

Culture and Self-Expression

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The right to freedom of expression is justified first of all as the right of an individual purely in his capacity as an individual. It derives from the widely accepted premise of Western thought that the proper end of man is the realization of his character and potentialities as a human being (Thomas Emerson, 1963).

Typing the phrase “express yourself” in the Google web search engine gives a list of 1,050,000 links. These sites range from blogs to design studios to hotels to dating sites. Typing the same phrase at Amazon.com yields a list of 467 books. Many of these books point out the benefits of self-expression (e.g., “Self-Discovery through Self-Expression (Betensky, 1973)”), and many others aim to teach people how to express themselves better (e.g., “Clothe Your Spirit: Dressing for Self-Expression (Robin, 1988)”). Self-expression is a notion that is very commonly and very positively used in contemporary popular culture in the U.S. Self-expression is a notion that is closely associated with a horde of positive concepts, such as freedom, creativity, style, courage, self-assurance, and even healing and spirituality. Thus, individuals are urged to express themselves whenever possible, and self-expression is expected to be, by and large, good and beneficial. The freedom to express one’s opinion, the Freedom of Speech, is one of the legally protected basic human rights in the U.S. This social understanding of self-expression and its psychological consequences have been supported by scientific evidence as well. Generally speaking, psychological findings support the idea that self-expression affects people in positive ways (e.g., Freud, 1920/1966; Pennebaker, 1990).

Yet, many studies in cultural psychology show that the concept of self varies greatly across different cultural contexts, and to the extent that the meaning of the self differs, how people engage in any self-actions, such as self-expression, and their psychological consequences could differ as well. The specific nature of how people express themselves and how different forms of expression affect people seem to vary greatly depending on the assumptions about the self and its relationship in a given socio-cultural context. Thus, in this chapter, we explore different cultural assumptions about self-expression and its implications for psychological processes. We define self-expression as expressing one's thoughts and feelings, and these expressions can be accomplished through words, choices or actions. In this present review, we tried to contextualize the effect of self-expression on specific psychological processes, including cognitive functioning, preference, self-esteem, and interpersonal relationships.

#### *The Role of Self-Expression in American Psychology*

Western culture has often defined the individual as paramount (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Therefore, losing this sense of individuality is thought to have negative consequences, including deindividuation, group think, mob mentality, and blind obedience (e.g., Buys, 1978). These values of individualism are rooted in Western intellectual traditions.

Rousseau, the father of Social Contract, believed that man in his purest state was free of the dregs of society (Rousseau, 1750/1997). In this cultural tradition, man was meant to reside in this most natural state. Nature embodied the strength of the individual, his freedom and integrity. He stated that society corrupted this innate goodness and freewill of individuals and oppressed their self-expression. By focusing on and being true

to the self in the face of societal pressures, individuals can come closer to the idyllic state of nature. Through self-integrity and self-reliance, individuals strive to attain happiness and freedom, and self-expression empowers individuals.

Self-expression allows people to distinguish themselves from others, to reflect their own beliefs and needs, and validate their own self-concepts. Psychology has aimed to better understand and enhance the knowledge of the self by studying its manifestations through actions. Research on choice behaviors has shown that people try to reflect and enhance an image of individuality, autonomy, and self-empowerment in their choices (Belk, 1988; Han & Shavitt, 1994). In addition, studies showed that people express their self-identities through their choices and preferences for objects and opinions (Prentice, 1987; Smith, Bruner, & White, 1956). Individuals favor possessions, attitudes, and values that embodied personal-identity (Prentice, 1987), and seek to differ from others to assert and reflect their own uniqueness (Ratner & Kahn, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Belk (1988) argued that it is the reflection of self through choices that allows one to extend his or her self to possessions. Choice, in individualist cultures, reflects the inner voice of the self where an object provides it with a body.

