

# **The Influence of Personal and Collective Self-Esteem on the Interpersonal and Inter-group Evaluations of Japanese University Students**

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## **Abstract**

A sample of 236 Japanese college students evaluated themselves, two in-groups, and two out-groups, on five positive and five negative traits. They also completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and two subscales of the Luhtanen & Crocker Collective Self-Esteem Scale. The results revealed that the personal and collective self-esteem of Japanese college students is unaffected by perceptions of interpersonal or inter-group superiority or inferiority. It is therefore inferred that personal or group enhancement is not universally associated with personal or collective self-esteem. Individuals can maintain self-esteem without derogating out-groups or holding illusory “better than average” beliefs. Results also indicated that participants’ interpersonal assessments varied depending on the specificity of the in-group serving as the comparison target (participants assessed themselves more positively than Japanese students in general, but less positively than their classmates in particular).

**KEY WORDS:** in-group bias, inter-group perception, self-concept, self-esteem, self-effacement

It has been argued that individuals need positive self-regard and actively strive in various ways to achieve it (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Self-esteem, particularly high self-esteem is claimed to be adaptive, psychologically healthy, (Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003) and not surprisingly, “normal” in that the majority of Americans have it (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2003) and want to have it (Brown & Dutton, 1995). This is understandable. If low self-esteem is a form of psychological unhealthiness and is associated with a number of undesirable conditions and outcomes (Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2003), individuals are likely to be motivated to avoid having it, or at least to deny having it. This at least would seem to be the case the United States, where self-esteem has become so highly schematic that it can be reliably measured simply by asking people whether their self-esteem is high (Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001).

In America, self-esteem is maintained, among other ways, through self-enhancement, and one form of self-enhancement is evaluating oneself as better than others or better than average (Kobayashi & Brown, 2003). Self-enhancement occurs primarily at the personal level, but because individuals derive parts of their identities and correspondingly parts of their self-evaluations and self-esteem from their group memberships, it can occur at the group level as well (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hornsey, 2003; Negy, Shreve, Jensen, & Uddin, 2003; Rubin & Hewstone 1998; Tajfel, 1981, 1982). Thus, one can self-enhance, and hence maintain one’s self-esteem, indirectly by evaluating one’s groups more favorably than other groups. It is unclear however, what the

role of self-esteem is in inter-group discrimination. It has been hypothesized that favoring the in-group enhances personal self-esteem and most studies support this (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). It has also been proposed that low or threatened self-esteem promotes inter-group discrimination, and while little support has been found for this possibility, the reason may be that one crucial variable has typically been ignored, namely the degree to which the individual identifies with the in-group (Hewstone et al.). Of course, both may be true. In either case, self-esteem must necessarily covary with inter-group discrimination. Lack of such covariation would constitute evidence of the non-universality of the role of self-esteem either as an independent variable or as a dependent variable involved in inter-group discrimination.

If self-enhancement universally promotes high self-esteem which in turn leads to in-group self-enhancement, cultural differences in self-esteem and self-enhancement should be irrelevant. It is well established that Japanese exhibit patterns of self-esteem and self-enhancement that are unlike and in many cases the complete opposite of North American patterns (J. D. Brown, 2003, Brown & Ferrara, 2006; Brown & Kobayashi, 2002; Campbell, et al, 1996; Heine & Lehman, 1997; Kobayashi & Brown, 2003; Kobayashi, & Greenwald, 2003; Kudo, & Numazaki, 2003; Kurman, 2003; Kurman, & Sriram, 2002 Muramoto, 2003; Norasakkunkit, & Kalik, 2002; Takata, 2003). Nevertheless, if self-esteem and inter-group discrimination universally covary, Japanese with high personal self-esteem should self-enhance more, and Japanese with high collective self-esteem should discriminate in favor of their in-group more. Accordingly, for the purpose of the present study, culture was not a variable of interest and all participants were Japanese.

