

## **Attitudes Towards Self-change: A Comparison of Japanese and American University Students**

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This study examined attitudes related to the possibility of changing cognitions and behaviours among samples of college students in the United States and Japan. Students were asked to identify three things about themselves that they wanted to change, the method they would use to effect these changes, how difficult they thought making such changes would be, and how much they desired to make the changes. Japanese and US students differed significantly in the frequency with which they mentioned all seven aspects of the self that were targeted for change. Students in the United States expressed a desire to improve their sociability, academic achievement and cognitive abilities, physical appearance, and sense of individuality. Students in Japan were most concerned about enhancing their relationships with others, self-control and motivation, and ability to manage practical affairs. In addition, US respondents were more likely than their Japanese counterparts to use behaviour-oriented strategies, to believe it was easy to make self-changes, and to indicate a strong desire to improve the self. The findings are discussed in the context of theories describing different cultural construals of self, and of empirical research on differences between collectivistic and individualistic cultures.

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is growing consensus among social scientists that an individual's attitudes towards, beliefs about, and representations of the self vary significantly, depending on his or her sociocultural context (e.g. Marsella, DeVos, & Hsu, 1985; Shweder & LeVine, 1984). We define "self" in this report as the accumulation of sets of role expectations or identities which are "organised hierarchically by the probability of their invocation in or across

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social situations" (Stryker, 1987, p. 89). It follows from this definition that cultures which place differential importance on various types of social situations will produce individuals whose hierarchy of identities is organised differently from one another.

In support of this line of reasoning, numerous studies have documented basic differences that exist between individuals from disparate types of cultures in regard to such self-related variables as self-monitoring of conflict styles (Trubisky, Ting-Toomey, & Lin, 1991), the storage and retrieval of self-cognitions (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991), self-descriptions (Cousins, 1989), and the appropriate display of emotions (Matsumoto, 1990). Although gradually leading to a reconsideration of many Western assumptions about the self, these investigations have primarily investigated how different cultural patterns—specifically, collectivism versus individualism—influence the way in which the self acts upon the world or thinks about itself. None of these studies, however, has examined the differential implications of collectivism and individualism when the self *acts upon itself*, for example, in order to make some kind of cognitive or behavioural transformation.

The idea of changing or transforming the self has its roots in the earliest histories of both Eastern and Western cultures. Early Buddhism, for example, may be seen as the exposition of a technique for self-change aimed at winning liberation from a painful situation—the world of existence (Chandra, 1978). The Western equivalent may be found in the philosophy of Socrates and Plato that has, as one of its major themes, the goal of examining and perfecting the self so as to make life worth while (e.g. Hamilton & Cairns, 1980). In recent times, interest in improving or changing the self, at least in the United States, has burgeoned, especially during the last 10 years with the growth of the self-help and recovery movements (e.g. Kaminer, 1992; Katz, 1993). Also, in collectivistic cultures, such as Japan, interest in self-help and personal change has increased significantly (e.g. Hasegawa, 1988; Suwaki, 1989).

Given this expanding concern with transforming and improving the self, and the growing interest in viewing the self from a cross-cultural perspective, it is surprising that there are no reports exploring key issues in regard to how people from different cultural backgrounds approach this important self-related activity. The literature suggests that among the key issues individuals confront in the process of self-change are: (1) identification of the specific parts of the self that need to be changed; (2) selection of the method that will be used to make the change; (3) extent of the individual's motivation to change; and (4) realistic assessment of the probability of success (e.g. DiClemente, Prochaska, Fairhurst, & Velicer, 1991; Mikulas, 1986; Nelson, 1988; Piaget & Binkley, 1985).

Using these four dimensions as guidelines, the present study examined

attitudes toward self-change among university students in two cultures considered to be representative of the collectivistic and individualistic orientations: that of Japan and the United States. We chose to focus on university students because, in both of these societies, the university age is the period when experimentation in transforming the self is thought to be at its peak (e.g. Horowitz, 1987; Woronoff, 1980). Specifically, we wanted to know what are the most salient aspects of their own cognitions and behaviours that members of a collectivistic culture, such as the Japanese, would wish to change in comparison to their counterparts in an individualistic culture, such as the American? What strategies might Japanese versus Americans use to make such changes? How much value would individuals from these different types of cultures place on improving various aspects of the self, and how difficult would they expect making such improvements to be? Although reports of research on this topic are virtually non-existent, several recent theories regarding different cultural construals of the self might suggest answers to these questions.

