

# Situation-Sensitivity and Self-Esteem in Japan and America

By R.A. Brown

## Abstract

The present study explored the possibility that Japanese self-esteem is situation-sensitive to a greater degree than is that of Americans, and that Japanese therefore have greater difficulties assessing themselves globally. Ninety-eight Japanese and 101 American college students completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) in two versions, one with a “depends on the situation” response option, the other without it, in addition to “agree,” “disagree,” and “unsure.” The Japanese students described their self-esteem as situation-sensitive to a greater degree than did the Americans students. They were also significantly more unsure and more inclined to endorse negative RSES items.

Although recent reviews (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003; Krueger, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2008; but see Swann, Chang-Schneider, & Mc-Clarty, 2007; 2008) for contrasting views) have indicated that higher self-esteem (SE) is not reliably associated with the positive behaviors promised by advocates and desired by public policy makers (Kahne, 1996), it is nevertheless seldom questioned that liking, respecting, approving of, and being content with oneself (Blascovich & Tomaka, 1991) is “one of the most pervasive motives in human behavior” (Zhang & Baumeister, 2006). Thousands of studies have been conducted using SE as a dependent or independent measure (Baumeister, et al). Few, if any, have failed to find high SE in North Americans. Problematically, from the earliest studies of Japanese, few if any studies have not found moderate SE among Japanese participants (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002; Heine, 2001-a, 2001-b, 2003, 2004, 2005-a, 2005-b; Triandis & Suh, 2000). This would indicate that high SE is not in fact a universal need, unless it can be shown that Japanese SE scores systematically misrepresent Japanese self-attitudes of the sort that are assessed by the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) and similar instruments.

Findings of moderate Japanese SE derive from a variety of sources, including content analyses of “spontaneous” self-descriptions (Bond & Cheung, 1983; Cousins, 1989; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2002; Ross, Heine, Wilson, & Sugimori, 2005), measures of actual-self versus ideal-self discrepancies (Endo, 1992a; Heine & Lehman, 1997), and by a variety of self-aggrandizement measures, often combined with more explicit SE tests (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002; Heine & Lehman, 1997; Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Ito, 1999; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). In possibly the first study of Japanese SE, Mahler (1976) used the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and found lower Japanese SE scores compared to his American comparison group. Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999) and Campbell, Trapnell, Heine, Katz, Lavalee, & Lehman, (1996), cite Mahler’s results as providing evidence for low Japanese SE.

Most results however emanate from the RSES, which in Japan (Hori, 2003) as in America (Baumeister et

al (2003) is the most commonly used device for the assessment of SE. However, the actual number of studies that have reported the psychometric properties of the Japanese RSES has been rather small in relation to broadness of the generalizations based on them. Such studies include Endo (1992-a), Endo (1992-b) Endo (1992-c), Feather & McKee (1993), Campbell et al (1996), Heine and Lehman (1997), Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Noraskkunit, (1997); Kobayashi and Brown (2003), Kurman, Tanaka, and Elkoshi (2003), Ogawa, Gudykunst, and Nishida (2004), and Yamamoto, Matsui, and Yamanari (1982). Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999) summarized the available data up to 1999. The studies cited above investigated the relations between SE and assorted other conditions of interest, but all converged on the conclusion that the RSES scores of Japanese participants taken as a group (1) are lower than North American SE scores, and (2) seldom, or never, deviate from the middle of the response scale when aggregated over the ten RSES items.

Implicit association tests (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Kitayama & Uchida, 2003; Kobayashi & Greenwald, 2003; Yamaguchi, Greenwald, Banaji, Murakami, Chen, Shiomura, et al., 2007) have tentatively indicated that Japanese SE is *not* lower than North American SE. It has been suggested that implicit and explicit attitudes are processed by different cognitive systems (DeCoster, Banner, Smith, & Semin, 2006) and are distinct but related orientations toward the evaluation target and therefore may sometimes conflict (Briñol, Petty, & Wheeler, 2006). Because explicit scores are by definition public in some degree (Baumeister et al., 1989), self-presentational considerations are also probably implicated. Participants may in other words want to depict themselves as more self-assured, or as more diffident, than they actually feel. As Baumeister et al., speculated, explicit SE scales such as the RSES may be assessing self-presentational orientation as much as or more than intrapsychic cognitions and affect.

