Self-Effacement Tendency and Self-Esteem in Japanese College Students

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Abstract

Self-aggrandizement in the form of "better than average" self-evaluations co-occur with and are generally accepted as evidence of high self-esteem in North Americans, who typically evaluate themselves as better than average and express high self-esteem. This pattern has been viewed as universal. But studies in Japan have consistently failed to find high self-esteem and self-aggrandizement, leading some to question whether the tendency to self-aggrandize in the service of self-esteem is indeed universal. One sample of Japanese college students (*n* = 72) rated themselves on 35 personality traits relative to average college students. A second sample (*n* = 107) rated themselves on a different set of 23 personality traits and also completed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. The results indicate that Japanese do self-aggrandize, and that self-esteem is associated with self-aggrandizement. However, because a majority of participants, particularly female students, evaluate themselves as average, both self-aggrandizement and self-esteem tend to be moderate rather than high. It is concluded that Japanese differ from North Americans primarily in that relatively fewer Japanese people maintain illusory self-beliefs.

Key Words: self-esteem, self-enhancement, self-aggrandizement

Feeling good about oneself is one of the generally accepted criteria for good mental health and psychological adaptation (Taylor & Armor, 1996; Taylor & Brown, 1988, 1994; Taylor, Lerner, Sherman Sage, & McDowell, 2003). One of the things that help people feel good about themselves is the sense that they are better than most other people, or "better than average" (Alicke, 1985: Alicke, Klotz, Breitenbecher, Yorak, & Vredenburg, 1995). Typically, people attribute to themselves more positive and fewer negative characteristics than they attribute to most other people. Between 67% and 96% of people describe themselves as superior to peers in a variety of personal characteristics (Taylor & Armor), and similar numbers have consistently been reported. The problem is that a majority of any group can not be above average and in this sense such beliefs are illusory. Yet people consistently assess themselves as above average.

Or rather, North American people do. Heine and his collaborators (for example, Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999) have argued persistently and vehemently that East Asians and especially Japanese do not self-enhance in general, and do not "self-aggrandize," i.e., view themselves as

better than average, in particular (Paulhus, 1998), and that to the extent that they do self-aggrandize, they do so to a much lower degree than Americans do. Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Noraskkunit (1997) have further argued that self-enhancement is unrelated to self-esteem in Japan.

Self-Aggrandizement and Self-esteem.

The most widely used instrument for assessing self-esteem in North America is the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), introduced in 1965 by Morris Rosenberg (1965) to study the self-concepts of American adolescents. The concept of self-esteem was introduced in Japan by Hoshino (1970), who provided the translation of the RSES that has been used in most Japanese self-esteem studies. Hoshino did not use the English expression self-esteem, but rather the Japanese expression *jisonkanjou* 自尊感情 (self-respect feelings). More recent writers (for example, Kitayama et al., 1997) tend to use the expression *jisonshin* (自尊心). In neither case however can it be assumed that the meaning is perfectly synonymous with the English expression *self-esteem*. Indeed, if English *self-esteem* and *self-respect* do not mean the same (Roland & Foxx, 2003), then it is unlikely that self-esteem and *jisonkanjou* or *jisonshin* mean the same.

Yamamoto, Matsui, & Yamanari (1982) used the RSES to assess the extent to which *jiko-hyoka* (self-value) is associated with self-concept (*jiko-gainen*) and self-knowledge (*jiko-ninchi*) in 11 personal characteristic domains (social skills, intelligence, sex, niceness, sports ability, looks, economic power, lifestyle, seriousness, academic standing, taste and special talents), They found that the male students had higher self-value than the female students, and that the male and female students differed significantly in their self-concept in nine of the 11 domains (all but niceness and seriousness), that self-value and self-concept were associated for five domains in the case of the males, and for four domains in the case of the females. In only two domains did the correlations differ significantly ($p < .05$). These were niceness (the females self-value was more impacted by niceness) and knowledge (the males self-value was more impacted by intelligence). The individual correlations were small, the average of the nine significant correlations being .20. However, the pooled correlations were .429 and .449, for the males and females respectively.

Endo (1995) used the RSES in two studies that tested whether self-esteem and self-enhancing self-descriptions in a version of the Pelham & Swann (1989) Self-Attributes Questionnaire (SAQ) were sensitive to competitive versus non-competitive context, and to the specificity of the comparison persons (specific people known to the participants versus hitonami,, "average people"). In Study 1, Endo found that high self-esteem participants evaluated themselves as about equal to specific reference others in non-competitive contexts, while low self-esteem participants evaluated themselves less favorably. In competitive contexts, both high and low self-esteem participants evaluated themselves less favorably than specific reference others. In Study 2, Self-evaluations and evaluations of specific reference others were more favorable than evaluations of "average" others.

