# Culture, Identity Consistency, and Subjective Well-Being

Eunkook M. Suh
University of California, Irvine

All individuals have multiple views of themselves. Whereas the consistency among the different aspects of identity is emphasized in Western cultures, the "multiple selves" are often viewed as coexisting realities in East Asian cultures. This research revisits the classic thesis in psychology that identity consistency is a prerequisite condition of psychological well-being. Between individuals (Study 1), people with a more consistent self-view had a more clear self-knowledge, were more assertive, and, most notably, had self-experiences that were less affected by the perspectives of others. Compared with North American participants (Study 2), Koreans viewed themselves more flexibly across situations, and their subjective well-being was less predictable from levels of identity consistency. Also, consistent individuals received positive social evaluations from others in the United States but not in Korea.



One basic premise of social psychology is that individuals strive to resolve inconsistent psychological experiences (Abelson et al., 1968). In addition to being a major fabric of social psychology theory, the importance of consistency is also deeply ingrained in classical theories of mental health. According to prominent personality psychologists, developing and maintaining a consistent identity is a key foundation of psychological well-being (e.g., Jourard, 1965; Lecky, 1945; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1951). As Erikson (1968) encapsulated, for instance, possessing a sense of "invigorating sameness" (p. 19) has been long regarded as one of the staple conditions of mental health in mainstream psychology.

This theoretical position fits well with the North American cultural spirit, which heralds the supreme autonomy of the individual self. The self, not the context, is believed to be the primary anchor of behavior. Within this highly self-centered cultural scheme, it comes quite naturally that the self, the principal source of personal meaning and guidance, needs to be highly organized and consistent. A strong possibility exists, however, that the link between identity consistency and well-being could be more tenuous in East Asian cultures, where situational forces strongly dictate the experiences and expressions of the self (Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997).

Interpersonal harmony is the keynote in East Asian thinking (Moore, 1967; Rosenberger, 1992). It is a theme deriving from Confucian philosophy, which teaches that truly meaningful existence is conceivable only in relation to others (Bond & Hwang, 1986). For the purpose of fostering this ever-important harmony, social situations in these cultures call for a self-system that is relatively malleable and highly context sensitive (Cousins, 1989; Kitayama & Markus, 1999). In fact, extreme forms of self-consistency in such cultures, Markus and Kitayama (1994) argued, could be perceived as a "lack of flexibility, rigidity, or even immaturity" (p. 576).

Theories of psychological well-being are shaped by cultural beliefs concerning the fundamental nature of the person (Christopher, 1999; Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Suh, 2000). The long-standing belief in psychology that maintaining a consistent, unified self-identity is crucial to mental health might be another prime example of such synthesis between theory and culture. This classic assumption in psychology—that identity consistency is a prerequisite of mental health—is revisited in this cross-cultural research.

## Identity Consistency and Psychological Well-Being

The idea that various negative experiences, such as anxiety, tension, and confusion, stem from a lack of consistency among self-concepts was widely shared among early personality theorists (e.g., Lecky, 1945). To achieve this crucial sense of psychological unity, they claimed that the self-view needs to be coherently organized (inner congruence) and also consistently maintained across situations (cross-situational consistency). For instance, regarding the importance of congruence, Maslow (1954) argued that inner conflicts need to be "merged and coalesced to form unities" (p. 233) for the person to self-actualize. Similarly, Rogers (1951)

The present article is partly based on the doctoral dissertation I submitted to the Department of Psychology of the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. Portions of this research were presented at the meeting of the Asian Association of Social Psychology, August 1999, Taipei, Taiwan, and at the meeting of the Society of Personality and Social Psychology, February 2002, Savannah, Georgia. I express my gratitude to the chair of my doctoral committee, and to Drs. Harry Triandis, Jerry Clore, Eva Pomerantz, and Howard Berenbaum. Thanks also go to Keehak Lee, Youngoh Hong, Dongwoo Hahn, and Dongwon Choi in Korea and to Linda Levine, Chuansheng Chen, and Sal Maddi in California.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Eunkook M. Suh, Department of Psychology and Social Behavior, 3340 Social Ecology II, University of California, Irvine, California 92697-7085. E-mail: esuh@uci.edu

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 6, 1378–1391
 0022-3514/02/$5.00 DOI: 10.1037//0022-3514.83.6.1378

suggested that a person reaches the most fully functioning psychological state after resolving incongruent internal experiences. The consistency of self-view across situations was also emphasized. Jourard (1965) contended that a person who has a healthy personality seeks behavioral guidance primarily from his or her inner beliefs and values rather than from external sources (e.g., norms, expectations). Accordingly, Jourard believed that the self-view of a mature person is highly consistent across social contexts.

A more contemporary line of research that again underscores the importance of identity consistency comes from the works of Swann and his colleagues (Swann, 1983; Swann & Read, 1981). According to their self-verification theory, people actively try to verify, validate, and sustain their existing self-views in social contexts. One way people achieve this goal is by selectively seeking out and interacting with those who see them as they view themselves. Swann and Colleagues found, for instance, that people prefer to interact with partners who provide feedback that is congruent with their existing self-views rather than merely positive (Swann, de la Ronde, & Hixon, 1994). Another strategy people adopt to maintain their existing self-view is to behave in ways that elicit self-verifying reactions from others. When people think that others hold inaccurate impressions of them (even in an overly positive direction), for example, they deliberately behave in ways to correct the misconceptions (Swann & Read, 1981).

The self-verification research offers empirical support for the idea that each person actively negotiates with reality to maintain a consistent self-view. A number of recent studies extend this notion and demonstrate that the degree of identity consistency is predictive of psychological adjustment. Donahue, Robins, Roberts, and John (1993), for instance, found that people who view themselves highly inconsistently across social roles (high *self-concept differentiation*) were more depressed and more neurotic than others (see also Roberts & Donahue, 1994). Similarly, Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi (1997) found that consistency of self-view across roles was significantly associated with psychological thriving.

In sum, recent studies offer empirical support for the influential belief in psychology proposed by Lecky (1945), Rogers (1951), and other major personality psychologists. They demonstrate that individuals indeed dedicate themselves to establishing and sustaining a self-view that is consistent across different social contexts. Furthermore, the degree of identity consistency appears to be positively associated with levels of psychological adjustment. Although this is a powerful idea, virtually all of the theories and research findings that constitute the current knowledge on this topic come from North American participants. This is a critical blind spot of the literature, leaving open the question of whether identity consistency is a universally essential condition of psychological well-being.

## Culture and Self-Consistency

"Persistent need for consistency and stability," according to Markus et al. (1997, p. 24), is one of the key characterizations of the European American self. Although consistency is strongly emphasized in North America, in East Asian cultures, the belief that behavior should be consistent with internal thoughts is less salient. A study by Iwao (1988, cited in Triandis, 1989) exemplifies this cultural difference. In the study, Japanese and Americans were presented with a scenario in which a daughter brings home a man whom she wishes to marry. Even though her father privately believes he will "never allow them to marry," he behaves as if he is in favor of the marriage. Although the majority of Americans disapproved of the father's inconsistent behavior, 44% of the Japanese respondents thought the father handled the situation "appropriately." Such greater tolerance for inconsistencies has been documented in various other psychological domains. For instance, East Asians are less disturbed by cognitively dissonant situations (Heine & Lehman, 1997), are less likely to believe that behavior should align with private attitudes (Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka, & Kashima, 1992), and are less critical of incongruent acts displayed between private and public situations (Fu, Lee, Cameron, & Xu, 2001) than are North Americans.

Why are East Asians less preoccupied with the notion of self-consistency than are westerners? Most notably, beliefs about the self, the social context, and the relation between the two differ considerably between the two cultures. In the West, the self is typically characterized as an autonomous, distinct, and self-sufficient entity (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Lillard, 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). At the core of this inherently independent self are internal attributes, which are believed to be unique, self-diagnostic, and, most relevant to our discussion, highly stable. It is more imperative in Western cultures to cultivate and express these stable, self-defining inner attributes than to tailor the self to fit social mandates and expectations (Markus et al., 1997; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002).

In contrast, one can realize the fundamental sense of East Asian selfhood by enriching the feeling of connectedness with significant others (Ho, 1993; King & Bond, 1985; Miller, 1997). The self is viewed preeminently as a social product. Because each self-defining relationship calls for unique sets of behaviors and expectations, self-experience is constantly referenced to the thoughts and feelings of others. A tree is often used as a metaphor for illustrating this highly malleable and context-dependent East Asian self (Rosenberger, 1992). The tree's seasonal change of appearance (e.g., color, shape) does not threaten the essence of the tree. Similarly, a person being somewhat different in interactions with people of different age, gender, or social status is understood as quite natural. In fact, the ability to spontaneously detect and align the self to the subtle expectations of different social situations is considered a critical social skill in East Asian cultures (*nunchi* in Korea, S. G. Choi, 2000; *kejime* in Japan, Bachnik, 1992).