Previous explicit studies have generally assumed either that Japanese are falsely denying their positive self-feelings (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002, among others), or that they are veridically reporting critical self-views (Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001). Complicating the matter is the fact that critical self-views may also be a form of modesty, or self-enhancement, or both (if it is socially desirable to be self-critical, then one can self-enhance by claiming to be worse than one actually is, or than other people are). Indeed, modesty and self-criticalness appear to be largely variant manifestations of a common socio-cultural impulse, namely the desire to avoid social disapprobation (Brown, in press-a). No doubt both modesty and self-criticalness play roles in explicit self-descriptions, both sides of this debate having been recently reviewed in an extensive series of exchanges between proponents of the respective points of view (Heine, 2005-b; Heine, & Hamamura, 2007; Heine, Kitayama, & Hamamura, 2007; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005, 2007).

### *Measurement Issues*

The Japanese propensity for using the middle of rating scales has been detected in numerous other studies, including Brown (2006-a, 2006-b), Chen, Lee, and Stevenson (1995), Lalwani, Shavitt, & Johnson (2006), Mahler (1976), Reid (1990) and Schmitt and Allik (2005). As noted by Nunnally (1978, p. 596) and Paulhus (1991, p. 49), among others (cited by Baumeister et al., 1989, p. 556), this may represent a response style, or genuine attitudes, or both. One method for controlling for extreme responding is to ignore the extreme responses (Hui & Triandis, 1989), and a similar approach can be taken with neutral or moderate responding. Chen, Lee, and Stevenson controlled for extreme responding by transforming 7-point scales into 3-point scales (agree, neutral, and disagree), and non-committal responding by further transforming the scales into 2-point

scales (agree, disagree, omitting responses to the neutral point) and observed that the resulting data were “equivalent to what would have been obtained if the midpoint were actually omitted during the data collection,” citing Schuman & Presser, 1981, a point earlier noted by Nunnally (1978). Chen et al found that the magnitude of the cross-cultural differences depended on the number of points in the rating scale used, but the pattern of differences did not (p. 174). Essentially the same approach has been adopted in the present research, with the difference that the transformation has been effected prior to administration. Obviously, information (about attitudinal intensity) is thereby lost (Paulhus, 1991) but in the present case the cross-cultural comparability of that information is unknown and it seems judicious to dispense with it. It is possible that participants might self-efface or self-enhance by reporting self-views the opposite of how they genuinely see and feel about themselves. For example, a Japanese individual could self-enhance by claiming low SE if she believes that low SE is an admired trait among the people whose opinions matter to her. At some point we must take participants at their word, after, of course, disconfirming the hypothesis that they are prevaricating and other sources of bias (Nederhof, 1985). As DeCoster et al (2006, p. 6) say, “while there is always the possibility that the response will actually answer the question you asked, you will typically have to take these and other potential biases into account when interpreting what people say.”

#### *Purpose of the Present Research*

The purpose of the present study was to reexamine the interpretation of moderate RSES scores as indicating genuinely moderate SE. Building on the familiar notion that Japanese selves are experienced as inextricably embedded in social contexts (Cousins, 1989; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003; Rosenberger, 1989), while SE is generally conceptualized as global and context-free, it is hypothesized that moderate Japanese RSES scores may reflect participants’ awareness of the situation-sensitivity<sup>1</sup> of their self-cognitions and feelings, rather than a deficiency of global positive self-regard. Note that situation-sensitivity shares some features with a number of related constructs, including self-ambivalence (Riketta & Ziegler, 2006), naïve dialecticalism (Choi & Choi, 2002; Spencer-Rogers, Peng, Wang, & Hou, 2004), self-concept pluralism (Campbell, Assanand, & Paula, 2003; McReynolds, Altrocchi, & House, 2000), self-concept differentiation (Donahue, Robins, Roberts, & John, 1993), contingent self-esteem (Crocker, Luhtanen, & Bouvrette, 2003), fragile self-esteem (Kernis, 2003, 2005), and self-concept unclarity (Campbell, 1990) which warrant further investigation. Of particular interest is Paulhus and Martin’s (1988) concept of situationality (regrettably hitherto neglected, according to Kernis (2003, p. 17), which is a measure of how much the expression of one’s attributes depends on particular situations. They note (as does Goldberg, 1981, whom they cite) that high situationality is associated with low SE. The present research extends this line of inquiry into the area of self-concept evaluation. It is accordingly worth investigating whether Japanese self-evaluative situation-sensitivity is also associated with low SE. Situation-sensitive SE merits being directly assessed because if SE is situation-sensitive, it undoubtedly hinges on the daily life experiences of the participants (generally 19 year old college students). If the situations participants encounter are variable in self-relevance and emotional impact, they are likely to select appropriately labeled response options—if available. The fact that Japanese college students’ SE tends to be overwhelmingly moderate on average may simply reflect the situational realities of student existence in Japan.