Because self-expression allows people to reflexively present themselves, this act can be beneficial in revealing insights and new perspectives into the self-concept of individuals. Most forms of psychotherapy have emphasized the therapeutic effects of disclosure in order to come to terms with traumatic or highly stressful events. Freud believed that only through vocal expression could one truly gain perspective into one's own psyche (Breuer & Freud, 1957). Suppression of self-expression seems to be connected to mental illness and psychopathology (Freud, 1923/1961; Pennebaker &

Beall, 1986). It has also been related to negative stress responses and to many physical problems such as coronary heart disease (Friedman & Booth-Kewly, 1987; Gross & Levenson, 1993).

In Western cultures, the dominant belief about speech posits that speaking taps into the self, and that through speech people express their inner feelings, emotions, and beliefs that make up their personal identities. Substantial evidence has shown that talking or writing about stressful events has psychological and physiological benefits. Written emotional disclosure is associated with improvements in physical health and mood (Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser, & Glaser, 1988; Petrie, Booth, & Pennebaker, 1995; Smyth, Stone, Hurewitz, & Kaell, 1999). Self-expression through music and art acts as an alternative form of catharsis and has been used in pain management and substance abuse groups as healthier outlets for inner conflicts and emotions (Adelman & Castricone, 1986; Bailey, 1986). In sum, self-expression in many forms has been widely used in the U.S. in order to manage and cope with events and feelings detrimental to the self.

### *Culture and the Definition of the Self*

In order to culturally contextualize the practices and effects of self-expression, it is important to recognize that the very notion of the self is defined differently across cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997; Triandis, 1989). For instance, in individualist cultures, including the U.S., the most commonly held view of the self is the independent self that defines a person as an entity that is unique, bounded and fundamentally separate from its social surrounding. Therefore, the core aspects of the self are those that come from within a person, such as thoughts, values, preferences, feelings, and beliefs. These internal attributes are considered to provide the

motives to guide behaviors, and used as the central explanations of people's behaviors (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005). In this cultural tradition, thoughts define a person as exemplified by the famous quote from Descartes (1637/1998), "I think, therefore I am."

There are, however, other ways of defining the self. In more collectivist cultural contexts, such as East Asia, the most commonly shared view of the self is the interdependent self. This view defines the person as a primarily relational entity that is fundamentally connected and influenced by its social surroundings. In these cultures, it is the social relationship that defines the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, 1989). Thus, the basic motives for a person's behaviors are sought externally, rather than internally. In these cultures, people assume that social factors, such as norms, roles, tradition, and a sense of social obligation, guide behaviors (Fiske et al., 1998; Kitayama & Uchida, 2005). Many cultural teachings, such as Confucian teaching often concern guidelines for how to successfully fulfill one's roles and social obligation.

These different views of the self implicate various psychological processes. For instance, people from East Asian and European American cultural contexts differ in how they make causal attributions of behaviors. Morris and Peng (1994) show that those from East Asian cultures tend to make more situational attributions whereas European Americans tend to make more internal attributions. Cross-cultural studies also show that East Asians are less likely to infer corresponding internal attributes from written words than European Americans (Choi & Nisbett, 1999; Miyamoto & Kitayama, 2002), because East Asians are more likely to recognize the role of situational influence on others' behaviors. Moreover, well-being in European American cultural contexts is defined in

terms of internal beliefs about oneself (hence subjective well-being), and is correlated with individualism (Diener & Diener, 1995). In a more collectivist culture where normative and objective judgment of one's happiness matters more, one's beliefs about one's own happiness were found to be less relevant (Diener & Diener, 1995; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). These different cultural views on what constitute the core of the self influence how people consider and practice the act of self-expression in a given cultural context.