The major objectives of the study were to test several hypotheses concerning the effect of personal and collective self-esteem on interpersonal and inter-group self-enhancement. Interpersonal self-enhancement refers to the propensity to evaluate oneself more positively than others, specifically in-group members. Inter-group enhancement refers to the propensity to evaluate one's in-group more positively than out-groups. A group that one is a member of is by definition an in-group (Crisp & Nicel, 2004). Individuals can identify with, be involved with, committed to, and "invested in" different groups to different degrees (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002), and it is reasonable to suppose that this may affect the extent to which an individual favors the in-group (Rubin & Hewstone, 1998). Similarly, an out-group is by definition a group that one is not a member of, and such groups can differ in many ways, including psychological distance (i.e., more or less similar to the source individual in ways that may be specific to the individuals making the assessments) and status directionality (superior, inferior, or equal, in ways that may be specific to the individuals making the evaluations). In the Japanese context, Takata (2003) points to the Japanese distinction between *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside). *Uchi* refers to family and small groups where cooperation and consideration are expected and where emotional bonds are present. *Soto* refers to everyone outside of that group. Takata notes that when the *uchi-soto* distinction is taken into account, Japanese self-enhancement resembles closely that of Canadians'. A related Japanese distinction is between *wareware nihonjin* (we Japanese) and *gaijin* (outside people). In this way, "other Japanese" or "Japanese college students in general" can be either in-groups or out-groups, depending on the comparison group.

For the purposes of the present study, two types of in-groups were designated, e.g., classmates of the same sex and age, and Japanese college students in general, and two types of out-groups, e.g., typical American college students, and typical Third World college students. Classmates and college students in general were selected as in-groups to provide a different perspective into the phenomenon observed by Heine & Lehman

(1997), who defined the in-group as “most students” of the participant’s same university, and the out-group as “most students” of a rival university.. In the context of the questionnaire, classmates and Japanese college students in general are clearly in-groups vis-à-vis American and Third World college students. It was assumed that participants would regard themselves as more similar and closer to their classmates than to Japanese college students in general and that they would regard American college students as at least status equals and Third World college students as status inferiors, based on economic, political, and social criteria. Classmates and Japanese college students in general will henceforth be referred to as In-group 1 and In-group 2, respectively. American college students and Third World college students will henceforth be referred to as Out-group 1 and Out-group 2, respectively.

The major objective of the present article was to ascertain in what manner the propensity to self-enhance<sup>1</sup> or self-efface is restricted to the personal self (interpersonal bias) or rather extends over the collective self (inter-group bias) as well. It was predicted that:

1. Individuals would evaluate themselves more positively than others (hereafter referred to this as “interpersonal bias”). More specifically, they would evaluate themselves more positively than (a) their classmates and (b) Japanese college students in general.
2. They would evaluate their in-groups more positively than out-groups (inter-group bias). More specifically, they would evaluate Japanese college students more positively than (a) American and (b) Third World college students.
3. Higher self-esteem students would evaluate themselves more positively than in-group members. More specifically, higher self-esteem students would evaluate themselves more positively than (a) classmates and (b) Japanese college students in general.
4. Higher collective self-esteem students would evaluate in-group members more positively than out-group members. More specifically, they would evaluate Japanese college students in general more positively than (a) American and (b) Third World college students.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Participants were 275 college students enrolled in introductory psychology courses at two mid-sized universities in the Tokyo area (44 males, 54 females, 138 unspecified<sup>2</sup>; ages ranging from 18 to 23 ( $M = 18.8$ ,  $SD = 0.99$ ). Students’ voluntary participation in a study described as concerning “student attitudes about various topics” was requested by a Japanese colleague of the author. No deception or experimental manipulation was involved. A number of students filled out the questionnaire in such a way that the data could not be trusted (obvious response patterns, illegible responses, or excessively incomplete). These questionnaires were discarded, leaving a sample of 236 for subsequent analysis. Questionnaires were administered during the month on June, 2004. Fifty-eight percent of the sample had lived or vacationed in a wide variety of foreign countries. The variation was considerable, ranging from 3 days in Hong Kong to 14 years in America and Europe.