This East Asian metatheory of selfhood also seems congruent with the culture's general cognitive outlook, which accepts change and contradictions as natural aspects of reality (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). Such a dialectic mode of thinking, according to Peng and Nisbett (1999), sharply contrasts with the traditional Western epistemological habit, which polarizes contradictions and inconsistencies. This cultural difference further suggests that East Asians and westerners might construe inconsistencies of the self in a somewhat different manner. East Asians might be more inclined to see the different selves across situations as inevitable manifestations of a complex selfhood, whereas westerners might view them essentially as contradictions.

## Present Research

This research reexamines the longstanding belief that having a consistent identity is crucial for psychological well-being, from a

culturally informed perspective. Before I investigate this issue at a cultural level, however, a better understanding of identity consistency is required. Study 1 addresses the question of what identity consistency, as an individual-differences variable, actually measures.

Study 2, by comparing U.S. and Korean college students, addresses three interrelated questions at a cross-cultural level. First, is the self-view of North Americans significantly more consistent across contexts than that of East Asians? Second, how crucial is the level of identity consistency to the subjective well-being of the members of the two cultures? Finally, are consistent people viewed more positively in one culture than in another?

One point that needs clarification is that there are at least three relevant but distinct dimensions of identity consistency: the cross-situational consistency of the self-view across social settings, the internal consistency (congruence) of various self-components, and the temporal consistency (stability) of the self-view. The present research focuses on the first type of consistency (i.e., the overall consistency of the self-view across multiple social situations) for two reasons. First, this dimension of consistency has been of most theoretical interest for both early and modern personality psychologists (e.g., Bem & Allen, 1974; Jourard, 1965; Lecky, 1945; Mischel & Peake, 1982). In addition, this cross-situational dimension of consistency is most likely to be affected by cultural factors that are of particular interest to social psychology (e.g., social norms, lay beliefs about selfhood).

## Study 1: Who Is Self-Consistent?

Existing research offers only a broad sketch about the dispositional characteristics of a consistent person. For instance, Donahue et al. (1993) found that individuals who view themselves more consistently than others tend to be highly Conscientious, Agreeable, and low in Neuroticism. Sheldon et al. (1997) reported that people who have inconsistent self-views tend to be more depressed and have lower self-esteem than others. In this study, a number of more specific cognitive and motivational characteristics that are conceptually relevant to identity consistency are examined.

First, consistency of self-view might be related with self-monitoring, the motivational tendency to be concerned about the situational appropriateness of one's social behavior (for a review, see Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). Past research reveals that the behaviors of high self-monitors, who are eager to create positive social images, tend to be inconsistent across social settings (e.g., Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991; Harris & Rosenthal, 1986). Is it the case that the self-view of high self-monitors, like their behavior, also changes notably across situations? If so, among the three key factors of self-monitoring (Acting, Extraversion, and Other-Directedness), as reported by Briggs, Cheek, and Buss (1980), which is most associated with identity consistency?

Variations in self-view might also be associated with the sense of self-clarity. According to Campbell (1990; Campbell et al., 1996), people differ in terms of how clearly and confidently they know themselves (also Baumgardner, 1990). The more certain the person is about himself or herself (high self-clarity), the less likely it is that he or she will depend on unstable social cues for self-insight. Indeed, Campbell et al. found a positive relation between identity consistency and self-clarity. The self-clarity measure was included in the present study to replicate the findings of Campbell et al. and also to examine the relative importance of this variable to others in the prediction of consistency.

Another self characteristic that is expected to relate to identity consistency is the pattern of self-awareness (i.e., habitual way of experiencing the self). Some individuals chronically pay more attention to the private and covert aspects of the self, whereas others constantly attend to the public and overt dimensions of the self (e.g., Baumeister, 1986; Fenigstein, Scheier, & Buss, 1975). It was hypothesized that the tendency to view the self primarily as a social object (e.g., chronically taking others' perspectives into account in the self-construal processes) would relate negatively with identity consistency. Sheldon's (1996) social awareness inventory was used to examine this possibility.

Finally, one specific personality characteristic that might predict consistency is social assertiveness. A person who is socially dominant and assertive, compared with a socially passive person, finds it easier to shape social interactions in ways that are congruent with his or her existing personality. Hence, an assertive person might feel less need to modify his or her self-view across different situations. On the basis of this reasoning, identity consistency was correlated with the Assertiveness subscale of Extraversion (Revised NEO Personality Inventory; NEO–PI–R; Costa & McCrae, 1992).

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

Two samples enrolled in introductory psychology courses at a large U.S. university completed the questionnaire. Sample 1 consisted of 150 participants (119 women), and Sample 2 included 219 participants (158 women). The average ages of Sample 1 and Sample 2, respectively, were 20.7 and 18.9. All participants received extra course credit for their participation. All findings reported in Study 1 are based on the aggregated responses from the two samples ($N = 366$; 3 incomplete reports), except for those related to the Social Awareness Inventory (SAI; Sheldon, 1996). Because the SAI was not administered to Sample 1, results pertaining to this measure are based only on Sample 2 data.

#### *Measures*

*Identity consistency.* To obtain an index of the participant's identity consistency (IC) level, I first asked each person to rate how accurately 25 personality traits described his or her "general self" on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all like myself*) to 7 (*very much like myself*). After completing a number of filler measures, the participants rated themselves again on these same 25 personality traits. In this second round, each personality trait was randomly paired with a specific interaction partner. For instance, one item read, "When I interact with my parents, I am talkative." The participant rated how accurately each of the 100 situation-specific statements (25 traits $\times$ 4 interaction partners) described them. The 25 adjectives consisted of positive (e.g., *cheerful*), neutral (e.g., *serious*), and negative (e.g., *cynical*) personality characteristics that were compiled in reference to the Big Five traits (Goldberg, 1993). In a pilot study, undergraduate students indicated that the three most significant people with whom they interact frequently are parents, a romantic partner, and a same-gender friend. In addition to these three, a stranger was included as a fourth interaction condition to increase the variability of the social situations. I obtained a personal index of IC by calculating the overall consistency of the five situation-specific self-views (detailed description follows in the Results section).

*Subjective well-being.* In addition to the trait ratings, participants completed measures of subjective well-being (SWB; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). The five-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) was used as a measure of global life satisfaction. Participants also indicated how frequently they had experienced four positive (joy, pride, love, affection) and four negative emotions (sadness, shame, anger, fear) during the previous month on a 7-point scale (Diener, Smith, & Fujita, 1995). The sums of the four positive and four negative emotion ratings were used, respectively, as the positive affect and negative affect scores.

*Predictors of consistency: Self-monitoring.* The 25-item Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder, 1974) measures the degree to which people use social cues to monitor and control their behavior in public situations. Factor analyses suggest that the scale includes three factors (Briggs et al., 1980): Acting (e.g., "I would probably make a good actor"), Other-Directedness (e.g., "I guess I put on a show to impress or entertain people"), and Extraversion (e.g., "At a party I let others keep the jokes and stories going"; reverse scored). The alpha of the full scale was .57. Coefficient alphas for the three subscales were as follows: Acting = .60, Other-Directedness = .52 and Extraversion = .49.

*Self-concept clarity.* Campbell et al.'s (1996) Self-Concept Clarity Scale measures the extent to which self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined. The measure consists of 12 items (e.g., "In general, I have a clear sense of who I am and what I am"), and the alpha for this measure was .81.

*Self-awareness.* A person may habitually attend to either the internal experience or the external appearance of the self from either his or her own or the other's psychological perspective. Crossing the two binary dimensions of self-content (e.g., experience vs. appearance) and perspective (self vs. other's) leads to four distinct self-awareness styles. The Social Awareness Inventory, developed by Sheldon (1996), measures the four self-awareness dimensions: Attending to self-experience from self-perspective (e.g., scrutinizing one's mood), self-experience from the other's perspective (SEOP; e.g., seeking insight from a therapist), self-appearance from self-perspective (e.g., studying oneself in front of the mirror), and self-appearance from the other's perspective (SAOP; e.g., reading a friend's reaction to one's new hairstyle). The coefficient alpha for the four self-awareness subscales ranged from .73 to .78.

*Assertiveness.* Eight items tapping the social assertiveness facet of Extraversion (NEO–PI–R; Costa & McCrae, 1992) were included. A sample item read, "I am dominant, forceful, and assertive." The coefficient alpha of these eight social assertiveness items was .79.

## Results

### Identity Consistency

For each individual, I obtained an overall measure of IC by adopting a method originally developed by Block (1961) and included in Donahue et al.'s (1993) study. In the present study, each person made 125 ratings of his or her personality. After converting each person's 125 ratings into a 25 × 5 matrix (25 traits in five different contexts, including the general self), I factor analyzed each personal matrix. If a person views himself or herself consistently across all social contexts (e.g., impulsive in all situations), the first principal-components factor obtained from this within-subject factor analysis accounts for a large percentage of the person's self-view variance across the situations. Conversely, when a person views himself or herself very differently across situations (e.g., impulsive when with X but not when with Y), the first factor only accounts for a small amount of the variance in the self-rating matrix. On the basis of this statistical logic, the percentage of variance accounted for by the first factor was used as a personal index of IC. In Donahue et al.'s (1993) study, the residual variance was analyzed (as opposed to the predicted variance) because the authors' prime interest was in the notion of *self-concept differentiation*. In this study, the personality profile of a person who has a high IC score was more consistent across the five interpersonal settings than was the personality profile of a person with a low IC score. In short, higher IC values indicate higher consistency of self-view.

