Asian Journal of Social Psychology (2002) **5**: 145–167

Self-enhancement in Japan and America

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North Americans view themselves in more positive terms than they view most other people. In the present paper, we report three studies showing that this bias is also found in Japan. For highly valued traits and abilities, Japanese students rated themselves and their best friends in more positive terms than they rated most other students (Study 1 and Study 2) and most other Japanese (Study 2). In Study 3, a sample of older Japanese displayed the same tendency when evaluating themselves and a member of their family. We discuss the theoretical importance of the findings.

Key words: cross-cultural comparison, extended self, self-enhancement, trait importance.

Introduction

Most people evaluate themselves favorably when comparing themselves with others (Brown, 1986, 1998). They think that they are more fair than others (Messick *et al.*, 1985), possess richer and more adaptive personalities than others (Sande *et al.*, 1988), drive a car better than others (Svenson, 1981) and have more satisfying interpersonal relationships than do others (Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995; Buunk & van der Eijnden, 1997). A 1976 College Board survey provides the most dramatic illustration of these findings (Dunning *et al.*, 1989). As part of their standardized tests, nearly one million high school students were asked to compare themselves with their peers. Seventy percent rated themselves above the median in leadership ability, 60% rated themselves above the median in athletic ability and 85% rated themselves above the median in their ability to get along well with others. Of these, 25% placed themselves in the top 1%!

These tendencies are not simply due to the excesses of youth; similar results are found with adults. In one survey, 90% of business managers rated their performance as superior to other managers and 86% rated themselves as more ethical than their peers (Myers, 1993). Another study found that 94% of college professors believe they do above-average work (Cross, 1977). Finally, people facing threats to their health (e.g. cancer, HIV) show the same

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self-aggrandizing bias when evaluating themselves relative to other patients with the same disease (Buunk *et al.*, 1990; Taylor *et al.*, 1991; Helgeson & Taylor, 1993).

To summarize, the majority of individuals regard themselves in far more desirable terms than they generally regard others. Moreover, this self–other bias occurs across a wide range of traits and abilities (Alicke, 1985; Brown, 1986, 1998).

Is the self–other bias a cultural phenomenon?

The self–other bias was originally thought to be a universal tendency, but there is now reason to question whether this is true. A number of investigations, using a variety of methodologies, have shown that many self-enhancement biases are less prevalent in Eastern cultures (e.g. China, Korea, Japan) than in Western cultures (e.g. America, Canada and the countries of Western Europe) (Heine & Lehman, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; 1999; Heine *et al.*, 1999). For example, in comparison with their North American counterparts, the Japanese have lower self-esteem and larger self-discrepancies; they are also less apt to offset the negative implications of failure by belittling the importance of a task or by reminding themselves that they have many other positive qualities (see Heine *et al.*, 1999 for a comprehensive review of this literature).

A distinction between individualistic and collectivistic cultures has been invoked to explain these differences. Triandis (1989) and Markus and Kitayama (1991) have noted that Western cultures are very competitive and individualistic and people are encouraged to think of themselves in ways that distinguishes them from others. In contrast, Eastern cultures are more collectivistic in nature and people are urged think of themselves in ways that emphasize their commonality with others. Although these distinctions have recently been questioned (Takano & Osaka, 1999), they could lead people from Western cultures to emphasize their superiority over others, but lead people from Eastern cultures to focus on their similarity to others.

Heine and Lehman (1999) provided a direct test of this hypothesis (see also Brockner & Chen, 1996; Falbo *et al.*, 1997). In their investigation, Japanese, European Canadian and Asian Canadian college students rated themselves and the average student on a variety of trait terms (attractive, intelligent, considerate). Among other things, the results showed that only European Canadians rated themselves more favorably than they rated the average student. The Japanese students rated themselves less favorably than they rated the average student and the Asian Canadians rated themselves neither more nor less favorably than they rated the average student. These findings are important because they suggest that the tendency to view oneself in positive terms may be rather parochial in scope, occurring only among people raised in Western cultures (Heine *et al.*, 1999). However, a similar study by Ito (1999) found that Japanese students did evaluate themselves more favorably than they evaluated others, suggesting that further research is needed before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

One variable that might shed light on this issue is trait importance. The tendency to appraise oneself in more positive terms than one appraises others should be particularly pronounced for highly valued traits and muted or, perhaps, even absent for relatively unimportant traits. For example, if people think punctuality is an unimportant trait to possess they will probably not boast that they are more punctual than are others. Although this variable has been included in prior studies of cultural biases (Heine & Lehman, 1999), it has not been used to illuminate the self–other bias.

Role of the extended self

A consideration of the 'extended self' may also shed light on the universality of self-enhancement biases. Beginning with William James (1890), psychologists have recognized that 'the self' extends beyond our physical features and personality characteristics to include other people (e.g. my children), places (e.g. my home town) and objects (e.g. my car).

> . . . a man's self is the sum total of all that he can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account. All these things give him the same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down, – not necessarily in the same degree for each thing but in much the same way for all. (pp. 291–292).

In support of James's analysis, people spontaneously mention their relationship partners when describing themselves and show evidence of incorporating their relationship partners into their self-concept (Aron *et al.*, 1991; Andersen & Baum, 1994; Smith & Henry, 1996). Furthermore, the kinds of biases that characterize self-evaluations also characterize evaluations of one's relationship partners. People appraise their friends (Brown, 1986), dating partners and spouses (Van Lange & Rusbult, 1995; Murray *et al.*, 1996) and fellow-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Brown *et al.*, 1988; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998) in highly favorable terms, often viewing them in more positive terms than they view most other people. In short, the self–other bias does not just occur when people compare themselves with others; it also occurs when people compare aspects of their extended self with others who are not part of that extended self.

This form of self-enhancement may be particularly prominent in Eastern cultures. Being raised in a society that emphasizes the importance of social relationships may lead people from Eastern cultures to regard members of their extended self as exceptionally meritorious and commendable. Evidence for this type of indirect self-enhancement would indicate that self-enhancement biases occur in both cultures, albeit in slightly different forms.

To date, relatively few studies have addressed this issue. Endo (1997) found that a majority of Japanese participants rated their friendships and marriages as being better than average and Endo, Heine and Lehman (2000) found that this tendency was as prevalent among the Japanese as among North Americans (see also Muramoto & Yamaguchi, 1997). If we accept that relationships are part of the extended self, these findings provide preliminary evidence that at least some self-enhancement biases occur across cultures. The studies reported in the present paper were designed to provide an additional test of this issue.

Study 1

Study 1 examined the self–other bias in Japan and America. Participants from both cultures rated themselves, most other students at their university, and their best friends on a variety of trait terms. They also indicated how important these qualities are, allowing us to determine whether trait importance moderates the self–other bias.

Methods

Participants

Eighty-six students participated in this investigation. Sixty-three of the participants were from the University of Washington and, of these, 35 described themselves as being of European background (hereafter referred to as European Americans) and 28 described themselves as being of Asian descent (hereafter referred to as Asian Americans). The remaining 23 participants were students at Osaka University in Japan (hereafter referred to as Japanese). Across the groups, 54 of the participants were females and 32 were males.