### *Measures and Procedure*

Participants completed a questionnaire consisting of the 10-item Japanese version<sup>3</sup> of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) two 4-item subscales from the Luhtanen & Crocker Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES). The RSES is the most commonly used instrument in Japanese SE studies, as it is in North America (Baumeister et al, 2003; Tafordi, & Milne, 2002; Trzesniewski, et al, 2003). Sample items are “I am able to do things as well as most other people” and “At times I think I am no good at all.” Sample items from the CSES are “In general belonging to social groups is an important part of my self-image” and “Overall, my group memberships has very little to do with how I feel about myself.” (reverse scored). As suggested by Long & Spears (1997), Luhtanen & Crocker (1992), and Rubin & Hewstone (1998), the relevant items in the CSES were rephrased so that they referred specifically to “Japanese” rather than “social groups” or “group memberships”, as these expressions are vague in Japanese and would probably not assess the participants’ sense of Japanese identity. Seven--point rating scales with appropriate end-points were used, higher scale points representing greater endorsement. Following this section participants evaluated themselves and four other groups of people (classmates of the same age and gender, Japanese college students in general, typical American college students, and typical college students from third world countries) on ten different trait descriptions that were previously identified by a demographically identical group of students (Brown & Ferrara 2006) as appropriate for describing Japanese people. These were *shojiki-na* (honest), *jikochusin-teki* (egocentric), *teinei-na* (polite), *shokyoku-teki* (passive), *ki ga yowaii* (weak-willed), *kashikoi* (intelligent), *namakemono* (lazy), *majime-na* (serious), *yokubari-na* (greedy), and *seijitsu-na* (sincere). (For clarity of exposition, the English translations will be used in the following discussion.) Participants were asked to consider to what degree they felt that the each of the ten traits was characteristic of each of the five targets (themselves, two in-groups, and two out-groups). A 7-point rating scale was used ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*completely*). The traits were listed vertically in the order above, with positive and negative expressions alternating. Counterbalanced versions were not used. The target groups were listed horizontally with “self” first on the left and participants were instructed to rate “self” first as a point of reference for the other ratings. To the right of “self” were classmates, Japanese students in general, American students, and Third World students, respectively. The 10 traits (and many others) had previously been evaluated for favorability, by a large and demographically identical sample of students, which included 175 students from the present sample (R. A. Brown, 2005). As expected, five (honest, polite, smart, serious, sincere) were rated as positive (significantly higher than the scale midpoint) and five were rated as negative (selfish, passive, weak-willed, lazy, greedy). Participants completed the questionnaire anonymously in large groups ranging in size from 50 to 150. Demographic and miscellaneous questions included age, sex, and foreign residence or travel experience. The questionnaire included several additional items that are not relevant here. The entire questionnaire was translated into Japanese and back-translated into English to check for accuracy, following generally accepted procedures outlined by Behling & Law (2000). It was first pilot tested on a smaller sample and several minor modifications made as a result.

### *Plan for Analysis*

Scores were calculated for the RSES and the CSES Importance to Identity (ID) and Private Collective Self-Esteem (PRIV) subscales. The mean scores for the five positive traits with respect to each target group were summed to constitute a positive evaluation score. Similarly, the mean scores for the five negative traits

with respect to each target group were summed to constitute a negative evaluation score. Next, the negative evaluation scores were recoded so that higher ratings represented more positive evaluations of the target with respect to the trait, and were then aggregated with the positive evaluations scores to constitute an overall evaluation score. Overall evaluation scores for the target groups were then compared and Difference Scores between the groups were calculated. A principle components analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation, conducted on each of the five data subsets (self ratings of self, in-group 1, in-group 2, out-group 1, and out-group 2) indicated that the five positive traits were unidimensional, while the five negative traits were bidimensional; self-centered and greedy formed a single factor, while lazy, weak-willed, and passive formed another. Cronbach's alphas for the positive traits were generally acceptable, ranging from .64 (out-group 1) to .87 (self) with an average of .74. However, in no case did the Cronbach's alphas for the negative traits reach the minimum recommended by Nunnally & Bernstein (1994) for exploratory indexes. However, it is pointed out that in the present case, the traits are not in fact being used as indexes but rather are the measures of interest in themselves. The fact that the traits are not highly inter-correlated does not invalidate their use as specific measures of particular targets, as will be discussed below. Finally, predictions were tested by calculating Pearson *r*s between the RSES and CSES, and ID and PRIV subscales and the various combinations of Difference Scores. Initial analyses indicated that sex differences were minimal and so sex will not be discussed as a variable. For the purpose of in-group versus out-group comparisons, In-group 1 and In-group 2 were combined and Out-group 1 and Out-group 2 were also combined. This represents one of the possible uchi-soto pairings discussed previously (it is not clear that "classmates" constitutes an uchi in-group in contrast to "Japanese students in general" and therefore is not treated as such here). Subsequently, specific in-group versus out-group comparisons were conducted to ascertain the source of any biases that emerged.

A principle components analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation established that the two CSE subscales did constitute two independent factors, which cumulatively explained 60.92% of the variance. All items loaded on the appropriate factor, with item loadings ranging from .58 to .86. Cronbach's alphas for the two scales and two subscales ranged from .76 to .77.

## Results

Means, standard deviations, and alphas are shown in Table 1. Male and female mean scores for the RSES, CSES, and ID and PRIV subscales did not differ significantly.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations and Cronbach's alpha for RSE, CSES, and PRIV and ID scales.