Heine & Lehman (1997) used a Japanese version of the RSES in a study designed to ascertain whether collective level self-enhancement was sensitive to the independent versus interdependent dimension of target traits. They found that it is not.

Ito (1999) administered the RSES to determine if self-esteem is related to self-aggrandizement,

using the Yamamoto, Matsui, and Matsunari (1982) paradigm (described above) among Japanese college students and obtained mixed results. Participants rated themselves more positively on traits that they had described as more important, and rated themselves lower in traits that they had described as less important. Moreover, four of the 10 traits were associated with RSES scores. Ito repeated the study with a partially different set of traits, using the BTA paradigm and obtained similar results. Ito notes that the self-ascribed important traits (niceness, seriousness) were those for which there are no commonly agreed upon objective standards, compared to the less important traits (appearance, academic performance, wealth, sports ability, etc), and speculates that participants rated as more important the traits that they felt they could safely attribute to the self.

Endo, Heine, and Lehman (2000, Study 2) asked groups of Japanese, Canadian, and Asian Canadian college students to rate themselves and average same-sex students, on 20 positive. Both groups of Canadians rated themselves significantly better than the average student, while the Japanese rated themselves less positively than the average student. Self-esteem data were collected but the correlations with self-evaluations were not reported. However, the Japanese self-esteem scores were significantly lower than those of the other two groups.

Kobayashi & Brown (2003) administered the RSES in a study to test whether the self-descriptions of Japanese and American college students relative to other people is sensitive to the personal importance of the target traits and varies with self-esteem. They found that in all groups (high self-esteem, low self-esteem, Japanese, Canadians), "....the link between self-other bias was stronger for important than for unimportant traits". Additionally, all groups evaluated themselves more positively than "most other students" (with the exception of the low self-esteem Japanese, who evaluated themselves as less "competent") .

What these studies and numerous others like them (e.g., those using alternative methods to assess self-esteem and forms of self-enhancement other than self-aggrandizement) have in common are two things. First, when there is comparative data from a Western sample, the Japanese group mean is in every case lower than the Western group mean. Second, the Japanese group mean is in every case, very close to the actual or hypothetical midpoint of the scale (Heine et al, 1999). Third, Japanese participants describe themselves in less flattering terms than do North Americans (Heine, 2001, 2003a, 2005a, 2005b).

Overview

A total of 254 participants completed a total of three questionnaires on three separate occasions. The sample size for each questionnaire is indicated below. The Preliminary Study was intended to establish favorability base rates for the personal trait descriptions used in Studies 1 and 2, in which participants rated themselves with respect to the traits relative to their peers. Data were collected between Spring 2002 and Spring 2005, in Chigasaki and Tokyo, Japan.

Preliminary Study

For a social comparison to have any possible connection to self-esteem or self-worth, the comparisons must be made on dimensions that have some sort of evaluative significance. They must also be self-relevant. The Preliminary study was intended to establish the evaluative significance of the trait words to be used in Study 1.

Preliminary Study

Method

Participants and Measures.
Participants were 72 students (48 males, 23 females, 1 unspecified, average age = 18.94, *SD* = 0.97) selected on an availability basis from among the approximately 90 who were enrolled in the author's introductory English classes for first-year students. The instrument was a list of 35 traits and personal descriptions previously established as being those that Japanese students use to describe other Japanese and other people in general, and liked and disliked people in particular (Brown & Ferrara, 2004) Participants were asked to rate the favorability of these traits in general on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very bad*) to 7 (*very good*), with the midpoint (4) labeled "neither good nor bad". The questionnaire was written in Japanese (available from the author).

Results and Discussion

One exception (*emotional*), was rated as neither significantly more nor less positive than the scale mid-point. Twelve expressions were rated more positively at *p* < .001 or greater), and 22 expressions were rated less positively. These are shown arranged in order of positivity in the appendix. The present sample size is too small in relation to the number of variables to support a factor analysis for the purpose of data reduction but an examination of correlation matrices indicates that while there are high correlations and obvious semantic similarities between certain pairs of traits, they are by and large distinct. (The problem of overlapping meaning of trait words will be discussed below.)