## Main Study

If the SE of American participants is as situation-sensitive as Japanese participants', then situation-sensitivity cannot account for differences in Japanese and American SE scores. The primary hypothesis to be tested was that Japanese participants would be more situation-sensitive than their American counterparts in their self-assessments with respect to the RSES.

## Method

### Participants

Participants were 98 Japanese (61 male, 36 female, one unspecified, average age 19.1,  $SD = 0.78$ ) and 101 American (19 male, 82 female, average age 20.2,  $SD = 2.2$ ) university students. The males and female participants from each group did not differ significantly in age. The American participants were significantly older,  $t(192) = 4.61$ ,  $p < .0001$ , primarily due to the inclusion of two females aged 30 and 32, but otherwise the samples were rather similar in age. The Japanese participants attended a private university in the Yokohama area. The American participants attended a state university in New York State, USA. Questionnaires were filled out in large classes, voluntarily, and without compensation. Participants were asked for their cooperation in a study of "personal orientation." No deception or manipulation was involved.

### Instrument

Participants filled out the RSES, the standard demographic questions (sex, age, ethnic background, and nationality) and some other items germane to related research. Sample items include "I feel that I have a number of good qualities," "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself" and "I wish I could have more respect for myself" (reverse scored). Japanese participants completed the Hoshino (1970) translation of the RSES. Following Paulhus (1991, p. 49) and the practice of Chen, Lee, and Stevenson (1995), a 3-point response format was adopted. Responses were "agree" (Japanese *sou omou*) scored as 3, "disagree" (Japanese *sou omowanai*), scored as 1, and "unsure" (Japanese *wakaranai*),<sup>2</sup> scored as 2. A fourth option was also provided, "depends on the case or time" (Japanese *baai ni yotte, toki ni yotte*), which was not scored. After completing the ten items, participants were instructed to imagine that the "depends" options had not been available and to decide which of the remaining three options most nearly represented their view and to enter that option in a labeled column to the right of the original responses. Only previous *depends* responses were to be revised in this way. Global SE was calculated by summing the responses to the ten items after reversing the negatively phrased items. Total scores could range from 0-30 (zero representing *depends* responses). Situation-dependence and uncertainty were calculated by summing the number of times participants selected the "*depends*" and "*unsure*" responses, respectively. Positive (POS) SE was the total number of "agree" responses to the positive items and "disagree" responses to the negative items. Negative (NEG) SE was the total number of "agree" responses to the negative items and "disagree" responses to the positive items. Because there were ten items, scores could range from 0 to 10. Independent-sample  $t$  tests were conducted to test whether the two groups differed in their propensities for using the four response options. Of particular interest was the inclination of participants who had initially selected the "*depends*" response. Their subsequent responses were calculated as above.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the Japanese participants used the *depends* and *unsure* options significantly more often than the American participants did. Both groups used the *depends* option significantly more often than the *unsure* option (paired-sample *t* tests,  $t(97) = 3.52, p < .001$ , and  $t(100) = 10.01, p < .0001$  respectively.) The Americans demonstrated a greater preference for *depends* over *unsure*, compared to the Japanese,  $d = 0.72, r = .34$ , a small effect size (Cohen 1988, 1992). This indicates that the Americans were seldom *unsure* about their self-attitudes. The Japanese participants actually rejected the SE items more often than they accepted them, the opposite pattern for the Americans. The American SE scores were significantly higher than the Japanese scores ( $p < .0001$ ), with substantial effect sizes, as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2. The mean scores of the male and female participants did not differ on any of the relevant measures at the Bonferroni adjusted level of  $p < .01$ . The SE of the Japanese participants was low, as seen by the fact that they endorsed significantly more NEG than POS SE items,  $t(97) = 3.04, p < .01$ . The SE of the American participants was high, as seen by the fact that they endorsed significantly more POS than NEG SE items,  $t(100) = 24.04, p < .0001$ . The largest of the four measures for the Americans was POS SE. For the Japanese, it was NEG SE.