As an example, the self-ratings of 2 pilot study participants are presented in Figures 1 ("Leonard") and 2 ("Zelig"). Figure 1 reveals that Leonard's self-view was highly consistent across the five contexts (plus when he was alone). Each of the six poles stemming from the center of the diagram represents a specific interpersonal context (e.g., w/A = with Person A), each marked by a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all like myself*, 7 = *very much like myself*). Each of the 25 concentric lines surrounding the center represents a trait. For instance, the bold line in Figure 1 reflects Leonard's self-ratings for *affectionate* across the five settings (plus alone). As we can see, Leonard's self-rating of this trait was relatively consistent across the situations (his ratings were mostly 7s). Leonard's IC score was 87.4%, and his five self-views, on average, correlated .87 with each other.

In contrast, Zelig's self-view varied considerably across contexts (Figure 2). For instance, Zelig's rating on *affectionate* (bold line) was high in some contexts (i.e., 7), but low (1 or 2) in others. As the heavy intersections among the trait lines suggest, Zelig's self-view changed quite significantly across interpersonal settings. Specifically, Zelig's IC score was 26.6%, and the average correlation of his five self-view profiles was only .16. Unlike Leonard, Zelig's self-profile in one situation was hardly predictable from another.

In total, 366 within subject matrices were factor analyzed in Study 1. Significant individual differences emerged in the overall level of IC. The percentage of variance accounted for by the first principal-components factor ranged from 22.6% (least consistent person) to 95.0% (most consistent person). The sample yielded a mean IC score of 58.4% ($SD$ = 15.1).

### Correlates of Identity Consistency

The zero-order correlations between IC and the major variables are presented in the left column of Table 1. The first notable finding is that IC was not significantly related to the overall self-monitoring score. Even though high self-monitors are known to behave quite inconsistently across social situations (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000), the finding suggests that self-monitoring does not predict the consistency of self-view. The null relation between IC and self-monitoring emerged in large part because two Self-Monitoring subscales were correlated with IC in opposite directions. The Extraversion factor related positively with IC ($r$ = .27, $p < .001$), whereas the Other-Directedness factor correlated negatively with IC ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$). Ironically, people with highly consistent identity were similar to high self-monitors in one dimension but resembled low self-monitors in another. Like high self-monitors, they were proactive and outgoing people in social situations (Extraverted), yet, like low self-monitors, they were not that interested in how they might be perceived by others (low Other-Directedness).

Outcomes from the SAI measure reinforce the impression that highly self-consistent people are relatively less concerned about

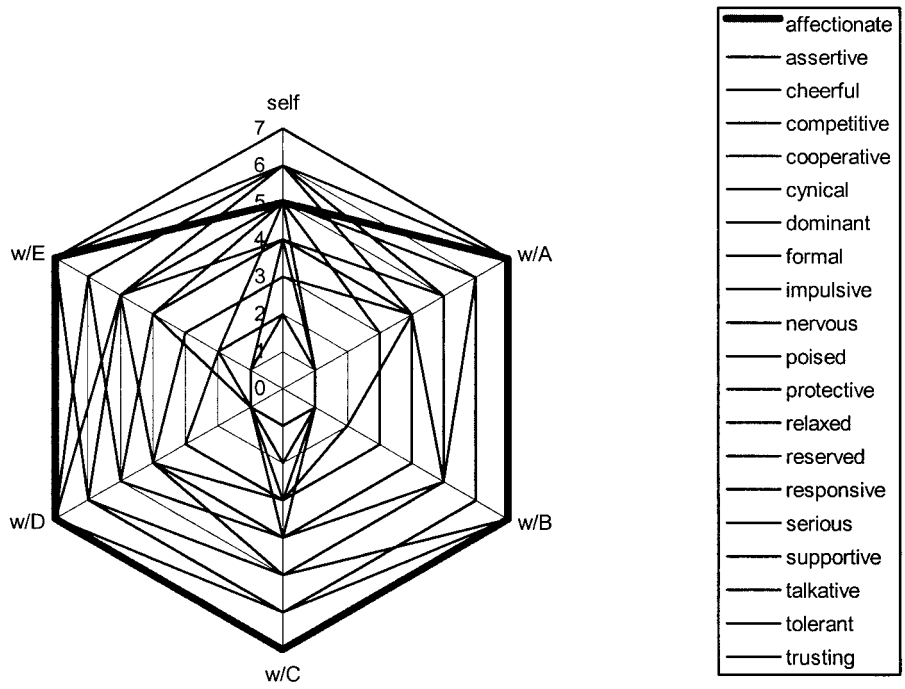


*Figure 1.* Personality ratings of Leonard (identity consistency = 87.4%). w/A = with Person A, w/B = with Person B, and so on.

others' views. Significant negative associations were found between IC and the two other-grounded self-awareness tendencies ($r = -.26$, $p < .001$, with SAOP; $r = -.42$, $p < .001$, with SEOP). In short, a key dispositional feature of individuals who have a stable self-view is that they pay chronically less attention to how the self might be seen by other people. Also, as predicted, IC was significantly related with social assertiveness and with the degree of self-clarity.

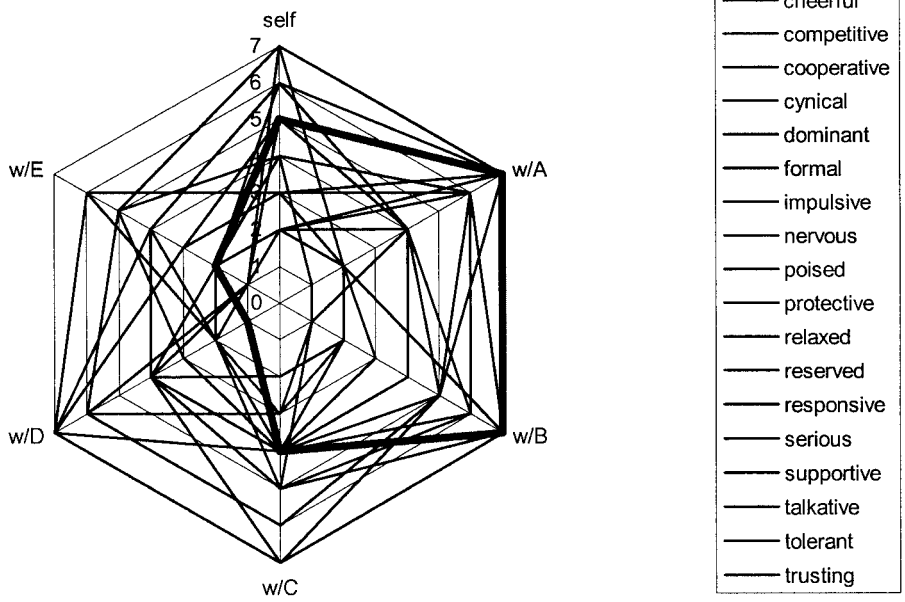


*Figure 2.* Personality ratings of Zelig (identity consistency = 26.6%). w/A = with Person A, w/B = with Person B, and so on.

Table 1
*Correlations and Standardized Beta Coefficients for Predicting Identity Consistency*

| Measure | Correlation with IC | $\beta$ |
|---|---|---|
| Self-clarity | .37** | .07 |
| Assertiveness | .23** | −.04 |
| SM: total score | −.08 | |
| SM: Acting | .03 | −.08 |
| SM: Other-Directedness | −.21** | −.01 |
| SM: Extraversion | .27** | .11 |
| Self-perspective: experience | .01 | .10 |
| Self-perspective: appearance | −.16* | .03 |
| Other's perspective: experience | −.42** | −.38*** |
| Other's perspective: appearance | −.26** | −.05 |

*Note.* IC = identity consistency; SM = self-monitoring.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Among the various correlates, which is the best predictor of IC? Is self-clarity, for instance, still an important predictor of IC after levels of assertiveness are controlled for? To address this question, I simultaneously regressed IC on all nine predictors: The standardized regression coefficients are presented under the right column of Table 1. The only significant predictor (in a negative direction) in this regression analysis was the tendency to evaluate inner experience from others' perspective (SEOP). Besides SEOP, no other variable made unique contributions in the prediction of IC. Implications of this finding are discussed later.

### *Identity Consistency and SWB*

Across individuals, those who viewed themselves more consistently across situations were significantly more likely ($p < .001$) to experience higher life satisfaction ($r = .29$), more positive affect ($r = .25$), and less negative affect ($r = -.38$). In support of past theory and research, Americans who were more consistent enjoyed higher levels of SWB.

### *Summary and Discussion*

Study 1 makes a contribution to the literature by offering new insights about the psychological dispositions of highly self-consistent people. According to the findings, a person who maintains a consistent identity (a) is not necessarily a high self-monitor, (b) has a clear sense of self-knowledge, (c) tends to be assertive and extraverted in social interactions, and (d) pays relatively less attention to how others might think of his or her inner thoughts and feelings.