Procedures

All participants completed a 32-item questionnaire. For each of eight attributes, the participants indicated: (i) how important it was for a person to possess that attribute and to what extent that attribute described: (ii) themselves; (iii) most students at their university; and (iv) their best friend. (Note that we have avoided the use of the term 'average' as it may have a pejorative connotation.) The eight attributes we used were of two types. Six were trait terms (competent, friendly, modest, persistent, responsible, well-liked) and two were more general orientations toward life (enjoy life with regard to recreation, work and family; value friendship). The eight traits were selected on the basis of prior research on the self–other bias (Brown & Gallagher, 1992; Brown, 1993) and on the basis of pilot testing in Japan. The 32 questions were presented in two randomized orders, and each question was answered on a 7-point scale, labeled with appropriate end-points [e.g. 1 = not at all (competent); 7 = very (competent)]. Finally, the second author provided the translation of terms into Japanese, and these translations were back-translated to ensure comparability with the English terms.

Results

Aggregated data

Main analyses. For our first set of analyses, we averaged the ratings across the eight items to derive summary evaluations for self, most other students, and best friends. These evaluations were then submitted to a 3 (Group: European American, Japanese, Asian American) × 3 (Target: Self, Most Other Students, Best Friends) analysis of variance (ANOVA), with the second factor treated as a repeated measure.[1] The ANOVA revealed main effects of Group, $F_{2,83} = 11.90$, $p < 0.001$, and target, $F_{2,166} = 73.15$, $p < 0.001$, and a Group–Target interaction, $F_{4,166} = 2.86$, $p < 0.05$. The nature of these effects are seen in Figure 1.

Although the Japanese students described themselves in less positive terms than did the European American and Asian American students (both p values < 0.001), they also described most other students in less positive terms (both $ps < 0.05$).[2] Consequently, all three groups evaluated themselves more favorably than they appraised most other students (all $ps < 0.005$) Further analyses using all three groups revealed that the strength of this bias did not vary across cultures [$F_{2,83} = 2.44$, $p = 0.09$, for the simple Group × Target (Self *vs* Others) interaction]. However, a more focused contrast comparing only Japanese and European

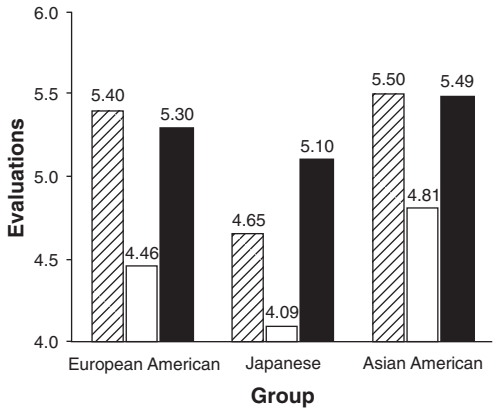

Figure 1 Study 1: Evaluations of (▨) Self, (□) Most Other Students and (■) One's Best Friend among European Americans, Japanese and Asian American students.

Americans indicated that the self–other bias was slightly weaker among the Japanese than among European Americans, $F_{1,56} = 4.07$, $p < 0.10$.[3]

Inspection of Figure 1 indicates a similar pattern when we compare ratings of one's best friend with ratings of most other students. A simple 3 (Group) $\times 2$ (Target: Best Friend *vs* Most Other Students) ANOVA produced a highly significant main effect of target, $F_{1,83} = 114.73$, $p < 0.001$ and a non-significant interaction, $F_{2,83} = 1.39$, $p > 0.20$. The non-significant interaction means that all three groups were equally likely to evaluate their best friends more positively than they evaluated most other students (all Student's t-tests > 5.20, all ps < 0.001).

Finally, we examined the relationship between self-ratings and ratings of one's best friends. An ANOVA using ratings of self and best friends revealed a significant Group–Target interaction, $F_{2,83} = 4.85$, $p = 0.01$. Follow-up tests revealed that ratings of self and best friends did not differ among European Americans and Asian Americans (both $ts < 1$), but the Japanese participants rated their best friends more favorably than they rated themselves, $t(22) = 2.30$, $p < 0.05$.

Supplemental analyses. Because measures of central tendency can be unduly influenced by a small proportion of participants with extreme values, we supplemented these analyses using non-parametric data. After averaging across the eight traits, we calculated the proportion of participants who evaluated themselves more positively, less positively, or as positively as they evaluated most others. Similar values were computed comparing evaluations of best friends and most others and evaluations of self and best friends.

Across cultural groups, 83% of the participants regarded themselves in more positive terms than they regarded most other people. This percentage did not vary as a function of culture, $\chi^2(4, n = 86) = 7.52$, *ns*. Similarly, across cultural groups, 88% of the participants regarded their best friends in more favorable terms than they regarded most other people and this percentage did not vary as a function of culture, $\chi^2(4, n = 86) = 4.05$, *ns*. Finally, only 39% of the participants viewed themselves more favorably than their best friends, with many participants showing no bias or a negative bias. Here again, these tendencies did not vary across cultures, $\chi^2(4, n = 86) = 4.62$, *ns*.

Individual traits

The aggregation procedure we have used provides an expedient way to examine self-enhancement biases, but it leaves open the possibility that the effects we have reported are driven by only a few of the eight traits we examined. Table 1 presents data relevant to this issue. An examination of the table shows that European Americans rated themselves more positively than they rated most other students at their university on seven of the eight traits, Japanese participants did this on four of the eight traits, and Asian American students exhibited this bias on six of the eight traits. A χ^2 test revealed that these proportions do not

Table 1 Study 1: Evaluations of Self, Most Other Students, and Best Friends

	Self	Most Other Students	Best Friends	Importance	Importance rank order
Competent					
European Americans	5.91[a]	4.94[b]	5.43[c]	5.63	4
Japanese	4.30[a]	4.48[a]	5.35[b]	4.83	3
Asian Americans	5.61[a]	4.93[b]	5.50[a]	5.89	5
Enjoy life					
Self	5.37[a]	4.83[b]	5.37[a]	6.63	8
Most Other Students	4.65[a]	*3.44*[b]	5.09[a]	5.87	7
Best Friend	5.36[a]	4.89[b]	5.57[a]	6.57	8
Friendly					
Self	5.31[a]	4.14[b]	5.86[c]	5.74	5
Most Other Students	4.13[a]	*3.30*[b]	4.91[a]	4.78	2
Best Friend	5.50[a]	4.79[b]	5.75[a]	5.82	4
Modest					
Self	4.26[a]	*3.66*[b]	4.49[a]	4.86	2
Most Other Students	4.74[a]	4.26[a]	4.70[a]	4.17	1
Best Friend	4.96[a]	4.21[b]	5.00[a]	4.93	1
Persistent					
Self	4.74[a]	4.51[a]	4.80[a]	5.03	3
Most Other Students	4.70[a]	4.61[a]	4.61[a]	4.87	4
Best Friend	5.00[ab]	4.61[b]	5.14[a]	5.39	3
Responsible					
Self	5.74[a]	4.51[b]	5.00[b]	6.26	7
Most Other Students	4.96[a]	4.48[a]	5.00[a]	5.70	6
Best Friend	5.71[a]	4.96[b]	5.46[a]	6.50	7
Value friends					
Self	6.37[a]	4.63[b]	5.89[c]	6.06	6
Most Other Students	5.61[a]	4.57[b]	5.52[a]	6.00	8
Best Friend	6.57[a]	5.11[b]	5.89[c]	6.46	6
Well-liked					
Self	5.46[a]	4.43[b]	5.54[a]	4.80	1
Most Other Students	4.13[a]	*3.61*[b]	5.65[c]	5.52	5
Best Friend	5.32[ab]	5.00[b]	5.57[a]	5.00	2

