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Self-Concept, Aspirations, and Well-Being in South Korea and the United States

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ABSTRACT. The authors examined the similarities and differences between 3 dimensions that represent people's focus on self vs. other: individualistic vs. collectivistic nations, independent vs. interdependent self-concepts, and intrinsic vs. extrinsic aspirations. In samples of South Korean and U.S. college students, the authors found that each of these dimensions was interrelated in expected ways and that each also was independently associated with different aspects of participants' self-report of their own well-being (i.e., self-actualization, vitality, happiness, anxiety, and physical manifestations). The authors concluded that environmental circumstances and personality characteristics that focus on personal needs are more likely to provide experiences supportive of psychological well-being.

Key words: cross-cultural study, independent versus interdependent self-concepts, individualistic versus collectivistic cultures, intrinsic versus extrinsic aspirations, well-being

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY contains several dimensional constructs representing the extent to which individuals focus on their own needs and rights versus their desires to fit their behavior and goals into the context of the broader group. In this study, we focused on three such constructs, examining how they are interrelated and how each is associated with personal well-being.

The first of the constructs, that of individualism versus collectivism (Triandis, 1995), refers to a distinction between characteristics of the culture in which one lives. Individualistic nations, such as the economically developed, democratic, Western nations, tend to suggest to their citizens that individual freedoms and rights
are paramount. In contrast, collectivistic nations, such as the less economically
developed Asian countries and those in the Southern Hemisphere, tend to send the
message that social harmony and stability are most necessary for their citizens.

The second construct, that of independent versus interdependent self-concept,
is related to the first (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This dimension does not refer
to a cultural context but rather to a set of beliefs people have about themselves.
Specifically, it concerns a dimension capturing the distinction between thinking of
oneself as an individual, autonomous being versus viewing one's self as linked
with others with their roles and status in society. People with independent self-
concepts typically believe that their own rights and feelings outweigh those of the
group, whereas those with interdependent self-concepts are particularly focused
on the stability and harmonious functioning of the whole group (Markus & Kitaya-
ma, 1991; Singelis, 1994).

The third construct, that of intrinsic versus extrinsic aspirations (Kasser &
Ryan, 1993, 1996), distinguishes between strivings and aspirations likely to sat-
isfy important psychological needs of the self (Ryan, 1995; Sheldon & Kasser,
1995, 1998) and those more concerned with attaining social rewards and praise
that signal high status within the group. Intrinsically oriented individuals are
highly focused on goals for self-acceptance, affiliation, and community contribu-
tion, whereas extrinsically oriented individuals are more concerned with
enhancing their wealth, image, or popularity.

Each of these three constructs involves a dimension in which at one end, peo-
ple are more likely to focus on their own individual psychological needs (indi-
vidualistic cultures, independent self-concept, and intrinsic goals), and at the
other end, they are more concerned with making sure that their behavior fits with
social norms (collectivistic cultures, interdependent self-concept, and extrinsic
goals). The three dimensions seem to have much in common, suggesting that they
should be highly correlated with each other. Indeed, researchers have strongly
suggested that living in an individualistic culture is conducive to an independent
self-concept, whereas living in a collectivistic culture encourages interdependent
self-concepts (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Furthermore, some
research shows differences between the types of values held by people with inde-
pendent self-concepts and those with interdependent self-concepts. For example,
Oishi, Schimmack, Diener, and Suh (1998) examined the relationships between
independent and interdependent self-concepts in a sample of U.S. students and
the values derived from Schwartz's (1994) theory of values. They found modest,
but significant, positive correlations between an independent self and measures
of self-direction—considered an intrinsic value—and positive correlations

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between an interdependent self and the values of benevolence—an intrinsic value—and tradition and conformity, which are more like extrinsic values. This study was conducted in a highly individualistic nation, and therefore it is unclear what results might be obtained in other contexts, particularly in collectivistic nations.