One such theory, proposed by Triandis (1989), incorporates Greenwald and Pratkanis's (1984) conceptions of private, collective, and public aspects of the self. The private self focuses on cognitions that involve traits, states, and behaviours (e.g. "I am intelligent"). The collective self comprises cognitions that refer to group membership (e.g. "I am a mother"). Lastly, the public self consists of cognitions about assessments of the self by a generalised "other" (e.g. "My colleagues consider me to be reliable"). Triandis (1989) argues that the private self is more salient in individualistic cultures, such as those of North America or Europe, and that the collective and public selves are more salient in collectivistic cultures such as those of East Asia. According to Triandis, people from an individualistic culture will have more private self-cognitions, and fewer collective or public self-cognitions than people from a collectivistic culture. Similarly, members of a collectivistic culture will have more collective and public self-cognitions than their counterparts in an individualistic society.

A second theory, elaborated by Markus and Kitayama (1991), posits two distinct types of self: the interdependent and the independent. For the interdependent self, which is found most frequently in collectivistic cultures, the "other" or the "self-in-relation-to-other" becomes the focal point of attention and cognition. Fitting in and harmonising with others is the chief goal of the interdependent self, and consequently, consideration of the reactions of others significantly shapes and influences its emotions, cognitions, and motives. The independent self, which is thought to be more prevalent in individualistic cultures, believes in the wholeness and separateness of each person's array of internal attributes. The independent self thus finds meaning by reference to its own internal thoughts, feelings,

and actions, and is most concerned with discovering and expressing its unique abilities.

From these two theories, numerous predictions can be made about how people in collectivistic versus individualist cultures might approach the questions posed earlier regarding the improvement of the self. For example, in thinking about the aspects of the self they might want to change, it would be expected that US university students, as members of an individualistic culture, would most often choose traits, states, or behaviours that reflect the nature of the private or independent self. Areas targeted for change by Americans, therefore, would most likely be related to personal attributes, such as physical appearance or individual achievement, and to behaviours that would enhance the expression and assertion of the individual self. In contrast, we would expect students from a collectivistic culture, such as that of Japan, to be more apt to want to change aspects of their collective/public or interdependent self. Japanese individuals, then, would most likely seek to alter cognitions and behaviours that increase their ability to get along with others. This might take the form of wishing to improve family relationships, or desiring more patience and tolerance in social situations.

The work of Markus and Kitayama (1991) may also help to clarify the question of which strategies for effecting self-change will be preferred in the two cultures. These authors claim that, in having to adapt to a variety of social situations, the interdependent self demonstrates a high degree of self-control, a quality that has distinguished Japanese in the eyes of several observers (e.g. Hess et al., 1986; Lebra, 1976; Reischauer, 1977). The self-control exercised by the interdependent self in its efforts to adjust to interpersonal contingencies has been described by Weisz, Rothbaum, and Blackburn (1984) as that of "secondary control". In contrast, the control that the American independent self employs is more often that of "primary control", which seeks to influence existing realities through direct means such as personal agency or dominance. This implies that Americans would tend to use active, behaviourally oriented methods to change the self, whereas the Japanese would tend to use indirect methods, such as those involving the exercise of self-control.

The issue of control may also be applicable to the question of how easy or difficult Americans and Japanese believe it will be to change various aspects of the self. Weisz et al.'s (1984) hypothesis suggests that Americans would be more likely than Japanese to see themselves as having direct control over their own cognitions and behaviours, whereas Japanese might tend to view themselves as needing to accept an undesirable situation as it is and learn to live with it. In accord with such an hypothesis, studies have found that American university students exhibit a greater sense of internal locus of control than do their Japanese peers (e.g. Evans, 1981; Kimpen & Wieberg, 1981). Based on this theoretical and empirical work, we would predict that

US subjects might feel a greater sense of personal agency, and would, therefore, believe it to be easier to change their own cognitions and behaviours than would Japanese subjects.

