

## The Jury and Abjuration of My Peers: The Self in Face and Dignity Cultures

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The self is defined and judged differently by people from face and dignity cultures (in this case, Hong Kong and the United States, respectively). Across 3 experiments, people from a face culture absorbed the judgments of other people into their private self-definitions. Particularly important for people from a face culture are public representations—knowledge that is shared and known to be shared about someone. In contrast, people from a dignity culture try to preserve the sovereign self by not letting others define them. In the 3 experiments, dignity culture participants showed a studied indifference to the judgments of their peers, ignoring peers' assessments—whether those assessments were public or private, were positive or negative, or were made by qualified peers or unqualified peers. Ways that the self is “knotted” up with social judgments and cultural imperatives are discussed.

*Keywords:* culture, perspective-taking, face, dignity, self

There are two ways to know the self: from the inside and from the outside. In all cultures, people know themselves from both directions. People make judgments about themselves from what they “know” about themselves, and they absorb the judgments of other people so that the judgments become their own. The process is one of constant flow, but there is variation, from both person to person and culture to culture, in which direction takes precedence.

In this article, we outline the way *face cultures* tend to give priority to knowing oneself from the outside, whereas *dignity cultures* tend to give priority to knowing the self from the inside and may resist allowing the self to be defined by others. We first distinguish between face cultures and dignity cultures, describing the cultural logics of each and how these lead to distinctive ways in which the self is defined and constructed. We discuss the differing roles of public (vs. private) information in the two cultures, noting the way that such public information becomes absorbed into the definition of face culture participants and the way that it can become something to struggle against among dignity culture participants—even when it might reflect positively on the participant. Finally, we describe three cross-cultural experiments in which the phenomena is examined and then close with a discussion of the different ways our selves are “knotted” up with the judgments of other people.

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### Face and Dignity Cultures

#### Face Cultures

To understand cultural differences in ways of knowing the self, it is necessary to understand the cultural logics and contexts of face and dignity cultures. The context of a face culture is a stable hierarchy. In describing the examples provided by the face cultures of East Asia, Ho (1976, p. 883; also Heine, 2005) defined face as “the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others by virtue of [his or her] relative position” in a hierarchy and the proper fulfillment of his/her role. Because society is hierarchical, certain people have more face than do others, though everyone can have some face as long as they are fulfilling the expectations of their position. Worth is socially conferred in a face society, with others judging the adequacy of one's performance (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Lee, Kam, & Bond, 2007; for more on face among Asian and Asian American populations, see also Cohen & Leung, in press; Ho, 1976; Kim & Cohen, in press; Leung & Cohen, 2009; Triandis, 1994).

One's own self-assessment is not particularly relevant because one cannot effectively claim more face than others are willing to grant. In fact, there is a penalty for trying to claim more face than one is entitled to. Such behavior violates the rules for how status is distributed in a hierarchy, and thus, it threatens to violate the much-valued harmony of the system. Such behavior is seen as boorish and will ultimately lead to humiliating losses of face when the person learns a painful lesson about their true place in the hierarchy and how much status others are willing to accord him or her. Thus, there is a built-in humility bias in face cultures (see Kurman & Sriram, 2002, also Lalwani, Shavitt, & Johnson, 2006). For an individual to operate within the hierarchy of a face culture, his perception of himself may be no greater than others' perception of him and should probably be a little lower, so that he can exercise

the humility necessary to not overreach on status claims (see Heine et al., 1999, for an excellent review of a self-criticism bias among Japanese participants; also, Chiu & Kim, in press; Gelfand et al., 2002; Gelfand et al., 2001; Hamamura & Heine, 2008; Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001; Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000; Ji, Schwarz, & Nisbett, 2000; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Kim, Chiu, Peng, Cai, & Tov, 2010; Kim, Peng, & Chiu, 2008; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Ross, Heine, Wilson, & Sugimori, 2005; Yuki, 2003). Harmonious functioning in a face culture requires common, consensual judgments about who belongs where in the hierarchy. Thus, the public representations about a person—the information about a person that is acknowledged as publicly known and consensually shared—take on extreme importance in a face culture.

Note that whereas face must be socially conferred and is thus an interdependent construct, face cultures—with their emphasis on the three Hs of hierarchy, harmony, and humility—may contrast sharply with other types of interdependent or collectivist cultures. Israel is one example. It is a relatively collectivistic culture (see Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelman's, 2002, p. 19, meta-analysis). Yet, few would confuse Israeli social norms with those of East Asia, and few would argue that Israelis are generally content to let others define them or determine their worth (Kurman & Sriram, 2002; see also Almog's, 2000, description of *davka*, an Israeli word for which "there is no precise parallel in other languages. . . . The *davka* spirit is one of defiance, disobedience, standing one's ground, doing things out of spite and stubbornness—all founded on an awareness of one's own worth," Almog, 2000, pp. 113–114).

Further, there is an entire class of interdependent cultures—honor cultures that are collectivistic—that offers an interesting contrast to face cultures. Honor—like face—must be claimed from other people, and thus honor, too, is in some ways dependent on others. However, unlike the settled hierarchies of a face culture in which harmony is prized, honor cultures tend to involve competitive environments of rough equals within a status category. Honor is always potentially in flux, because people (and groups such as families, tribes, or clans) can establish their public reputations through challenge, competition, and cycles of "insult and riposte" (see Bourdieu, 1977; Gilmore, 1991; Peristiany, 1965).