	<i>M</i>		<i>SD</i>	<i>alpha</i>
RSES	3.93		0.87	.76
CSES	4.51 ***		0.92	.76
ID	3.74 **		1.30	.77
PRIV	5.28 ***		0.99	.76

Note. Significantly different from scale midpoint, \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Correlations between RSES, CSES, and the two subscales are shown in Table 2. Evidently, Japanese college students' personal identity is not very much impacted by their Japanese identity, but their self-feelings are modestly impacted by their feelings about being Japanese.

Table 2. *Correlations between RSES, CSES, and two CSES subscales.*

	RSES	CSES	ID	PRIV
RSES	-----	.11	.02	.23 *
CSES			.86 *	.74 *
ID	-----	-----	-----	.28 *
PRIV	-----	-----	-----	-----

Note. \* Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient, significant at  $p < .0001$ .

#### *Self versus In-group Evaluations*

With the exception of in-group 2 (Japanese college students in general), which was significantly less positive, all overall evaluation scores were significantly more positive than the scale midpoint at  $p < .0001$ . (All summary and component descriptives are shown in Table 3). A Repeated Measures ANOVA indicated that mean overall evaluation scores differed substantially within the set of targets ( $F(4,233) = 85.03, p < .0001$ ). Subsequent paired sample  $t$ -tests with the Bonferroni adjustment to  $p < .02$ , indicated that participants did not evaluate themselves more positively than composite in-group members, but this lack of bias is only apparent because participants evaluated one in-group (classmates) substantially and significantly more positively than the other (Japanese college students in general). Because it cannot be assumed that positive and negative traits carry equivalent meanings or valences (Spencer-Rogers, Wang, & Hou, 2004), separate Repeated Measures ANOVAs were conducted with the five aggregated positive traits and the five aggregated negative traits as dependent measures. Again,  $F$  tests were highly significant,  $F(4,235) = 79.07$ , and  $F(4,233) = 139.46$ , respectively, both  $p < .0001$ . All pairs of means were tested with paired-sample  $t$  tests, Bonferroni adjusted to preserve the Type I error rate of  $p < .05$ . These results are shown below in Table 3. All pairs of means differed significantly with three exceptions. Self did not differ from in-group 1 (classmates) with respect to positive traits, or from in-group 2 (Japanese students in general) with respect to negative traits. Previous factor analysis described above indicated that the aggregate of the five positive traits was unidimensional, while the aggregate of the five negative traits consisted of two underlying dimensions, which are clearly *self-centeredness* (self-centered and greedy), and *passivity* (passive, weak-willed, lazy). As it is not inconceivable that groups can differ with respect to some but not all negative characteristics, the five targets were tested to determine which of the two negative clusters was more responsible for the contribution of the negative traits to the overall evaluations.

Table 3. Mean Evaluations of Self and In-groups.

	Self	In-1	In-2
Overall	4.13a (0.73)	4.37b (0.63)	3.70c (0.64)
Positive	4.67a (0.90)	4.61a (0.85)	3.88b (0.84)
Negative	3.59a (0.89)	4.14b (0.72)	3.51a (0.76)
Self	3.40a (1.28)	3.46a (1.05)	3.28a (1.03)
Pass	3.72a (1.19)	4.59b (0.94)	3.67a (0.92)

Note. In-1 = classmates, In-2 = Japanese college students in general. Positive = averaged sum of the five positive traits; Negative = averaged sum of the five negative traits. Self = the averaged sum of *self-centered* and *greedy*. Pass = the averaged sum of *passive weak-willed*, and *lazy*. Neg, Self, and Pass have been reversed such that higher scores indicate more positive evaluations. Within each row, trait means with different subscripts differ at  $p < .0001$  or less. All means are significantly different from the scale midpoint at  $p < .0001$ , with the exceptions of Self with respect to overall evaluation ( $p < .01$ ), In-1 with respect to the five negative traits ( $p < .01$ ) and In-2 with respect to the five positive traits ( $p < .05$ ). *SD* are reported in parentheses.

Paired-sample *t* tests showed that Self did not differ from either in-group with respect to the self-centeredness cluster, but in-group 1 was evaluated more positively than in-group 2 (or rather, less negatively, since all three means were well below the scale midpoint). The same procedure was followed for the passivity cluster. In this case, in-group 1 was evaluated as less passive than Self and in-group 2.

Table 4. Mean Evaluations of Out-groups.