Finally, in terms of the value that individuals place on changing various parts of the self, we might predict from the theories of Triandis (1989) and Markus and Kitayama (1991) that members of an individualistic culture would find it more desirable to change aspects of their private or independent self, and individuals from a collectivistic culture would feel more strongly about altering features of their collective/public or interdependent self, than would their counterparts in the other culture. It was expected, then, that US students would have a stronger desire to change cognitions and behaviours that expressed their personal attributes or affected their presentation of self; and that Japanese students would show a greater desire to change facets of the self that influenced relationships with in-groups (i.e. family) or generalised others.

## METHOD

### Subjects

The US sample consisted of 95 university students (mean age = 19 years; 48 males and 47 females) recruited from a psychology subject pool at a large Midwestern university. The Japanese sample was made up of 105 university students (mean age = 21 years; 44 males and 61 females) selected from education and science classes at a mid-sized university located in southern Japan.

### Materials

Because of the difficulty of establishing the equivalence of cross-cultural data (e.g. Poortinga, 1989), great care was taken to make the questionnaire as linguistically and semantically equivalent across languages as possible. To accomplish this, the questionnaire was developed simultaneously in both English and Japanese. Two of the authors spoke both languages, and all of the authors have had previous experience in conducting cross-cultural research between Japan and the United States. There were several reasons why we used simultaneous composition to ensure linguistic equivalence, rather than the method of back translation that has been used in a number of cross-national studies (e.g. Bravo, Canino, Rubio-Stipec, & Woodbury-Farina, 1991; Smith, Tisak, Bauman, & Green, 1991). First, the direct translation into one language of a term in another language—the method of back translation—does not assure that both terms will have the same connotation. For example, the Japanese word *amae* is often translated into English as “dependence”. In many cases, however, the connotations of *amae*

and “dependence” are subtly, yet profoundly, different, and may elicit quite different responses. Using a back translation method, such subtle differences in word meanings are likely to remain obscured. Secondly, back translation depends entirely on the skill of the translator. If the translator is lacking in cultural knowledge or is unfamiliar with the methodology of social science research, numerous errors in the translation may result that could lead to skewed findings or inaccurate measurement. In contrast, simultaneous construction of the instruments considerably reduces the inconsistencies in nuance that can often occur when items are first written in English and then translated into unrelated languages such as Japanese. Rather than forcing words in the second language to fit those of the first language after the questions have been constructed, simultaneous composition permits psychologists familiar with both languages to discuss the appropriateness of terms before the selection of the items. Such a procedure has been used successfully in several large cross-cultural studies of English- and Japanese-speakers (e.g. Stevenson, Chen, & Lee, 1993; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992).

## Procedure

Subjects were administered the questionnaire in small groups of approximately four to 10 students at a time. The questionnaire began as follows: “Sometimes people want to change things about themselves. For example, they might want to change something about their behaviour or the way they think about themselves or other people.” Subjects were asked to list three things about themselves that they would most like to change. For each change, they were asked to indicate on a 6-point scale (1 = “very easy” and 6 = “very difficult”) how easy or difficult it would be to change this aspect of themselves. They were then asked to describe how they might try to change it. Lastly, for the first entry only, they were asked to rate on a 6-point scale (1 = “a little” and 6 = “very much”) how much they wanted to change this behaviour or way of thinking.

## Coding

The coding scheme developed for the open-ended questions was first based on an analysis of the answers from subsamples of 30 respondents in each culture. It was then subsequently modified to accommodate new responses that did not fit the original coding categories. We were able to sort responses into seven major domains of desired change, those related to: (1) interpersonal harmony (“I’d like to be more understanding and tolerant of other people”, “I tend to get bitchy when I’m tired and have a lot of things on my mind”, “I wish I were more sensitive to other people’s feelings”); (2) sociability (“I would like to be more outgoing”, “I’d like to keep in closer

contact with my friends”, “I wish I weren’t so shy meeting new people”); (3) achievement and cognition (“I’d like to do better in math and science”, “I wish I were more intelligent”, “I wish I had a better memory”); (4) motivation and self-control (“I wish I had more self-discipline”, “I would like to be able to motivate myself more”, “I wish I were more interested in math”); (5) practical management (“I’m terrible at organising my time”, “I procrastinate too much”, “I wish I could learn to save more money”); (6) individualism (“I need to stand up for myself more”, “I want to get more of what I deserve”, “I need to rely less on others for my happiness”); (7) physical appearance (“I wish I were taller”, “I’d like to lose more weight”, “I want to change the shape of my nose”). In addition, an “other” category contained 16% of the American and 15% of the Japanese responses that did not fit these seven domains. Two native speakers of each language, one male and one female, independently coded the answers to the open-ended questions according to a common scheme for the two languages and cultures. Interview responses were not translated into the other language, but rather were coded in the original language of the respondents. Inter-rater reliability on coding of the areas of desired change before resolution was calculated using Cohen’s Kappa: 85% (Japan) and 81% (United States).