Because of this, honor cultures require men to have a certain assertiveness, boldness, and confidence to compete and handle conflict. One's honor or that of one's group is often contested, and through dialectics of "challenge and riposte," there is a dynamic tension between acceptance and defiance of others' judgments, of one's standing in the eyes of others. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 15; see, for example, Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwarz, 1996, in which participants from an honor culture who were insulted believed that others who witnessed the insult thought of them as less masculine but did not internalize this feeling. Instead, they subsequently showed more assertiveness in their demeanor, more aggressiveness in their behavior, and increases in their testosterone level, suggesting they were preparing for competition.)

This contrast with honor cultures highlights again an important element of a face culture—knowing one's place and not upsetting the harmony of the system means accepting the public judgments about oneself with a certain amount of resignation. One does one's best, but ultimately, others must judge the adequacy of the self, and their consensus opinions define who one is and how much defer-

ence one is entitled to. This consensus—this information that is "on the table" and acknowledged by everyone—becomes the social reality one must accommodate.<sup>1</sup>

## Dignity Cultures

The norms of a dignity culture—such as that found among mainstream Anglo Americans in the northern part of the United States—are based on an entirely different premise. Dignity is defined in theory (even if not always in practice) as "the conviction that each individual at birth possesses an *intrinsic* value at least theoretically equal to that of every other person" (Ayers, 1984, p. 19). This inherent worth is not socially conferred, and it is inalienable in that it cannot be taken away by others. Such beliefs may have been originally rooted in religious dogma, with inherent worth granted by God or Grace (Ayers, 1984); however, these beliefs seem over time to have become untethered from their religious origin. (For more on dignity culture in the north of the United States, see also Ayers, 1984; Cohen & Leung, in press; Kim & Cohen, in press; Leung & Cohen, 2009; Triandis, 1994).

A dignity culture attempts to precariously balance ideals of equality (at birth, everyone's worth is equal) and liberty (one's worth does not depend on other people's judgments). With respect to the latter ideal, the freedom of a person to define herself independently of what others think seems wrapped up with a dignity culture's primary emphasis on negative liberty (as opposed to positive liberty). That is, a dignity culture generally emphasizes removing external constraints that interfere with the freedom of the individual (Isiah Berlin's, 1969, concept of *negative liberty*) and places less emphasis on cultivating the correct internal states that would supposedly allow the individual to flourish (Berlin's, 1969, concept of *positive liberty*, which he feared was open to abuse by authorities who believed they knew the correct way for others to think, feel, and act; Berlin, 1969; Carter, 2009; Fischer, 1988, pp. 199–205).

Dignity cultures are thus different from other types of individualistic cultures. Persons in a dignity culture view agency and autonomy as something preserved in opposition to others' attempts to control them rather than as something realized through interactions with others (cf. the individualism of hunter-gatherers). Those in a dignity culture view their autonomy as freedom from others' control rather

<sup>1</sup> Shame is important in both cultures of honor and cultures of face. However, shame is incurred in different ways and—more important for the present purposes—dealt with very differently in these two cultures, illustrating the themes of acceptance versus challenge described in the text. Exploring this issue in depth would take us too far off track. Briefly, however, for men in an honor culture, precedence is lost and shame is incurred not so much by insult but by the acceptance of insult—by one's unwillingness or inability to respond to the challenge implied by the insult. An honorable person must meet the challenge, not shrink from it (Bourdieu, 1977; see also Cohen et al., 1996, showing how participants from an honor culture acknowledge that their masculine status in the eyes of others has been lowered by an insult but do not internalize their loss of masculinity and instead respond with increased aggression, domineering behavior, and a testosterone surge [indicating they are preparing for competition, rather than simply accepting their status loss]). In a face culture, one redeems oneself from a state of shame by contrition, not by resistance. This contrition requires that one should not defensively reject the judgments of the group or the judgment of one's superiors but must accept the truth in those judgments before redemption is possible.

than as the freedom to control others. (cf. the conception of *hegemonic liberty* as the liberty to express one's will and freely impose it on others; see also Triandis's, 1990, suggestion that ancient Greece might be a classic case of an individualist culture, based in part on the narcissistic individualism found in the Homeric epics.)

Further, dignity is more compatible with threads of Tocquevillian individualism than aristocratic individualism (Dworkin, 1996). Aristocratic individualism combines a "love of liberty with a desire for admiration and praise" (Dworkin, 1996, p. 175). Tocquevillian individualism "conveys the opposite experience—a kind of inertness, or detachment from others—with the individualist less affected by judgments arising from another person's imagination. . . . In becoming self-centered, he or she moved away from a dependence on worldly praise and a concern for another's social position. The thrust of Tocquevillian individualism was in the opposite direction of aristocratic individualism" (Dworkin, 1996, p. 175).

The self-contained, unconstrained individual is a fictional ideal. Over the long run, people's evaluations of themselves cannot get too far out of line with what others think of them (Leary, Tambor, Terdal, & Downs, 1995). Even so, it is remarkable that the correlations between Americans' self-views and the views other people have of them are—in general—relatively underwhelming. In a review, Shrauger and Shoeneman (1979) found that self-other correlations tend to be "rather low," and "subsequent studies have managed to find some positive correlations, although these generally remain small" (Baumeister, 1998, p. 701).