Study1

Method

Participants and Measures.
Participants were 75 students (51 males, 24 females, average age = 19.0, *SD* = 0.91) again selected on an availability basis from among the same sample as in Study 1. The questionnaire consisted of the same 35 trait expressions. Participants were asked to evaluate themselves, relative to their same age, same sex peers, with respect to the 35 personality traits, on a scale ranging from 1 (*very much below average*) to 9 (*very much above average*), with the midpoint (5) explicitly labeled "perfectly average" (*choudo heikin*).

Procedure.

Single-sample *t* tests were used to assess whether students'self-evaluations were above or below the scale mid-point for each trait. In view of the large number of tests, a conservative $p <$ .002 (2-tailed) level of significance was adopted to hold the Type I error rate constant. (i.e., the standard $p < .05$ level Bonferroni adjusted to $p < .002$). Next, the positive traits were combined and averaged, as were the negative traits and these two composites were compared using paired-sample *t* tests.

Results

Positive Expressions

Students evaluated themselves significantly below average (t (74) = 3.80, $p < .0001$) on one positive expression (strong) and above average (t (74) = 3.30, $p < .002$) on one other (curious). They evaluated themselves as average on the ten other positive traits.

Negative Expressions

Students evaluated themselves significantly below average on ten negative traits (*foolish* (t (74) = 3.84, $p < .001$), *boastful* (t (74) = 5.31, $p < .0001$), *cold* (t (74) = 3.48, $p < .001$), *untruthful* (t (74) = 6.58, $p < .001$), *conceited* (t (74) = 3.93, $p < .001$), *irritable* (t (74) = 3.00, $p < .004$), *violent* (t (74) = 9.53, $p < .001$), *narrow minded* (t (74) = 4.55, $p < .000$), *aggressive* (t (74) = 6.02, $p < .0001$), and *persistent* (t (74) = 5.03, $p < .0001$)) and above average on none. They evaluated themselves as average on the twelve other negative traits. The distribution of self-ratings for the positive traits differed significantly from the distribution for self-ratings of the negative traits χ^2(2, 34) = 6.13, $p < .05$), and the distribution for both positive and negative traits together differed substantially from a random distribution (χ^2 (2,67) = 11.99, $p .< .01$), which one might expect to see if the students as a group viewed themselves in realistic terms., The difference is clearly due to the paucity of unfavorable self-ratings.

Given that there were 12 positive and 22 negative traits, there would be 34 opportunities for participants to display either self-enhancing or self-effacing biases. They could evaluate themselves as being below average in possession of negative traits and above average in positive traits, or they could evaluate themselves as being above average in negative traits and below average in positive traits. The former would constitute self-enhancement and the latter would constitute self-effacement.

As can be seen from Table 1, the obtained pattern suggests a slight "better than average" (BTA) effect. Most self-ratings were not significantly different (at $p < .01$) from "average" but 11 out of 12 that were different were self-enhancing. Nevertheless, the propensity to describe oneself as about average is obvious: Students rated themselves as average on 22 (62%) of the 34 evaluatively valenced traits. There is also little indication of self-effacement: On only one of the 34 traits (strong) did the students rate themselves as worse than average. Moreover, all of the differences that approached but did not reach the appointed significance level of $p < .01$ occurred in a self-

enhancing direction: There was a clear tendency for participants to evaluate themselves as being more *open to new challenges*, t (74) = 2.21, $p < .03$, more *open-hearted*, t (74) = 2.12, $p < .04$, to have more *fighting spirit*, t (74) = 2.09, $p < .04$, and to be less *selfish*, t (74) = 2.08, $p < .05$, and less *apathetic*, t (74) = 2.53, $p < .02$.

Table 1. Distribution of self-ratings on positive and negative traits relative to "average student" of same age and sex.

	Positive Traits	*Negative Traits*
Below Average	1	10
Average	10	12
Above Average	1	0

Note. A self-rating of below average with regard to a negative trait indicates a favorable self-view. A self-rating of below average with regard to a positive trait indicates a critical self-view.

The 12 positive traits together formed a stable scale (Cronbach's $a = .78$, as did the 22 negative traits together (Cronbach's $a = .87$). The mean for the 12 positive traits combined was 5.17 (*SD* = 0.89) and the mean for the 22 negative traits combined was 4.46 (*SD* = 0.92). Participants viewed themselves as average with respect to the combined positive traits, but below average (i.e., more favorably than the average student) with respect to the combined negative traits (single-sample t tests against the scale mid-point were (t (73) = 1.62, $p < .11$ for the positive traits, and t (73) = -4.99, $p < .0001$ for the negative traits).