Among these four attributes, regression analysis indicated that the other-oriented self-construal tendency is the key predictor of IC. The more the individual construes himself or herself in terms of the other's perspective, the less likely it is that he or she will have a consistent self-view. This is a theoretically important finding. Many researchers contend that the tendency to reference self-experiences to the thoughts, feelings, and expectations of others is a signature feature of the interdependent self (Cohen & Gunz, 2002; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Heine et al., 2001; Suh, Diener, Oishi, Triandis, 1998). It is interesting that the very process that captures the essence of the interdependent self-construal (i.e., vigilant monitoring of other's view), according to the present finding, is related strongly with identity inconsistency. This outcome heightens the likelihood that IC will be lower and less relevant to SWB in East Asian cultures.

## Study 2: Cross-Cultural Examination

Study 2 examines the relation between IC and SWB in the United States and in South Korea. Three key predictions were made. Compared with the U.S. sample, the Korean respondents were expected (a) to have a more flexible self-view across social contexts, (b) to experience SWB that is less dependent on IC level, and (c) to receive less positive social feedback from others for being self-consistent. I examined this last prediction by analyzing informant reports provided by family members and friends of the participants.

If consistency is less predictive of SWB in East Asian cultures, what might matter more? One significant predictor of SWB among those who have a strong relational self-view is perceived social appraisal—the degree to which one believes his or her life is approved by significant others (Suh & Diener, 2002; Suh et al., 1998). If so, in Korea, is social appraisal more important than IC in predicting SWB?

### *Pilot Study*

Prior to the cross-cultural comparison, it was necessary to obtain a culturally representative pool of personality traits and social roles. In a pilot study, 50 American and 38 Korean college students were asked to provide the five most self-defining social roles and the 10 most self-descriptive personality traits. Both groups offered similar responses to the role nomination (friend and daughter or son were mentioned most frequently). One unique Korean response (mentioned by 24% of the respondents) was the status of being a few years younger (*hoobae*) or older (*sunbae*) than a fellow student. These social roles are salient in East Asian cultures, in which seniority plays a vital role in shaping the content and tone of social interactions.

Unlike the social role, the trait responses differed quite substantially. The 10 most frequently nominated self-descriptors in the U.S. sample were *friendly*, *optimistic*, *caring*, *intelligent*, *outgoing*, *trustworthy*, *honest*, *hardworking*, *fun-loving*, and *responsible*. The Koreans most often mentioned *optimistic*, *cheerful*, *social*, *hasty*, *passive*, *two-faced*, *calm*, *determined*, *positive*, and *conscientious*. Some English speakers might find it rather puzzling that many Koreans described themselves as two-faced. The very fact that the Koreans mentioned this term spontaneously in this open-ended questionnaire implies that the notion of inconsistency carries a less negative connotation in East Asian cultures than in North America. The traits and social roles nominated by the two cultural groups were used as inputs for constructing the questionnaire in Study 2.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

Eighty-four college students (43 women) in the United States and 123 undergraduates in Korea (72 women) participated in this study. The mean

ages of the U.S. and Korean samples, respectively, were 18.4 and 20.4. Respondents in both countries received course credit for their participation.

In addition to self-reports, participants were asked to provide two informant reports, one from a family member, and another from a friend. In Korea, participants arranged the two sets of informant reports in exchange for a book certificate. American participants received additional experiment credit for providing informant data. Both the participants and the informants clearly understood that the contents of the informant report, mailed directly to the laboratory, would be confidential. Seventy-nine Korean participants (64% of the sample) and 57 U.S. participants (68%) had informant reports returned from both a friend and a family member. Individuals who provided informant reports showed no systematic mean differences from those who did not among the major variables.

## Measures

*SWB.* The participants' SWB was assessed by the same measures described in Study 1. The alpha coefficients of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) for the Korean and U.S. samples were, respectively, .83 and .84. Individuals also reported how frequently they had experienced various pleasant and unpleasant emotions in the recent past. The alpha coefficients for the pleasant affect scale for the Korean and U.S. samples were, respectively, .82 and .80. The alpha of the negative affect scale was also equally high for both groups (Korea, .88; United States, .86).

*Perceived social appraisal.* Using a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), respondents rated the degree to which they thought others approved their lives. The first item read, "People around me approve of the way I have lived my life." The other item was "My family is satisfied with my life." The two items were combined to obtain the perceived social appraisal score.

*Identity consistency.* To obtain a measure of IC across social roles, I constructed the role–trait matrix described earlier in Study 1. The five interaction partners included in the current role–trait matrix were close friend, parents, professor/teaching assistant, someone younger (5 years or less), and a stranger. Four of the five social roles were based on the results of the pilot study. An interaction involving a stranger was added to increase the range of interpersonal situations.

In selecting the 20 personality traits, I considered two points. First, the findings from the pilot study were given special attention. Second, overt personality traits (e.g., *talkative*), which are more likely to vary across social roles, were given priority over purely experiential traits (e.g., *optimistic*). Twelve of the final 20 traits were compiled from the pilot study (6 traits from each country); the 8 additional traits were sampled from Wiggins's (1979) circumplex of interpersonal traits to ensure comprehensiveness. The final list of 20 traits included in the questionnaire is as follows: *emotional, modest, cold, friendly, cooperative, talkative, impatient, impulsive, open-minded, outgoing, introverted, dominant, business-like, calculative, honest, two-faced, cheerful, kind, rational,* and *cranky*.

As in Study 1, participants were asked to rate how accurately the 20 personality traits describe them on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all descriptive*) to 7 (*very much descriptive*). After describing their general self-view, the participants rated how accurately each of the 20 traits described them across the five different interpersonal contexts. An example item reads, "When I interact with my *parents*, I am *impatient*." The 100 role–trait combinations were presented in random order.

The questionnaire was initially constructed in English. It was translated into Korean by the author who is bilingual. After the initial translation, two Korean graduate students studying in the United States provided feedback concerning translation equivalence. The English and the revised Korean draft were compared once again in Korea by two professors who were fluent in both languages. The high measurement reliability observed in both cultures suggests that the translation was satisfactory.

*Informant reports.* Two informants (one family member, one friend) provided additional information about each participant. Of most interest was the informant's impression of the target person on the dimensions of social skill and likability. The underlying idea was that the Korean and the U.S. informants might differ in how favorably they thought of highly consistent versus inconsistent individuals. As a measure of social skill, informants evaluated how well the target person deals with social situations on a scale ranging from 1 (*very poorly*) to 4 (*very well*). Also, informants rated how likable they thought the target person was on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very likable*). Informants clearly understood that their responses would be confidential.

## Results

The means and standard deviations of major variables are summarized in Table 2. Consistent with previous research (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995), the Korean sample reported lower life satisfaction, less positive affect, and more unpleasant affect than the U.S. participants ($p < .001$). The Koreans' perceived social appraisal score was significantly lower than the American mean ($p < .001$).

## Cultural Difference in Identity Consistency

The first key question was whether the self-view is more consistent in the United States than in Korea. This issue was examined both at the idiographic and at the nomothetic level. The idiographic analysis was based on the IC measure. As described in Study 1, the IC index reflects the extent to which each person's ordering of the least to the most self-descriptive trait is maintained across the five different social contexts (plus the general self). As anticipated, the Americans viewed themselves more consistently across social situations than did the Koreans. The mean IC score of the Korean respondents (52.8%) was significantly lower ($p < .001$) than the U.S. average (64.0%).

Another idiographic measure of IC is the within-subject correlation between the general self and each of the five situation-specific self-views. Table 3 summarizes the mean of the 121 within-subject correlations in Korea and the mean of the 84 within-subject correlations obtained from the U.S. sample. Compared with the United States, the correlations between the general self and the various context-dependent selves were consistently lower in Korea. For instance, on average, the general self and the with-parents self correlated .32 in Korea, whereas the average size of this correlation was .58 in the United States. When the within-subject correlations were transformed to Fischer's *z* scores, all 5 correlation means were significantly smaller in the Korean sample ($p < .001$). Thus, it was more difficult to predict the profiles of social selves from the general self in Korea than in the United States.

Table 2
*Means and Standard Deviations of Major Variables*

| | Korea | | United States | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Variable | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| SWLS | 17.1 | 4.9 | 24.4 | 6.5 |
| Pleasant emotions | 15.7 | 3.1 | 18.7 | 3.5 |
| Unpleasant emotions | 13.5 | 2.9 | 11.1 | 2.6 |
| IC (%) | 52.8 | 11.6 | 64.0 | 13.1 |

*Note.* SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; IC = identity consistency.