As we discuss later, perhaps one reason for self-other correlations being so small is that the ideals of dignity require a person to maintain sovereignty over his or her own evaluation of himself or herself and not make others' opinions the measure of his or her worth. Preserving this sovereignty sometimes requires ignoring others' evaluation of the self, and this holds even when those others' evaluations may be positive and even when those others are well qualified to judge you. This is definitely not to claim that self-enhancement does not exist in a dignity culture. It is only to say that sometimes preserving the self's sovereignty and making it independent of others' opinions overrides the desire for simple and quick self-enhancement. "Don't fence me in"—even with praise or with assessments from people who are well-qualified to judge me—might be the motto for those who don't want to let themselves be defined by other people's judgments.<sup>2</sup>

## Overview of Experiments

In Experiments 1 through 3, we explore these arguments about how the self is defined in dignity and face cultures. In Experiment 1, we examine how the private self-definitions of dignity and face culture participants are affected, depending on whether others have or have not seen their ignorant performance, in a modified version of Ross, Amabile, and Steinmetz's (1977) quiz bowl task. In Experiment 2, we use a different paradigm, make either negative or positive information public, and examine what the limiting condition of public is. Namely, we examine whether, for people from a face culture, simply having one other person know a piece of information about the self is enough to enhance that information's perceived validity, making it more influential for self-definition. Such effects should not occur for those from a dignity culture.

Finally, in Experiment 3, we examine how public representations—information that is publicly shared and publicly known to be shared—come to define the self for those from a face culture. Such public representations constitute information that is the presumed consensus about the participant because such information is on the table as publicly shared rather than simply privately known by other individuals. In a face culture, knowledge that is only privately known by others may be important, but it does not have the status of a public representation that is acknowledged as known to all. Whereas such public representations should be profoundly important to people from a face culture, such representations should be ignored or even spurned by those from a dignity culture, who want to define the self for the self instead of letting it be publicly defined.

### Experiment 1: Feeling Dumb Versus Looking Dumb in One's Social Role

In Ross et al.'s (1977) classic quiz bowl study, participants were randomly assigned to one of two roles: One participant composed a series of difficult, but not impossible, questions; the other (the "contestant") had to answer those questions. Questioners drew on their own idiosyncratic specialized knowledge to formulate the questions, so contestants tended to perform poorly. When later asked to evaluate themselves, contestants failed to realize the questioners' role-conferred advantage and their own role-conferred disadvantage and, consequently, tended to believe they were less knowledgeable than their questioners were.

We adapted this experimental paradigm for Experiment 1, creating one private condition in which the contestant privately and anonymously tried to answer the questions and one public condition in which the contestant publicly tried to answer the questions in front of the questioner and two confederates posing as coparticipants. The prediction for face culture participants was that their poor performance in the private condition would have little impact on their self-assessments because no one actually saw it, whereas their poor performance in the public condition would have a major impact on their self-assessments because it was seen by other people.

For dignity culture participants in the private condition, we expected to replicate Ross et al.'s (1977) finding that contestants evaluate themselves as less knowledgeable than their questioners. In the public condition, the effect might lessen as dignity culture participants might try to retain some sovereignty over their self-evaluation after their poor public performance.

In essence, for our face culture participants, what should matter for self-assessments is "looking dumb" in front of others; a poor performance that others did not see should not much affect their self-definition. For our dignity culture participants, what should

<sup>2</sup> Of course, one could argue that the surest route to high self-esteem is to reserve for oneself the power of judgment and that preservation of the self's autonomy to judge itself is simply a clever way of preserving the self's ability to self-enhance in the long run. Alternately, one could argue that autonomy is the ultimate motive—that people are ultimately driven to preserve their sovereignty over self and that self-enhancement is merely a probable consequence of the self being its own judge. Which of these arguments is true—and whether there is an ultimate motive for all individuals within or between cultural groups—is besides the point of the present discussion.

matter for self-assessments is “feeling dumb” privately or publicly (with the effect perhaps being smaller in the public condition if dignity culture participants try to have their self-assessments not align with others’ assessments of them).

## Method

**Participants.** One hundred-two participants (43 female, 59 male; mean age = 19.14 years) were from the University of Illinois, and 122 participants (63 female, 59 male; mean age = 20.46 years) were from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. For their participation, American participants received extra credit toward their class, and Hong Kong participants received U.S. \$7.

**Procedure.** Four participants in the private condition and 2 participants and two confederates in the public condition took part in this experiment, which began in all cases with a brief get-acquainted task.

**Private condition.** The experimenter explained that we had developed a knowledge-assessment test, called the quiz game. It was designed to be a fun test, and it involved one participant composing 10 challenging (but not impossibly difficult) questions and another participant (the contestant) attempting to answer those questions. As part of the cover story, participants were told that we would ask for their feedback about the task when the experiment was over.

Participants drew a card to see whether they would be the questioner or the contestant. To keep the participants’ performance anonymous to their coparticipants, they were told not to reveal their role; thus, each person knew his or her own role but not that of anyone else. Participants were then led to their own rooms. Questioners wrote down 10 challenging questions, whereas contestants wrote down 10 relatively easy questions just to “get into the spirit” of the study (see Ross et al., 1977, p. 487). Each participant was also told to write down the answers on a separate sheet. After taking 10 min to perform this task, the experimenter then gave each contestant one set of questions from the questioners, and the experimenter simply gave each questioner a short survey to occupy their time. After working on their respective tasks for 5 min, the experimenter then distributed the appropriate answer sheet so contestants could see how many items they had gotten right, and questioners again received a short survey to occupy them.

Next, the experimenter collected all the materials and handed out a follow up questionnaire that asked participants their opinions about the test and also asked the six self-evaluation and partner evaluation questions that composed our dependent variable. Participants were assured that their self-assessments would never be seen by other participants. The questions were as follows (UIUC = University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; CUHK = Chinese University of Hong Kong):

1. Indicate how knowledgeable you think you are, compared to other average UIUC (or CUHK, for participants in Hong Kong) students (1 = *not very knowledgeable*, 9 = *very knowledgeable*).
2. Indicate how knowledgeable you think your partner is, compared to other average UIUC students (1 = *not very knowledgeable*, 9 = *very knowledgeable*).