Strategies used to make changes were sorted into three basic domains: (1) cognitive (“I have to analyse things with precision and depth in order to form sound conclusions”, “When something bad happens, I could think of worse things that could have happened, then my problem won’t look so bad”, “I have to realise that people aren’t always against me”); (2) self-control (“I have to learn to relax and not concentrate my energies on things I cannot change”, “I need to motivate myself more and care more about my work”, “Whenever I start to feel tense or angry, I have to maintain my control and tell myself things are going to be alright”); and (3) behavioural (“I need to put myself in situations where I am forced to meet new people and be outgoing”, “The only way to improve my looks is to get plastic surgery”, “I have to change my bad eating habits and get into a regular exercise regimen”). Inter-rater reliabilities before resolution on the question regarding strategies for effecting change were 96% for Japanese and 96% for American responses.

Our analyses took account of the fact that respondents could give answers relevant to more than a single domain in terms of both the area of desired change and the strategy for change. Consequently, results are based on the number of respondents who mentioned each domain.

## RESULTS

## Area of Desired Change

To examine the relations among culture, gender, and the domains of cognition and behaviour that students targeted for change, we conducted a series of log-linear analyses. Each domain of desired change served as the dependent variable, with culture and gender comprising the independent variables. Significant effects were investigated by systematically omitting factors in the model over successive analyses and examining differences in the  $-2 \log$  likelihood statistics, which are distributed as chi-square values. We report these chi-square values in describing main effects. No interaction effects between culture and gender were found for any of the analyses reported later.

A main effect of culture emerged for every domain of desired change (see Table 1). In general, the direction of these effects were in accord with what would be expected based on the social values in each culture.

As predicted, US students were more likely than Japanese students to want to change aspects of self related to achievement/cognition, physical appearance, and individualistic concerns. US respondents also desired to improve their sociability significantly more often than did their Japanese counterparts. In contrast, Japanese students tended to focus on areas of self dealing with interpersonal harmony and self-control/motivation. In addition, they displayed a strong interest in changing behaviour associated with the management of practical affairs.

Main effects of gender emerged in only one domain: that related to interpersonal harmony [ $\chi^2(1, N = 199) = 7.92, P < 0.01$ ], which females mentioned more frequently than did males (53% vs. 32%).

TABLE 1  
Percentages and Chi-square Values from Log-linear Analyses  
for US and Japanese Students' Responses falling in Domains  
of Self-change

Domain	Students (%)		$\chi^2$ -values
	US	Japan	
Inter. Harmony	34	51	5.36*
Sociability	31	10	14.18***
Achievement/Cognition	28	8	15.29***
Self-control/Motivation	14	37	14.13***
Prac. Management	16	28	4.28*
Individualism	47	22	8.96**
Physical Appearance	23	8	9.53**

Note:  $N = 199$ ;  $df = 1$ .

\* $P < 0.05$ ; \*\* $P < 0.01$ ; \*\*\* $P < 0.001$ .



## Strategies for Change

Log-linear analyses revealed a main effect of culture on the use of behavioural strategies to change students' cognitions and behaviours [ $\chi^2(1, N = 192) = 7.92, P < 0.01$ ]. US students were found to choose this type of strategy more often than were their Japanese peers (83% vs. 65%). Investigating strategies across separate domains with two-way chi-square analyses, we found that US respondents used behavioural strategies more frequently than did Japanese respondents in the domains of self-control/motivation (85% vs. 65%), [ $\chi^2(1, N = 47) = 4.68, P < 0.05$ ], and practical management (100% vs. 71%), [ $\chi^2(1, N = 43) = 5.27, P < 0.05$ ]. No main effects of culture emerged for either self-control or cognitive strategies.