Table 1. Responses to RSES items (with *depends* option).

	Japanese		Americans		<i>d</i>	<i>r</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
RSE	13.55	(5.22)	22.37	(5.72) ****	1.62	0.63
Depends	2.66	(2.12)	2.06	(1.71) *	0.31	0.15
Unsure	1.49	(1.75)	0.21	(0.53) ****	0.96	0.43
POS SE	2.36	(2.02)	7.10	(2.11) ****	2.29	0.75
NEG SE	3.49	(2.20)	0.62	(0.85) ****	1.72	0.65

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*\*  $p < .0001$ . *d* = Cohen's *d*, *r* = effect size.

When the *depends* option was assumed to be unavailable, participants selected the available response categories in the same proportions that they had when it was an option (Table 2). Only one of the chi-square values was significant at  $p < .05$ . The American participants tended to endorse the statement “I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others” more when they were denied the opportunity to be indecisive about it. In all other cases, the pattern of responding was maintained with or without the *depends* option. The redistribution of responses for each item is shown in the appendix.

Table 2. Responses to RSES items (without *depends* option).

	Japanese		Americans		<i>d</i>	<i>r</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
RSE	19.06	(4.16)	27.00	(2.95) ****	2.20	0.74
Unsure	2.22	(2.06)	0.52	(0.92) ****	1.07	0.47
POS SE	3.44	(2.37)	8.24	(1.65) ****	2.35	0.76
NEG SE	4.33	(2.28)	1.24	(1.44) ****	1.62	0.63

Note. \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*\*  $p < .0001$ . *d* = Cohen's *d*, *r* = effect size.

### Discussion

SE scores were low for the Japanese and high for the American participants whether or not the *depends* option was available. The fact that *unsure* and *depends* were differentially used when both were available indicates that *depends* is not simply a substitute for *unsure*, an interpretation borne out by the fact that *depends* responses were not differentially reassigned to the *unsure* response category. In the same way, the fact that *depends* responses were not differentially reassigned to either *agree* or *disagree* indicates that it expresses a self-view that is neither globally positive nor negative. Rather it appears to express a distinct dimension of self-evaluation, one that is perhaps less illusory than the self-evaluations typical of North Americans (Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994)—which the present results suggest as well. Apparently, *depends* better reflects the context-contingency of their self-views. It does not alter the general pattern of their responses, consistent with results obtained by Chen, Lee, and Stevenson (1995), but does permit Japanese participants to express somewhat less unfavorable self-views.

It is worth pointing out both the high degree of within-culture consensus on most items as well as a considerable degree of between-culture discrepancy (as can be seen in the appendix), suggesting that some items may not be effectively tapping into a universal concept of positive self-regard, but rather may be asking participants to endorse or reject themes which may be socio-culturally unfamiliar to them (Brown, in press-a).

