

# Effects of cultural values and self-monitoring on explicit and implicit self-esteem

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This study examined how explicit (i.e., self-report) and implicit (i.e., hidden, unconscious) self-esteem are affected by cultural values and self-monitoring. Ninety-five Japanese undergraduate students participated in an online experiment. The results revealed that implicit self-esteem was positive overall, while explicit self-esteem was consistently negative, and these two were not significantly correlated. Moreover, collectivistic tendencies and explicit self-esteem were negatively correlated among participants who were high in self-monitoring, while they were not related among those who were low in self-monitoring. In addition, implicit self-esteem was not associated with self-monitoring or collectivistic tendencies. These results imply the need to consider cultural and personal values when measuring self-esteem.

**Keywords:** Self-esteem, self-monitoring, collectivism, Implicit Association Test (IAT)

## Implicit attitudes about the self

Many psychology studies have been conducted on the construct of self-esteem, which represents the degree to which one values oneself. The most commonly used tools for measuring self-esteem are self-report scales; for example, Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale asks respondents to answer ten introspective questions about how positively they view themselves. In such measurements, the conscious self-evaluations made by respondents can be described as "explicit self-esteem."

However, in light of findings that unconscious factors influence our behavior and cognition, this implicit component of self-esteem is currently drawing researchers' attention. Therefore, recently, there has been a proliferation of research using implicit measures such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) (e.g., Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Falk & Heine, 2015).

Greenwald and his colleagues introduced the notion that implicit attitudes operate unconsciously and represent people's "true feelings." They argue that implicit attitudes can be activated automatically, influencing people's thoughts and behaviors. For example, Greenwald and Banaji (1995, p.11) describe implicit self-esteem as "the introspectively unidentified (or inaccurately identified) effect of the self-attitude on evaluation of self-associated and self-dissociated objects." Thus, implicit attitudes are based on automatic links or associations of concepts arising from experience. It is believed that when a concept is activated, the emotional valence associated with it is also aroused.

The IAT requires participants to categorize words presented on a screen by clicking one of two buttons as quickly as possible. The speed

and correct answer rates differ depending on the concepts presented; the strength of the association is reflected in the difficulty of categorizing the stimuli. Therefore, the stronger the association, the easier the categorization task becomes, and the quicker the concept can be categorized. The critical point is that items pertaining to the "self" share the same response key as "pleasant" or "unpleasant" items. This relationship implies that participants with a positive self-image should respond faster when the "self" words share the same response key as "pleasant" words than when they are paired with "unpleasant" words. The IAT score is based on the latency of responses to two kinds of tasks with different instructions on using two response keys for classifying four stimulus categories. Thus, IAT reveals implicit attitudes about various constructs, including stereotypes.

## Relationship between explicit and implicit self-esteem

Although potential indicators have been used for various psychological phenomena (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013), implicit self-esteem is poorly correlated with explicit self-esteem (measured using conventional self-report questionnaires). Its predictive validity is low (e.g., Bosson et al., 2000; Greenwald & Banaji, 2017; Yamaguchi et al., 2007) even though these two are believed to measure the same concept. These findings are consistent across cultures, including Japan (e.g., Harashima & Oguchi, 2007). One reason may be that explicit self-esteem measures may reflect humility and feelings of self-worth at the same time, while implicit self-esteem measures reflect only feelings of self-worth.

As with other psychological concepts, the correlation between explicit and implicit attitudes

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remains low, although there are concept-dependent differences (e.g., Greenwald & Banaji, 2017). The implications of the gap between explicit and implicit self-esteem are still being examined. Some studies have pointed out that the wider the discrepancy between attitudes, the greater is the level of psychological maladaptation (Jordan et al., 2003), and the more negative the emotions experienced, for example, loneliness and depression (Fujii, 2014).

### **Cultural differences**

Psychologists have long recognized the influence of culture on self-esteem. In several theories about the axis that captures cultural differences, the constructs of individualism and collectivism, and the related construct of self-construal have attracted attention.

Individualism and collectivism refer to differences in the degree to which the goals and interests of an individual's affiliated group take priority over their own. "Individualists give priority to personal goals over the goals of collectives; collectivists either make no distinctions between personal and collective goals or if they do make such distinctions, they subordinate their personal goals to the collective goals" (Triandis 1989, p. 509). An example of collectivistic behavior is the performance of overtime work without the expectation of overtime pay.

Cultural self-construal refers to cultural differences in people's shared views of human beings (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010; see also Hashimoto & Yamagishi, 2016). Independent self-construal, which is predominant in North America and Europe, is the belief that a human being is an internally driven entity detached and distinct from others. On the other hand, interdependent self-construal, which is predominant in Asia, refers to a culturally shared belief that an individual is embedded in relationships with others and cannot be independent. To build a good reputation in collectivist societies, people must be sensitive to others' needs and sentiments and avoid offensive behavior. People with an interdependent self-view care about others' feelings, resulting in their not displaying high self-esteem explicitly while still holding high self-esteem implicitly. Moreover, the cultural view of self-theory argues that East Asians generally have a lower need for high self-esteem (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

East Asians, such as the Japanese, are said to be predominantly collectivist with an interdependent self-view. They rarely self-aggrandize or proclaim their accomplishments out of consideration for those around them. It is unclear whether collectivists' true self-esteem is as high as individualists'. Still, a comparison between Japan and the United States, using the IAT, showed no significant cultural differences (Yamaguchi et al., 2007).