Table 3
*Mean Correlation Between General Self-View and Situation-Dependent Self-Views*

| | General self | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Korea | | United States | |
| Context | *M* | *SD* | *M* | *SD* |
| With parents | .32 | .29 | .58 | .28 |
| With a close friend | .35 | .34 | .66 | .24 |
| With a professor/teaching assistant | .29 | .31 | .54 | .24 |
| With a stranger | .29 | .31 | .52 | .26 |
| With a younger person | .37 | .30 | .58 | .24 |
| *M* | .32 | | .58 | |

Nomothetic ratings also suggested that the self-view is significantly more consistent in the United States than in Korea. The American and Korean rankings of each trait (based on self-descriptiveness ratings) within each interpersonal context are summarized in Tables 4 and 5, respectively. Within each column, higher rankings indicate that the trait is more descriptive of the self in that particular context. For instance, American respondents reported that among the 20 traits, *honest* (Rank 1) is most self-descriptive, and *two-faced* (Rank 20) is least self-descriptive of their general self (second column, Table 4). Across contexts, *honest* was rated as the second most self-descriptive trait when Americans interact with friends, the fourth most self-descriptive trait when they are with their parents, and so forth (first row, Table 4). The trait *honest* across the six different contexts was, on average, ranked as 4.2, with a standard deviation of 2.6. According to the standard deviation of each trait ranks, *cold* was ranked most consistently ($SD = 0.8$), whereas *emotional* was ranked least consistently ($SD = 4.8$). Among the five context-dependent selves, the with-parent self-profile was most similar to the general self (Spearman's $r = .94$), whereas the with-stranger self was least similar (Spearman's $r = .73$).

The rankings in Table 5 once again illustrate the highly context-dependent nature of the Korean self-view. For instance, although *emotional* was ranked as the most self-descriptive trait of the general self, it emerged as one of the least self-descriptive traits (Rank 16) in the with-professor or with-stranger contexts. The standard deviation of each trait ranking across contexts is summarized in the far right column of Table 5. According to these standard deviations, 15 out of the 20 trait rankings in Korea varied more across contexts than in the United States. The mean standard deviation of the total 20 rankings in Korea (3.8) was significantly larger ($p < .01$) than that of the U.S. (2.6), implying once again that the self-view shifts to a greater degree across situations in the former culture. Although the general self-profile correlated .80 with the with-parent self, it was weakly correlated with the with-professor (.36) and the with-stranger (.08) selves. The East Asian's self-view seems to take notably different forms, depending on whether the person interacts with an in-group or an out-group member.

In sum, the current study offers powerful evidence in support of the idea that the self-view is more consistent in cultures in which the autonomous, independent aspects of the self are prioritized over the relational, interdependent aspects of the self (Campbell et al., 1996; Cousins, 1989; Ip & Bond, 1995; Kanagawa, Cross, &

Table 4
*Ranking of Self-Descriptiveness of Traits Within Context: United States*

| | | Context | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Trait | Self | Friend | Parent | Professor | Stranger | Younger person | *M* | *SD* |
| Honest | 1 | 2 | 4 | 6 | 8 | 4 | 4.2 | 2.6 |
| Kind | 2 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 2.5 | 1.6 |
| Rational | 3 | 10 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 9 | 5.2 | 3.5 |
| Cooperative | 4 | 6 | 6 | 1 | 5 | 7 | 4.8 | 2.1 |
| Friendly | 5 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 2.8 | 1.8 |
| Open-minded | 6 | 7 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 5.8 | 1.5 |
| Talkative | 7 | 3 | 3 | 12 | 12 | 8 | 7.5 | 4.0 |
| Emotional | 8 | 9 | 9 | 16 | 20 | 12 | 12.3 | 4.8 |
| Cheerful | 9 | 8 | 10 | 9 | 7 | 3 | 7.7 | 2.5 |
| Outgoing | 10 | 4 | 8 | 13 | 11 | 5 | 8.5 | 3.5 |
| Modest | 11 | 12 | 12 | 8 | 4 | 11 | 9.7 | 3.1 |
| Impatient | 12 | 15 | 11 | 14 | 15 | 14 | 13.5 | 1.6 |
| Businesslike | 13 | 17 | 16 | 7 | 9 | 16 | 13.0 | 4.1 |
| Calculative | 14 | 14 | 13 | 10 | 13 | 15 | 13.2 | 1.7 |
| Dominant | 15 | 13 | 17 | 18 | 14 | 10 | 14.5 | 2.9 |
| Impulsive | 16 | 11 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 13 | 14.2 | 1.9 |
| Introverted | 17 | 18 | 18 | 11 | 10 | 18 | 15.3 | 3.8 |
| Cranky | 18 | 16 | 15 | 19 | 19 | 17 | 17.3 | 1.6 |
| Cold | 19 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 18 | 20 | 19.5 | 0.8 |
| Two-faced | 20 | 19 | 19 | 17 | 17 | 19 | 18.5 | 1.2 |
| Total | | | | | | | | 2.6 |
| Spearman's correlation with self | | .85 | .94 | .80 | .73 | .85 | .83 | |

*Note.* 1 = most self-descriptive trait within context; 20 = least self-descriptive trait within context.

Table 5
*Ranking of Self-Descriptiveness of Traits Within Context: Korea*

| Trait | Self | Context | | | | | *M* | *SD* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Friend | Parent | Professor | Stranger | Younger person | | |
| Emotional | 1 | 9 | 7 | 16 | 16 | 11 | 10.0 | 5.7 |
| Cheerful | 2 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 13 | 5 | 5.7 | 4.5 |
| Kind | 3 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3.5 | 2.1 |
| Cooperative | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 3.0 | 1.8 |
| Friendly | 5 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 14 | 4 | 5.5 | 4.7 |
| Honest | 6 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 4.8 | 1.6 |
| Impatient | 7 | 14 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 18 | 13.8 | 3.7 |
| Impulsive | 8 | 11 | 12 | 18 | 17 | 17 | 13.8 | 4.1 |
| Outgoing | 9 | 4 | 5 | 11 | 12 | 7 | 8.0 | 3.2 |
| Rational | 10 | 12 | 10 | 6 | 3 | 8 | 8.2 | 3.3 |
| Modest | 11 | 10 | 11 | 2 | 1 | 9 | 7.3 | 4.6 |
| Open-minded | 12 | 5 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 6 | 8.8 | 2.8 |
| Introverted | 13 | 20 | 16 | 4 | 4 | 12 | 11.5 | 6.4 |
| Two-faced | 14 | 17 | 14 | 13 | 10 | 15 | 13.8 | 2.3 |
| Cranky | 15 | 15 | 13 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 17.2 | 3.2 |
| Talkative | 16 | 8 | 8 | 17 | 19 | 10 | 13.0 | 4.9 |
| Calculative | 17 | 16 | 20 | 15 | 9 | 19 | 16.0 | 3.9 |
| Dominant | 18 | 13 | 18 | 19 | 18 | 14 | 16.7 | 2.5 |
| Cold | 19 | 18 | 17 | 12 | 8 | 13 | 14.5 | 4.2 |
| Businesslike | 20 | 19 | 19 | 8 | 7 | 16 | 14.8 | 5.8 |
| Total | | | | | | | | 3.8 |
| Spearman's correlation with self | | .72 | .80 | .36 | .08 | .62 | .52 | |

*Note.* 1 = most self-descriptive trait within context; 20 = least self-descriptive trait within context.

Markus, 2001). The relatively unobtrusive nature of the current IC index (derived through a series of statistical analyses) weakens methodological threats, such as strong intrusion of cultural norms or values on the self-responses. Both the idiographic and the nomothetic data support the conclusion that the self-view changes quite drastically—especially between formal and informal situations—in East Asian cultures.

### *Consistency and SWB*

The second major question was whether maintaining a consistent identity is more important to the SWB of Americans than of Koreans. Overall, IC was associated with higher SWB in both cultures. Individuals who viewed themselves more similarly across roles were more likely to be satisfied with their life and experienced more pleasant emotions. As anticipated, however, IC was a more effective predictor of SWB in the United States than in Korea.

The zero-order correlations between IC and the three SWB components were all significant in the United States ($r = .49$, $p < .001$, with life satisfaction; $r = .31$, $p < .01$, with positive affect; and $r = -.50$, $p < .001$, with negative affect). In Korea, IC also correlated significantly with life satisfaction ($r = .22$, $p < .05$) and negative affect ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$). However, the size of these Korean correlations was significantly smaller than those of the U.S. sample ($p < .05$). Also, in contrast to the U.S. finding, the correlation between IC and positive affect in Korea was not significant ($r = .17$, *ns*).

The relative importance of IC and social appraisal in the prediction of SWB in each culture was examined by a regression analysis. Table 6 summarizes the standardized coefficients of IC and social appraisal in the prediction of SWB. A somewhat contrasting pattern emerged from the two cultures. Life satisfaction in Korea was predicted more effectively by social appraisal than by IC, whereas the reverse was true in the United States. For predictions of positive affect, only the beta of social appraisal was significant in Korea, whereas only IC reached significance in the United States. Finally, IC was clearly a more effective predictor of negative affect than was social appraisal in the United States, whereas this difference was attenuated in the Korean sample.

### *Evaluations by Informants*

Is there a cultural difference in how other people evaluate consistent versus inconsistent individuals? To examine this possibility, the informant's ratings of the target person's social skill and likability were correlated with the target person's IC level. Five Korean participants and 1 U.S. participant who each provided only

Table 6
*Predicting Subjective Well-Being by Identity Consistency and Social Appraisal (Standardized Regression Coefficient)*

| Variable | Korea | | United States | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | IC | SA | IC | SA |
| Life satisfaction | .19* | .42*** | .44*** | .25* |
| Positive affect | .16 | .21* | .27* | .19 |
| Negative affect | −.22* | −.16 | −.50*** | −.02 |

*Note.* IC = identity consistency; SA = social appraisal.
* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

one informant report were also included in the analyses. For the rest of the sample, the mean of the two informant reports was used in the analyses (Korea, $n = 87$; United States, $n = 60$).