	Out-1	Out-2
Overall	4.38 (0.59)	4.98 (0.73) ***
Positive	4.40 (0.80)	5.11 (0.88) ***
Negative	4.35 (0.70)	4.84 (0.82) ***
Self	2.84 (1.15)	4.18 (1.25) ***
Pass	5.37 (0.93)	5.28 (1.14)

Note. Out-1 = American college students, Out-2 = Third World college students. Positive = averaged sum of the five positive traits; Negative = averaged sum of the five negative traits. Self = the averaged sum of *self-centered* and *greedy*. Pass = the averaged sum of *passive weak-willed*, and *lazy*. Neg, Self, and Pass have been reversed such that higher scores indicate more positive evaluations.

\*\*\* Means differ at  $p < .0001$  or less. All means are significantly different from the scale midpoint at  $p < .0001$ . *SD* are reported in parentheses.

Overall, Self and in-group 1 were evaluated positively, in that their mean scores exceeded the scale midpoint, while in-group 2 was evaluated negatively by the same criterion. Participants evaluated the three

targets more favorably with respect to the five positive than the five negative traits, (all  $p < .0001$ ). Within the negative traits, they evaluated Self and in-group 2 unfavorably within respect to both clusters. They also evaluated in-group 1 unfavorably with respect to the self-centeredness cluster, but favorably with respect to the passivity cluster. Thus it appears that the source of the generally more favorable evaluations of in-group 1 is the perception that they (classmates) are less passive, weak-willed, and lazy than students in general. In this regard, the Self is viewed as more similar to the average student than to classmates. These results indicate both self-effacement and self-enhancement, depending on the target of comparison.

Table 5. Mean Evaluations of Composite In-group and Out-group.

	IN-GROUP	OUT-GROUP
Overall	4.04 (0.48)	4.68 (0.49) ***
Positive	4.24 (0.66)	4.75 (0.70) ***
Negative	3.83 (0.60)	4.60 (0.62) ***
Self	3.39 (0.85)	3.51 (0.92)
Pass	4.13 (0.72)	5.32 (0.90) ***

*Note.* ING = Average of means of classmates and Japanese college students in general, OUTG = Average of means of Out-1 and Out-2; Out-1 = American college students, Out-2 = Third World college students. Positive = averaged sum of the five positive traits; Negative = averaged sum of the five negative traits. Self = the averaged sum of self-centered and greedy. Pass = the averaged sum of passive weak-willed, and lazy. Neg, Self, and Pass have been reversed such that higher scores indicate more positive evaluations.

\*\*\* Means differ at  $p < .0001$  or less. All means are significantly different from the scale midpoint at  $p < .0001$ . *SD* are reported in parentheses.

Participants also evaluated the two out-groups substantially and significantly differently. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 4. As above, paired-sample  $t$  tests were conducted to determine which clusters of traits, if any, were driving overall evaluations. Out-group 2 was evaluated more favorably than out-group 1 overall, and with respect to both positive and negative traits, although both out-groups were evaluated more favorably than the scale midpoint. Within the negative traits however, there was a substantial difference between the out-groups with respect to the self-centeredness cluster. American college students were evaluated as being more self-centered and greedy than Third World college students, in both relative and absolute (below the scale midpoint) terms. Both out-groups were evaluated overall positively (mean scores significantly in excess of the scale midpoint), however, out-group 1 (Americans) was evaluated unfavorably (below the scale midpoint) with respect to the self-centeredness cluster, while out-group 2 was evaluated marginally significantly above the scale midpoint. Of interest, it is with respect to the self-centeredness cluster that Self and both in-group evaluations are most favorable, at least with regard to out-group 1 (but not out-group 2). With respect to the passivity cluster, Self and both in-groups were evaluated less favorably than either out-group.



*In-Group versus Out-group*

Participants evaluated the Composite in-groups and out-groups substantially and significantly differently. Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 5. Mean evaluations indicate a significant level of in-group effacement.

Both out-groups were evaluated significantly more positively than the composite in-group and both in-groups were evaluated significantly less positively than the composite out-group. (all  $ps < .0001$ ) Specific between group comparisons revealed that out-groups 1 and 2 were both evaluated more positively than in-group 2, and out-group 2 was evaluated more positively than in-group 1 (all  $ps < .0001$ ), but in-group 1 and out-group 2 were both evaluated in equally positive terms,  $t(233) = -.01, ns.$

*Correlations*

RSES failed to correlate with overall self evaluation,  $r(234) = .03, ns$ , or with the differences between self-evaluations and the composite in-group or either in-group evaluation. Unexpectedly, as such correlations have been found in Western samples (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), RSES failed to correlate with CSES. CSES also failed to correlate with the composite in-group, or with either of the two in-groups, or with the difference between the overall composite in-group and composite out-group evaluations. (all  $rs, ns$ ).<sup>4</sup>