The present study used a collectivism scale to assess individual differences in cultural values. Out of several collectivism/individualism scales, the study chose one that evaluated preferences relating to the ingroup and the self (Yamaguchi et al., 1995).

### **Purpose of the present study**

This study examined how self-monitoring and cultural values associated with humility relate to self-esteem. Self-monitoring refers to an individual's tendency to "monitor (observe and control) their self-presentation and expressive behavior" (Snyder, 1974, p.527) out of concern for social appropriateness, and to adjust their words and behaviors to the people around them. Snyder lists five self-monitoring goals: "(a) to communicate accurately one's true emotional state by means of intensified expressive presentations; (b) to communicate accurately an arbitrary emotional state which need not be congruent with actual emotional experience; (c) to conceal adaptively an inappropriate emotional state and appear unresponsive and unexpressive; (d) to conceal adaptively an inappropriate emotional state and appear to be experiencing an appropriate one; (e) to appear to be experiencing some emotion when one experiences nothing and a nonresponse is inappropriate" (p. 527).

The present study focused on how cultural values related to humility and self-monitoring influence explicit and implicit self-esteem. Explicit self-esteem, but not necessarily implicit self-esteem, should be low in collectivistic cultures such as Japan, where humility is considered a virtue, as previous studies showed. It is also true that there are some variations within a culture. Cultural values can be studied at the individual and cultural levels because these two are different units of analysis (Yamaguchi et al., 1995). At the individual level, too, it can be expected that the more collectivistic the person is, the lower his/her explicit self-esteem would be, but this is not true for implicit self-esteem, because those who self-promote

or proclaim their value appear to disregard others' opinions.

In addition, self-monitoring can affect explicit self-esteem. Those high in self-monitoring tend to change their words and behaviors depending on the people around them, while those low in self-monitoring do not. Thus, it is expected that those low in self-monitoring overall may feel hesitant to show explicit self-esteem in Japan where modesty is valued, even if they are not collectivists themselves. As individuals, the Japanese are less collectivistic now than in past eras. Still, they believe that most other Japanese have collectivistic ideas (Hirai, 2000). Those with low self-monitoring would not be aware of the diminished status of their cultural values much and still follow these values, resulting in hesitancy to appear superior to others. On the other hand, among those high in self-monitoring, the less collectivistic the person is, the more he/she would show explicit self-esteem.

## Method

### Participants

The participants were 95 Japanese undergraduate students (29 men and 66 women) enrolled in a psychology class with a mandatory research participation assignment. Their average age was 19.56 years ( $SD = 0.82$ ). The participants gave informed consent for the use of their data.

### Procedure

An experiment was conducted in a computer room with one station per student. First, the participants were asked to provide personal information (age, gender, and nationality). Then, two types of self-esteem were measured. Implicit self-esteem was measured using the IAT, based on Greenwald and Farnham (2000), using Inquisit 4.0 (Millisecond). Four categories—"self," "others," "pleasant," and "unpleasant"—were used. The IAT score is based on latencies for two tasks that differ in instructions for using two response keys to classify four categories of stimuli. The participants were required to categorize each target word, either left or right, as fast as possible and correctly by pressing an assigned key. Shorter response latency indicates a stronger association between paired categories. The more positive the score is, the more positive the implicit self-esteem. D1 of Greenwald et al., (2003)

was used among some variations in calculating the score.

Explicit self-esteem was measured using Rosenberg's (1965) Self-Esteem Scale which consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point scale. The order of the explicit/implicit measurements was counterbalanced (the implicit first,  $n = 57$ ; the explicit first,  $n = 38$ ).

Finally, the self-monitoring scale (Snyder, 1974) and a collectivism scale (Yamaguchi et al., 1995) were administered to the participants. The self-monitoring scale comprised several subscales. The total score was used because the internal correlation was high. After the experiment, the participants were debriefed.

The experiment was approved by the research ethics committee of the university with which the author is affiliated (No.37).

## Results

Table 1 summarizes the scores of the two self-esteem measurements. The average score of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale was significantly lower than the mid-point (30), while the average IAT score was significantly higher than the mid-point (0). The IAT score and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale score did not significantly differ depending on the order of administration ( $t[93] = 0.28, d = .06, ns$ ;  $t[93] = 0.38, d = 0.08, ns$ ). The two scores were independent ( $r = .05, ns$ ). These results are consistent with those of previous research in Japan. Table 2 shows the correlations between the variables.