One purpose of the present study was to examine how the three dimensions—culture, self-concept, and values—are associated with each other in both individualistic and collectivistic nations. We predicted that participants living in the United States would have a more independent self-concept, whereas participants in South Korea would view themselves more interdependently. We also explored the possibility that people's values would be differentially associated with their self-concepts. In particular, we expected to find that an independent self-concept is associated with a stronger focus on intrinsic values because both lead people to focus on their own inner needs. However, we expected a mixed pattern for the interdependent self-concept. That is, some of the intrinsic values, such as self-acceptance, appear somewhat at odds with this belief system, whereas other aspects of the intrinsic values, such as community feeling and affiliation, may be more congruent with an interdependent self-concept.

The second purpose of the present study was to examine how these three dimensions independently relate to personal well-being. Past research shows a clear pattern of results for two of the dimensions but a more mixed pattern for the third. Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995), in a large cross-cultural study, demonstrated that people living in individualistic nations were typically happier than those living in collectivistic cultures and that this result held even after controlling for a number of other important national characteristics (such as wealth and basic need satisfaction). Regarding the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goals, researchers have demonstrated that U.S. adults and late adolescents are highly oriented toward intrinsic aspirations and show evidence of greater self-actualization, vitality, openness to experience, and general functioning, while showing signs of lesser distress (e.g., depression and anxiety) than those oriented toward extrinsic aspirations (Carver & Baird, 1998; Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995, 1998, 2001). Although these findings have been replicated in Germany (Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000) and Russia (Ryan et al., 1999), we think that our study is the first that has examined relationships between intrinsic and extrinsic values and well-being in an Asian culture.

Although the well-being benefits of living in an individualistic nation and holding intrinsic values seem rather clear, work on the independent versus interdependent self-concept is more mixed. Some researchers have suggested that an independent self-concept is associated with lesser neuroticism than the interdependent self-concept (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997). However, others have suggested that individuals living in individualistic cultures who have interdependent self-concepts report more life satisfaction than those with independent self-concepts (Bettencourt & Dorr, 1997). Also, in collectivistic cultures, characteristics of interdependent self-concepts, such as valuing relationship harmony and social
norms, can predict individuals' life satisfaction as strongly as having an independent self-concept (Kwan et al., 1997; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998).

To our knowledge, no researcher has investigated how well-being is simultaneously associated with each of these three dimensions representing a focus on personal needs versus others' opinions. Despite the fact that the three dimensions are similar to each other, we suspected that each may play an important role in predicting well-being, in part because each dimension refers to a different level of personal experience: Individualism versus collectivism refers largely to an environmental context, independence versus interdependence refers to a belief about oneself, and intrinsic versus extrinsic aspirations refer to the values and goals that one is striving toward in life. Because these levels of experience, though related, do not entirely overlap, each of the dimensions could help explain people's well-being.

A second, more theoretical reason for this prediction is that the conceptualizations of the self from which each distinction derives are quite different. Although the self-concept of the individual view versus that of the collective view and the independent versus interdependent distinction is primarily a concept inculcated from social experiences (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations is central to inherent psychological needs that must be fulfilled in order for growth and optimal adjustment to occur (Ryan, 1995). Thus, the two distinctions may be tapping different parts of psychological functioning, one more cognitive and the other more phenomenological and motivational in nature.

Therefore, in the present study, we expected to replicate past findings that showed that living in an individualistic nation and placing a strong relative focus on intrinsic aspirations were associated with greater well-being, whereas living in a collectivistic nation and focusing on extrinsic aspirations were associated with lower well-being. We also suspected that an independent self-concept might yield more well-being benefits than would an interdependent self-concept, although we recognized that the literature is mixed on this issue (e.g., Bettencourt & Dorr, 1997; Kwan et al., 1997). Finally, we also examined whether people's home nation, self-concept, and aspirations would independently and interactively predict levels of personal well-being or suggest both. Generally, we expected each variable to typically account for its own share of variance in well-being and that any interactions would merely be amplifications of the predicted main effects.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Participants included 537 students at U.S. universities (93 men and 122 women) and South Korean universities (149 men and 173 women) who completed a packet of questionnaires in small groups. Surveys were presented in participants' native language, with South Korean scales translated by the first author, translated back to English by another translator, and then checked by the second author.
Measures

Individualistic versus collectivistic nation. We contrast-coded this variable so that Koreans received -1 and Americans received +1. Although there are scales that measure the internalization of individualistic and collectivistic values, other researchers have successfully applied parallel categorizations at a national level rather than an individual level (e.g., Diener et al., 1995; Suh et al., 1998).