An intriguing pattern of cultural difference emerged. In the United States, the social skill ($r = .37$, $p < .01$) and general likability ($r = .33$, $p < .05$) ratings provided by the informants correlated significantly with the target person's IC level. In other words, there was a significant tendency among American informants to evaluate consistent people more favorably than less consistent people. In contrast, however, the Korean informants showed no preference between consistent and less consistent individuals. In Korea, neither the social skill ($r = .12$) nor the likability ($r = -.02$) ratings of the informants were correlated with the target person's IC level. In short, a link seems to exist between IC and social reward in individualist but not in collectivist cultures. This finding has implications for understanding the motive behind self-consistent behaviors, an issue that is addressed in the General Discussion.

Finally, cultural difference emerged in the correlations between the general self-view and the two informant reports. The mean convergence between the general self-view and the informant reports of friends (Korea, $r = .34$; United States, $r = .60$) and family members (Korea, $r = .33$; United States, $r = .63$) was consistently lower in Korea than in the United States ($p < .05$). Furthermore, when evaluating the target person's personality, the pair of Korean informants (friend and family member) agreed less with each other (on average, $r = .47$) than did the American informant pairs (on average, $r = .62$). Why is the agreement between the self and informant and between the two informants lower in Korea? Although the current study was not designed to specifically answer this question, past research documents that, all other things being equal, informant reports yield higher consensus when the target person's personality is expressed consistently across contexts (e.g., Bem & Allen, 1974; Colvin, 1993). Whether the consistency of the target's personality expression is directly linked with the cultural difference in informant agreement deserves further examination.

### *Summary and Discussion*

As anticipated, Koreans, compared with American respondents, construed themselves significantly more flexibly across situations, and the degree of consistency was less predictive of their SWB. Also, consistent individuals in the United States were rated highly by others on the dimensions of social skill and likability. Such a pattern was absent in the Korean data. Before I discuss the larger theoretical implications of these findings, two points warrant comment.

First, even though the East Asian self-view appears to be more malleable across situations, whether similar cultural difference exists in other dimensions of IC remains to be studied. For instance, when Campbell et al. (1996) examined how Japanese and Canadians responded to an item tapping the continuity of the self over time (i.e., "When I think about the kind of person I have been in the past, I'm not sure what I was really like," reverse scored), they found no cultural difference. As Campbell et al. correctly pointed out, the high situational variability observed among East Asians does not necessarily imply "a past self that lacks continuity with the present self" (p. 150). In a similar vein, one should not make quick cultural assumptions about the internal congruence dimension of identity from the current findings. Conceptual and methodological distinctions are required in studies of the temporal, cross-situational, and internal consistency of self-identity.

The interesting cultural difference found in the informant data raises a question. Why and on what basis do other people make such positive evaluations about consistent people? One possibility, namely that consistent individuals may simply have a good and nice personality, was not supported. Even when the informants' perception of highly positive traits (e.g., kind, friendly, honest) was controlled, they continued to think that more consistent people are more likable ($r = .26$, $p < .05$) and more socially skilled ($r = .36$, $p < .01$). A more plausible scenario is suggested by Study 1. Highly consistent individuals, according to this study, are self-confident in social interactions, have clear opinions about themselves, and, most important, are less influenced by other people's thoughts. Such personality configuration seems to match more with the idealized picture of North American than East Asian selfhood (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Because consistent people possess many of the personality trademarks cherished in Western cultures, they might convey a social image that appeals more to North Americans than to Koreans. Although this is the favored interpretation, more research is needed to clarify precisely why people like consistent persons more in the United States than in Korea and whether the cultural members are consciously aware of this link between consistency and social reward.

## General Discussion

The concept of consistency is the backbone of many influential personality and social psychology theories (Triandis, 1999). Given its prominent position, it is rather surprising how little has been asked about the universal significance and applicability of this concept. This research hopes to shed light on how cultural factors come into the picture of consistency. The current findings have direct theoretical implications on SWB, the motive of self-consistency, and the study of personality across cultures.

### *Consistency and Well-Being*

Many of the influential Western perspectives on well-being start with an implicit assumption that the needs of self-enhancement and self-consistency are fundamental and more or less universal (Suh, 2000). This assumption is strongly challenged by recent cross-cultural findings. Heine et al. (1999) contended, for instance, that the tendency to possess, to enhance, and to express positive self-views is in large part a feature of contemporary North American culture. Diener and Diener (1995) and Kwan, Bond, and Singelis (1997) offered additional empirical support.

Compared with the self-esteem literature, very little is known about the cross-cultural validity of the IC and well-being link. According to the current findings, the gist of the classic idea—consistency predicts higher mental health—seems to be valid. However, it seems incorrect to assume that IC is a universally essential component of psychological well-being. It is vital to have a constant self-view and act accordingly in highly individualistic cultures, in which the person, more so than the situation, is expected to orchestrate his or her psychological behavior. In a sense, social context in individualist cultures is a canvas on which

the values, desires, and interests of the relatively self-sufficient self are freely expressed.

The mental approach is somewhat different in East Asian cultures, in which others are deeply involved in the experience of being. The highest goal during the constant interactions with self-defining others is the fostering of long-term respect and harmony. When everyday attention is framed in terms of harmony, each individual becomes highly vigilant to social cues and, more often than in the West, feels the need to adjust the self to the social situation (cf. Morling et al., 2002). When these contrasting cultural priorities are considered, it makes sense that the psychological benefits associated with IC emerge more clearly in the West than in the East.

The larger implication of this study is that the experience of well-being results from a collaborative project between the individual and the culture (Kitayama & Markus, 2000). Well-being is not a vague, amorphous state but rather entails specific and concrete psychological experiences. The concrete experiences that the person feels most rewarding and meaningful, as Kitayama and Markus elaborately pointed out, are perpetually shaped by cultural ideals and practices. Current findings imply that IC, even though long considered as an indispensable element of mental health, might be one of those specific experiences that is more valued in one culture than in another.

Recent cross-cultural research has made contributions by demonstrating that many supposedly Western constructs that reflect the psychological conditions of the internal self (e.g., self-esteem, self-consistency) are less predictive of well-being in highly relation-oriented cultures. One future direction is to uncover constructs that are more predictive of SWB in non-Western cultures. A promising category of variables seems to be the one that taps the psychological experiences that occur between or among selves (e.g., relationship harmony, Kwan et al., 1997; perceived norms; Suh et al., 1998; socially engaged emotions; Kitayama & Markus, 2000). In this study, for instance, the question of how one's life might be viewed by others (social appraisal) was a stronger predictor of the Koreans' SWB than was IC. Thus, various intersubjective experiences that occur in the context of self-defining relationships need more notice in upcoming research on culture and SWB (Diener & Suh, 2000).

### *Revisiting Consistency*

One key question arising from this research is why members of some cultures seem less disturbed by inconsistent experiences than do those of others. More specifically, why is the correlation between IC and negative affect significantly weaker ($p < .05$) in Korea ($-.23$) than in the United States ($-.50$)? Although more systematic future research is required, I can think of at least two possibilities, one at the level of perception, and the other at the level of attribution. The first possibility is that the Eastern mind may have a higher threshold for dissonance. Cognitive habits or implicit world views that are prevalent in East Asian cultures, such as the dialectic mode of thinking (Nisbett et al., 2001) or the principles of yin and yang (Kitayama & Markus, 1999), have more generous assumptions about inconsistencies. Chronic exposure to such ideas may desensitize the Eastern mind from perceiving inconsistencies as unnatural, disturbing, or surprising (I. Choi & Nisbett, 2000).

Another possible reason is that cultural members may make different attributions about their inconsistent behaviors. In other words, East Asians may not differ from westerners so much in how they perceive inconsistencies but more in terms of how they interpret them. The uncomfortable feeling of dissonance arises when the sense of personal responsibility for the action is high (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). Compared with the United States, however, East Asian cultures are very "tight" (Triandis, 1995). A hallmark of a tight culture is that situation-specific norms are strictly imposed and personal deviations from norms are severely criticized. Also, many verbal and behavioral exchanges that take place during social interactions tend to be highly formal, ritualized, and driven by implicitly shared social scripts (S. G. Choi, 2000). The strong presence of such external factors may allow East Asians to feel somewhat less accountable for the inconsistencies they display across social contexts. In short, another possible reason why the distress associated with inconsistency is dampened in East Asian cultures might be because the cause of the inconsistency is chronically attributed to factors outside of the self. These two scenarios offer some directions for uncovering the mechanisms responsible for the cultural difference reported in this article.

Another key question prompted by this research concerns the psychological motive underlying self-consistency. The prevailing explanations in social psychology have been highly intrapsychic and cognitive ones. According to the most influential theory on this issue, cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957), people's efforts toward consistency stem from a basic, inner cognitive need. The rewards of achieving consistency also have been described most often in terms of internal psychological reasons, such as enhanced predictability or controllability of the world view (Lecky, 1945; Swann, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). However, if the efforts to be self-consistent emerge essentially from a basic need that serves to structure mental life, it is unclear why cultural members vary so much in their quest for self-consistency (Cialdini, Wosinska, Barrett, Butner, & Gornik-Durose, 1999; Heine & Lehman, 1997). The widely accepted cognitive explanations are certainly valid; nevertheless, they seem to severely underestimate the role of social and cultural factors in explaining why people try to be self-consistent.