Discussion

As the results above indicate, self-enhancement can result from two different evaluative tactics. The first is to view oneself as having more positive traits, or larger "quantities" of those positive traits, than (relevant) other people. The second is to view oneself as having fewer negative traits, or less of them, than (relevant) other people. Participants favored the second option, which can be described as being modest, but not self-effacing. They viewed themselves as average with regard to positive traits, but better than average with regard to negative traits.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate the results of Study 1 with a different sample, at a different time, and with a different set of traits, and additionally to test the hypothesis that self-enhancement is not positively related to self-esteem in Japanese people (as claimed by Kitayama et al, 1997).

Method

Participants and Measures.

Participants were 107 students (60 males and 45 females, 2 unspecified, mean age = 19.6, *SD* = 1.3)) enrolled in several sections of an introductory psychology course at two universities in the same area as in Study 1. The instrument was essentially the same as that used in study 1, except that slightly fewer traits were used, and traits were selected so as to be maximally meaningful and relevant for the purpose of comparative self-assessment (with same age and sex peers as the specific targets of comparison) to the student participants, based on prior research (R.A. Brown, 2005a, 2005d), as well as evaluatively salient and semantically distinct. To reemphasize this point, these are precisely the traits that students very much like the participants routinely use when asked to describe themselves and other students. Twelve positive and 11 negative traits were selected. Desirability ratings were provided by students similar in background to the participants (2005d). The positive traits were *Kokorogahiroi* (Open Hearted), *Konjougaaru* (Fighting Spirit), *Seijitsu* (Sincere), *Shitashimiyasui* (Friendly), *Shojikina* (Honest), *Yasashii* (Kind), *Kashikoi* (Intelligent), *Kinben* (diligent), *Teineina* (Polite), *Sekyokuteki* (Active), *Jiyuu* (Liberal) and *Kensonna* (Modest). The negative traits were *Baka* (Fool), *Shokyokuteki* (Passive), *Aimai* (Vague), *Unuborenotsuyoi* (over-confident), *Tsumetai* (Cold), *Kogekiteki* (Aggressive), *Hikanteki* (Pessimistic), *Ishigayowaii* (Weakwilled), *Shitsukoi* (Insistent), *Namakemono* (Lazy), *Jikochuushinteki* (Self-centered). Note at this point that the seeming synonymy or antonymy of some of the pairs is less evident in the original Japanese than in the English, which is here used merely for expository convenience. To take one obvious example, the correlation between "lazy" (*namakemono*) and "diligent" (*kinbenna*), in the present dataset is non-significant, r (197) = .19, *ns*. One would expect more substantial correlations than this for synonymous and antonymous pairs of expressions. Participants assessed themselves in terms of the traits relative to students of their own age and gender on an explicitly labeled 9-point scale ranging from 1 (*very much below average*) through 5 (*completely average*) to 9 (*very much above average*). The questionnaire was originally composed in Japanese, hence translation issues are not a concern.

Participants also completed a Japanese version of the 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). This version of the RSES is essentially identical to that of Hoshino (1970) which has been used in the majority of Japanese self-esteem studies from 1970 to the present. Sample RSES items are "I certainly feel useless at times," "I feel that I have a number of good qualities," and "I am able to do things as well as most other people." The present version has also been used in several recent studies with student samples similar to the present one and has shown adequate internal reliabilities (R. A. Brown, 2005b; 2005c). All items on both sections of the instrument were randomly presented, and two counterbalanced forms of the instrument were distributed randomly to participants. Participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously in large groups.

Procedure

I first analyzed the traits separately using single-sample *t* tests against the scale midpoint