Log-linear analyses also yielded a main effect of gender on methods of self-change for the sample as a whole, with female students tending to use behavioural strategies more frequently than their male counterparts (79% vs. 67%), [ $\chi^2(1, N = 193) = 5.37, P < 0.05$ ]. The only domain in which this difference proved to be significant was that of interpersonal harmony (84% vs. 54%, respectively), [ $\chi^2(1, N = 84) = 8.90, P < 0.01$ ].

## Ease or Difficulty of Change

Several studies have suggested that US and Japanese university students exhibit differential response styles, with Americans generally being more likely than the Japanese to use the extreme ends of a scale (e.g. Vondracek, Shimizu, Schulenberg, Hostetler, & Sakayanagi, 1990; Zax & Takahashi, 1967). It is very difficult to prove the existence or non-existence of response bias. However, to explore the possibility of whether such a bias was operating in the present study, we compared the frequency distributions of students' responses on the scale of ease/difficulty of change between the two samples. We found the shapes of the distributions to be almost identical in the two locations. Additionally, we looked at the standard deviations on this measure and also found them to be very similar across the two cultures (US, 1.10; Japan, 1.08).

We then conducted two-way ANOVAs to investigate the effects of culture and gender on students' ratings of the difficulty of making changes. A main effect of culture emerged, indicating that Japanese students overall thought it was more difficult to change their cognitions and behaviours than did US students ( $M_s = 4.7$  vs. 4.4), [ $F(1, 199) = 5.57, P < 0.05$ ]. To determine the precise source of this difference, we examined the ratings for each domain separately using one-way ANOVAs. Japanese students gave higher ratings of difficulty than did their US peers only in the domain of interpersonal harmony ( $M_s = 4.7$  vs. 3.9), [ $F(1, 38) = 4.18, P < 0.05$ ].

No main effect of gender on ratings of the ease or difficulty of making changes was found.

## Desire for Change

To check for possible response bias on the scale of desire for change, we generated separate frequency distributions for US and Japanese students and found, as described earlier, almost identical patterns in the two cultures. Similarly, an examination of standard deviations indicated that Japanese students (1.29) used an even wider range of responses on this measure than did their US counterparts (1.12).

Two-way ANOVAs revealed a significant effect of culture on the degree of students' desire to change their cognitions and behaviours [ $F(1,198) = 7.29, P < 0.01$ ]. US students ( $M = 5.0$ ) expressed a greater desire to change themselves than did Japanese students ( $M = 4.6$ ). Examining each domain separately, we found that students in the United States gave higher ratings than did their Japanese counterparts in the area of physical appearance ( $M_s = 5.0$  vs.  $4.0$ ), [ $F(1,29) = 4.61, P < 0.05$ ]. No significant differences emerged in any other domain.

Gender was found to have a significant effect on the degree of desire to change, with female students wanting to change more than did male students ( $M_s = 5.1$  vs.  $4.5$ ), [ $F(1,198) = 13.57, P < 0.001$ ]. In particular, female students ( $M = 4.9$ ) were more concerned about changing behaviour related to interpersonal harmony than were their male peers ( $M_s = 3.6$ ), [ $F(1,38) = 9.64, P < 0.01$ ].

## DISCUSSION

Japanese and US university students differed significantly in the frequency with which they mentioned all seven aspects of the self that were targeted for change. Students in the United States were more likely than those in Japan to express a desire to improve their sense of individuality, academic achievement and cognitive abilities, sociability, and physical appearance. In contrast, students in Japan were most concerned about enhancing their relationships with others, self-control and motivation, and ability to manage practical affairs. These differences generally conform to what one would expect from empirical descriptions of collectivistic and individualistic cultures found in the literature (e.g. Kagitobasi & Berry, 1989).

As predicted, students in the United States were more likely than those in Japan to want to alter behaviours and cognitions that would enhance the expression of their individuality. The higher valuation of individuality in the US, relative to that in Japan, has been confirmed in other studies (e.g. Engel, 1988; Howard, Shudo, & Umeshima, 1983). Recent commentators on American culture, such as Bellah (1985), have noted that the expression and preservation of a person's individuality still plays a major role in the lives of a wide spectrum of contemporary Americans. Numerous observers of Japan have also identified key Japanese values, such as modesty and group

harmony, that would militate against a desire to assert one's uniqueness and individuality (e.g. Kojima, 1989; Lebra, 1976). Empirical investigations have also reported the strong disapproval with which self-promotion is regarded among Japanese children (Yoshida, Kojo, & Kaku, 1982), and the consistent bias toward self-effacement, rather than self-enhancement, exhibited by Japanese university students (Takata, 1987).