3. Indicate how extensive your knowledge is, compared to other average UIUC students (1 = *not very extensive*, 9 = *very extensive*).
4. Indicate how extensive your partner’s knowledge is, compared to other average UIUC students (1 = *not very extensive*, 9 = *very extensive*).
5. Some people are knowledgeable in many domains. Some are knowledgeable in few domains. Compared to other average UIUC students, are you knowledgeable in (1 = *a few domains*, 9 = *many domains*)?
6. Some people are knowledgeable in many domains. Some are knowledgeable in few domains. Compared to other average UIUC students, is your partner knowledgeable in (1 = *a few domains*, 9 = *many domains*)?

Alphas ( $\alpha$ ) for Asians and European Americans were .82 or higher. Questioners taking this follow up questionnaire were also given back their questions along with the anonymous contestant’s answers to those questions, though contestants were not aware of this. When this questionnaire was completed, participants were debriefed.

**Public condition.** In the public condition, 2 real participants and two confederates drew lots to see who would participate in the quiz bowl game and who would participate in another task called the multiple task game. The rules of both games were explained to all; and after randomly drawing lots, the 2 real participants found they would do the quiz game (as contestant and questioner), whereas the two confederates would do the multiple task game. The confederates filled out some bogus questionnaires while the questioner and contestant prepared for the quiz bowl; however, the confederates were allowed to watch the quiz bowl game, thus fulfilling their true experimental role as audience members.

During the game, the questioner was to orally present each of the 10 questions to the contestant, who had 30 s to answer each. After the contestant gave his response, the questioner spoke the true answer. Though the confederates watched the quiz game, the experimenter left the room to assure participants that he or she would not see the game.

After the game was completed, participants filled out the same dependent measures as above, whereas confederates supposedly

<sup>3</sup> Two outliers in Experiment 1, 1 outlier in Experiment 2, and 2 outliers in Experiment 3 were excluded from analyses because they were over 1.5 times the interquartile range away from the 25th and 75th percentiles. Additionally, there are an odd number of participants because there were a few private condition sessions in which only 3 participants showed up. We included these sessions because the participants’ anonymity to her peers could be secured just as in the regular private condition with 4 participants. In 3-person sessions, we prepared only three cards (two cards labeled *contestant* and one card labeled *questioner*). Then, each participant randomly chose one of the cards. (Note that participants could not know which role was chosen by the other coparticipants). Next, the experimenter entered the questioner’s cubicle and asked her to compose a set of 10 questions and duplicate it. Later on, each contestant received one of the questionnaires from the experimenter. Therefore, both contestants did not know who composed their questionnaire. Finally, one of the questionnaires answered by the contestants was randomly given to the questioner. Therefore, the questioner also did not know who responded to the questionnaire.

worked on the multiple task game in their own cubicles. After questionnaires were completed, participants were checked for suspicion and debriefed.

## Results and Discussion

A Culture (dignity culture vs. face culture)  $\times$  Public/Private Condition  $\times$  Target (self vs. partner) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted on contestants' ratings of knowledgeability.<sup>3</sup> (Self vs. partner was a within-subjects variable because 114 contestants rated themselves and their partners [the questioners]). The predicted three-way interaction was observed,  $F(1, 110) = 6.13, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , as seen in Figure 1.

Decomposing the three-way interaction, we first examined face culture participants. Among face culture contestants, the interaction of Public Versus Private  $\times$  Self Versus Partner was significant,  $F(1, 110) = 6.76, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .08$ . More specifically, face culture contestants rated themselves as not as smart as their partners (the questioners) when others had seen their performance ( $M$  self-ratings = 4.74 vs.  $M$  partner ratings = 5.93, in the public condition),  $t(113) = 5.08, p < .001, d = 1.92$ . In contrast, this difference shrunk by 70% and was not significant when no one saw their performance ( $M$  self-ratings = 5.24 vs.  $M$  partner ratings = 5.60, in the private condition),  $t(113) = 1.61, p > .10, d = .56$ .

Among dignity culture participants, self-ratings versus partner ratings were not affected by the public versus private manipulation (interaction of Public Versus Private  $\times$  Self Versus Partner),  $t(113) = .96, p > .10$ . Dignity culture contestants rated themselves as not as smart as their questioners regardless of whether others

had seen their performance ( $M$  self-ratings = 5.44 vs.  $M$  partner ratings = 6.20),  $t(113) = 4.42, p < .001$ .<sup>4,5</sup>

**A second test of the hypothesis.** Because we know how many questions the participant answered correctly, we can also check to see whether the number of correct answers correlated with the participant's private ratings. The prediction is that for face culture participants, the number of questions answered correctly would indeed predict participants' ratings when the performance was public. However, when no one saw the participants' performance, how well or poorly they did would not have much effect on their self-ratings. For dignity culture participants, this sort of public-private calibration disparity should not occur.

This second test of the hypothesis is statistically independent of the test above. The results described above concern mean-level differences in the public versus private conditions. This second test examines the calibration between participants' ratings and their actual performance in the public versus private conditions.

