete descriptors than do American respondents. A recently published study (Choi et al., 1999) in fact argues that American and East Asian respondents do not differ in their use of dispositions but only in their willingness to invoke situational factors. The close analysis of descriptors afforded by this study suggests a different conclusion. Whereas traits and attitudes were among the most frequently generated descriptors for the Americans (among the top four most frequently mentioned categories), this was not the case for the Japanese, who instead described themselves in terms of their preferences and physical characteristics. Two other categories of self-descriptors commonly used by Japanese respon-

dents were goals ("I want to be a nurse") and activities ("I have a part-time job"). These descriptors reflect the ways in which people are engaged in their worlds and are arguably different from the type of context-free, trans-situational habitual inclinations implied by the use of trait terms in self-descriptions. These findings would not be well summarized by concluding that the Japanese are dispositionists or that they think of themselves primarily in terms of personality traits or internal attributes (as Choi et al., 1999, suggest) or that the disposition/situation dichotomy adequately captures Japanese understandings of behavior.

Concluding Remarks

This study indicates that very different referents may underlie the statements to "be yourself" or "behave the way you are." The statement to Americans to "just be yourself" implies a central, transcendent set of attributes and characteristics that are not influenced by the situation and that reflect one's unique and positive attributes. When Japanese exhort others to "behave just the way you are" they imply a self that is defined by the relationships inherent in the situation and that reflects a self-critical orientation intended to help one fit into the situation. Consequently, theories of self-esteem and other self-related processes that are based on the assumption of a relatively fixed and stable self-concept may not properly capture the malleable and evolving nature of the Japanese self. In future research, theories and methods that identify the self as active and dynamic may fruitfully expand understanding of the role of the conceptual self in behavior.

NOTES

1. Following Neisser (1991), we use this term to refer to the type of self-knowledge we believe can be assessed by self-report measures. Other types of self-knowledge not assessed could include experiences of the interpersonal self, the extended self, the private self, and the ecological self.

2. For example, participants were told, "Your responses might be related to how you see yourself in the present, such as 'I am blank' or 'I like such and so.' Or your responses might be about your past, such as 'I did something.' Or your responses might have something to do with your future, such as 'I would like to do such and so.' "

3. We also conducted additional analyses on the entire data set, one using the American coders' ratings of the American participants' responses and the Japanese coders' ratings of the Japanese participants' responses. The results of these analyses were virtually identical to the results presented in Tables 3 and 6.

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