The greater emphasis among US students, relative to their Japanese counterparts, on changing their academic achievement and cognitive abilities is consistent with the work of Markus and Kitayama (1991). These authors theorise that members of an individualistic culture, such as the American, would be more concerned with aspects of self, related to personal accomplishments, cognitions, and attributes, than would members of a collectivistic culture, such as the Japanese (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Additionally, Crystal and Stevenson (1995), in a cross-national study of high school students, found that Americans place a higher value on academic achievement than do the Japanese. Differences in the nature of higher education in the United States and Japan may also account, in part, for our present findings. Several authors have observed that for many Japanese students, the four years of university are a time for relaxation—a reward for students' strenuous efforts during the preceding 12 years—rather than a time for academic attainment (e.g. Leestma, August, George, & Peak, 1987; Reischauer, 1977). In contrast, American education is said by some to begin in the university, and relative to their Japanese peers, US university students are known to work hard at obtaining good grades and scholastic achievement (e.g. Ellington, 1992). It is reasonable, then, that the US students in our sample would be more concerned than the Japanese students about improving aspects of self related to their academic and cognitive abilities.

The high proportion of US students wanting to enhance their sociability was an unexpected finding. Cross-cultural psychologists, such as Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988), have attempted to explain how the peculiar dynamics of in-groups make sociability an important attribute for success in an individualistic culture, such as that of the United States, in contrast to a collectivistic culture such as that of Japan. Empirical studies by researchers, such as Sofue (1979), have also found US subjects to be more sociable towards strangers than their Japanese counterparts, who tend to respond to strangers negatively. Similarly, US high school students were found to be more likely than their Japanese peers to cite their social skills as a source of pride (Crystal, Fuligni, & Stevenson, unpublished manuscript).

Rather than wanting to be assertive with peers or meet new people, Japanese students in the present study were more concerned than US students with creating smooth and harmonious interpersonal relations. The

value the Japanese place on interpersonal harmony is seen by many as one of the central features of Japanese child rearing and culture (e.g. Kojima, 1989; Lebra, 1976). Studies by Engel (1988) and by Howard et al. (1983) offer empirical evidence of Japanese subjects' higher valuation of group and social harmony. Additionally, given the fact that the majority of Japanese employers place a high premium on the prospective employee's ability to be part of a team (e.g. Azumi & Hull, 1989; Berezin, 1989), increasing one's capacity for getting along with others would seem to be especially important for university students in Japan.

Japanese students also expressed a desire to enhance their self-control more frequently than did US students. The effort to discipline the self is a basic component of both Buddhism and Confucianism, philosophies which form the spiritual and ethical foundations of Japanese culture. Reischauer (1977, p. 152) has commented that "the Japanese commonly make a fetish of self-discipline". Japanese social scientists have also identified the stress on self-discipline and self-control as a key value in Japan (e.g. Befu, 1986). The value placed on cultivating self-control may be seen in various aspects of Japanese culture, from the content of children's reading textbooks to the training given to bank employees (Lanham, 1986; Rohlen, 1986).

In addition to the focus on interpersonal harmony and self-control, Japanese students showed an unexpected concern with enhancing their ability to manage practical affairs. Authors in the organisational psychology literature have noted the organisational and managerial skills of members of collectivistic cultures relative to their counterparts in individualistic cultures (e.g. Yatani, 1989). Another explanation, however, may lie in the atmosphere of *amae*-based indulgence (Doi, 1973) in which most Japanese children are brought up. Japanese mothers tend to take care of almost all of their child's material needs to allow him or her the peace of mind to study most effectively, especially during the years preceding the college entrance examination (e.g. Rohlen, 1983; White, 1987). Living on their own at the university for the first time in their lives, these somewhat pampered adolescents may be much less accustomed to dealing with the practical affairs of daily living than their more independent and self-reliant US peers. For these Japanese students, who no longer have their doting mothers to help them, the management of practical affairs may become a major source of difficulty and frustration.

In terms of strategies for changing aspects of the self, US students, as expected, preferred active, behavioural methods. This finding is consonant with Weisz et al.'s (1984) postulate that Americans would tend to exhibit primary control, as opposed to the secondary control thought to be favoured by their Japanese peers. Additionally, the United States has long been a bastion of behaviouristic approaches to self-change (e.g. Watson, 1919).