The expected three-way interaction of Culture  $\times$  Questions Correct  $\times$  Public Versus Private condition was significant in a regression predicting self versus partner ratings ( $\beta = .19$ ),  $t(113) = 2.06, p = .04$ . Decomposing the three-way interaction, we find that in predicting self versus partner ratings, among face culture participants, the  $p$  for the two-way interaction between Number of Questions Correct  $\times$  Public Versus Private condition was .07 (interaction  $\beta = .24, t = 1.85$ , when the culture variable was centered at the face culture value). Thus, face culture participants did give themselves lower ratings than their partners when they performed poorly in the public condition (questions correct  $\beta = .4, t = 2.1, p < .05$ , when the condition variable was also centered at the public condition value). However, in the private condition, when no one saw their performance, there was no relation between the number of questions they answered correctly and their self versus partner ratings (questions correct  $\beta = -.1$ ,

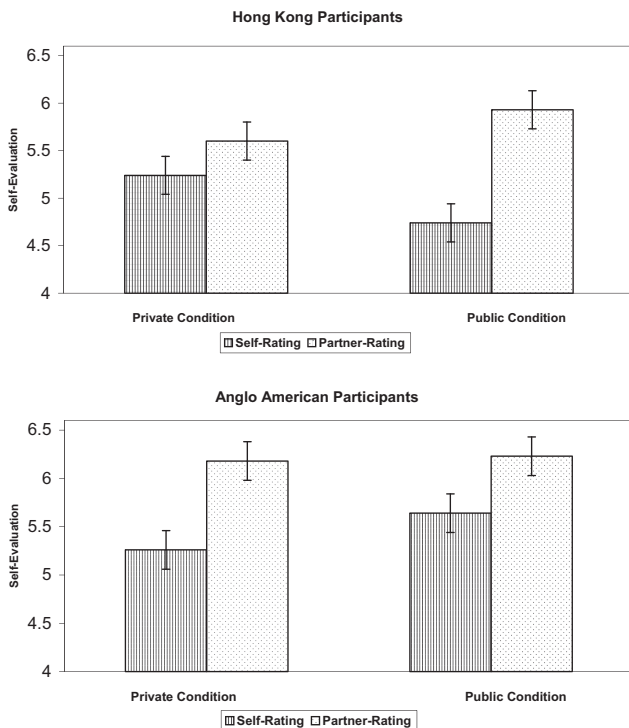


Figure 1. Self- and partner-evaluation as a function of the public versus private manipulation for Anglo American and Hong Kong participants. Error bars correspond to  $\pm 1$  standard error.

<sup>4</sup> In Experiments 2 and 3, we gave participants feedback about their performance in terms of readily interpretable percentile scores. However, in the quiz bowl study, one might argue that there is some ambiguity about what constitutes a good performance and what might be a failure. This ambiguity probably lessens as participants' performances become worse. Thus, one might examine the subset of people who got particularly low scores on the quiz bowl task. To do so, we examined the 66 participants who correctly answered three or fewer questions. As might be expected, the effect is strongest among this group (three-way interaction of Culture  $\times$  Public-Private  $\times$  Self-Partner),  $F(1, 62) = 7.93$ , effect size  $r = .34$ . Among the face group, the  $p$  level for the two-way interaction of Public-Private  $\times$  Self-Partner was  $p < .03, F(1, 32) = 5.12$ , effect size  $r = .37$ . That is, among the face group, there was much greater diminishment of self (vs. partner) ratings in the public condition (self-rating = 4.36, partner rating = 5.84),  $F(1, 14) = 10.75, p < .01$ , as compared with the private condition; (self-rating = 5.02, partner rating = 5.39),  $F(1, 18) = 1.07, p > .10$ . Among the dignity group, the  $p$  level for the two-way interaction of Public-Private  $\times$  Self-Partner was  $p < .09, F(1, 30) = 3.02$ , effect size  $r = .30$ . That is, among the dignity group, there was much smaller diminishment of self (vs. partner) ratings in the public condition (self-rating = 5.39, partner rating = 5.91),  $F(1, 10) = 3.18, p > .10$ , as compared with ratings in the private condition; (self-rating = 5.06, partner rating = 6.33),  $F(1, 20) = 21.37, p < .01$ .

<sup>5</sup> As found in Ross et al. (1977), questioners overall did not rate themselves as smarter than their partners, apparently realizing their inherent advantage in the game.

$t = -0.5$ ,  $ns$ ). For dignity culture participants, the reverse was true, though not significantly. There was a trend for the number of correct answers to be positively associated with self versus partner ratings when their performance was private (questions correct  $\beta = .29$ ,  $t = 1.59$ ,  $p = .11$ , when culture was centered at the dignity level and condition was centered at the private level), but there was no such trend when their performance was public ( $\beta = .01$ ,  $t = 0.06$ ,  $ns$ ).

**Summary.** In essence, face culture participants gave themselves much lower self (vs. partner) ratings when they looked dumb in public but did not do so when their performance might have (but apparently did not) make them feel dumb in private. In contrast, dignity culture participants rated themselves lower than their partners in both the public and private conditions. If anything, dignity participants showed a nonsignificant tendency to rate themselves more poorly after a private failure that no one saw than they did after a public failure witnessed by their peers. Related to but independent of this effect, face culture participants showed better calibration between performance and self-ratings when in the public condition rather than the private condition. If anything, the reverse tendency was found for dignity culture participants.

## Experiment 2: Somebody Knows

In Experiment 1, for dignity culture participants, it made little difference whether they had failed to answer questions in private or in front of three other people. In contrast, for face culture participants, public failure was associated with dramatically lower self-evaluations, whereas private failure did not lead to a significant decrement in self-evaluation; further, the number of questions answered in private was completely unrelated to face culture participants' self-evaluations.