### *Culture and the Meaning and Practice of Self-Expression*

In individualist and collectivist cultural contexts, the perceived importance of self-expression differs. Emphasis on expression is one of integral aspects of individualism (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). People in individualist cultural contexts are urged to self-express as it involves asserting "a unique core of feeling and intuition (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 334)" that makes a person individual. This emphasis on self-expression is represented in many aspects of individualist cultural practices and institutions as noted previously. Yet, this cultural emphasis is not strongly shared in other cultural contexts in which feelings and thoughts are not considered to be the core of a person. In more collectivist cultures, the practice of expressing one's thoughts and feelings is either discouraged or simply considered trivial and inconsequential, depending on specific situations. In this paper, we discuss how various acts of expressions take place in different cultural contexts and how those implicate psychological processes by focusing on two distinct forms of self-expression, choice and speech.

*Choice and Self-Expression*

One way in which expression influences psychological processes is by affecting choice making. Choice making is an important exercise because of its function as an expression of the self in American culture (Kim & Drolet, 2003; Kim & Sherman, 2005; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Tafarodi, Mehranvar, Panton, & Milne, 2002). Choice is a form of self-expression, as people can make their preferences and values overt and observable through choice. Thus, American culture places strong emphasis on choice, and people value their freedom to choose and care about what they choose.

This consideration of choice as a self-expression in this cultural context leads people to make particular kinds of choices and use particular choice making strategies in order to make sure that those choices announce something about themselves. People in individualist cultures generally seek and value the expression of individuality. For instance, those from European American cultural contexts tend to express their uniqueness by choosing objects that represent uniqueness (Kim & Markus, 1999), and tend to respond more positively to advertisements that emphasize uniqueness and individuality of objects (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kim & Markus, 1999). In contrast, people in collectivist cultures often value the notion of standing out less and do not try to highlight unique aspects of themselves. Thus, they tend to avoid choosing objects that represents uniqueness, and gravitate toward objects that represent sameness (Kim & Markus, 1999). They are also likely to respond positively to advertisements that emphasize group harmony, sharedness, and conformity (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kim & Markus, 1999).

The importance of expressing uniqueness influences not only *what* people choose but also *how* people choose. Previous research conducted primarily with Americans showed that people often seek variety in their choice making, and this variety-seeking tendency is related to their desire to appear unique (Ariely & Levav, 2000; Drolet, 2002). Moreover, further research shows that the variety-seeking tendency is in part due to the American cultural assumption about choice as an act of expression of internal attributes of a person. Thus, the same phenomenon does not appear in a cultural context in which the self is defined in different and less internal ways (Kim & Drolet, 2003). One study compared Americans and Koreans from collectivist cultural traditions where choice is not assumed to be an act of self-expression. The results showed that Americans displayed strong variety seeking in the use of choice rules, whereas Koreans did not show such a tendency. A second study was conducted to explore the process in which the cultural difference arises using an experimental method. It examined the effect of primes and showed that American participants who were primed with ads that used individualist themes sought variety, but not participants who were primed with ads that used collectivist themes. A third study tested the idea that choice is assumed to be an act of self-expression and that the assumption underlies the variety seeking tendency by experimentally manipulating the level of motivation to self-express. It showed that when participants had a chance to write down their choices prior to the target choices, and hence had reduced motivation to self-express, they sought variety less than participants who did not have a chance to write down their choices. Together, these studies support the idea that a desire to express individuality leads people to seek changes in their choices

and that the existence and strength of the desire depends on cultural assumptions about choice.

There are also cultural differences in how the act of choosing implicates psychological processes. Studies using the free-choice dissonance research paradigm show the “spreading alternatives effect” among participants from the U.S. That is, after making a choice between two objects, people tend to increase liking for the chosen object, and decrease liking for the rejected object, compared to their liking for the same objects prior to the choice making (Brehm, 1956; Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993). However, more recent cultural psychological studies have shown that among people from Asian cultural contexts, the same act of choice making does not seem to cause the experience of dissonance, and consequently do not alter their subsequent liking for a chosen option (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne, et al., in press; Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004).