A clear order of evaluative positivity emerged, with Third World college students evaluated most positively, followed by Class-mates and American College students, followed by Self, with Japanese college students least favorably evaluated, and the only group evaluated negatively overall (with respect to the ten targets traits). Thus the evidence for self-enhancing and self-effacing tendencies at both personal and collective levels is mixed. Participants evaluated themselves more positively than average Japanese college students but less positively than a more specific group of Japanese college students and one about whom participants could be expected to have useful information. They evaluated themselves less positively than two out-groups, and they evaluated one in-group less positively than both out-groups, and the other in-group more positively than one out-group and equal to another. Self-esteem, either personal or collective appeared to exert no influence on the evaluations.

In conclusion, Prediction 1 was partially supported. Participants evaluated themselves more positively than Japanese college students in general. However, they evaluated themselves less positively than their classmates.

Prediction 2 was not supported. Participants did not evaluate their composite in-group more positively than a composite out-group or either of the component out-groups.

Prediction 3 was not supported. Participants with higher self-esteem did not evaluate themselves more positively relative to in-group members.

Prediction 4 was not supported. Participants with higher collective self-esteem did not evaluate in-groups more positively than out-groups.

**Discussion**

The major objective of the present article was to ascertain in what manner the propensity to self-enhance or self-efface is restricted to the personal self (interpersonal bias) or rather extends over the collective self (inter-group bias) as well. Evidence of self-enhancement was found in the present sample of Japanese college

students with regard to one of the two constituent in-groups, namely other Japanese college students in general. They did not exhibit the bias, and in fact exhibited a self-effacing bias, when the in-group consisted of a more narrowly specified set of Japanese college students, namely, the participants' same age and sex classmates. Similarly, no evidence of an inter-group bias was found; on the contrary, inter-group effacement emerged. The absence of a correlation between personal or collective and in-group enhancement indicates that the Social Identity self-esteem hypothesis (Long & Spears, 1997; Rubin & Hewstone, 1998) cannot be universal. No relation between either SE or CSE and inter-group discrimination was found in the present sample.

However, the absence of a significant relationship between self-esteem and interpersonal bias indicates that in Japan, unlike North America, self-esteem and self-enhancement may be unrelated, as argued by Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunit (1997) That is, one can, in Japan, evaluate oneself as better, or worse, or no better and no worse than average, without it having an impact on one's self-regard. In this case, both modesty (R. A. Brown, 2006b; Kurman, 2003), and self-criticalness (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001; Kitayama et al., 1997) can exist independently of self-esteem. In other words, modest self-presentation and self-criticalness are both desiderata in Japan, but neither is directly related to self-esteem.

Japanese students were self-effacing at the interpersonal level, evaluating themselves less positively than a composite in-group, and also at the inter-group level, evaluating the same composite in-group less positively than a composite out-group. They were not consistently self-effacing at the interpersonal level, in that they evaluated themselves more positively than one of the component in-groups. Neither were they consistently self-effacing at the inter-group level, as one of the component in-groups (classmates) was evaluated equally positively as one of the component out-groups (American college students). This is consistent with results obtained by Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yurak, and Vredenburg (1995) indicating that attenuation of the "better than average" effect when the comparison group is more specific may apply in both Japan and North America, and can coexist with either self-enhancing or self-effacing propensities. However, it only partially supports the claim of Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea (2005) that "Japanese rate themselves more positively than their peers or members of the general population." The data discussed in the present article indicate that Japanese university students can be both self-enhancing and self-effacing at the same time, which in turn supports Mischel's "behavioural signature" concept of personality. (Mischel, 2004) according to which traits (such as self-esteem) are expressed relative to the individual's definition of the situation and the other people constituting it.