How far can this public-private discrepancy be pushed? Does information take on heightened importance or validity if somebody in the group knows it, even if not everyone in the group knows it? Would information have to be weighted more heavily and absorbed into one's self-concept merely because it is known to just one other person in the group? In Study 2, we used a different experimental paradigm to examine these questions.

In this experiment, the participant took a supposed creativity test scored by two different computer programs: one that was older and more tested and another that was more up-to-date but not as well tested. The two pieces of feedback were rigged so that when one computer score was high, the other computer score was low. Which score is a participant to believe? The participant in Experiment 2 does not know which score comes from the new program and which comes from the old program. However, there is one thing that distinguishes the two scores. That is, due to a clerical error, one of the scores is inadvertently seen by another person in the group.

The prediction is that for a person from a face culture, information about the self that is known to another person takes on a reality that completely private information about the self does not. What is known to another simply cannot be ignored, and as a consequence, such public information is likely to be absorbed into one's self-definition to a far greater extent than purely private information. In Experiment 2, we thus explore the limiting case of the phenomena described in Experiment 1: More specifically, information takes on a greater reality when someone else knows

about it—even if that someone else is only one person in an experimentally contrived group. On the other hand, for our participants from a dignity culture, the score that is known to a peer should receive no greater weight than a score unknown to one's peers.

## Method

**Participants.** Fifty-seven participants (36 female, 21 male; mean age = 18.68 years) from the University of Illinois and 41 participants (28 female, 13 male; mean age = 20.31 years) from the Chinese University of Hong Kong were recruited in the same way as in Experiment 1.

**Procedure.** Three participants and one confederate took part in each experimental session. Each session began with a short icebreaker task so that participants could get briefly acquainted with each other before they proceeded to their individual cubicles for a "creative thinking test." This test was described as a computerized Rorschach test that examined participants' creativity by scoring their responses to three ink blots (presumably in much the same way that the most widely used creativity tests, such as the Torrance tests, could be scored; Kaufman, Plucker, & Baer, 2008).

Each participant was randomly assigned an identification number after drawing a number from an envelope. The numbers were unknown to the experimenter, who would thus be unable to match up participants with their subsequent responses. (The exception was that the confederate always drew his number first and always drew Subject 4 [identifiable to the confederate by touch]).

In their cubicles, participants entered their numbers into the computer and took the "creativity" test. They were given 4 min to describe each picture (Rorschach Plate 2, Plate 4, and a simplified version of Plate 10), after which the computer would supposedly score their answers according to established criteria. (Length of answers and writing fluency were described as irrelevant to the task, so that participants could not use these criteria as heuristics for guessing what their score might be. See also the popular Torrance tests of creativity; <http://www.ststesting.com>). Participants were told that two different computer programs would analyze their picture descriptions—one program was older and more well tested; the newer program was more up-to-date but obviously had not been tested for the same length of time. Participants were told that both programs had been validated and were able to predict outcomes as diverse as job productivity, career success, and life satisfaction.

Upon completing the test, participants returned to a table in the center of the room. The two computer programs supposedly scored the test, though actually the two feedback sheets that the participant would ultimately receive were the same across all participants. One feedback sheet would indicate a relatively high performance (92nd percentile) and another would indicate an average performance (53rd percentile). However, we did not indicate which performance feedback was from which computer program.

**Experimental manipulation.** Feedback sheets from both programs were to be put in folders identified only by subject number and were to be picked up by participants when the experimenter was not in the room. However, when participants took their folders, they found that they had only one feedback sheet instead of two. Meanwhile, the confederate opened his folder to discover that his folder contained both his forms and the missing forms of other

people. Realizing that something was wrong, the confederate called out to the experimenter and asked whether he wanted the forms back to redistribute to the other participants. The experimenter, a bit flustered and embarrassed by the mistake, did not take the forms because he said he was not supposed to be able to match the score with the participant. Instead, the experimenter asked the confederate to distribute the forms to each participant when he left the room. In a very deliberate and careful fashion, the confederate then distributed the forms to each participant. This was done deliberately rather than matter-of-factly so that participants would realize the confederate had seen their sheet and knew their scores. The experimental manipulation was such that for half the participants, the confederate saw their high score, and for the other half, the confederate saw their low score.

**Self-evaluation.** Once forms had been distributed, the experimenter returned and gave participants some time to look over both feedback forms. The experimenter then asked participants to privately fill out a brief self-evaluation questionnaire that would never be seen by other participants and would be anonymous to the experimenter. The four self-evaluation questions were as follows:

People may be creative in many domains of life or in just a few. Would you say you are creative in (1 = *a few domains of life*, 7 = *most domains of life*)?

People may be creative almost none of the time, some of the time, a lot of the time, almost all of the time, and so on. Would you say that you are creative (1 = *almost none of the time*, 7 = *almost all of the time*)?

Some people are creative on a few things, whereas some other people are creative on most things in their life. Would you say that you are creative on (1 = *a few things*, 7 = *most things*)?

For some people, it is easy to be creative. For some other people, it is hard to be creative. How hard is it for you to be creative? (1 = *very hard*, 7 = *very easy*);

(The four-item  $\alpha = .84$  among dignity culture participants and  $.90$  among face culture participants.) When the forms were completed, participants signaled to the experimenter, who then distributed a questionnaire with a few brief demographic items. After those were completed, the experimenter called participants individually to a cubicle to probe for suspicion, debrief participants, and thank them for their participation.

## Results and Discussion

The participant's low and high scores supposedly came from analyses by two different computer programs, though the participant was unable to match the feedback to the program. The only difference between the feedback forms then (besides the score) was that one of the feedback forms had been seen by another person.