Moreover, even among European Americans, college-educated participants who care more about expressive aspects of individualism like their chosen object more than unchosen object whereas choice does not affect preferences of less educated participants who care more about self-reliance aspect of individualism than self-expression (Snibbe & Markus, 2005). That is, those from cultural contexts with greater emphasis on self-expression act as though they become more invested in their chosen object once they express their liking through choice, whereas those from cultural contexts without such emphasis were not affected by their choice. In this research paradigm, what is expressed through choice is one’s preference. For those from cultural contexts where people place emphasis on their thoughts and feelings, expressing the feeling of liking implicates the

core aspect of themselves, and therefore puts themselves in a potentially vulnerable position, and motivates them to justify their choice. In contrast, for those from cultural contexts where people do not emphasize internal attributes, what is expressed through choice does not carry much cultural importance, and therefore, does not stir up the same level of motivation to justify their choice.

Further research aimed to address the role of expression more directly by experimentally separating expressive choices and non-expressive choices (Kim & Sherman, 2005). In these studies, East Asian American and European American participants were asked to make a choice among pens, and half of them were randomly assigned to indicate their choice by writing down the name of their chosen pen and the other half were instructed to make a choice but keep their choice only in their mind. Then, the experimenter ignored the choice of participants, and offered an alternative pen that was not chosen by participants themselves, and participants were asked to evaluate the unchosen pen. The results show that this manipulation of expression had a significant impact on subsequent preference of European Americans as they liked the unchosen pen *less* after they expressed their choice than after they did not express their choice. In contrast, whether a participant expressed the choice or not did not have a significant impact on East Asian Americans. Moreover, a subsequent study showed that how much a person is impacted by expression of choice is predicted by what the person views as the core aspect of the self. That is, those who think that thoughts and feelings are the most important component of the self tend to justify their choices more. These findings suggest that self-expression, that is the expression of internal attributes through choice, leads people from individualist cultural contexts to feel more invested in the choice as it

implicates themselves, whereas the same act does not have as much psychological significance to those from collectivist cultural contexts.

As much as the importance of choice, a form of self-expression, differs across cultures, being denied one's freedom to choose has different psychological consequences as well. Having one's choice usurped even by those who are close to oneself is demotivating for European Americans, whereas choice made by a close other is motivating for East Asian Americans (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Taken together, these reviewed studies on cultural differences in practices and the effect of choice show that perhaps the reason for the importance of choice in the U.S. is its self-expressive function, and that freedom of choice is essentially freedom of self-expression.

#### *Speech and Self-Expression*

Speech is perhaps an even more representative form of self-expression than choice, and consequently, speech holds particular importance in the Western cultural context as a primary means to express one's internal attributes, as "speaking one's mind" is perhaps the most effective way to express one's thoughts (Kim & Markus, 2002; Kim & Sherman, 2005). Through speech, individuals in these cultural contexts make their thoughts and feelings known to others, and in so doing, they let others know who they are. Along with the freedom of choice, the freedom of speech symbolizes one's ultimate freedom to be oneself. Thus, speech enjoys a special privilege in these cultural contexts, and the freedom of speech is one of the most important rights of individuals in the U.S.

In contrast, speech is not as valued in the East Asian cultural context. Given the relatively weak connections between what is spoken and the core aspects of the self, the cultural emphasis on talking in the U.S. cultural context is not shared. Silence is often

valued above talking and talking is practiced with caution because the potential negative social implications of talking are more salient in these cultures (Kim & Markus, 2002; Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996).