While the pattern of results is not completely consistent, it does fail to support the claim that "people are motivated to think of their groups as being more positive than other groups, because such a bias, helps create and maintain a positive view of oneself," and that ". . . people are motivated to view all levels of self in a relatively positive light" (Hornsey, 2003). In sum, not all people think of their in-groups as more positive than out-groups and the self-esteem of people who do think of their groups as more positive is not always elevated. If one is not motivated to maintain high self-esteem, then one will have no reason to self-enhance, even if self-enhancement is related to self-esteem. Moreover, if one's group membership is unimportant to one's self-esteem, then one will obtain little self-esteem benefit from enhancing one's group vis-à-vis other groups. In short, while it is common for students from some Western countries to have high self-esteem, to self-enhance, and to show inter-group bias, and for interpersonal and inter-group biases to be positively related (Hornsey, 2003), none of these are invariably true in Japan: The Japanese student participants in the present study did not

in general have high self-esteem and did not consistently self-enhance at either interpersonal or inter-group levels, and interpersonal and inter-group biases were not positively related. They may fail to enhance their group due to weaker motivations to enhance their group, as Heine (2003), somewhat tautologically suggests. Ironically, in view of the longstanding popularity of *Nihonjinron* (the study of what it means to be Japanese) studies (Befu, 1992, 1993, cited in McVeigh, 2004; Miller, 1989; R. A. Brown, 1989), the present data suggest that Japanese of college age, though proud to be Japanese, derive little of their sense of personal identity from their collective Japanese identity (see also Brown & Ferrara, 2006). Accordingly, their collective identities may not contribute enough to their sense of self-worth to justify enhancing the group. No doubt their Japanese identity is not highly salient when in Japan. When abroad or perhaps in the company of large groups of non-Japanese, that could well be different.

### Limitations

As with most such studies, in-group identification was not precisely specified. Two in-groups were defined, and participants were unequivocally members of both groups, judged by external criteria (i.e., they were members of their own class, and they were Japanese college students). But it is unknown to what degree individuals derived any part of their self-concept or sense of self-worth from these particular memberships. An attempt was made to make in-group membership salient by explicitly contrasting the two in-groups with two groups that the participants by definition could not possibly belong to (since they were neither American nor Third World students). Also, the in-groups were related in a way that the out-groups were not (one in-group was subset of the other, while the two out-groups were mutually exclusive). Self-esteem was assessed with the RSES, which was not problematic, but assessing Collective self-esteem with the Luhtanen & Crocker CSES subscales may be, since they assessed importance to identity and attitudes toward being *Japanese*, rather than being members of the specific in-groups. The mean scores for these subscales indicated that being Japanese was not highly important to the participants' identity but that they felt basically positive about being Japanese.<sup>5</sup> Necessarily, to be a Japanese college student is to be Japanese, but it is possible that a more particularized phrasing of the CSES items might have yielded different results. Future research should explore that possibility.

As the results above suggest (see also Brown & Ferrara, 2006) inter-group comparisons can vary according to the particular out-group that is the target of the comparison. Using a completely generic out-group is one solution, but it is unlikely that many participants will be able to aggregate all the possible out-groups within their experience into a single composite out-group, or that they will not distinguish between various out-groups. Precisely specifying out-group targets is another solution, but does not permit us to distinguish between bias and attitude. Evaluating one's group more positively than one out-group but less positively than another does not necessarily reveal "bias." Aggregating the target out-groups is another solution, but obviously depends on which out-groups are there to be aggregated. Providing an extensive list of out-group targets is another solution but presents problems of sampling, cognitive load, and compliance, or any combination of the above. I believe using the two in-groups and two out-groups as defined above and analyzing them separately and compositely is a reasonable compromise.

It may be asked what purpose it serves to aggregate two such dissimilar out-groups? The answer is that Japanese routinely do precisely that, in fact, aggregating out-groups in an even more non-discriminating

manner. The Japanese expression *gaijin* (“outside person”) refers to a member (or members, as the Japanese language does not customarily mark nouns for number) of any group that is not Japanese.<sup>6</sup> It is not unusual for ordinary Japanese to discuss matters of cultural differences in dichotomous terms of Japanese versus non-Japanese (Befu, 1992, 1993, cited in McVeigh, 2004; Miller, 1982; 1989). This does not mean that Japanese do not distinguish between different out-groups, but rather that they are also capable of mentally lumping all non-Japanese into a single out-group for the purpose of inter-group comparisons. Similarly, the expression *wareware nihonjin* amalgamates all Japanese into a single in-group, with *gaijin* as an implicit comparison out-group. A particular group can be an *in-group* in one context and an *out-group* in another. Thus, aggregating classmates and Japanese college students in general may not be problematic when comparison is made to an explicit out-group. That is, whether classmates and Japanese students in general constitute in-groups is contextually variable, but American college students and Third World college students will invariably be out-groups. As discussed above, Takata (2003) notes that self-enhancement, not only in Japan but in Canada as well, appears to depend on whether the comparison group is *uchi* (inside) or *soto* (outside). *Uchi* and *soto* are similar to in-group and out-group, but more specifically demarcated and by definition presuppose cooperation, consideration, and emotional bonds. In-groups as defined in the social psychological literature do not invariably presuppose these conditions. For example, nationality or enrollment at a particular university may constitute in-group status in a particular context, but they do not necessarily presuppose cooperation, coordination, and emotional bonds. Perhaps the inconsistent result obtained in this study and others like it derive from definitions of in-groups in which participants are not very much “invested,” as discussed above.