Independent and interdependent self-concepts. The Independent and Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994) asks participants to rate how much they agree or disagree with 24 statements on a 9-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 9 = strongly agree). Average scores of 12 statements each for independent (α = .65) and interdependent (α = .66) self-concept were calculated. To represent the dimension of interest, we subtracted the interdependent score from the independent score to assess the relative independence–interdependence of participants’ self-concepts.

Intrinsic versus extrinsic aspirations (Kasser & Ryan, 1993, 1996, 2001). Participants were presented with 57 goals that they might have for the future and were asked to rate the importance of each goal on a 1 (not at all) to 9 (extremely) Likert-type scale. Consistent with past work, aspirations for self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, and physical fitness were considered intrinsic, whereas aspirations for financial success, social recognition, and attractiveness were considered extrinsic. Alpha coefficients in the present study were .67 for intrinsic goals and .79 for extrinsic goals. We subtracted summary extrinsic scores from summary intrinsic scores to compute a relative intrinsic–extrinsic orientation variable.

Well-being. Six variables assessed individuals’ levels of well-being. On 9-point Likert-type scales, participants completed the 15-item Jones and Crandall (1986) measure of self-actualization (α = .64), the 7-item vitality measure (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; α = .86), 6 items measuring anxiety (Derogatis, Lipman, Rickels, Uhlenhuth, & Covi, 1974; α = .84), and 10 items reporting experience of physical complaints (Emmons, 1991; α = .79). Finally, participants reported the percentage of time that they were generally happy and unhappy (Fordyce, 1988).

Results

Tests for Measurement Comparability and Sociocultural Differences on Constructs

First, we sought to demonstrate the reliability and comparability of study constructs across the two cultures by applying the multiple-group means comparison procedure (Little, 1997) in addition to the variance–covariance informa-
tion of standard structural equation-modeling analyses, using Amos 4.0 (Arbuckle & Wothke, 1999). Thus, the following questions can be answered directly: (a) whether the same underlying dimension is measured with little or no bias across multiple groups (viz., measurement equivalence of the constructs) and (b) whether there are similarities and differences across groups on the error free means of the latent constructs (viz., construct comparability). The following three model-fit indices were used in the present study: the root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA), the normed fit index (NFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). Values reflecting adequate fits of a specified model to the data were set at < .08 for the RMSEA measure (Browne & Cudeck, 1993) and > .9 for the NFI and CFI (Marsh, Balla, & McDonald, 1988). The self-concept construct was measured by two indicators: independent (reference) and interdependent self-concepts. The aspiration construct was measured by two indicators: intrinsic (reference) and extrinsic aspirations. Finally, well-being was measured by six indicators: self-actualization (reference), vitality, anxiety, physical manifestations, percentage of time happy, and percentage of time unhappy.

Showing good support for cultural comparability, the measurement model for each construct (self-concepts, aspirations, and well-being) without equal constraints fit satisfactorily (.00 < RMSEAs < .04; .99 < NFIs < .999; .99 < CFIs < .999). When both factor loadings and intercepts in measurement models were constrained to be equal between the two nations, each construct was again found to be comparable (.03 < RMSEAs < .12; .95 < NFIs < .999; .96 < CFIs < .999). Thus, we can be confident that our primary study variables were both reliably and equivalently measured across cultures.

Because construct comparability was tenable, equality of the latent means was tested between the two nations (Little, 1997). All corresponding parameters (viz., factor loadings, intercepts, and error variances of observed variables) were freed for the Korean sample and set to be the same for the U.S. sample. The estimated latent factor means were fixed to 0 for the Korean sample and freed for the U.S. sample. Thus a given construct’s mean could be identified and estimated as a relative difference from the reference point estimated in the Korean sample (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1996; McArdle & McDonald, 1984).