Ratings were made on 7-point scales. For each trait, means with different superscripts within each row differ at $p < 0.05$ or less. Underlined values do not differ significantly from scale midpoint; italicized values are significantly below scale midpoint; all other values are significantly above the scale midpoint at $p < 0.05$ or greater. For rank order, 8 is most important; 1 is least important.

differ ($p > 0.20$). Group differences also failed to emerge when ratings of best friends were compared with ratings of most other students ($p > 0.15$). European Americans evaluated their best friends more favorably than they evaluated most other students for six of the eight traits, the Japanese did so for five of the eight traits, and Asian Americans did so for all eight of the traits. Finally, a significant cultural effect was found when ratings of best friends were compared with self-ratings, $\chi^2(2, n = 86) = 9.20$, $p < 0.05$. This finding reflects the fact that European Americans rated themselves more favorably than their best friends on three of the traits, whereas the Japanese never did so and Asian Americans did so for only one trait. In addition, the Japanese rated themselves less favorably than their best friends on two of the eight traits, whereas the European Americans did so for only one trait and Asian Americans never did so.

Importance ratings

In addition to rating themselves and others, we also asked participants to indicate how important it is for a person to possess each of the eight qualities. Although significant effects of group emerged for five of the eight traits, there was also considerable overlap among the groups. The rank order correlations were as follows: European Americans and Japanese ($r = 0.60$); European Americans and Asian Americans ($r = 0.95$); Japanese and Asian Americans ($r = 0.71$). As shown in Table 1, all three groups believed it was very important to enjoy life, be responsible and value friends, and less important to be modest and persistent.

Main analyses. We conducted several analyses to determine how these importance judgements influenced participants' evaluations. First, we averaged the ratings for the three traits judged to be important by all three groups (enjoy life, responsible, value friends) and the two traits judged to be relatively unimportant by all three groups (modesty and persistence). We then analyzed these scores using a 3 (Group) $\times$ 3 (Target) $\times$ 2 (Importance) ANOVA, with the last two factors treated as repeated measures.

The ANOVA revealed a number of lower-order effects, each of which was qualified by a higher-order triple interaction, $F_{4,166} = 2.42$, $p = 0.05$. Figure 2 shows the nature of the effect. Perhaps the most striking thing to notice is that European Americans and Asian Americans viewed themselves and their best friends as better than most other students for both the important and relatively unimportant traits (all $ps < 0.01$), but the Japanese did not. They viewed themselves and their best friends as better than most other students for the important traits (both $ps < 0.005$), but not for the relatively unimportant traits (both $ps > 0.20$). In short, the Japanese were just as self-aggrandizing as the two American samples for important traits, but were more self-effacing for relatively unimportant traits.

Figure 2 reveals another interesting effect. The only instance in which a person was not viewed as having more important than unimportant qualities was when the Japanese rated most other students. In fact, the Japanese tended to rate most other students more favorably on relatively unimportant traits ($M = 4.44$) than on important traits ($M = 4.16$), although the effect fell short of significance, $t(22) = 1.74$, $p < 0.10$. Additional analyses revealed that the mean for the important traits was not above the scale midpoint of four, $t < 1$, but the mean for the relatively unimportant traits was above the scale midpoint of four, $t(22) = 2.40$, $p < 0.05$.

Subsidiary analyses. The analyses we reported have the advantage of comparability: by using only traits judged to be important and unimportant by all three groups, we can be sure that

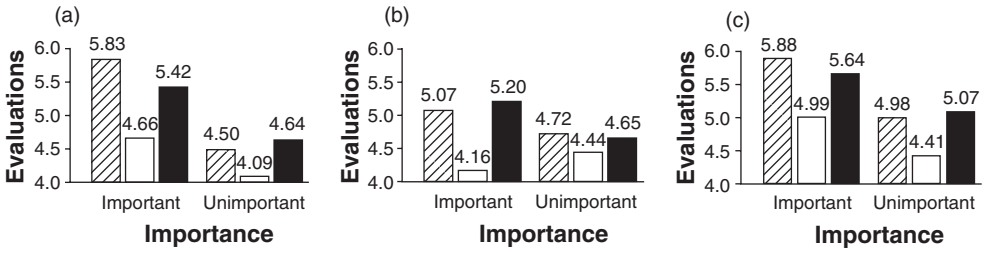

Figure 2 Study 1: Social evaluations among (a) European Americans, (b) Japanese and (c) Asian American students as a function of trait importance. (▨) Self, (□) Most Other Students and (■) One's Best Friend.

different traits are not responsible for the effects we have reported. The disadvantage is that we used only five of the eight traits. We conducted two additional analyses to address this issue. First, for each participant, we compared the traits given the highest importance ratings with those given the lowest importance ratings. Second, within each ethnic group, we compared the four most important traits versus the four least important traits. The critical three-way interaction was significant in the former analysis ($p = 0.036$) and marginally significant in the latter analysis ($p = 0.086$), and the form of each interaction was identical to the one displayed in Figure 2. In all cases, the Japanese viewed themselves and their best friends as better than most other students on important traits, but not on traits judged to be of lesser importance.

Discussion

A great deal of previous research has found that Americans regard themselves and those who are part of their extended self in more favorable terms than they regard people in general (Brown, 1998). Study 1 examined whether this bias also occurs among Japanese. For highly valued traits and abilities, the data indicated that it does. Although the Japanese evaluated themselves less positively than did European Americans and Asian Americans for these important traits, they also evaluated most other students less positively. Consequently, they were just as likely to regard themselves as being 'better than others'. All three groups also rated their best friends in highly favorable terms, believing that their best friends were also 'better than others'. However, only the Japanese viewed their best friends more positively than they viewed themselves. This finding is somewhat difficult to interpret. It could provide evidence of self-effacement, as the Japanese are evaluating themselves less positively than they are evaluating their best friends. However, it could represent a form of indirect self-enhancement, as best friends are part of what James (1890) called the extended self, and many studies have shown that viewing ingroup members in highly favorable terms makes people feel good about themselves (Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Brown, 1986; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Brown *et al.*, 1988; Brown & Gallagher, 1992). Because Japanese culture emphasizes interpersonal relationships and connectedness with others, it is not surprising that the Japanese were most likely to exhibit this tendency. Unfortunately, our data do not provide a way to distinguish these explanations. It is noteworthy, however, that the negative bias was not widespread, especially when considered alongside the general tendency to view oneself and

one's best friends as better than others for highly important traits. This suggests that self-effacement among the Japanese may be less prevalent than previously believed.