Further, because of this difference in the importance of speech, speech is often assumed to be a reflection of true thoughts, feelings, and intentions in the U.S., whereas it is not to be taken at face value in East Asian cultural contexts. Generally speaking, studies show that what is directly conveyed through speech (i.e., the content of speech) matters more for European Americans compared to East Asians who tend to focus more on indirect aspects of speech, such as the context, or non-verbal cues (Holtgraves, 1997; Kim & Markus, 2002). Using a method that resembles the Stroop task in which emotion words are presented in a vocal tone that is contradictory to the meaning of the words (e.g., hearing “enjoy” in an angry tone), participants from the U.S. had greater difficulty in ignoring the verbal content than participants from Japan and Philippines (Ishii, Reyes, & Kitayama, 2003; Kitayama & Ishii, 2002). Similarly, European Americans tend to use a direct communication style that relies less on contextual cues to a greater extent than East Asians (Hall, 1976; Holtgraves, 1997). Holtgraves’ research (1997) shows that European Americans tend to use words and phrases in their conversation to reflect their intentions more directly and literally than East Asians, for whom intentions are indirectly implied and must be read “between the lines.”

How people from different cultural contexts infer meanings from speech also differs. Studies show that those from an individualist cultural context assume a closer connection between a person’s thoughts and speech, compared to those from a collectivist cultural context. Classic studies in social psychology show that those from the

U.S. cultural context tend to show robust “correspondence bias (Jones, 1979)” in which people infer that corresponding thoughts exist when people talk about their ideas, even when the situational constraints that lead to making such speech are clear. More recent studies looking at cultural differences in the phenomenon show that East Asians are less likely to assume corresponding attitudes based on spoken words than European Americans (Choi & Nisbett, 1998; Miyamoto & Kitayama, 2002).

The cultural difference is found not only in the meaning of speech, but also in the actual effect of speech on various psychological functioning. Research on cultural influences on the effect of verbalization on cognitive functioning shows that people differ in how they are affected by verbalizing their thoughts as a function of cultural background. A series of studies (Kim, 2002) examined the effect of verbalization (i.e., thinking-aloud) on thinking (i.e., cognitive problem solving). In these studies, East Asian American and European American participants were randomly assigned to either verbalize their thoughts or stay silent while they were working on a cognitive problem set. The performance (i.e., the number of items answered correctly) in the verbalization condition or the silent condition was compared, and the results showed that verbalization of the problem solving process impaired the performance on a reasoning test for East Asian Americans, whereas verbalization did not affect the performance of European Americans (Figure 1).

Cultural differences in the effect of talking appear to be due to the difference in the degree to which East Asian Americans and European Americans rely on language in their thinking (Kim, 2002). To understand the underlying mechanism, two studies were conducted. One study was a self-report study in which participants were asked about the

extent to which they rely on language in their thinking, and the other study was an experimental study utilizing an articulatory suppression task (e.g., repeating the alphabet while working on the problem solving task) that interferes more with verbal thinking than non-verbal thinking. Results from both studies supported this hypothesis. European Americans seem to rely on language in their thinking more than East Asian Americans do. Therefore, verbalization of thinking is perhaps a more complicated task for East Asian Americans, who have to convert their non-verbal thoughts to words, than for European Americans, who merely need to vocalize their internal speech. Thus, talking damages East Asian Americans' performance on the reasoning test, but not European Americans' performance.

Another set of studies (Kim, 2005a) examined the interaction between culture and the specific nature of cognitive task on the effect of speech on problem solving. In these studies, the level of difficulty of a cognitive task was manipulated in order to examine the relative amount of cognitive resource required by verbalization of thoughts. The studies show that the cultural difference between East Asians/ East Asian Americans and European Americans is more pronounced when the task is difficult (i.e., when the task requires more cognitive resources) than when the task is easy. Moreover, this cultural difference in the level of cognitive resource seems to lead to a cultural difference in how psychologically taxing verbalization is between East Asian Americans and European Americans. Measuring the level of the stress hormone, cortisol, in response to verbalization of thought processes, a study (Kim, 2005b) shows that East Asian Americans show neuroendocrine responses of a more stressed person, compared to European Americans.

Beyond the effect of speech on cognitive processes and biological responses, the self-expression through speech also has implications for more social processes.