(explicitly labeled "perfectly average") to determine with respect to which traits the participants regarded themselves as deviating from average, and whether the deviation represented a positive rather than a negative bias. Following the recent example of Brown & Kobayashi (2002) the traditional alpha level of .05 was adopted, Bonferroni adjusted as required by the number of each type of test being conducted (i.e., single-sample t test, independent-sample t test, and Pearson bivariate and partial correlations). In practice, differences were generally judged to be significant at $p < .002$. I tested the differences between male and female means for each of the trait self-assessments using independent-sample t tests using the same criterion as noted above. In order to potentially elucidate the structure of the self-concepts being assessed I performed a factor analysis on the initial sets of 12 positive and 11 negative traits. using SPSS 11. For the positive traits, three factors emerged, two of which were readily interpretable. Factor 1 consisted of kind, modest, open, sincere, honest, and polite, and accounted for 22.23% of the variance. These are qualities that are associated with successful affiliative outcomes, and might be labeled Niceness. When combined they had a Cronbach's α of .73. Factor 2 consisted of intelligent, fighting spirit, active, and diligent and accounted for 17.41% of the variance. These are qualities associated with successful achievement outcomes, and might be labeled Capability. When combined they had a Cronbach's α of .63. Factor 3 consisted of two traits, friendly and liberal. This factor accounted for 13.45% of the variance. Unfortunately, it is unclear what these traits have in common, and their Cronbach's α was an inadequate .35. Therefore I treated them as two single- item clusters, and analyzed them along with the 6 item (Niceness) and 4 item (Capability) clusters. For the negative traits, four factors emerged. Factor 1 consisted of lazy, passive, and vague, accounting for 17.32% of the variance. At least the first two of these traits are clearly associated with unsuccessful achievement outcomes. Factor 2 consisted of aggressive, cold, and self-centered, accounting for 15.60% of the variance. These are qualities associated with unsuccessful affiliative outcomes. This cluster might be labeled Unsocial. Factors 3 and 4 consisted of conceited, insistent, pessimistic, and foolish and weak-willed respectively, accounting for 13.97% and 12.51% of the variance, respectively. It is unclear what they share in common. In any case, none of the clusters had internal reliabilities that reached the .70 level recommended by Nunnally (1978). (The average α was .44, and the highest, factor 1, was .62). Rather than analyze semantically unmotivated clusters, I elected to analyze them individually.

A mean score for each multi-trait cluster was computed by dividing the total score for the cluster by the number of traits comprising the cluster. I then aggregated the four positive clusters into a variable POS and the 11 negative traits into the variable NEG. After reversing the scores for the negative traits, an overall score (OES) was obtained by summing the positive and negative mean scores, as has been standard procedure since the earliest days of personality research. I then conducted Pearson correlation tests to determine to what extent positive, negative and overall self-evaluations covaried with self-esteem scores.

Results

No self-evaluation mean differed at $p < .01$ for any trait across the two counterbalanced forms.

Consequently, the data were aggregated for subsequent analyses. I used independent-sample *t* tests to test whether male and female self-assessments differed systematically. Few differences were observed. These will be discussed at the appropriate time.

Positive Traits

Using single-sample *t* tests against the scale midpoint, participants evaluated themselves as significantly more liberal, honest, modest, and kind than average, and less intelligent and diligent, but neither above nor below average with regard to friendly, polite, active, sincere, and fighting spirit. Thus they evaluated themselves above average with regard to four traits, below average with regard to two, and average with regard to five. Of note, both below average self-ratings refer to Capability. In aggregate they assessed themselves as less Capable than their peers, but Nicer, and more Liberal, but neither more nor less Friendly. Their overall self-assessment based on these positive clusters of traits was significantly above average (M = 5.27, SD = 0.93, t (102) = 2.93, p < .01). Means, standard deviations, and significance levels are shown in Table 2.

Negative Traits

With regard to the negative traits, participants assessed themselves as more foolish, vague, and lazy than average, and less conceited and cold than average, but neither more nor less passive, insistent, pessimistic, weak-willed, self-centered, and aggressive. Thus, they evaluated themselves less favorably than average with respect to three traits, more favorably than average with respect to two, and as average with respect to six. In aggregate they evaluated themselves as marginally but non-significantly above average in possession of the negative traits included in this study (i.e., less favorably than average), M =4.85, SD = 0.82, t (103) = -1.88, p < .07. Means, standard deviations, and significance levels are shown in Table 2.

After reversing the scores for the negative traits, the positive and negative traits were summed and an average computed. The average overall self-evaluation (OSE) was 5.06 (SD = 0.66), which did not differ from the scale midpoint (t (100) = .914, *ns*) indicating that participants' overall self-evaluation, with respect to the 23 traits, was one of "averageness." Categorically, they rated themselves more favorably than average with respect to 6 traits, less favorably with respect to 5, and as average with respect to 11. This distribution of responses did not differ from a random distribution (χ^2 (2.41) = 1.37, *ns*) thus providing no evidence for a better than average, self-aggrandizing bias. It may be worth noting however that above and below average self-assessments seem to divide roughly along the Capability versus Non-Capability dimensions. Worse than average self-assessments were primarily limited to traits that are related to or have Capability implications (less intelligent, hardworking, more foolish, lazy, vague) Better than average self-assessments occurred among the traits with Niceness implications (more open, honest, kind, modest, less conceited, cold) and one other that appears to be relatively independent (liberal).

Table 2. Self-Assessments relative to "average" student of same age and sex, mean, standard deviation, and correlation with self-esteem.