Finally, it must be conceded that Japanese participants' greater situation-sensitivity, relative to American participants, does not explain their relatively lower SE, because situations (considered abstractly, as in the present research) appear to be equally likely to boost as to depress their self-evaluations. This in turn appears to warrant the conclusion that Japanese SE actually is moderate (or mixed), if not in fact low. That is to say, 19 year old Japanese college students are likely to take a balanced but mostly critical self-attitude, at least as assessed on global measures such as the RSES. Since recent studies (Yamaguchi et al., 2007) have shown that their implicit SE is not lower than that of their American counterparts, it may be the case that global self-reports are not appropriate for assessing the self-views of young Japanese people, simply because their self-views are significantly less "global" than that of most Americans. Again, it is stressed that this conclusion is based on global measures. It is entirely possible that Japanese have positive specific self-views with regard to particular types of evaluation targets (Brown, 2006-a, 2006-c; Endo, 1995; Ito, 1999; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). This suggests that Fiske (2002) may be correct that "if norms and values are defined contextually and are meaningful only with respect to situationally defined factors, it does not make sense to ask respondents to answer global questions that require them to average over contexts." It is well-known that many participants will express views that they do not actually hold, or endorse statements that are literally meaningless, in order to cooperate with the researcher, among other reasons (Converse & Presser, 1986; Norenzayan, & Schwarz, 1999; Nunnally, 1978; Schwarz, 1999; Schwarz & Oyserman, 2001). The fact that Japanese participants endorse or reject RSES or similar items does not necessarily indicate that these statements accurately reflect their habitual self-views (or for that matter, any view of themselves). In this case, it might be expedient to offer participants the opportunity to more unambiguously express their self-views in terms of their own choosing. Of course, this also assumes that the act of self-evaluation, with its perhaps culture specific implications of self-affirmation, is indigenously meaningful in Japan, whereas there is some reason to suspect that it is not.<sup>3</sup> Japanese SE may be too situationally fluid to be accurately summarizable as a quantity. If this is true, it may account to some degree for the descriptions Japanese individuals sometimes

provide (Cousins, 1989, or fail to provide (Brown, 2005) of themselves when contexts are not specified.

In recent years a growing body of evidence has suggested that personality is best understood as a function, not merely of traits, but of the interaction of traits in particular situations and relationships (see Chen, English, & Peng, 2006; Kammrath, Mendoza-Denton, & Mischel, 2005; Mischel 2004; Mischel, Shoda, & Mendoza-Denton, 2002; Shoda & Mischel, 2000 for reviews). If this is so, then personality need not be defined by consistency across situations, but rather by consistency within situations. It may be necessary to reconsider whether self-esteem, traditionally delineated as a positive *global* self-evaluation (i.e., relatively invariant across situations and stable over time) is indeed an enduring characteristic of personality rather than a more bounded response to particular types of situations.

It may be objected that participants used *depends* to self-efface, or because they are modest (or want to appear to be), or cautious (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989). This possibility cannot be ruled out, but it seems unlikely, because they could have done so more convincingly by rejecting the positive SE items, or endorsing the negative items. Moreover, if self-effacement, modesty, or cautiousness, are defined as not endorsing positive SE items, then it is difficult to imagine any way that Japanese could not be self-effacing, modest, or cautious, other than by strongly endorsing or strongly rejecting the relevant RSES items, a result that would conflict with their well established moderate responding style. Similarly, participants may have used *depends* to signal unwillingness to reveal their true views (Nunnally, 1978, p. 596). However, they could have done this just as well by answering with *unsure* or not answering at all. Thus it appears that *depends* does in fact represent a response that appeals to a substantial number of participants more than *unsure* does, and more to Japanese than Americans. The most obvious interpretation for this preference is that it represents the situation-sensitivity of their self-views. What may be more in need of explanation is why North American SE is so relatively impervious to external impacts, a question which may be as much sociological or linguistic as psychological (see Brown, in press-a for discussion).

Kernis has recently proposed that situationally variable high SE is fragile and unhealthy, and leads to undesirable outcomes, at least in America (Kernis, 2003, p. 7-8). There may be some truth in this idea (or may not), but in either case, Japanese SE is not high, but moderate at best, and by some measures, low. It remains to be investigated whether situationally variable moderate or low SE is unhealthy. Resolution of this issue awaits future research.