The current informant data raise the possibility that social rewards also play a role in stimulating self-consistent thoughts and behavior. In the United States but not in Korea, consistent individuals were more likely to glean social praise from other people. It might not be a coincidence that the overall mean level of IC was higher in the former than in the latter culture. In addition to pure cognitive needs, the finding implies that positive social reinforcements may also fuel people's desire to be (or at least to appear) self-consistent. This possibility, even though discussed at times in the self-presentation literature (Tedeschi & Rosenfeld, 1981), warrants more serious attention in understanding why people try to be consistent.

### *The Self-Consistent Personality*

From a personality standpoint, why do self-consistent individuals enjoy high SWB? In Study 1, the single most important predictor of IC was the tendency not to be overly conscious of how the inner self might be construed by others (low SEOP). The

personal thoughts and feelings of consistent individuals, compared with inconsistent individuals, seem to be less constrained by other people's approvals, criticisms, and opinions. The idea implied here, that a certain degree of transcendence from external social input is psychologically beneficial, is also supported by studies on self-esteem. Well-adjusted people, for instance, have a sense of self-worth that requires less affirmation from external sources (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001) and fluctuates less in reaction to external feedback (Butler, Hokanson, & Flynn, 1994). In short, consistent people seem to have a more confident and self-sufficient version of self-view than others, which might play a key role in enhancing their SWB. Also, this strong sense of autonomy and self-sufficiency that characterizes consistent people might partly account for why their chances of being happy are higher in individualist than in collectivist cultures.

One individual-differences variable that seems conceptually relevant to consistency but suggests opposite predictions is self-complexity (Linville, 1985). Self-complexity refers to the number of different dimensions in which people conceptualize themselves. It is argued that high self-complexity buffers the individual from the effects of negative events by compartmentalizing those effects to only one aspect of the multidimensional self. Why is it the case, then, that self-inconsistency is associated with lower SWB? One possibility is that self-complexity and self-inconsistency (or self-concept differentiation) conceptually are quite different constructs. Among others, the quantity of self-knowledge may have direct relevance with self-complexity but not with self-inconsistency. For instance, a highly self-complex person is very likely to have a rich and elaborate body of self-knowledge (less relevant with consistency level), which enables him or her to make flexible interpretations about the implication of negative experiences. Also, methodologically, the card-sorting procedure used to assess self-complexity does not yield an index of consistency that is as straightforward and direct as the one obtained from Block's (1961) measure. Thus, there could be a conceptual as well as a methodological gap between the two constructs. Also, even though the ideas proposed by self-complexity theory are rich and very interesting, empirically, they are not strongly supported (Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002).

Finally, the current findings have implications on the study of personality across cultures. A key assumption in personality research is that patterns of psychological behavior can be explained with reference to higher order traits. Much of the current cross-cultural personality research adopts this idea and focuses heavily on verifying the structural equivalence of traits. What is suggested in the current study, however, is that behaviors may not be equally predictable from higher trait constructs across cultures. In cultures in which people chronically adjust their personality across situations, the predictive power of traits may be limited. The ways traits are expressed and function in everyday life deserve as much attention as the structural questions in the study of culture and personality (Triandis & Suh, 2002).

### *Caveats and Future Directions*

One caveat is that the cultural difference in self-view consistency reported in this article has not been corroborated with behavioral data. Thus, it is unclear, for instance, whether the Koreans actually act as inconsistently as their self-ratings imply. Several reasons suggest, however, that Koreans' behavior also might be more flexible than that of westerners. For example, studies find that East Asians are more inclined than North Americans to approve inconsistent behaviors as long as these behaviors are instrumental for fostering stable, harmonious relationships (Iwao, 1988, cited in Triandis, 1989; Fu et al., 2001). Second, the malleable nature of the East Asian identity directly relates to the process of adjusting the self to situation-specific expectations. Successful adjustment requires more than cognitive change. In fact, making the correct behavioral adjustments might be even more critical than amending the self-view for the purpose of fitting in. Nevertheless, the current findings do not speak directly about cultural differences in the consistency of overt behavior.

Gender difference is an issue that deserves future scrutiny in relation to self-consistency. Many scholars find that women, compared with men, define themselves more in relational terms and are more concerned about relational issues (Josephs, Markus, & Tafarodi, 1992; Markus & Oyserman, 1989). From this angle, one might ask whether similarity exists between women and East Asians in the dimension of self-consistency (however, see Kashima et al., 1995). Mixed outcomes were found in the current research. Women had higher IC than did men in Study 1, whereas the reverse was true in Study 2. Although further speculations are discouraged by these inconsistent findings, gender difference in consistency is a topic worth revisiting in the future, using more innovative methods and sophisticated theoretical assumptions. Finally, the fact that the present data come primarily from college students should be taken into account in generalizations of the findings.

### *Conclusion*

What is psychologically good, healthy, and worth emulating is constantly redefined by the forces of time and culture. One idea that has been very influential in mainstream psychology is that optimal psychological functioning requires the person to have a consistent self-identity across the different spheres of experience. The present findings suggest that this highly individualistic prescription might be less applicable to the SWB of cultural members who are inclined to think that the self is inherently social, multiple, and changing.

## References

Abelson, R. P., Aronson, E., McGuire, W. J., Newcomb, T. M., Rosenberg, M. J., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (Eds.). (1968). *Theories of cognitive consistency: A sourcebook.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

Bachnik, J. M. (1992). Kejime: Defining a shifting self in multiple organizational modes. In N. R. Rosenberger (Ed.), *Japanese sense of self* (pp. 152–172). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Baumeister, R. F. (Ed.). (1986). *Public self and private self.* New York: Springer-Verlag.

Baumgardner, A. H. (1990). To know oneself is to like oneself: Self-certainty and self-affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58,* 1062–1072.

Bem, D. J., & Allen, A. (1974). Predicting more of the people more of the time: The search for cross-situational consistencies in behavior. *Psychological Review, 81,* 506–520.

Block, J. (1961). Ego identity, role variability, and adjustment. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 25,* 392–397.

Bond, M. H., & Hwang, K. (1986). The social psychology of Chinese

people. In M. H. Bond (Ed.), *The psychology of the Chinese people* (pp. 213–266). Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.

Briggs, S. R., Cheek, J. M., & Buss, A. H. (1980). An analysis of the self-monitoring scale. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 38,* 679–686.

Butler, A. C., Hokanson, J. E., & Flynn, H. A. (1994). A comparison of self-esteem liability and low self-esteem as vulnerability factors for depression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66,* 166–177.

Campbell, J. D. (1990). Self-esteem and the clarity of the self-concept. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 59,* 538–549.

Campbell, J. D., Trapnell, P. D., Heine, S. J., Katz, I. M., Lavallee, L. F., & Lehman, D. R. (1996). Self-concept clarity: Measurement, personality correlates, and cultural boundaries. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70,* 141–156.

Choi, I., & Nisbett, R. E. (2000). Cultural psychology of surprise: Holistic theories and recognition of contradiction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79,* 890–905.

Choi, S. G. (2000). *Hankookin shimleehak* [Korean's psychology]. Seoul, Korea: Jung-Ahng University Press.

Christopher, J. C. (1999). Situating psychological well-being: Exploring the cultural roots of its theory and research. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 77,* 141–152.

Cialdini, R. B., Wosinska, W., Barrett, D. W., Butner, J., & Gornik-Durose, M. (1999). Compliance with a request in two cultures: The differential influence of social proof and commitment/consistency on collectivists and individualists. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25,* 1242–1253.

Cohen, D., & Gunz, A. (2002). As seen by the other . . . : Perspective on the self in the memories and emotional perceptions of Easterners and Westerners. *Psychological Science, 13,* 55–59.

Colvin, C. R. (1993). Judgable people: Personality, behavior, and competing explanations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64,* 861–873.

Cooper, J., & Fazio, R. H. (1984). A new look at dissonance theory. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 17, pp. 229–266). New York: Academic Press.

Costa, P. T. Jr., & McCrae, R. R. (1992). *Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO–PI–R) and NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO–FFI) professional manual.* Odessa, FL; Psychological Assessment Resources.

Cousins, S. D. (1989). Culture and self-perception in Japan and the United States. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 56,* 124–131.

Crocker, J., & Wolfe, C. T. (2001). Contingencies of self-worth. *Psychological Review, 108,* 593–623.

Diener, E., & Diener, M. (1995). Cross-cultural correlates of life satisfaction and self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68,* 653–663.

Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Larsen, R. J., & Griffin, S. (1985). The Satisfaction With Life Scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment, 49,* 71–75.

Diener, E., Smith, H., & Fujita, F. (1995). The personality structure of affect. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 130–141.