	M	SD	r
Open Hearted	5.77 ***	1.63	.28 *
Fighting Spirit	5.09	2.03	.33 **
Sincere	5.26	1.75	.36 ***
Friendly	5.21	1.78	.34 **
Honest	5.90 ***	1.72	.05
Kind	5.69 ***	1.59	.38 ***
Intelligent	4.29 † † †	1.71	.35 ***
Hardworking	3.93 † † †	1.66	.12
Polite	4.93	1.65	.26
Active	4.69	1.73	.32 *
Liberal	5.98 ***	1.76	.18
Modest	5.39 *	1.45	.12
Foolish	4.35 +	2.08	.03
Passive	4.74	1.88	.29 *
Vague	4.25 † † †	1.62	.19
Conceited	5.55 *	1.69	.11
Cold	5.42 *	1.62	.11
Aggressive	5.52	2.14	-0.04
Pessimistic	4.82	1.99	.40 ***
Weak-willed	4.73	1.78	.08
Insistent	5.24	1.76	.10
Lazy	3.96 † † †	1.60	.30 *
Self-centered	4.91	2.04	.04
All Positive Traits	5.27 *	0.93	.48 ***
All Negative Traits	4.85	0.82	.28 *
Combined Traits	5.06	0.66	.52 ***.

Note. Negative traits scores have been reversed, so that higher scores indicate less of the trait in question, hence more positive self-views.

Note. Mean is more positive than average at * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$. Mean is less positive than average, † $p < .01$, † † $p < .001$, † † † $p < .0001$. r * $p < .01$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$.

The RSES had a Cronbach's α of .76). Male and female means did not differ significantly, and the overall mean was 3.71 (SD = .90) which was significantly lower than the scale midpoint, t (105) = -3.29 $p < .001$. RSES correlated significantly both with POS, r (102 = .48 $p < .0001$, and NEG, r (103) = .283, $p < .01$, and OSE, r (100) = .525 $p < .0001$. Positive correlations between SE and individ-

ual positive traits were significant at $p < .01$ for intelligent, active, sincere, kind, fighting spirit, friendly and open, and for passive, lazy, and pessimistic, among the negative traits (after reversal of scores). Sex did not affect correlation between self-esteem and self-evaluation. Zero-order and partial (controlling for sex) correlations were virtually identical.

Discussion

Consistent with results of Study 1, participants in Study 2 tended to describe themselves as "average" or slightly above average, with respect to the 23 target traits. Contrary to claims often made, but consistent with some empirical results (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002; Ito, 1999; Kobayashi & Brown, 2003) these students not only were not self-effacing, but were self-aggrandizing, in that they evaluated themselves more positively than other students of their own age and gender, on a range of indigenously meaningful traits and constructs. Moreover, consistent with the results of Ito (1999) the self-effacing assessments were highly specific to the domain of achievement related traits in which to some degree there are objective standards of evaluation. Moreover, self-esteem was related to how much above average participants evaluated themselves. Thus, while mean self-esteem scores are low (by North American standards), or at least not high, higher self-esteem relative to the local standard is associated with the tendency to evaluate oneself as better than average with respect to the 23 indigenous traits used in the present study. In addition, no negative correlations were obtained, indicating that while, for example, being more intelligent than average is associated with higher self-esteem, being more foolish then average is *not* associated with lower self-esteem.

General Discussion

Studies 1 and 2 uncovered evidence against a self-effacement bias in Japanese college students. In Study 1, 75 students judged themselves more favorably than average with respect to 10 out of 22 negative traits, but average with regard to 10 of 12 positive traits. In study 2, 107 students self-enhanced by judging themselves as above average with regard to 15 positive traits, but average with regard to 15 negative traits. The particular evaluative tactic (emphasizing the positive versus de-emphasizing the negative) was reversed but the result was the same: Both samples of students evaluated themselves as better than average. However, when viewed in categorical terms, the picture is rather one of "optimistic averageness." Students overwhelmingly described themselves as average but their self-judgments of non-averageness were noticeably skewed in the direction of the positive traits. In particular, self-described non-average students tended to see themselves as having relatively fewer negative traits than their peers.

Study 2 also examined the relationship between self-esteem and self-enhancement, specifically evaluations of self relative to average students of the same sex and age. Self-esteem was found to be positively correlated with self-enhancement and negatively correlated with self-effacement. Thus, contrary to Kitayama et al. (1997), Japanese college students appear to be rather similar to

North American college students and subject to similar cognitive distortions, which may serve a similar purpose, that of promoting positive feelings of self-worth. However, it is also worth mentioning, the strong inclination toward self-evaluations of "average" among the two samples described herein. This is consistent with the claim that wanting to feel good about oneself is universal because in Japan being average is, unlike in the United States, not synonymous with being inferior (Alicke, et al., 1995；Dunning, Meyerowitz, & Holzberg, 1989). One can, it seems, feel good about oneself despite not being above average, although this depends on what it means to be "average," and that obviously is not constant across time and place.