A study (Kim, 2005c) examined the importance of the expressive aspect of self-affirmative activities utilizing the methods and theory of self-affirmation research (Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988). This study (Kim, 2005c) examined the effect of expression (i.e., verbal reading) or silent reflection (i.e., silent thinking) of people's personally important values on the extent to which they were self-serving in their social judgments.

Consistent with the American cultural emphasis on self-expression, for European Americans, talking about personal values makes them more affirmed (i.e., less self-serving; Dunning, Leuenberger, & Sherman, 1995), but merely thinking about one's values without expressing them actually makes them less affirmed than being in the control condition. In contrast, for East Asian Americans from a cultural context in which people are encouraged to be cautious about talking, having to talk about one's values seemed to threaten their sense of self as it actually made them more self-serving, whereas merely reflecting on their values without talking did not (Figure 2). Self-expression affirms the European Americans perhaps because expressing their important values clarifies who they are, whereas the same act threatens East Asian Americans probably because it makes them feel concerned about the interpersonal and social implications of such acts.

One of the implications of this finding is that the difference in cultural meanings of speech might lead to differences in how people from different cultures view talking about one's thoughts in interpersonal settings. That is, talking about oneself can be seen

as a form of self-expression for those who are from cultural contexts where people generally focus on the self, whereas the same act can be seen as a fundamentally social act with full social and interpersonal consequences for those from cultural contexts where people more often focus on their social groups.

### *Culture and Interpersonal Implications of Self-Expression*

If the motivation for and effect of self-expression differs across cultures, how does that affect the patterns of relationships and communication with others? Research about self-disclosure and social support seeking demonstrates the interpersonal implications of self-expression and how these are affected by culture.

Talking about oneself with others, the act that is an essential element in self-disclosure and social support seeking, is fundamentally a social act that has various relationship consequences. Whereas most people probably would not dispute that such self-disclosure and social support seeking implicate relationships, the nature of these impacts and the salience of this concern is to people seem to differ across cultures. That is, for those from more individualist cultures, people often express their thoughts and feelings as well as aspects of their personal lives with the goal of letting others know who they are. Thus, opening up and disclosing personal information means one's motivation to enhance interpersonal closeness in individualistic cultures (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988). In contrast, for those from more collectivist cultures, talking about one's feelings and thoughts is more often seen as irrelevant, inappropriate, and disagreeable (Kim & Markus, 2002) as it can potentially violate conversational norms, or create disagreements with others. Thus, people in collectivist cultures tend to develop the habit of paying closer attention to cues from social contexts when disclosing self-relevant

information and of using more implicit forms of communication, such as non-verbal cues (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

It is not clear whether the amount of self-disclosure differs between people from individualist and collectivist cultures because studies show inconsistent findings, depending on the specific methodology and cultures of participants (e.g., Ting-Toomey, 1991; Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989). However, it seems clear that there is a difference in how people convey their thoughts and feelings. A study on culture and intimacy reveals that people from individualist cultures exercise the “voice approach (Ting-Toomey, 1991, p. 34)” more often in intimate interpersonal relationships than people from collectivist cultures who employ less overt expressions of intimacy. In other forms of relationships, people from individualist cultures more frequently use direct self-disclosure whereas people from collectivist cultures use more indirect self-disclosure (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Moreover, the amount and content of self-disclosure varies more in collectivist cultures depending on the context. Wheeler et al. (1989) found that Hong Kong Chinese respondents disclosed more personal information than European Americans when they were talking to close members of their in-group. However, the content of disclosure depended on the nature of the topic. Hong Kong Chinese respondents disclosed less when the topic could be a burden to the listener and when the need for face-maintenance was great (Ting-Toomey & Cocroft, 1994; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998).