The results showed that the fit of the model was satisfactory but significantly different from the model without equal constraint in latent means: for self-concept, \( \chi^2_{\text{diff}}(11, N = 534) = 96.10, p < .001 \); for aspirations, \( \chi^2_{\text{diff}}(15, N = 534) = 99.64, p < .001 \); and for well-being, \( \chi^2_{\text{diff}}(11, N = 534) = 52.91, p < .001 \). With the Korean sample as a reference group of mean equal zero, differences in construct means were .85 for self-concept, .31 for aspirations, and .48 for well-being, p < .001. The results indicated that the two cultures differed in their endorsement of the personality variables. Consistent with past research (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), the U.S. sample scored higher than the Korean sample in independent self-concept and in well-being; the U.S. sample was also higher in intrinsic aspirations, as predicted but not previously demonstrated.
Independent Versus Interdependent Self-Concepts and Intrinsic Versus Extrinsic Aspirations

Next, we examined relationships between self-concepts and aspirations to determine whether our results conceptually replicated those of Oishi et al. (1998) when tested in both individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The results supported our hypothesis—having an independent self-concept was positively associated with students' focus on intrinsic aspirations ($r = .16$ for Korean students, $r = .17$ for U.S. students; $p < .05$) and negatively correlated with their focus on extrinsic aspirations ($r = -.11$ in Korea, $r = -.14$ in United States; $p < .05$). As expected, the directions of relationship between interdependent self-concept and intrinsic versus extrinsic aspirations were more mixed. The interdependent self-concept was negatively associated with the summary intrinsic score ($r = -.12$ for Korean students, $p < .05$; $r = -.08$ for U.S. students; $ns$) and was not significantly associated with the summary extrinsic score ($r = .05$ for Korean students, $r = .01$ for U.S. students; $ns$). Supplementary analyses with individual intrinsic and extrinsic subscales revealed that the interdependent self-concept was associated with greater community feeling ($r = .11$ for Korean students, $p < .05$; $r = .12$ for U.S. students, $p < .10$) and less focused on self-acceptance ($r = -.24$ for Korean students, $r = -.19$ for U.S. students; $p < .01$) among intrinsic subscales, and was associated with a greater focus on social recognition ($r = .16$ for Korean students, $r = .20$ for U.S. students; $p < .01$ and less focus on financial success ($r = -.10$ for Korean students, $p < .10$; $r = -.14$ for U.S. students, $p < .05$) among extrinsic subscales. These associations were not significantly different between the two nations.

Predicting Well-Being

We then examined how the three dimensions of interest predicted participants' well-being. As reported earlier, the measurement models for the endogenous latent variables of self-concepts and aspirations fit satisfactorily, meaning that each latent variable can be accurately associated with the relative contribution of the observed variables. Thus, for subsequent analyses, we created two new variables: a relative independent to interdependent self-concept variable and a relative intrinsic to extrinsic aspiration variable.

The top third of Table 1 presents beta weights resulting from simultaneous regression analyses for the combined U.S. and South Korean sample, in which each of the six indicators of well-being was regressed onto the contrast-coded nation variable, the relative independent to interdependent self-concept variable, and the relative intrinsic to extrinsic aspiration variable. As can be seen, U.S. students reported higher self-actualization, vitality, and happiness than did Korean students. Furthermore, the relative independent to interdependent self-concept variable was associated with higher self-actualization, vitality, and happiness, and with less unhappiness and anxiety. Finally, the relative intrinsic to extrinsic aspi-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Self-actualization</th>
<th>Vitality</th>
<th>Happiness</th>
<th>Unhappiness</th>
<th>Anxiety symptoms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whole sample</td>
<td>R-independent</td>
<td>.24****</td>
<td>.17****</td>
<td>.18****</td>
<td>-.13***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R-intrinsic</td>
<td>.32****</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.12***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>R**</td>
<td>.34****</td>
<td>.23****</td>
<td>.10****</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Korea = -1; U.S. = 1)</td>
<td>R'</td>
<td>.36****</td>
<td>.10****</td>
<td>.08****</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean sample</td>
<td>R-independent</td>
<td>.27****</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>.19****</td>
<td>-.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R-intrinsic</td>
<td>.36****</td>
<td>.10****</td>
<td>.08****</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R**</td>
<td>.24****</td>
<td>.10****</td>
<td>.08****</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. sample</td>
<td>R-independent</td>
<td>.25****</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R-intrinsic</td>
<td>.35****</td>
<td>.20***</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R**</td>
<td>.22****</td>
<td>.10****</td>
<td>.08****</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Note. | R-independent = relative independent to interdependent self-concept. R-intrinsic = relative intrinsic to extrinsic aspirations.
|       | *p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01. ****p < .001. |
ration measure was associated with higher self-actualization and with less anxiety and physical symptoms.