#### *Which Self are Japanese Participants Evaluating?*

Maynard (2007) and Brown (2007) discuss some of the ways in which the Japanese pronoun system obligatorily encodes different “selves,” which speakers/writers must choose from among in their expressive and communicative activities. Each of the various first person pronouns (or no pronoun) presents a different “self,” each a valid, authentic self, but also appropriate to a specific setting. The items in the RSES however essentially force the participants to adopt and reflect on a particular self. Eight of the ten RSES items in the widely used Hoshino (1970) version translate “I” as 私. This can be pronounced as either *watashi*, or as *watakushi*, both of which are formal or very formal (respectively), and moreover foreground the speaker (relative to no pronoun, which is in fact the norm). The various pronouns “present different versions of a self...[and] are socially motivated...” (Maynard, 2007, p. 265). This is also evidence that the Japanese self is viewed as situationally embedded. If the Japanese self-concept (*jiko gainen*) is situationally embedded, it

makes sense that the evaluative aspect of that self concept (*viz.*, *jiko hyouka*) would also be situationally variable. Hasegawa and Hirose (2005) and Hirose (2002) argue from linguistic evidence that there are different varieties of Japanese self, including the private (absolute, “naked,” individual) self, which is “primary,” and an assortment of public, relational selves, manifested in the form of pronouns and other lexical elements. They contend that it is the public rather than private self that is situation-sensitive. Self-views as measured by the RSES are necessarily public (Baumeister et al, 1989). The problem is that every Japanese individual has several public selves and their expressed self-views are likely to depend on which “self” is being highlighted. The phrasing of the RSES imposes a formal, relational, “public” self on participants and implicitly places them in a subordinate (目下、*meshita*) role *vis-a-vis* the researcher. The self that Japanese college students feel comfortable presenting in formal public situations may differ from their private selves, or those expressed among their intimates and peers. That is, if there is a primary, absolute, private, “naked”, Japanese self distinct from the various relational selves (as argued by Hasegawa & Hirose, 2005, and Hirose, 2002), this is simply one of the available selves that participants may choose to represent.

SE presumably matters because of links to subjective experience and external outcomes (Baumeister, et al., 2003; Taylor & Brown, 1988). It is often assumed that moderate (or low) SE predisposes low subjective sense of subjective well-being (SWB) or life satisfaction (LS, Deiner & Deiner, 1995). But if adequate levels of SWB and LS can be obtained through means other than inflated SE, perhaps SE is less important, or even irrelevant, in certain environments (Uchida, Norasakkunit, & Kitayama, 2004). Similarly, if satisfactory outcomes can be achieved through means other than the motivation provided by pursuit of SE (for examples, parental or institutional pressure or support), then perhaps SE is again superfluous. Individuals may be motivated to focus their attentional resources on objects and activities that yield higher payoffs in terms of socio-culturally valued rewards, such as parental approval and high test scores, or simply to avoid social penalties, such as exclusion, bullying, or disapproval (Brown, in press-c). These are possibilities that need to be investigated.

Noguchi, Gohm, Dalsky, and Sakamoto (2007) note that while Americans focus on positive information about themselves and other people, Japanese focus on positive information about other people, but negative information about themselves. In this case, it is unremarkable that their SE scores would be negative because they are differentially attending to their negative aspects. In a related vein, Oishi and Sullivan (2005) found that Japanese participants’ sense of well-being was lower than that of American participants because they were less likely to believe that they had fulfilled their parents’ expectations. It is possible that their overall self-evaluations are lower for similar reasons. In view of the available evidence, the possibility cannot be ruled out that the SE of 19 year old research participants actually is moderate or low. This would, as many researchers (cited above) have observed, pose a problem for any universal theory of SE. On the other hand, the fact that so many Japanese participants agree with the negative RSES items in particular suggests that the instrument is conveying something to them other than healthy self-appraisal.

### *Limitations and Conclusion*

As with most previous studies of SE, the present results derive from the self-reports of college students (Major, 2006; for exceptions, see Baron, 2004; Cho, Sandel, Miller, & Wang, 2005; Kahng & Mowbray, 2005; Miller, Wang, Sandel, & Cho, 2002; Wang, Siegel, Falck, & Carlson, 2001). Both aspects (relying exclusively on self-reports and college student samples) have been criticized (Baumeister & Vohs, 2006;



Triandis, 1999; Zhang & Baumeister, 2006) and have serious repercussions (Major, 2006). Nevertheless, the practical difficulties of assessing subjective states behaviorally, and of obtaining the cooperation of non-student samples, are such that the present research does not represent a significant departure from the established tradition. To the extent that SE research is constrained by conceptual and practical realities to rely on self-reports, of college students or anyone else, the present results suggest that greater care should be taken in the labeling and interpretation of the response options provided to participants.