Study 2

One aspect of Study 1 was particularly surprising. Unlike their American counterparts, the Japanese evaluated other students at their university more positively for relatively unimportant traits than for important traits. This unexpected finding suggests that at least some of the self-criticism thought to characterize Japanese culture may actually apply to others rather than to oneself. Before accepting this conclusion, we thought it prudent to replicate this finding with an independent sample of Japanese students. Accordingly, we conducted a second study. There were two differences between the procedures used in Study 1 and the ones used in Study 2. First, in Study 1, we asked participants to indicate 'how important is it for a person' to possess the particular characteristics we studied. Conceivably, participants indicated what they thought others or society at large values, rather than what they personally think is important. To clarify this issue, we asked participants in Study 2 to indicate 'how personally important is it for you' and 'how important is it in general' for people to possess the various trait terms we included.

In addition to gathering ratings for self, most other students, and best friends, we also asked participants rate most Japanese. This enabled us to determine whether the importance bias observed in Study 1 (i.e. the tendency for the Japanese to believe that most other students possess more unimportant than important qualities) characterizes perceptions of most Japanese citizens or occurs only for most Japanese students.

Methods

Participants

The participants were 37 students attending Osaka University. Eleven of the students were males. Data from six additional participants were discarded because they failed to fully complete the questionnaires.[3]

Procedures

For each of the eight attributes used in Study 1, the participants indicated: (i) how important it is for a person to possess that attribute; (ii) how important it is for them, personally, to possess that attribute, and to what extent that attribute described: (iii) themselves; (iv) most students at their university; (v) their best friend; and (vi) most other Japanese. The items were presented in four randomized orders, and all items were answered on 7-point scales labeled with appropriate endpoints (e.g. 1 = not at all [modest]; 7 = very [modest]).

Results

Aggregated data

As in Study 1, we first averaged the judgements for the eight traits across each of the four target groups. These means were then submitted to a one-way ANOVA, with target group

Table 2 Study 2: Social evaluations and trait importance ratings

	Self	Most Other Students	Most Other Japanese	Best Friends	Importance to You	Importance to People in General
Competent	4.24[a]	4.89[b]	4.73[b]	4.97[b]	5.49	5.16
Enjoy life	4.49[a]	4.05[b]	3.92[b]	5.27[a]	6.38	6.51
Friendly	4.62[a]	4.16[b]	5.27[c]	5.03[ac]	4.84	5.00
Modest	5.08[a]	4.84[ab]	6.00[c]	4.57[b]	4.57	4.32
Persistent	4.32[a]	4.41[a]	5.32[b]	4.43[a]	5.62	5.51
Responsible	5.00[a]	4.16[c]	4.89[a]	4.78[a]	5.81	5.95
Value friends	5.46[a]	4.95[bc]	5.05[bc]	5.32[ac]	6.00	6.24
Well-liked	4.54[a]	4.03[b]	3.73[b]	5.57[c]	5.84	5.65
M	4.72[a]	4.44[b]	4.86[ac]	4.99[c]		

Within each row, means with different superscripts differ at $p < 0.05$ or less. Underlined values do not differ significantly from scale midpoint.

treated as a repeated measure. The ANOVA revealed a significant main effect, $F_{3,108} = 12.62$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the evaluations were not uniform across the target groups. Table 2 shows the nature of the effect (see row 9). Replicating our earlier findings, self-evaluations ($M = 4.72$) were more favorable than were evaluations of most other students ($M = 4.44$), $t(36) = 3.30$, $p < 0.005$, and ratings of best friends ($M = 4.99$) were more favorable than were ratings of most other students, $t(36) = 5.20$, $p < 0.001$. Moreover, as in Study 1, best friends were rated more favorably than oneself, $t(36) = 2.36$, $p < 0.025$. Finally, ratings of Japanese ($M = 4.86$) were more favorable than were ratings of most other students, $t(36) = 5.87$, $p < 0.001$, comparable to ratings of best friends, $t(36) = 1.21$, *ns*, and somewhat more favorable than were self-ratings, $t(36) = 1.93$, $p = 0.06$.

Individual traits

To determine whether these aggregated effects were driven by just a few traits, we submitted each of the eight traits to a four-factor one-way ANOVA. Inspection of Table 2 shows that seven of the eight ANOVAs produced significant effects, with the other trait being significant at the 0.08 level. Simple effects tests showed that self-evaluations were more favorable than evaluations of most other students for five of the eight traits (enjoy life, friendly, responsible, value friends, well-liked) and best friends were judged more favorably than most other students for four of the eight traits (enjoy life, friendly, responsible, well-liked). Finally, self-ratings were significantly less positive than were evaluations of most other students for only one trait (competent).

A different pattern emerged when most other Japanese served as the comparison group. Although self-ratings were significantly more positive than were ratings of most other Japanese for three of the eight traits (enjoy life, value friends, well-liked), the opposite was true for four of the traits (competent, friendly, modest, persistent). Similarly, ratings of best friends were significantly more favorable than were ratings of most Japanese for two of the eight traits (enjoy life, well-liked) and significantly less favorable for two other traits (modest, persistent). In summary, there was a good deal of variability when it came to comparing evaluations of self and best friends with most Japanese.

Importance ratings

Our next set of analyses was designed to determine whether trait importance sheds light on this variability. The right-hand side of Table 2 presents the ratings for 'how important is each trait for you' and 'how important is each trait, in general'. Not only were these ratings quite similar to the ones obtained in Study 1 (see Table 1), but there was also strong agreement across the two importance questions (rank order, $r = 0.98$). Apparently, people's judgements about the general importance of a trait closely match their own opinion about which traits are important to possess.

To ascertain how these ratings influenced participants' evaluations, we compared the mean ratings for the four most important traits (enjoy life, value friends, well-liked, and responsible) with the four least important traits (persistent, competent, friendly, and modest). A 2 (Importance) $\times$ 4 (Target) ANOVA on these data produced a highly significant interaction, $F_{3,108} = 48.60$, $p < 0.001$. Figure 3 presents the means. The left-hand side of the figure shows that for the important traits, self-ratings were more favorable than were ratings of most other students, $t(36) = 5.42$, $p < 0.001$, and most other Japanese, $t(36) = 4.54$, $p < 0.001$, and ratings of best friends were more favorable than were ratings of most other students, $t(36) = 8.04$, $p < 0.001$, most other Japanese, $t(36) = 6.14$, $p < 0.001$, and self-ratings, $t(36) = 2.66$, $p = 0.01$. For the relatively unimportant traits (see the right-hand side of Figure 3), self-ratings were comparable to ratings of most other students and best friends (both ps > 0.15), but were lower than ratings for most Japanese, $t(36) = 7.59$, $p < 0.001$. Ratings of best friends were comparable to ratings of most other students ($p > 0.15$), but less favorable than ratings of most other Japanese, $t(36) = 5.11$, $p < 0.001$. Finally, ratings of most other Japanese were more favorable than were ratings of most other students, $t(36) = 8.08$, $p < 0.001$.