In a very similar way, trait targets can never be exhaustive and the same considerations apply. It is not uncommon to use traits drawn introspectively from Anderson (1968) (see Crisp & Nicel, 2004; Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Hornsey, 2003; for recent examples). But the Anderson list is essentially a random list of trait words. There is no way to know whether the selected words are meaningful and relevant to the participants in a given study, apart from asking them. This is even more so true when cross-cultural research is involved. In the present case, this difficulty was overcome by using words that were previously identified by peers of the participants as appropriate for use in describing Japanese people (R. A. Brown, 2005a; Brown & Ferrara, 2006). However, it cannot be assumed that participants will regard the same set of words as appropriate for describing different groups of people. One solution is to use a single, maximally general item, assessing overall evaluation rather than deriving such an overall evaluation from components, somewhat in the vein suggested by Gosling, Renfrow, & Swann, 2003, and Robins, Hendin, & Trzesniewski, 2001, among others). This idea has several merits (one being ease of administration) but poses reliability problems. Moreover, research with Japanese students indicates that a single overall evaluation item does not invariably correlate highly with the mean of a composite of several more specific items (Brown & Ferrara). Thus the best solution may be to select trait words on a case-by-case basis with the specific research objective in mind.

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### Footnotes

1. Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunit (1997) argue that self-enhancement is unrelated to SE. They define self-enhancement as “a propensity to assign a greater estimate of influence to success situations than to failure situations....” in relation to consequent changes in SE. In the present paper self-enhancement is defined as a propensity to evaluate oneself or one’s in-groups more positively than non-self and non-in-group members, respectively.
2. Due to a clerical mishap, age and sex items were omitted from the first batch of questionnaires and data for these variables were therefore available for only 44 male and 54 female students.
3. In Japanese, Korean, and Chinese versions of the RSES, item # 2 of the RSES (“I wish I could have more respect for myself”) has frequently been found to exhibit low item to total correlations (R. A. Brown, 2006b, 2006c; Cheng & Hamid, 1995; Farruggia, Chen, Greenberger, Dmitrieva, & Macek, 2004; Cheung, Kwang, & Zhang, 2003; Feather & McKee 1993; Hamid & Cheng, 1995; Hori, 2003). This was also the case with the present dataset. Internal consistency of the scale went from .77 to .83 when this item was omitted. However the consequences of omitting the item are controversial and as it is not the purpose of the present article to take a position on this issue, the intact 10-item scale has been used.
4. To confirm these somewhat unexpected results, the sample was split into thirds based on self-esteem scores, and the low ( $n = 79$ ,  $M = 3.03$ ,  $SD = .46$ ) and high self-esteem ( $n = 75$ ,  $M = 5.0$ ,  $SD = 4.9$ ) groups were compared with respect to self-evaluations, evaluations of the composite in-group and both component in-groups, and the difference between self and in-group evaluations, using one-way ANOVAs with Bonferroni adjustments. There were no differences between the high and low self-esteem groups. Similarly, the sample was re-split into three groups based on CSES scores, and the high ( $n = 74$ ,  $M = 5.54$ ,  $SD = .54$ ) and low ( $n = 75$ ,  $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .47$ ) collective self-esteem groups were compared with respect to evaluations of both out-groups and the difference between the composite in-group and the composite out-group. Again, no differences between the groups were found.
5. A very similar result was found by Brown & Ferrara (2006). Turkish students’ personal identity was highly associated with their collective identity, but Japanese students’ were not.
6. Literally, *gaijin* means *gaikokujin* (foreign country person). Pragmatically, it denotes people who are unlike Japanese people in appearance, language, customs, and history, and therefore is not often used to refer to other Asian people. However, even those who are in a practical sense Japanese may not be included in the term *wareware nihonjin*. People of Korean descent, born and raised in Japan, holding Japanese citizenship, speaking no language but Japanese, knowing no culture but Japanese, are not considered Japanese, but rather as *zainichichosenjon* (Koreans who are staying in Japan). Interestingly, Koreans (in Korea) also consider these people to be *cheilhanguksarama* (Koreans who are staying in Japan).