We performed a Culture  $\times$  Score Seen by confederate ANOVA. As a main effect, face culture participants rated themselves as less creative ( $M = 3.55$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) than did dignity culture participants ( $M = 4.79$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ),  $F(1, 94) = 30.63$ ,  $p < .001$ .

More relevant to the present paper is the Culture  $\times$  Score Seen by confederate interaction,  $p = .05$ ,  $F(1, 94) = 3.88$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$  (see Figure 2). As expected, the information that was known to another

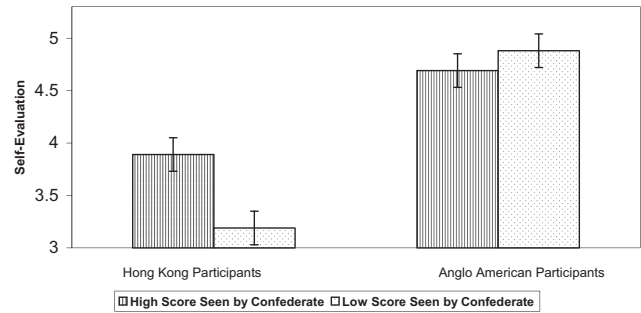


Figure 2. Self-evaluation as a function of the score seen by the confederate (high-score seen vs. low-score seen) for Anglo American and Hong Kong participants. Error bars correspond to  $\pm 1$  standard error.

person became absorbed into face culture participants' self-evaluation (self-evaluation  $M = 3.89$  when their high score was seen by another vs.  $M = 3.19$  when their low score was seen by another),  $t(96) = 2.06$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .09$ . This effect did not hold for the dignity culture participants, who showed a trivial tendency toward a reversal (self-evaluation  $M = 4.69$  when their high score was seen by another vs.  $M = 4.88$  when their low score was seen by another, *ns*).

## Summary

For our face culture participants, the tendency to treat information known to others as more relevant or more real than information not known to others was shown even in the limiting case in which the information was simply known to one other person. This tendency was again not shown by dignity culture respondents, who gave no greater weight to information that was known to another.

In the next study, we extend the results of Experiments 1 and 2 to a slightly different paradigm so that we can examine the crucial role that public representations play in face cultures. Public representations—information that is publicly known and acknowledged as publicly known to all—are extremely important in face cultures. And, as revealed in the next experiment, for the face culture participant, what is publicly on the table about the participant can be far more important than what others actually, privately, thought of her.

## Experiment 3: Public Representations

Again, participants entered the lab in groups and individually took a creativity test. Later in the study, they were given (bogus) feedback about how their performance was graded by (a) a computer program and (b) their peers in the group, who had scored their test individually. Half the time, the computer program scores were publicly shared with all group members, and half the time, the peer scores were publicly shared with all group members. At the end of the study, participants were asked to privately and anonymously make judgments about their own creativity.

The grades supposedly given by the peers and by the computer were rigged to be opposed, such that when the peers' grade was high, the computer's grade was low, and vice versa. The primary prediction is that face culture participants should be most likely to absorb into their self-definition whatever is publicly known and

acknowledged to be publicly known about them, whereas dignity culture participants should not absorb such judgments.

Note that this prediction also creates an interesting subprediction for the condition in which the computer's grade is publicly known and the peers' grade is kept private. This condition highlights the importance of the public representation of knowledge for those from a face culture. In the condition in which the computer's grade is high, but the peers' grade is low, the participant knows that privately and individually her peers do not think—or at least, did not think—much of her performance; however, what is publicly known and on the table for everyone to see is the high score from the computer. Conversely, when the computer's grade is low but the peers' grade is high, the participant knows that privately and individually her peers thought highly of her, but what is on the table as public for everyone to see is the low score. If what is most important is what is publicly known and acknowledged then people from a face culture should be more influenced by what is on the table as common knowledge among the peer group, regardless of what their peers actually privately thought in their solitary judgments.

## Method

**Participants.** One hundred-five participants (52 female, 53 male; mean age = 18.90 years) were from University of Illinois, and 123 participants (79 female, 44 male; mean age = 20.46 years) were from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, recruited in the same way as Experiments 1 and 2.<sup>6</sup>

**Detailed procedure.** Participants were run four at a time. Again, each session began with a short icebreaker task before participants proceeded to their individual cubicles for the creative thinking test, as in Experiment 2. (Again, each participant was randomly assigned an identification number after drawing a number from an envelope. The numbers were unknown to the experimenter, who would thus be unable to match up participants with their subsequent responses.)

After participants completed the creativity test in their cubicles, they returned to a table in the center of the room. While the computer was supposedly analyzing and printing out feedback on their responses, participants were told they would now have a chance to read and anonymously evaluate the other 3 participants' responses to the pictures. (In fact, all participants always saw the same three standardized responses). When peer evaluations were completed, the experimenter compiled this material along with the feedback supposedly generated by the computer to produce a folder for each participant with both the peer and the computer-generated feedback. Again, so that participants' identities would not be known to the experimenter, all response sheets and feedback forms were put in folders identified only by subject number and were selected by participants when the experimenter was not in the room.

The two between-subjects manipulations were introduced at this point. First, each session was randomly assigned to either the computer-score public condition or peer-score public condition. In the computer-score public condition, the experimenter explained that we originally planned to have participants discuss the test and its results among themselves (but not with the experimenter). However, because we were running out of time, participants would only discuss the computer scores among themselves. To aid this discussion, another sheet in their folder provided information on each participant's computer scores that could be used later as a reference. Thus, each

participant's computer score would be known to all others, though each participant's peer score was private and would never be seen by others. In the peer-score public condition, the reverse was true: Only peer scores would be discussed, and all peer scores were known to all others in the group, but each participant's computer score was private and would never be seen by others.