It is also informative to examine the effects of importance within each target. Consistent with the results of Study 1, important traits were judged to be more descriptive of oneself and one's best friend than were relatively unimportant traits (both ps < 0.005), but the reverse was true for ratings of most other students and most Japanese (both ps < 0.005).

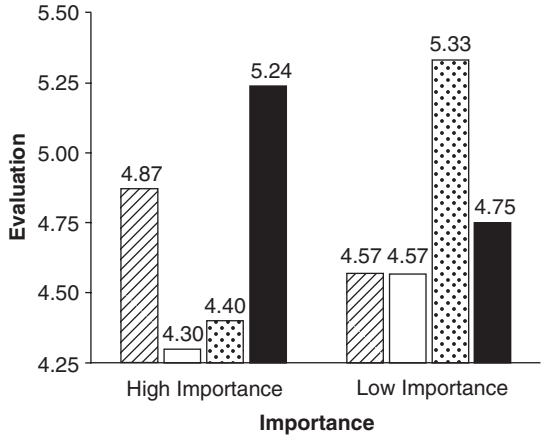

Figure 3 Study 2: Evaluations of (▨) Self, (□) Most Other Students, (⊡) Most Other Japanese and one's Best Friend (■) as a function of trait importance.

Discussion

The results from Study 2 replicate and extend the results from Study 1. First, for highly valued traits and abilities, the Japanese participants evaluated themselves and their best friends in far more favorable terms than they evaluated most other students. This bias also occurred when participants compared themselves and their best friends with most other Japanese. These data provide further evidence that a self-enhancing, self–other bias occurs in Japan when highly valued traits are considered.

A very different pattern emerged for qualities judged to be of lesser importance. Here, self-evaluations and ratings of one's best friend were actually less favorable than were ratings of most other Japanese. It could be argued that this finding represents a form of self-effacement or even self-abasement. Several factors argue against this interpretation. First, the data for highly valued traits point to the opposite interpretation. The more important a trait is assumed to be, the greater is the tendency to believe that oneself and one's friends possess it more than most other students and most other Japanese. Furthermore, although participants believed that they and their best friends were better characterized by important than relatively unimportant traits, they believed that most other students and most other Japanese were better characterized by relatively unimportant than important traits. This finding also argues against the claim that the Japanese hold others in higher regard than they hold themselves.

Our tendency to characterize some of the traits we examined as being relatively unimportant deserves mention. Inspection of the data shows that almost all of the traits were judged to be more important than unimportant (i.e. almost all ratings fall above the scale midpoint of 4), which is why we have described them as being relatively unimportant rather than trivial and inconsequential. In this sense, our data do not show that the Japanese are modest only for qualities they regard as insignificant or trifling. Instead, the data show only that importance and self-enhancement biases are positively correlated: the more important a trait is judged to be, the more self-aggrandizing the Japanese are. This effect seems all the more remarkable given the rather narrow range of importance ratings.

Of course, had we included many traits of even lesser importance, then the ones we have classified as being relatively unimportant would have been classified as being of high importance. This statistical verity would not alter the fact that self-enhancement biases are positively correlated with trait importance. Said differently, our findings would have been reversed only if we had: (i) included traits even *more* important than the ones we had used; and (ii) found that participants evaluated most other students and most other Japanese in extremely positive terms on these highly valued traits. Insofar as all of the traits we examined were relatively important, there is nothing in our data to suggest that this would occur.[4]

Identifying the causes of the biases we have uncovered poses a more formidable problem. One possibility is that these students actually possess more important qualities than do most other students and most other Japanese. There is, however, little reason to believe this is so. People's beliefs about themselves on highly valued qualities are only weakly correlated with their actual standing on these qualities (John & Robins, 1993; Brown, 1998). A more likely possibility is that constructive processes lead people to believe that they possess more important qualities than do most other people. This could occur in at least two ways. First, having discovered what their culture values, these students might claim to possess those traits more than most other students and most other Japanese. Alternatively, they could disparage traits they believe they lack relative to other Japanese. Experimental research has shown that both processes can occur (Brown *et al.*, 2001), but there is no way to establish which one is operating here. Given this limitation, we offer a speculation. Two traits viewed as relatively

unimportant by our participants (e.g. persistence and modesty) are generally assumed to be of great importance in Japan (Heine *et al.*, 1999). This finding suggests that modern Japanese students might be devaluing traditional qualities they believe they lack.

Study 3

The preceding possibility introduces a related issue. Our previous two studies have used college students, raising questions of external validity. Conceivably, Japanese college students have become Westernized, and the self-enhancement biases they exhibited do not occur among older Japanese. To assess this possibility, Study 3 included a sample of older Japanese adults. If these individuals exhibit the types of biases found in Study 1 and Study 2, we would have evidence that the effects we have uncovered are general rather than narrow.

Using an older sample also allowed us to address an ambiguity in our previous research. We have argued that best friends comprise an aspect of the extended self, and that a tendency to evaluate one's best friend more favorably than one evaluates people in general constitutes a form of indirect self-enhancement (Brown, 1986; Brown *et al.*, 1988). Although these assumptions are not without precedent (Aron *et al.*, 1991; Andersen & Baum, 1994; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Smith & Henry, 1996), it could be argued that best friends are not part of the extended self and that the tendency on the part of the Japanese to evaluate their best friends more favorably than they evaluate themselves represents a form of self-deprecation. To avoid this ambiguity, we asked older participants in Study 3 to evaluate a member of their family (e.g. spouse, son, daughter). It seems almost apodictic that family members are part of the self, particularly in a family-oriented culture like Japan.

Methods

Pilot research

We began by conducting interviews with citizens living in the Osaka area. From these interviews, we extracted eight trait terms to use in our research: four described qualities associated with interpersonal relationships (affable, caring, cheerful, easy-going) and four described qualities associated with achievement outcomes (bold, competitive, meticulous, persistent).

Participants

The participants were 78 adults; none was a college student. One group was recruited from students at open-to-the-public classes held by the Osaka University in North Osaka. Classes were held from 18.30 h to 20.30 h, allowing people to attend after work. One hundred people were given questionnaires upon entering their classroom and were asked to return the questionnaire when they came to the next class 5 days later. Forty-five participants returned completed questionnaires. The second group was recruited through a 3-day annual training period given to district court staff who work in Osaka. Questionnaires were distributed after the first class, and 34 of the 47 participants returned completed questionnaires before the training period ended. This left a combined final sample of 78, with 59 males and 17 females, ranging in age from 33 to 81 years with an average age of 54.5 ($SD = 15$).[5]

Procedures

All instructions were delivered in writing. The first page of the questionnaire indicated that the research was being conducted to 'understand how people see themselves and others'. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire during their free time and to return it when they came to the next class session. They were informed that the questionnaire would take approximately 10–15 min to complete.