Limitations

The primary limitation of any study that relies on self-assessments with respect to traits is the nature of the traits themselves. The number of traits that could be used is large (Anderson，1968; Ashton et al., 2004; Ashton, Lee. & Goldberg, 2004) and poses problems either of sampling from the relevant semantic domain, or of administration. Unavoidably, a relatively small number must be chosen and especially because their number is small, they must be selected so as to be representative (of the range of trait words), relevant (to the targets), meaningful (to the participants) and evaluatively potent (so that enhancement tendencies can be discerned), all considerations identified by Peabody (1985) and discussed in detail by R.A. Brown (1992) but generally subsequently ignored. Several important studies use a mere eight traits selected "on the basis of prior research. . . and. . . pilot testing. . . ." (Brown & Kobayashi, 2002, p.148) the nature of which is not explicated (Brown & Kobayashi; Kobayashi & Brown, 2003). I have attempted to accomplish these three goals by using trait words that were collected from samples of students who were very similar to the participants themselves, and evaluated by the participants themselves (along with other students). Thus the 35 trait words used in Study 1, the 30 trait words used in Study 2, and the 12 trait and domain words used in Study 3 were representative, relevant, meaningful, and evaluatively potent. (The process by which these lists were developed is described in R.A. Brown, 1992; Brown & Ferrara, 2004, and R.A. Brown, 2005d). Certainly, it is always possible that different trait targets offered will result in different patterns of evaluations. One way to potentially circumvent that difficulty would be to use general words representing domains or even more global self-assessments. However, this option is not without flaws, as often it is precisely the specific content of the trait words that we are interested in. Moreover, such a limited number of traits would present reliability problems, and their obvious evaluative nature will undoubtedly create validity and attrition problems, as many students will decline to render what they may feel are "biased" judgments. Unfortunately, there is no simple solution and cumulative research is required. It is recommended that any study that is intended to assess any target group (or self) begin with the collection of a set of trait words that is representative, relevant, meaningful, and evaluatively potent. Other words can also be used as fillers or distracters although this would, of course, create new problems in terms of the magnitude of the judgment task, and lead to relatively high non-completion rates, and raise questions about the impact of cognitive fatigue on the accuracy of the responses.

One additional consideration concerning the selection of traits should be brought up. Antonyms

and synonyms may have a distorting effect on the overall assessment. Antonyms will tend to neutralize the result because one trait will cancel out its opposite. Synonyms will inflate the assessments because essentially the same score will have been recorded twice. One could attempt to avoid this problem by, for example, sampling a pre-specified number of traits from among those that are subsumed by major dimensions of personality. This would unavoidably introduce controversial questions concerning how many such dimensions there are to be sampled from. While five dimensions is a widely accepted number (Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003; McCrea & Costa, 1997), it can by no means be assumed that five dimensions are meaningfully extractible from lexical self-ratings in all non-European languages (Triandis & Suh, 2002) and even in English there is dispute (Ashton, et al. 2004; Mayer, 2003; Zuckerman, 1995). This would however introduce an unwanted element of artificiality if it turns out that these terms are not those that are typically used by the participants, or that the participants feel are important (Schutz, 1998). Some of the trait words used in the two studies described herein are, obviously, related, as would be expected, given the procedure by which they were assembled. But semantic overlap is inevitable when the number of personality dimensions is substantially smaller than the number of trait words. In any case, the extent of the semantic overlap may be considerably less in the Japanese language than in English and perfectly antonymous or synonymous sets of words are rare, if they exist at all (Antilla, 1972; Bynon, 1977).