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## Appendix

Distribution of *agree*, *disagree*, and *unsure* responses when *depends* option was available (first number) and was not available (second number). Japanese  $n = 98$ , American  $n = 101$ .

I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	23 > 48		96 > 101	
Disagree	12 > 17	$\chi^2 (2,157) = 1.49$	0 > 0	NA
Unsure	24 > 34		0 > 0	
Depends	39 ---		5 ---	

I wish I could have more respect for myself.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	59 > 69		21 > 43	
Disagree	16 > 19	$\chi^2 (2,181) = 0.02$	42 > 49	$\chi^2 (2,167) = 3.94 ns$
Unsure	8 > 10		3 > 9	
Depends	15 ---		35 ---	

I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	19 > 33		87 > 94	
Disagree	17 > 20	$\chi^2 (2,165) = 0.80$	0 > 3	$\chi^2 (2,188) = 6.26 *$
Unsure	31 > 45		0 > 4	
Depends	31 ---		14 ---	

I feel I do not have much to be proud of.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	28 > 33		2 > 6	
Disagree	39 > 48	$\chi^2 (2,175) = 0.64$	81 > 92	$\chi^2 (2,185) = 2.16 ns$
Unsure	10 > 17		1 > 3	
Depends	31 ---		17 ---	

I take a positive attitude toward myself.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	24 > 42		54 > 80	
Disagree	32 > 37	$\chi^2 (2,166) = 1.39$	4 > 13	$\chi^2 (2,160) = 4.54 \text{ ns}$
Unsure	13 > 18		1 > 8	
Depends	29 ---		42 ---	

I certainly feel useless at times.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	48 > 65		25 > 34	
Disagree	11 > 18	$\chi^2 (2,175) = 0.66$	40 > 58	$\chi^2 (2,171) = 0.21 \text{ ns}$
Unsure	6 > 15		5 > 9	
Depends	33 ---		31 ---	

All in all, I'm inclined to feel that I am a failure.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	15 > 23		0 > 0	
Disagree	47 > 54	$\chi^2 (2,177) = 0.56$	96 > 98	NA
Unsure	17 > 21		2 > 3	
Depends	19 ---		3 ---	

I am able to do things as well as most other people.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	34 > 49		72 > 89	
Disagree	13 > 17	$\chi^2 (2,165) = 0.20$	2 > 7	$\chi^2 (2,179) = 1.76 \text{ ns}$
Unsure	20 > 32		4 > 5	
Depends	31 ---		23 ---	



At times I think I am no good at all.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	44 > 61		6 > 15	
Disagree	17 > 23	$\chi^2 (2,166) = 0.58$	69 > 82	$\chi^2 (2,179) = 2.2 ns$
Unsure	7 > 14		3 > 4	
Depends	30 ---		23 ---	

On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

	Japanese	$\chi^2$	Americans	$\chi^2$
Agree	1 > 3		80 > 89	
Disagree	74 > 82	$\chi^2 (2,183) = 0.88$	2 > 4	$\chi^2 (2,187) = 1.28 ns$
Unsure	10 > 13		4 > 8	
Depends	13 ---		15 ---	

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Note. \*  $p < .05$ , NA = could not be computed because table marginal total = 0. A > B represents the number of cases who agreed, disagreed, and were *unsure*, respectively when the “depends” option was available, while the number to the right represents the distribution of responses when the “depends” option was not available.

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### Footnotes

1. *Situation-sensitivity* and its variant expressions are used in the present article interchangeably with *context-dependency* and its variant expressions.
2. *Wakaranai* (分からないう) in Japanese can be translated variously as *unsure*, *unclear*, *don't know*, *undecided*, *don't want to answer*, *leave me alone*, etc., depending on the exact context. It tends to express a reluctance to venture an answer, rather than absolute lack of information or opinion, in which case *shiranai* (知らない) would tend to be used. In addition to *wakaranai*, the expression *dochiratomo ienai* (can't say one way or the other) is often used in questionnaires.

3. Self-reflection in Japan (*hansei*), is inherently a search for personal or collective deficiencies. Japanese participants who are asked to self-evaluate may by that very fact be primed to search for weaknesses (see Brown, 2008-c for discussion).