Two multiple regression analyses were conducted to understand better the type of person who had a higher Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale score and IAT score. Variance inflation factors were less than 1.5, indicating that there was no problem with multicollinearity. As shown in Table 3, no predictor was significant for the IAT score. For the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale score, there was a marginally significant interaction effect between the collectivism and self-monitoring scores, and a significant negative correlation with the collectivism score. The interaction patterns are shown in Figure 1. Simple slope tests indicated that the collectivism score did not affect the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale score among those low in self-monitoring ( $b = -.07, b SE = .18, ns$ ). In contrast, the higher the collectivism score, the lower Rosenberg's score was among those high in self-monitoring ( $b = -.47, b SE = .11, p < .001$ ).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics about self-esteem

	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	Theoretical midpoint	<i>t</i> value	
Rosenberg's scale score	26.65	(7.57)	30	-4.31	***
IAT score	0.74	(0.54)	0	13.47	***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 2 Correlations of variables

	Rosenberg's score	IAT score	SM score
IAT score	.05		
SM score	.09	.05	
collectivism score	-.27**	-.08	.10

\*\*  $p < .01$

Note: IAT, implicit association test; SM, self-monitoring

Table 3 Multiple regression analysis predicting explicit and implicit self-esteem

predictive variables	Rosenberg's scale score			IAT score		
	$\beta$	CI (95%)		$\beta$	CI (95%)	
Collectivism score	-.27 *	-0.48	-0.06	-.14	-0.36	0.08
Self-monitoring score	.13	-0.06	0.32	.03	-0.18	0.23
Collectivism score *Self-monitoring	-.20 +	-0.40	0.01	.05	-0.17	0.27
$R^2$	.16 **			.02		

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , +  $p < .10$

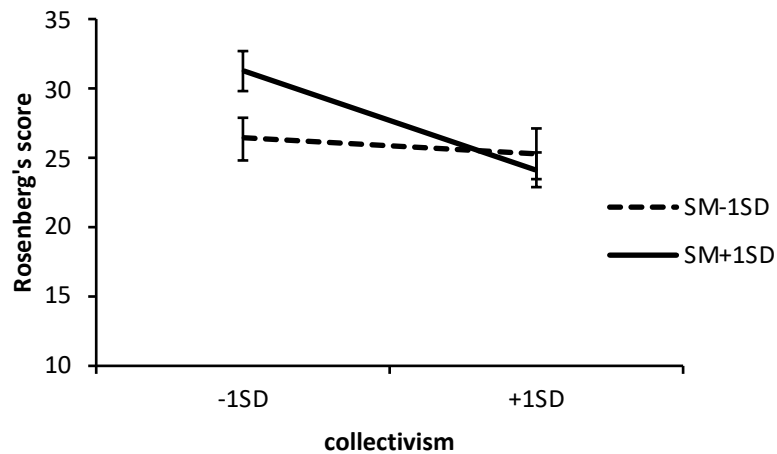


Figure 1. Interaction of self-monitoring (SM) and collectivism

Note. Error bars mean SE. SM, self-monitoring.

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## Discussion

The present study examined the effects of cultural values and self-monitoring on implicit and explicit self-esteem. Implicit self-esteem was unrelated to cultural values and self-monitoring, possibly because implicit attitudes are difficult to control. Furthermore, implicit self-esteem has been conceptualized as self-esteem based on past experiences and, thus, is relatively stable (e.g., Banaji & Greenwald, 2013). On the other hand, what IAT measures is still a matter of debate, as implicit factors are more stable than explicit ones (Gawronski et al., 2017), and internal correlations were low (Bosson et al., 2000).

As expected, explicit self-esteem and collectivism were negatively correlated. Understandably, those with traditional collectivist values tend not to display their self-esteem, out of humility. Moreover, the results also revealed that self-monitoring, the tendency to observe one's surroundings and adjust one's behavior, moderated the relationship between collectivism and explicit self-esteem. The results indicated that only individualists with high self-monitoring and low collectivism show high self-esteem. In other words, those who are low in self-monitoring do not show high-self-esteem even if they are not collectivists, possibly because they may adapt to the predominant Japanese collectivistic values. This interaction effect suggests the need to consider cultural and personal values in understanding self-esteem among Japanese individuals.

**Note.** This study was partially supported by a research grant from Tokyo Future University.

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## 日本語タイトル

文化的価値観とセルフモニタリング傾向が顕在的自尊心及び潜在的自尊心に与える影響

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## 要旨

本研究では、顕在的(自己報告による)自尊心と潜在的(隠された無意識の)自尊心に、文化的価値観、セルフモニタリング傾向がどのように影響するかを検討した。対象者は日本人大学生95名であり、彼らはオンライン上にあるプログラムを用いて実験を受けた。その結果、セルフモニタリングの程度が高い者たちの間で集団主義の程度と顕在的自尊心に負の相関が見られた。セルフモニタリング傾向が低い者たちの間ではこの関係は見られず、また潜在的自尊心はセルフモニタリングの程度及び集団主義の程度と関連が見られなかった。この結果は、文化全体の価値観と個人の価値観の両方を考慮する必要性を示すだろう。なお、潜在的自尊心は中点よりも肯定的、顕在的自尊心は中点よりも否定的であり、この二者の相関関係は有意ではなかった。

キーワード:自尊心, セルフモニタリング, 集団主義, 潜在連合テスト(IAT)

—2021.10.18 受稿, 2022.01.19 受理—