At the top of the second page, they were asked to select a member of their family to use when answering questions about 'your family member'. 'Family member' was explained as spouse, daughter, son, mother, father, sister, or brother. For each of the eight attributes, the participants indicated to what extent that attribute described: (i) themselves; (ii) a typical person of the same age and sex as themselves; (iii) a family member; and (iv) a typical person of the same age and sex as the family member they rated. Finally, consistent with our earlier research, we also asked participants to indicate: (v) how important it is for a person, in general, to possess (or not possess) this quality. These 40 judgements (eight traits × five questions) were presented in four randomized orders and they were made on 7-point scales with appropriate end-points (1 = not at all true of me; 7 = very true of me).[6]

Results and Discussion

Aggregated data

As in our previous two studies, we first analyzed the data averaging across the eight descriptors. The bottom row in Table 3 shows that self-ratings were more favorable ($M = 4.83$) than were ratings of a person of the same sex and age as oneself ($M = 4.51$), $t(77) = 4.05$, $p < 0.001$, and ratings of a family member ($M = 4.64$) were more favorable than were ratings of a person of the same sex and age as one's family member ($M = 4.42$), $t(77) = 3.41$, $p = 0.001$. Finally, unlike Studies 1 and 2, self-evaluations were more favorable than were evaluations of a family member, $t(77) = 2.79$, $p < 0.01$.

Table 3 Study 3: Social evaluations and trait importance ratings

	Self	Same Sex and Age as Self	Family Member	Same Sex and Age as Family Member	Importance
Affable	5.16^{a}	4.56^{b}	4.84^{b}	$\underline{4.22}^{c}$	5.39
Bold	4.37^{a}	4.64^{a}	4.58^{a}	4.59^{a}	4.74
Caring	4.96^{a}	4.37^{b}	4.55^{b}	$\underline{4.24}^{b}$	5.14
Cheerful	4.82^{a}	4.59^{a}	5.18^{b}	4.78^{a}	5.73
Competitive	4.82^{a}	4.68^{a}	4.73^{a}	4.78^{a}	5.01
Easy-going	4.41^{a}	$\underline{3.94}^{b}$	4.57^{a}	4.47^{a}	4.89
Meticulous	4.65^{a}	4.28^{b}	$\underline{4.01}^{b}$	$\underline{4.14}^{b}$	4.37
Persistent	5.42^{a}	4.97^{b}	4.66^{b}	$\underline{4.10}^{c}$	5.25
M	4.83^{a}	4.51^{bc}	4.64^{c}	4.42^{b}	

Within each row, means with different superscripts differ at $p < 0.05$ or less. Underlined values do not differ significantly from scale midpoint.

Individual traits

Table 3 also shows the effects for each individual trait. Self-evaluations were significantly more positive than were evaluations of a person of the same sex and age as oneself for five traits (affable, caring, easy-going, meticulous, persistent) and evaluations of family members were more favorable than were evaluations of a person of the same sex and age as a family member for three of the eight traits (affable, cheerful, persistent).

Importance ratings

The far right-hand column of Table 3 shows the importance ratings. The four most important traits were affable, caring, cheerful and persistent, and the four least important traits were bold, competitive, easy-going and meticulous.[7]

To determine how these judgements influenced the strength of the self–other bias, we first averaged the four most important traits and the four least important traits for each of the four judgments. A 2×2 (Target × Importance) ANOVA on ratings of self and others revealed main effects of target, $F_{1,77}=16.71$, $p<0.001$, and importance, $F_{1,77}=31.72$, $p<0.001$, and a significant Target–Importance interaction, $F_{1,77}=5.85$, $p<0.02$. Figure 4a reveals that the form of the interaction is highly similar to the ones found in our earlier studies. For important traits, these Japanese adults evaluated themselves much more favorably than they evaluated most other people of the same sex and age, $t(77)=4.38$, $p<0.001$. This was also true for relatively unimportant traits, but the bias was much smaller, $t(77)=2.02$, $p<0.05$. These adults also believed that they possessed more important than relatively unimportant traits, $t(77)=4.82$, $p<0.001$, but this belief was somewhat weaker when they evaluated most other people of the same sex and age, $t(77)=3.60$, $p<0.01$.

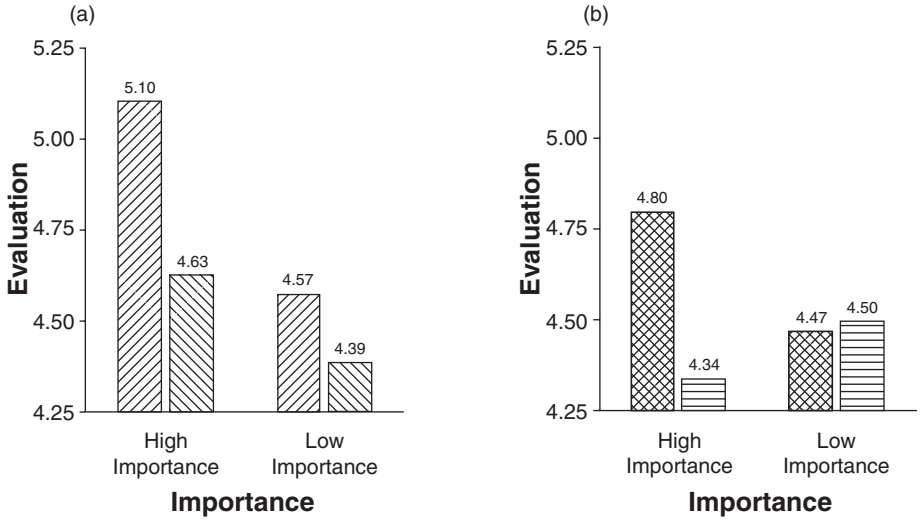

Figure 4 Study 3: Evaluations of (a) (▨) Self, (▧) a Person of the Same Sex and Age as Oneself and (b) a (▩) Family Member and (▤) a Person of the Same Sex and Age as a Family Member as a function of trait importance.

We used a comparable 2×2 ANOVA to analyze evaluations of family members and a person of the same sex and age as the family member. These analyses revealed a main effect of Target, $F_{1,77} = 10.97$, $p = 0.001$, and a significant Target–Importance interaction, $F_{1,77} = 13.03$, $p < 0.001$. Figure 4b shows the nature of the interaction. Family members were viewed more positively than were people of the same sex and age for important traits, $t(77) = 4.94$, $p < 0.001$, but not for relatively unimportant traits, $t < 1$. Furthermore, family members were characterized by important traits more than relatively unimportant traits, $t(77) = 2.59$, $p = 0.01$, but the opposite tended to be true for people of the same sex and age as one's family member, $t(77) = 1.88$, $p = 0.06$.

Finally, we compared self-evaluations with evaluations of a family member. Self-evaluations were more favorable for important qualities, $t(77) = 3.26$, $p < 0.001$, but not for relatively unimportant qualities, $t < 1$.