Contrary to expectations, however, Japanese students were no more

likely than US students to use strategies involving self-control. Rather, like their US counterparts, Japanese students mentioned using behavioural strategies most often among the three methods. One explanation may be that, regardless of culture, behavioural strategies are the most accessible, effective, and easily applied method of self-change. The influence of culture may be seen, rather, in the relative frequency with which students in the two societies resort to this universal tactic.

The lower ratings of difficulty overall that US students gave to changing various aspects of the self accord with Weisz et al.'s (1984) description of Americans' use of direct versus indirect methods of exercising control. Such findings are also consistent with the greater tendency towards an internal locus of control orientation that has been found among US, relative to Japanese, individuals (e.g. Evans, 1981). All of the cross-cultural difference in beliefs about the ease or difficulty of self-change came from cognitions and behaviours related to interpersonal harmony, which Japanese students perceived to be significantly more difficult to alter than did US students. A substantial proportion of responses in the interpersonal harmony domain included negative affects that arise in interpersonal situations such as "impatience", "inconsiderateness", "selfishness", and "inflexibility". Markus and Kitayama (1991) term such affects "ego-focused emotions", which have the individual's own needs, desires, or abilities as the chief referent. According to these authors, people with an interdependent view of the self, because of their focus on the "other", should have more difficulty managing this type of emotion than would those with an independent construal of the self, who are used to focusing on these internal attributes. Such an analysis is consonant with our findings that Japanese students rated these kinds of ego-focused emotions occurring in the context of interpersonal harmony as being more difficult to change than did their US counterparts. The apparent difficulty experienced by Japanese students in managing emotions related to interpersonal harmony underscores the great effort of self-control perceived to be needed to maintain the interdependence that characterises human relations in Japan (Reischauer, 1977).

Our prediction that US students would want more to change aspects of their private or independent self (e.g. personal attributes), and that Japanese students would want more to change aspects of their collective/public or interdependent self (e.g. relationships with others) was not supported by the data. There was no single domain of self in which Japanese and American students differed in the degree to which they wanted to change. Overall, however, American students did express a stronger desire than Japanese students to change themselves. One explanation may lie in the differential importance given by Japanese and Americans to maintaining consistency between feelings and actions. Doi (1986) has argued that Americans are

more concerned with preserving this consistency than are Japanese, and research by Iwao (1988) supports such an assumption. Markus and Kitayama (1991) have postulated that, because the independent self is defined by stable internal attributes, rather than by fluid social situations as in the case of the interdependent self, people with independent selves are more likely to experience cognitive dissonance due to contra-attitudinal behaviour than are those with interdependent selves. This suggests that, as we found, it would be relatively more important for people with independent self-construals, such as Americans, to change themselves so as to reduce cognitive dissonance and match outer behaviour with inner feelings, than it would be for their counterparts with interdependent self-construals, such as the Japanese.

The finding that males are more concerned than females with issues related to achievement has been duplicated in several other studies (e.g. Steinkamp, Harnisch, Walberg, & Tsai, 1985; Tamir & Gardner, 1989). Similarly, female students' more frequent focus on changing cognitions and behaviour associated with interpersonal harmony, and their greater desire than males to change this aspect themselves, is consistent with a large body of literature documenting the interpersonal orientation of women in comparison to that of men (e.g. Gilligan, 1982; Gove, 1984). Also, female students' greater desire to change themselves overall relative to males is in accord with the results of other investigations showing that women are more likely than men to seek professional counselling (e.g. Kessler, Brown, & Broman, 1981; Neighbors & Howard, 1987).

In summary, US and Japanese university students gave significantly different emphasis to changing various aspects of the self. These differences in emphases, for the most part, seem to correspond to different cultural construals of self as described by Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Triandis (1989). Our findings suggest that the cross-national study of attitudes toward self-change can provide a unique window into the salient values and concerns of individuals in different cultures. A number of the concerns expressed by the students in our study, however, seemed to be closely related to the life tasks they were facing at this particular stage of development. Future research, therefore, might gain new insight into how attitudes toward and strategies for self-change vary with age by approaching these questions from a developmental and life span, as well as from a cross-cultural, perspective.

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