To examine whether the predictors of well-being differed by individuals’ national context, we conducted these regression analyses separately again for the two countries. Results are reported in the middle and bottom thirds of Table 1. Within samples from both countries, a relative independent self-concept was associated with higher self-actualization, vitality, and happiness; however, only in Korea did the relative independent self-concept predict less unhappiness, and only in the United States did the relative independent self-concept predict low anxiety. Results across the two cultures were almost identical for the relationships between well-being and the relative intrinsic-extrinsic aspiration measure, such that a strong focus on intrinsic relative to extrinsic aspirations was associated with greater well-being. Thus, these results suggest that regardless of whether a person lives in an individualistic or a collectivistic nation, benefits from well-being come from the belief of being autonomous and from a focus on goals likely to satisfy one’s needs.

Finally, we examined potential two-way interactions between aspirations and self-concept and three-way interactions with the additional variable of nation to predict well-being using a hierarchical regression format. Only one significant two-way interaction was detected: The negative associations between extrinsic aspirations and higher anxiety were amplified for individuals relatively high in interdependent self-concept (β = -.13, p < .02). In addition, only one significant three-way interaction occurred. For the Korean students, intrinsic aspirations were more highly associated with increased self-actualization when individuals were strong in independent self-concept. For the U.S. students, intrinsic aspirations were especially associated with higher self-actualization when the individual had a relatively strong interdependent self-concept (β = -.13, p < .02). Interpretation of these two interactions should be treated cautiously, because they may be caused by chance, given the large number of analyses conducted.

Discussion

In the present study, we expanded on previous research by examining several hypotheses associated with national context, individual self-concept, personal goals, and subjective well-being. First, we expanded on the work of Oishi et al. (1998) by examining how self-concept and values relate to each other within both individualistic and collectivistic nations. As expected, people with an independent self-concept were more likely to place a strong value on intrinsically oriented goals and less likely to be focused on extrinsically oriented goals. We expected this result because an independent self-concept, with its concern for autonomous regulation, might orient people toward goals congruent with their own psychological needs and away from goals focused on status and others’ opinions. Results for the interdependent self-concept were more complex because correlations indicated more
self-concept value relational specificity. With regard to intrinsic values, interdependent people were more likely to value community feeling and to be less concerned with self-acceptance; for extrinsic values, interdependent-thinking people were more concerned with social recognition and less focused on financial success. In both cases, it seemed that an interdependent self-concept leads people to value more socially oriented values (i.e., community feeling and social recognition) and to be less concerned with more personally oriented values (i.e., self-acceptance and financial success). These results provided an important extension of the work regarding a collectivistic nation by Oishi et al. (1998).

A more unique contribution of this work was our examination of how cultural context, self-concept, and values independently relate to personal well-being. The results supported our hypothesis that living in an individualistic nation and believing that one is an autonomous, independent individual who is striving for intrinsic aspirations associated with psychological need are associated with greater well-being. In contrast, results suggested that living in a collectivistic nation, conceiving of oneself as highly embedded in social roles and statuses, and pursuing aspirations designed to obtain rewards and praise are associated with lower well-being. As expected, these results were essentially parallel in samples of college students drawn from both the highly individualistic United States and the more collectivistic South Korea. These results are consistent with past work demonstrating beneficial relationships between well-being and individualistic nations (Diener et al., 1995), independent self-concepts (Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999), and intrinsic aspirations (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Our results conflict with some past work demonstrating that interdependent self-concepts relate positively to well-being and life satisfaction in collectivistic nations (Kwan et al., 1997; Suh et al., 1998). Thus, our research adds to the growing, but somewhat contradictory, literature associating an independent self-concept with well-being and confirms previous work on the well-being benefits of living in an individualistic culture and pursuing intrinsic rather than extrinsic goals.