General discussion

Self-enhancement biases are commonly found in Western cultures (Brown, 1991, 1998; Taylor & Brown, 1988). Among these biases is a pervasive tendency to regard oneself and one's relationship partners in more favorable terms than one regards people in general (Alicke, 1985; Brown, 1986). In the present research, we tested whether this self–other bias also occurs in Japan. We found that it does. In Study 1, we asked European American, Japanese, and Asian American students to evaluate themselves, most other students at their university, and their best friends. Although the Japanese evaluated themselves less favorably than did both groups of Americans, they also evaluated most other students less positively than did both groups of Americans. Consequently, like their American counterparts, they viewed themselves more positively than they viewed most other students. Moreover, this bias was more apparent for highly valued traits and abilities than for qualities deemed to be of lesser importance.

Study 2 replicated and extended these findings. Once again, for traits judged to be highly important, Japanese students evaluated themselves and their best friend more positively than they evaluated most other students at their university. They also evaluated themselves and their best friends more favorably on important traits than they evaluated most other Japanese, but the reverse tended to be true for unimportant traits. Finally, they believed that they and their best friend possessed important traits more than relatively unimportant traits, but that most students at their university and most Japanese possessed relatively unimportant traits more than important traits.

Study 3 found a similar pattern using a sample of older adults, different traits, and an examination of evaluations of family members rather than a best friend. It is particularly noteworthy that these effects were obtained with an older sample of Japanese adults. It seems plausible that Japanese students exhibit self-enhancement biases because they have become Westernized, but that these biases do not characterize the judgements of older Japanese. Although plausible, this hypothesis was not supported. The older adults were every bit as inclined as the students to evaluate themselves and their loved ones in highly positive terms.

Our findings involving family members are also notable. In our first two studies, Japanese students evaluated their best friends in extremely positive terms, even more favorably than they evaluated themselves for important traits and abilities. We have argued that this represents an indirect form of self-enhancement, because viewing members of one's extended self in highly favorable terms makes people feel good about themselves. It is also possible,

however, that people's best friends really are exceptionally wonderful (or at least perceived to be that way). In Study 3, we attempted to resolve this ambiguity by examining evaluations of a family member. We found that the Japanese also evaluated their family members in highly positive terms, viewing them much more favorably than they viewed a person of comparable age and sex. This finding seems to offer support for our contention that these judgements represent an indirect form of self-enhancement, in which individuals inflate their feelings of self-worth by championing the virtues of those who are part of their extended self.

It also bears mentioning that the adult participants in Study 3 evaluated themselves more positively than they evaluated a family member for highly valued traits. This effect is at odds with the results of the two previous studies, in which Japanese students evaluated themselves less positively than their best friend for highly valued traits. Several points can be made about this discrepancy. First, in all three studies, members of the extended self were rated in highly positive terms and, in all cases, they were judged to be better than a relevant comparison group for important qualities and traits. In this sense, there is consistency across studies. Second, Study 3 used a sample of adults, whereas the two previous studies used college students. Friendships are particularly important during the college years, and this may explain why the Japanese students evaluated their best friends so positively. People also choose their best friends, but not their family members, so perhaps it is to be expected that best friends should be viewed in highly favorable terms. Finally, we used different traits in Study 3 than in the two previous studies, and this could also have contributed to the different findings.

Potential limitations and qualifications

Before discussing the implications of our research, some potential limitations need to be considered. First, our procedure was very straightforward. We simply asked our participants to make ratings of various social groups across a variety of traits. Unfortunately, this simplicity may have heightened self-presentational concerns or alerted participants to the true nature of our study. We attempted to mitigate these concerns by having participants complete the measures anonymously and by counterbalancing our questions, but these attempts may have been only partially successful. At the same time, insofar as self-enhancement is viewed as a negative quality in Japan (Heine *et al.*, 1999), it is difficult to see how salient self-presentational concerns would have led Japanese participants to be more self-enhancing. If anything, just the opposite should have occurred.

Our methodology may have influenced our findings in other ways. Importance has been examined in other research, often producing effects that appear inconsistent with the ones we have reported. For example, Heine and Lehman (1999) found that the Japanese were marginally more self-critical for important traits than for unimportant traits, and Heine and Renshaw (2002) found that the Japanese were less apt to view themselves more positively than they were viewed by others on important traits than on unimportant traits. These findings diverge from the results of our own studies, and we can only speculate as to why this might be. Perhaps the self–other bias is more influenced by importance than are other self-enhancement biases. Future research might profitably examine this possibility.

Future research could also examine whether the Japanese exhibit a self–other bias for negatively valued traits and qualities. We studied positively valued traits and abilities because we found during pilot testing that participants had difficulty judging the importance of many negatively valued traits (e.g. how important is it for a person to not be unintelligent?). The Japanese may well be more egalitarian when it comes to negatively valued qualities and traits. Other factors known to affect the magnitude of the self–other bias, such as trait ambiguity or

trait controllability, also merit consideration (Felson, 1981; Alicke, 1985; Dunning *et al.*, 1989). We attempted to control for these factors in Study 3 by having an independent sample of participants rate each trait according to its ambiguity and controllability. Unfortunately, controllability judgements were highly correlated with importance judgements (highly important traits were seen as more controllable), preventing us from determining whether these judgements independently affect the magnitude of the self-enhancement bias we observed.

Characterizing our findings as evidence of self-enhancement assumes that they represent motivated distortion. A more cognitive interpretation is also possible. Alicke *et al.* (1995) found that the self–other bias is stronger when people compare themselves with abstract aggregates (e.g. most other students) than when they compare themselves with a single individual. Conceivably, this individuation effect could also explain why our Japanese participants rated themselves and their best friends in more positive terms than they rated most other students and most other Japanese.

Although plausible, individuation effects cannot explain why importance had such a dramatic influence on target evaluations. Across all of the various participant groups, the tendency to see oneself as better than others was much more apparent for important traits than for unimportant ones. This finding hints at the operation of more motivational processes involving a desire to feel good about oneself. Moreover, although the Japanese students believed that they and their best friends possessed an abundance of important qualities, they believed most other students and most other Japanese were better characterized by relatively unimportant qualities. This finding also suggests a more tendentious process than a cognitive model would provide.

Another possibility is that people view themselves accurately, but have overly negative views of others. An investigation by Epley and Dunning (2000) recently addressed this issue. These researchers noted that people typically believe they are more likely than others to engage in selfless, generous acts. They asked whether this effect was due to overly charitable self-views or overly cynical views of others. Four studies found evidence that people's self-views were unrealistically positive and that their views of others were rather accurate and realistic. Along with other research (Shepperd, 1993; Dunning, 1999) these findings support the claim that self-aggrandizing judgements represent a form of self-enhancement.