Ting-Toomey (1988) proposed that face-negotiation was essential in communication and there are considerable cultural differences in how it is done. Face refers to the claim or demand for respect and the interaction between the self and a

member of another party in threat or assistance. In individualist cultures where the goal of communication is perceived as an expression and projection of the self and its independent ideals, people use the face strategy of protecting or enhancing self-image. On the other hand, in collectivist cultures, where the goal of communication is perceived more as the reinforcement and fortification of social bonds, people use the face strategy of mutual- or other-face maintenance.

When an individual encounters a problem that involves the support or aid from others, how do they use communication in order to draw on social resources? Social support is defined as information from others that one is loved and cared for, esteemed and valued, and part of a network of communication and mutual obligations. Social support may come from a spouse or companion, relatives, friends, co-workers, and community ties, such as belonging to a church or club. Social support has long been known to mute the experience of stress, reduce the severity of illness, and speed recovery from health disorders when they do occur (Seeman, 1996; Taylor, in press).

Social support seeking most often involves explicit expression of the personal distress from a support seeker, and research on culture and expression suggests that there are cultural differences in how people exercise and are affected by such an expression. Studies have shown that European Americans are more likely to ask and receive social support than Asians and Asian Americans to cope with stressful events (Shin, 2002; Taylor et al., 2004). A series of studies (Taylor, et al., 2004) showed that, compared to European Americans, Asians and Asian Americans are *less* likely to seek social support as a way to cope with stress. Asian and Asian Americans' reluctance seems to originate from a general concern for social consequences of expressing their feelings and problems

to others, such as losing face, disrupting harmony, and worrying and burdening others.

Subsequent studies (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2005) specifically address the effect of priming goals (either self goals or the goals of an ingroup or outgroup) on the willingness to seek social support and the eventual consequence of social support seeking. After being primed to think about their personal goals, or the goals of an outgroup goals, Asian American participants were more willing to seek social support than after being primed with in-group goals or without any priming. In contrast, European Americans' responses were impervious to goal priming. Moreover, social support seeking in dealing with stressors was perceived to be less helpful and even harmful for Asian Americans, especially after the in-group goals priming, compared to European Americans. In sum, these results show that social support seeking is a relational transaction is greatly influenced by the specific nature of relationship for Asian Americans, whereas for European Americans, it is more of an individual act.

Expression of personal needs through direct communication facilitates utilization of social resources to achieve personal goals in individualistic cultures but could challenge social bonds in collectivist cultures. Thus, type of communicative expression depends upon the cultural weights given to personal goals and social harmony (Markus et al., 1997). Interpersonal communication accentuates and defines social networks and intimate relationships, and the way in which individuals communicate with each other largely affects how they negotiate these social relations. By understanding cultural variation, we may better understand the nuances of communication and how people a balance between self-expression and social harmony.

*Rethinking Self-Expression*

The goal of this review goes beyond demonstrating cultural differences. We aim to contextualize the meaning and practices of self-expression to understand why people use or do not use various forms of self-expression, and why people are affected by self-expression in the way they are. We also aim to study the psychological effect of self-expression in a culturally more inclusive manner.

The need to belong, be accepted and be valued by one's relevant social groups is considered to be one of the most basic human needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). In order to achieve such a goal, people often strive to be seen as a good member of their social group, although what constitutes "being a good member" might differ in different cultures (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). Clearly, how one is projected to and viewed by others (and by oneself as well) bears psychological importance, and individuals should be motivated to communicate who they are. Thus, communicating oneself and others' recognition of the self has impacts on psychological well-being as well as the sense of self-integrity, and such a motive probably matters in many cultures. However, psychological investigation has mostly focused on this motive from an individualistic perspective. The motive of self-communication in general psychology assumes the self to be an independent agency in which a person is encouraged to take control and influence one's environment (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002). That is, the act of "expression" implies that it is a task for oneself to make the self recognizable. Yet, for those who have a more collectivistic perspective on the self, self may be conveyed differently in order to fulfill the same motive. It is possible that communication of social