More important, the results of this study demonstrated for the first time that these three dimensions, all focused on individuals’ needs versus others’ desires, bear unique and independent relationships to well-being. Although individualism versus collectivism, independent versus interdependent self-concept, and intrinsic versus extrinsic values all focus on similar issues, each has its unique role to play in understanding well-being. These results supported the idea, mentioned in the introduction, that each dimension taps a somewhat different aspect of experience relevant to well-being. Individualism versus collectivism likely concerns the effects of one’s environment in terms of pursuing one’s desires. Independent versus interdependent self-concept probably involves more cognitive issues, because it concerns the beliefs one has about identity and personhood. Intrinsic versus extrinsic values may tap a more motivational aspect of experience, particularly concerning how individual strivings and goals relate to the satisfaction of psychological needs.
Why should this conglomeration of environmental circumstances, beliefs about the self, and values and goals lead people to experience greater well-being and less distress? We think that the best answer derives from the concept of needs. Needs are psychological nutriments (Ryan, 1995) that must be satisfied in order for individuals to grow, thrive, and feel good about themselves (Sheldon, Ryan, & Reis, 1996; see also Maslow, 1954). People living in an individualistic culture are provided an environment that encourages them to focus on their own needs and to determine the means of satisfying them (Triandis, 1995). An independent self-concept leads people to believe that their own needs are important, and thus, they set up their identity around these needs (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Pursuing intrinsic aspirations leads people to be more likely to have experiences that might satisfy their needs (Kasser, 2002; Kim, Deci, & Zuckerman, 2002). In sum, people are more likely to be able to satisfy their psychological needs in such contexts and with such beliefs and goals and thus to reap the benefit of increased well-being.

In contrast, collectivistic nations, interdependent self-concepts, and extrinsic values are more focused on others and on making sure that one’s behaviors, expressions, and desires fit into what is acceptable to the whole group. Such an external focus may lead people to attend less to their psychological needs and thus to have more frequent experiences of contingent evaluation in which they feel that their worth is on the line—experiences that are rarely pleasant (see Deci & Ryan, 1991; Rogers, 1961). In other words, such environments, self-concepts, and goals lack more in providing psychological nutriments, thus causing potentially less satisfaction of needs and lowered well-being.

These conclusions must of course be tempered by several limitations to the present study. First, our use of college students as participants limits how our sample can be generalized. This limitation might be especially problematic in the case of the South Korean sample because college students may be more independent in their self-concept than, for example, rural farmers. Second, all data were self-reported, leaving open the possibility that response biases or shared method variance may be primarily responsible for the results. Third, all data were cross-sectional and correlational, thus making the results causally ambiguous. Thus, it was unclear whether self-concepts and goals lead happier people with stronger well-being to form independent self-concepts and pursue intrinsic goals or whether some third variable may be operating that explains the relationships. Fourth, although measurement comparability between the cultures was demonstrated and established scales were used in this study, researchers should not overlook the internal consistencies of some scales that were somewhat low (less than .70); this caveat may potentially have weakened reported results. Fifth, the amount of variance accounted for in regression equations was by no means large, suggesting that various other factors need to be assessed in order to provide a fuller understanding of well-being. Sixth, it would be interesting in future studies to measure participants’ levels of individualistic versus collectivistic values rather than use a dummy code for nation, because individ-
uals certainly experience and internalize this environmental dimension differently within the same nation and because there are many differences between the nations we sampled besides their standing on this variable.

A final limitation concerns our use of well-being as the primary outcome variable of this study. Such a strategy risks leading people to conclude that individualistic nations, independent self-concepts, and intrinsic aspirations are better than collectivistic nations, interdependent self-concepts, and extrinsic aspirations. The idea that happiness is the most important aim for humans is, itself, a value judgment and one especially consistent with individualism, independence, and intrinsic values. The goals that are better supported by collectivistic nations and interdependent self-concepts, such as relationship harmony and social stability, or represented in extrinsic aspirations, such as economic progress, can certainly be conceived of as equally as valuable as or more valuable than personal happiness and well-being. Furthermore, independent self-concepts and living in an individualistic nation are associated with higher suicide and divorce rates and substantial ecological degradation (Triandis, 1995). Future researchers might examine a broader range of variables that will enhance understanding and untangling of these complex issues.

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