Diener, E., & Suh, E. M. (Eds.). (2000). *Culture and subjective well-being.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Diener, E., Suh, E. M., Lucas, R., & Smith, H. (1999). Subjective well-being: Three decades of progress. *Psychological Bulletin, 125,* 276–302.

Diener, E., Suh, E., Smith, H., & Shao, L. (1995). National differences in reported subjective well-being: Why do they occur? *Social Indicators Research, 34,* 7–32.

Donahue, E. M., Robins, R. W., Roberts, B. W., & John, O. P. (1993). The divided self: Concurrent and longitudinal effects of psychological adjustment and social roles on self-concept differentiation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64,* 834–846.

Erikson, E. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis.* New York: Norton.

Fenigstein, A., Scheier, M. F., & Buss, A. H. (1975). Private and public self-consciousness: Assessment and theory. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 43,* 522–527.

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Evanston, IL: Row Peterson.

Fiske, A. P., Kitayama, S., Markus, H. R., & Nisbett, R. E. (1998). The cultural matrix of social psychology. In D. Gilbert, S. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 915–981). New York: McGraw-Hill.

Friedman, H. S., & Miller-Herringer, T. (1991). Nonverbal display of emotion in public and private: Self-monitoring, personality and expressive cues. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61,* 766–775.

Fu, G., Lee, K., Cameron, C. A., & Xu, F. (2001). Chinese and Canadian adults' categorization and evaluation of lie and truth-telling about prosocial and antisocial behaviors. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 32,* 720–727.

Gangestad, S. W., & Snyder, M. (2000). Self-monitoring: Appraisal and reappraisal. *Psychological Bulletin, 126,* 530–555.

Goldberg, L. R. (1993). The structure of phenotypic personality traits. *American Psychologist, 48,* 26–34.

Harris, M. J., & Rosenthal, R. (1986). Counselor and client personality as determinants of counselor expectancy effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50,* 362–369.

Heine, S. J., Kitayama, S., Lehman, D. R., Takata, T., Ide, E., Leung, C., & Matsumoto, H. (2001). Divergent consequences of success and failure in Japan and North America: An investigation of self-improving motivations and malleable selves. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81,* 599–615.

Heine, S. J., & Lehman, D. R. (1997). Culture, dissonance, and self-affirmation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23,* 389–400.

Heine, S. J., Lehman, D. R., Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1999). Is there a universal need for positive self-regard? *Psychological Review, 106,* 766–794.

Ho, D. F. (1993). Relational orientation in Asian social psychology. In U. Kim & J. W. Berry (Eds.), *Indigenous psychologies: Research and experience in cultural context* (pp. 240–259). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ip, G. W. M., & Bond, M. H. (1995). Culture, values, and the spontaneous self-concept. *Asian Journal of Psychology, 1,* 29–35.

Josephs, R. A., Markus, H. R., & Tafarodi, R. W. (1992). Gender and self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63,* 391–402.

Jourard, S. M. (1965). *Personal adjustment: An approach through the study of healthy personality.* New York: Macmillan.

Kanagawa, C., Cross, S. E., & Markus, H. R. (2001). "Who am I?": The cultural psychology of the conceptual self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 27,* 90–103.

Kashima, Y., Siegal, M., Tanaka, K., & Kashima, E. S. (1992). Do people believe behaviors are consistent with attitudes? Towards a cross-cultural psychology of attribution processes. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 31,* 111–124.

Kashima, Y., Yamaguchi, S., Kim, U., Choi, S., Gelfand, M. J., & Yuki, M. (1995). Culture, gender, and self: A perspective from individualism and collectivism research. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69,* 925–937.

King, A. Y. C., & Bond, M. H. (1985). The Confucian paradigm of man: A sociological view. In W. S. Tseng & D. Y. H. Wu (Eds.), *Chinese culture and mental health* (pp. 29–46). New York: Academic Press.

Kitayama, S., & Markus, H. R. (1999). Yin and yang of the Japanese self: The cultural psychology of coherence. In D. Cervone & Y. Shoda (Eds.), *The coherence of personality*: *Social cognitive bases of personality consistency, variability, and organization* (pp. 242–302). New York: Guilford Press.

Kitayama, S., & Markus, H. R. (2000). The pursuit of happiness and the realization of sympathy: Cultural patterns of self, social relations, and

well-being. In E. Diener & E. M. Suh (Eds.), *Culture and subjective well-being* (pp. 113–161). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Kwan, V. S. Y., Bond, M. H., & Singelis, T. M. (1997). Pancultural explanations for life satisfaction: Adding relationship harmony to self-esteem. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73,* 1038–1051.

Lecky, P. (1945). *Self-consistency: A theory of personality.* New York: Island.

Lillard, A. (1998). Ethnopsychologies: Cultural variations in theories of mind. *Psychological Bulletin, 123,* 3–32.

Linville, P. W. (1985). Self-complexity and affective extremity: Don't put all of your eggs in one cognitive basket. *Social Cognition, 3,* 94–120.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review, 98,* 224–253.

Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1994). A collective fear of the collective: Implications for selves and theories of selves. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20,* 568–579.

Markus, H. R., Mullally, P. R., & Kitayama, S. (1997). Selfways: Diversity in modes of cultural participation. In U. Neisser & D. Jopling (Eds.), *The conceptual self in context: Culture, experience, self-understanding* (pp. 13–60). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Markus, H. R., & Oyserman, D. (1989). Gender and thought: The role of the self-concept. In M. Crawford & M. Hamilton (Eds.), *Gender and thought* (pp. 100–127). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Maslow, A. H. (1954). *Motivation and personality.* New York: Harper & Brothers.

Miller, M. (1997). Views of Japanese selfhood: Japanese and Western perspectives. In D. Allen (Ed.), *Culture and self: Philosophical and religious perspectives, East and West* (pp. 145–162). Boulder, CO: Westview.

Mischel, W., & Peake, P. K. (1982). Beyond déjà vu in the search for cross-situational consistency. *Psychological Review, 89,* 730–755.

Moore, C. A. (1967). (Ed.). *The Chinese mind: Essentials of Chinese philosophy and culture.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Morling, B., Kitayama, S., & Miyamoto, Y. (2002). Cultural practices emphasize influence in the United States and adjustment in Japan. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 28,* 311–323.

Nisbett, R. E., Peng, K., Choi, I., & Norenzayan, A. (2001). Culture and systems of thought: Holistic versus analytic cognition. *Psychological Review, 108,* 291–310.

Peng, K., & Nisbett, R. E. (1999). Culture, dialectics, and reasoning about contradiction. *American Psychologist, 54,* 741–754.

Rafaeli-Mor, E., & Steinberg, J. (2002). Self-complexity and well-being: A review and research synthesis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 6,* 31–58.

Roberts, B. W., & Donahue, E. M. (1994). One personality, multiple selves: Integrating personality and social roles. *Journal of Personality, 62,* 199–218.

Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Rosenberger, N. R. (Ed.). (1992). *Japanese sense of self.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sheldon, K. M. (1996). The Social Awareness Inventory: Development and applications. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 22,* 620–634.

Sheldon, K. M., Ryan, R. M., Rawsthorne, L. J., & Ilardi, B. (1997). Trait self and true self: Cross-role variation in the Big-Five personality traits and its relations with psychological authenticity and subjective well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 73,* 1380–1393.

Snyder, M. (1974). Self-monitoring of expressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 30,* 526–537.

Suh, E. M. (2000). Self, the hyphen between culture and subjective well-being. In E. Diener & E. M. Suh (Eds.), *Culture and subjective well-being* (pp. 63–86). Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Suh, E. M., & Diener, E. (2002). *Self-view, social appraisal, and life satisfaction judgments.* Manuscript in preparation, University of California, Irvine.

Suh, E., Diener, E., Oishi, S., & Triandis, H. C. (1998). The shifting basis of life satisfaction judgments across cultures: Emotions versus norms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74,* 482–493.

Swann, W. B. Jr. (1983). Self-verification: Bringing social reality into harmony with the self. In J. Suls & A. G. Greenwald (Eds.), *Psychological perspectives on self* (Vol. 2, pp. 33–66).

Swann, W. B. Jr., de la Ronde, C., & Hixon, G. (1994). Authenticity and positivity strivings in marriage and courtship. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66,* 857–869.

Swann, W. B. Jr., & Read, S. J. (1981). Self-verification processes: How we sustain our self-conceptions. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 17,* 351–373.

Swann, W. B. Jr., Stein-Seroussi, A., & Giesler, R. B. (1992). Why people self-verify. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 62,* 392–401.

Tedeschi, J. T., & Rosenfeld, P. (1981). Impression management theory and the forced compliance situation. In J. T. Tedeschi (Ed.), *Impression management theory and social psychology research* (pp. 147–180). New York: Academic Press.

Triandis, H. C. (1989). Self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review, 96,* 269–289.

Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Triandis, H. C. (1999). Cross-cultural psychology. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 2,* 127–143.

Triandis, H. C., & Suh, E. M. (2002). Cultural influences on personality. *Annual Review of Psychology, 53,* 133–160.

Wiggins, J. S. (1979). A psychological taxonomy of trait-descriptive terms: The interpersonal domain. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37,* 395–412.

Received September 23, 1999
Revision received June 7, 2002
Accepted June 11, 2002 ■