status, roles and relationships has the same positive effect on those from collectivist cultures (some initial evidence is shown in Hoshino-Browne et al., in press). Given that, what is important (and more beneficial than individual expression) for those from collectivist cultures might be recognition from others. We are not merely saying that self-communication is not desired in Eastern cultures, but through our review of cultural disparities in the concept of self (individual and collective), this chapter serves to highlight how these differences may affect how people communicate who they are. Therefore, although we focused on cultural differences in this chapter, the general motive to have oneself socially recognizable may be universally shared. Consequently, much research is needed to understand the divergent forms of self-communication practiced in different cultural contexts.

This review also highlights the importance of sociality in self processes. We have suggested that self “expression” in more collectivist cultures hinges on social recognition and self definition through others. It seems to be the case that in more individualist cultures, self-expression generally has a positive psychological impact because of its socializing function. “Publicizing” the self in any form makes the self recognizable and observable to people including the self, and this function of expression and its most often positive effect shows the importance of the social in psychological processes of individuals. The cultural findings in our review underscore the importance of social recognition of the self, and acknowledge that “others” or society matter as recognizing agents as well as constituents of the self whether independent or interdependent. Self-expression reflects the desire for individuals to negotiate the self in a social world. The

promise of cultural psychology lies in understanding the complexity of this negotiation and the values and beliefs that shape it.

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Figure 1. Mean number correct as a function of talking and culture

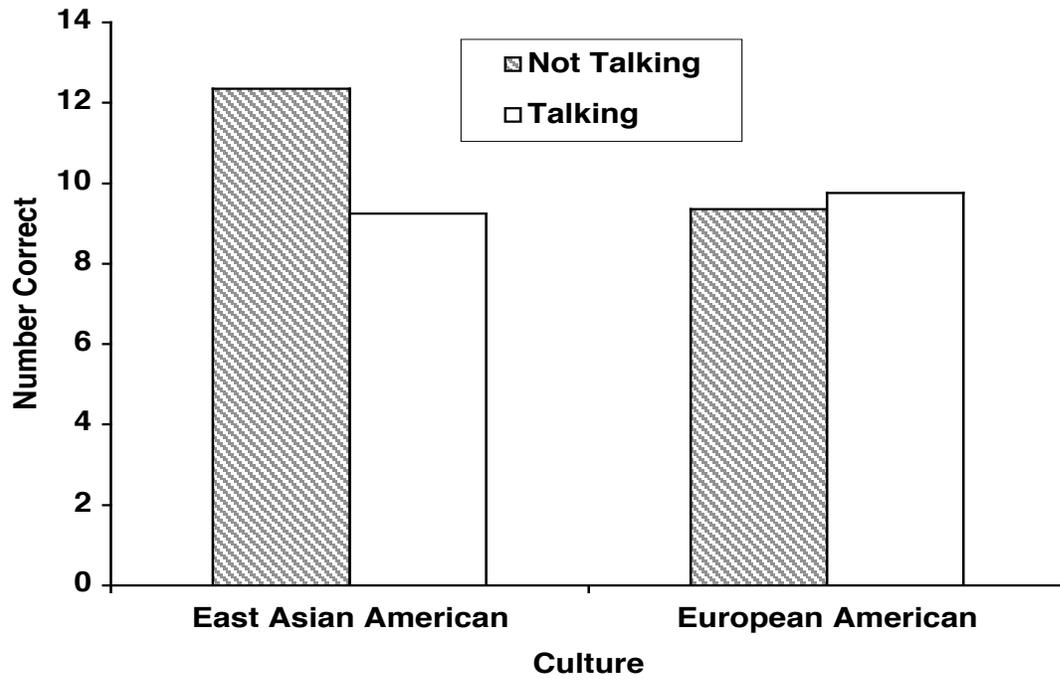


Figure 2. Mean (and SE) self-serving judgment as a function of culture and affirmation status.