Implications

Initial research regarding cultural variations in self-enhancement biases led some investigators to conclude that such biases were absent in Japan. For example, Heine and Lehman (1997a, p. 1268) asserted that 'Self-serving biases, found routinely in Western samples, have not been observed in Asian samples.' (p. 1268) and that 'research with Japanese has failed to detect self-enhancing biases.' (Heine & Lehman, 1999, p. 915). More recently, these authors have softened their stance, concluding that self-enhancement biases are simply less evident in Eastern cultures than in Western cultures (Heine *et al.*, 1999; Endo *et al.*, 2000; Heine & Renshaw, 2002). Our findings contribute to this evolution in thinking (Kashima & Triandis, 1986; Diener & Diener, 1995; Kwan *et al.*, 1997). We, too, found evidence for self-effacement (e.g. the Japanese regard themselves less positively than do Americans) and self-enhancement (e.g. the Japanese believe that they, their friends, and their family members possess more socially valued qualities than do most Japanese). Heine and colleagues have recently argued that within-culture comparisons like these constitute the most appropriate way to test for self-enhancement biases (Heine *et al.*, 2002).

Other investigators have reported similar findings. In research published after our studies were completed, Ito (1999) replicated our finding that Japanese students regard themselves more positively than the average student at their university. Similarly, Endo *et al.* (2000) found that North Americans and Japanese regarded their relationships partners as 'better than most other people' and Falbo *et al.* (1997) found that Chinese school children evaluated themselves more positively than they evaluated a classmate, and evaluated themselves more positively than they were evaluated by their classmates and teachers. Finally, Kurman and Sriram (1997) found that students in both Israel and Singapore overestimated their academic ability relative to objective criteria. Our findings go beyond previous research by showing: (i) that importance moderates the strength of the self–other bias in Asian cultures; and (ii) that the self–other bias also occurs among Japanese adults.

The effects of importance might shed light on recent findings reported by Kurman (2001). Kurman found that Singaporeans were more apt to show self-enhancement biases for interpersonal traits (e.g. generosity) than for agentic traits (e.g. intelligence). Our data suggest these differences might have been driven by perceptions of trait importance. Across our three studies, qualities pertaining to interpersonal relationships and the capacity to enjoy life were regarded as more important than were qualities pertaining to achievement outcomes. Conceivably, the Singaporeans were more self-enhancing on the interpersonal traits because they regard them as being more important.

Our research might also explain when cultural differences in self-enhancement biases occur. Research in this area is currently inconsistent: Some studies find that the Japanese are self-enhancing, while other studies find that the Japanese are modest or self-effacing. At present, no theoretical framework exists for explaining these variations across studies. The type of study being conducted is one variable worth considering. Studies that have examined how people cope with evaluative feedback have generally shown greater evidence of self-effacement among the Japanese than have studies that have examined how people evaluate themselves relative to others. To illustrate, North Americans are quick to dismiss the negative implications of failure, either by making external attributions or by belittling the importance of the domain (Brown, 1998). In contrast, the Japanese are less apt to exhibit self-enhancement biases of this type (Heine *et al.*, 1999). For example, in a study of post-decision dissonance reduction, Heine and Lehman (1997b) found that Japanese participants who selected a CD did not enhance the attractiveness of unchosen alternatives as much as did Canadians. Similarly, Heine *et al.* (2001) found that North Americans persisted more after success than after failure, whereas Japanese persisted more after failure than after success. These researchers speculated that this is due to a self-improvement motivation among the Japanese, who view failure as an opportunity to improve themselves.

The studies we have reported in this paper are not concerned with this issue, but focus instead on what people think they are like (relative to others). Here we find relatively small cultural differences. One way to reconcile these findings is to assume that the Japanese: (i) are more accepting of negative feedback than are Americans but also (ii) believe that they are more accepting of negative feedback than are most other Japanese. If so, cultural differences would be rather large when people confront evaluative feedback but rather small when people compare themselves with others within their own culture.

Of course, this doesn't mean cultures don't influence how people evaluate themselves (Fiske *et al.*, 1998). Cultures mandate what is good and important, and people then claim to possess these socially valued attributes (Greenberg *et al.*, 1997; Brown, 1998). From this perspective, what people think about themselves is rather arbitrary. If the culture values diligence, people will claim to be industrious (and more hard-working than others); if the

culture values kindness, people will describe themselves as kind (while simultaneously claiming to be kinder than most other people). The larger point is that to understand how people evaluate themselves, we first need to ask 'What's important for people to think about themselves?' Once we know the answer to this question, we can predict with some confidence how people will describe themselves.

Why should people lay claim to possessing socially valued qualities? The most likely reason is that they want to feel good about themselves. Elsewhere, we (Brown, 1998; Brown & Kobayashi, 2000) have referred to this need as the self-enhancement motive. This term refers to the fact that people want to feel good about themselves. One way they satisfy this desire is by claiming to possess socially valued traits and abilities.

This emphasis on feelings differs slightly from how other theorists have defined self-enhancement needs. Other theorists have taken the term to mean that people are motivated to think of themselves in highly favorable terms (Shrauger, 1975; Rosenberg, 1979; Swann, 1990). It is certainly the case that in many situations and in many cultures, feelings of self-worth are promoted by thinking of oneself as highly capable or somehow better than one's peers. But this is not invariably so. In some situations and in some cultures, feelings of self-worth may very well be promoted by thinking of oneself as ordinary or average, or even worse than others. Parents, for example, may take pride in thinking their children are smarter and more talented than are they. These apparent differences reveal an underlying similarity. The universal need (which McDougall (1923) called the 'master sentiment') is not a need to think of oneself in any specific way, but a need to maximize feelings of self-worth. Our findings suggest that, like their North American counterparts, one way the Japanese satisfy this mandate is by evaluating themselves and their loved ones much more positively than they evaluate others.

Acknowledgment

This research was supported by a Fulbright Scholarship to the second author.

Endnotes

1. Preliminary analyses indicated that participant sex and questionnaire order did not qualify any of the findings to be reported in the present paper, and these variables will not be discussed.
2. In fact, the only mean that wasn't significantly above the scale midpoint was when the Japanese rated most other students ($t < 1$) (all other ts > 3.85, all other ps < 0.01).
3. As this is a post-hoc test, significance levels were adjusted using a Bonferroni correction.
4. To further illuminate the issue under consideration here, we computed the correlation between importance ratings and ratings of most other Japanese across the eight traits. This correlation was substantially negative ($r = -0.76$, $p < 0.01$): The more important a trait was judged to be, the less characteristic participants thought it was of most other Japanese.
5. Two participants failed to indicate their sex. In addition, several other participants had missing data on a few ratings. Analyses performed using only participants with complete data yielded a pattern of findings identical to those reported in the text.
6. Preliminary analyses were conducted to determine whether the specific person chosen as the designated 'family member' affected any of our findings. It did not, and this variable will not be discussed further.
7. The biggest difference between the importance ratings for this study and those for our previous two studies concerns the item 'persistent'. In our earlier studies, this item was a relatively unimportant

trait, but in Study 3 it was rated as one of the more important traits by these adults. This is not all that surprising, insofar as persistence is widely regarded as a quality that emerges with maturity and is generally prized more by adults than students. In light of this ambiguity, however, we repeated our analyses excluding this trait. The pattern was identical to the one reported in the text.

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