Finally, the problem of aggregating positive and negative traits must be addressed. Spencer-Rogers et al. (p. 1421) remark that "we cannot assume that self-generated positive versus negative self statements.....are of equal value, significance, and strength." Spencer-Rogers et al. are referring to statements yielded by TST (twenty statements test) protocols but the point applies more broadly. Accordingly, in the present study, the possible inequality of value, significance, and strength of the target trait words was controlled for by isolating the evaluative aspect of the self-statements and focusing the analysis on that aspect. It bears pointing out that the process of aggregating positive and negative self-statements is surely not intractably problematic—the RSES does precisely that and reasonably so. If an individual endorses many negative and few positive self-descriptions or professes many negative and few positive self-cognitions and emotions, this is surely not incidental to their self-concept or self-valuation. Since the number of potential self-descriptions is large (Ashton, et al, 2004), if not infinite (Chomsky, 1957; 1972), sampling will always be necessary. In this case, the primary concern was to find and use descriptions that are representative, relevant, meaningful, and evaluatively potent, while realizing that these provide an unavoidably incomplete picture. It is unlikely that anyone's self-concept or self-enhancement tendencies will be discernible from their endorsement of descriptions that they do not feel are self-applicable and important.

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Appendix A. Translations for Japanese Expressions used in Studies 1-4.

English	Japanese	Japanese (romanized)
Open hearted	心が広い	Kokorogahiroi
Fighting Spirit	根性がある	Konjougaaru
Sincere	誠実な	Seijitsu
Friendly	親しみやすい	Shitashimiyasui
Honest	正直な	Shojikina
Kind	優しい	Yasashii
Intelligent	賢い	Kashikoi
Diligent	勤勉	Kinben
Polite	丁寧な	Teineina
Active	積極的	Sekyokuteki
Liberal	自由	Jiyuu
Modest	謙遜な	Kensonna
Foolish	馬鹿	Baka
Passive	消極的	Shokyokuteki
Vague	曖昧	Aimai
Conceited	うぬぼれの強い	Unuborenotsuyoi
Cold	冷たい	Tsumetai
Aggressive	攻撃的	Kogekiteki
Pessimistic	悲観的	Hikanteki
Weak Willed	意思が弱い	Ishigayowaii
Insistent	しつこい	Shitsukoi
Lazy	怠け者	Namakemono
Self-Centered	自己中心的	Jikochuushinteki
Warm	暖かい	Atatakai
Friendly	親しみやすい	Shitashimiyasui
Warm-hearted	心の暖かい	Kokoro ga atakai
Enjoys Challenges	新しいチャレンジを楽しむ	Atarashichyarenjio tanoshimu
Curious	好奇心がおおぜい	Koukishingaouzei
Calm	穏やか	Odayaka
Resourceful	臨機応	Rinkiohen
Adventurous	冒険好きな	Boukensukina

Strong	強い	Tsuyoi
Emotional	感情的	Kanjouteki
Shy	人見知り	Hitomishiri
Timid	臆病	Okubyou
Apathetic	感情を表さない	Kanjouwoarawasanai
Greedy	欲張り	Yokubari
Boastful	自慢する	Jiman suru
Vague	あいまいな	Aimaina
Embarrasable	すぐにまごまごする	Suguni magomagosuru
Aggressive	攻撃的	Kougekiteki
Untrustworthy	当てにならない	Ateninarenai
Foolish	馬鹿	Baka
Conceited	うぬぼれの強い	Unuborenotsuyoi
Persistent	しつこい	Shitsukoi
Narrow Mind	心が狭い	Kokoro ga semai
Quitter	簡単にあきらめてしまう	Kantanni akirameteshimau
Violent	暴力的な	Bouroyoukuteki
Untruthful	嘘つき	Usotsuki

Appendix B. 35 Traits used in Study 2, rated for favorability.

	Mean	*Standard Deviation*
Warm.	6.36	0.81
Friendly	6.08	0.91
Open Mind	6.04	1.01
Fighting Spirit	5.83	0.92
Enjoys Challenges	5.82	0.98
Sincere	5.68	1.12
Curious	5.64	0.97
Gentle	5.60	0.96
Resourceful	5.40	1.22
Adventurous	5.28	0.97
Strong	5.25	0.97
Modest	4.47	1.01
Emotional	3.96	1.13
Shy	3.54	0.80
Weak-willed	3.42	0.99
Passive	3.39	1.08

Timid	3.29	0.88
Apathetic	3.29	1.05
Greedy	3.21	1.09
Boastful	2.94	0.99
Cold	2.93	0.91
Vague	2 93	0.91
Embarrasible	2.89	0.97
Aggressive	2.83	1.14
Untrustworthy	2.74	0.98
Foolish	2.69	1.15
Conceited	2.49	0.95
Selfish	2.47	0.90
Persistent	2.35	1.02
Narrow Mind	2.32	0.96
Lazy	2.29	1.04
Quitter	2.28	0.81
Violent	1.89	1.03
Untruthful	1.78	0.94

Note. N = 72. Rating scale ranged from 1 (= *very bad*) to 7 (= *very good*).

Author Note