Additionally, all participants in a session were assigned to either the computer high score (peers low score) condition or the peers high score (computer low score) condition. In the former, participants received a high score from the computer but a low score from their peers. In the latter, the reverse was true. When the score that was publicly shared with other members of the group was the high score, participants found that they scored in the 78th percentile, as compared with others in their group who scored in the 65th, 57th, and 39th percentiles. When the score that was publicly shared was the low score, participants found that they scored in the 38th percentile, as compared with others who scored in the 79th, 64th, and 43rd percentile.

After participants were given some time to look over their feedback, the experimenter asked participants to fill out a form with a self-evaluation of their own creativity. Participants were assured that these self-evaluations were private and would never be seen by their peers. The four self-evaluation questions were the same as in Experiment 2.

When the forms were completed, participants signaled to the experimenter, who then distributed a questionnaire with a few demographic items and personality scales. After those were completed, the experimenter called participants individually to a cubicle to probe for suspicion, debrief participants, and thank them for their participation. No group discussion of scores was actually held.

## Results and Discussion

**Public representations.** The main hypothesis was that face culture participants would define themselves privately in terms of the public representation about them. That is, whatever was public and acknowledged as on the table for everyone to see—whether it was the computer score or the peer score, whether it was high or low—would be absorbed into the face culture participants' private judgments about the self. On the other hand, for those from a dignity culture, the sovereignty of their own self-judgments should be of paramount concern, so the common knowledge—even when positive—should be ignored.

To examine our hypothesis, we performed a Culture  $\times$  Computer Score High Versus Peer Score High  $\times$  Computer Score Public Versus Peer Score Public ANOVA on the self-evaluation score.<sup>7</sup> There was

<sup>6</sup> Four participants (out of 232 participants: 1.72%) in Experiment 3 were deleted from the data analyses because they showed strong suspicion that the results were made up. With the excluded participants included, the predicted three-way interaction becomes  $p = .07$ .

<sup>7</sup> All participants in a session were in the same condition. Participants' scores in a session are not technically independent of one another. One can address this problem by collapsing over individuals to create a composite score for each experimental session. Results for these composite scores look the same as those in the text (the relevant effects for Experiments 1, 2, and 3 were all  $p \leq .04$ ). The exception was the calibration effect in Experiment 1, in which it is inappropriate to collapse across participants within an experimental session).



a main effect such that face culture participants rated themselves more modestly ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 1.00$ ) than dignity culture participants did ( $M = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ),  $t(220) = 4.92$ ,  $p < .001$ . There was also a main effect, such that the computer score manipulation had a bigger effect than did the peer score manipulation,  $F(1, 220) = 8.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ; however, both of these were qualified by the significant three-way interaction that was predicted,  $F(1, 220) = 4.70$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , as seen in Figure 3.

Decomposing the three-way interaction, we found that for face culture participants, whichever score was public became absorbed into their own self-assessments (two-way Computer Score High vs. Peers Score High  $\times$  Computer Score Public vs. Peer Score Public interaction),  $F(1, 220) = 4.48$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$ . Especially interesting are the two conditions in which the computer score was public. In one case, the participant's peers privately did not think much of the participant's performance; however, what is on the table as common knowledge is the high computer score. In the other case, the participant's peers privately thought well of the participant; however, what is on the table is the low computer score. The higher self-evaluations in the first condition relative to the second show that the public representation—rather than their peers' initial private and individual assessments—counts more for the face culture participants ( $M$  high computer score public = 3.80 vs.  $M$  low computer score public = 3.19,  $t = 2.40$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

For face culture participants, when the computer score was private, participants' self-assessments were lower when the computer score was high, as opposed to low. However, this reversal was not significant as a simple effect (high computer score private  $M = 3.59$  vs. low computer score private  $M = 3.78$ ,  $t = 0.80$ ,  $p > .10$ ).

The dignity culture participants showed a very different pattern. First, they tended to give credence to the computer's evaluation

rather than to the judgments of their peers (computer high condition  $M = 4.56$ ; peers high condition  $M = 3.99$ ,  $t = 2.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Second, they showed no sign of absorbing the public representation about them into their own self-definition. There were easy opportunities for self-enhancement through public acclaim, such as when the peer scores were high and were publicly displayed. However, dignity culture participants passed up these opportunities, ignoring (and even nonsignificantly reacting against) the public representations about them.

**Will dignity participants allow themselves to be judged by a qualified jury of their peers?** Dignity culture participants gave more weight to the assessments by the computer than to the judgments of their peers. Perhaps this is normatively correct because there is no reason for participants to believe their peers are particularly qualified to judge them. However, some data also seem to suggest that the indifference to the judgments of their peers represents more than simply the adoption of what might be a normatively appropriate attitude. More specifically, on the basis of the participants' ratings of his or her peers, we know that some participants thought their peers were indeed quite creative, whereas others thought their peers were uncreative. Presumably, those who thought their peers were creative would have reason to give their peers' judgments more weight than those who thought their peers were uncreative.<sup>8</sup> However, there was absolutely no evidence that this was the case. The interaction of Participant's Assessment That His or Her Peers Were Creative  $\times$  Peers' Judgments of Participant's Ability as High Versus Low was  $b = 0.006$ ,  $t(105) = 0.06$ ,  $p > .10$ . Such a finding suggests that dignity culture participants were not making judgments in a normatively correct fashion but had instead cultivated a more studied indifference to their peers; dignity culture participants who thought their peers were creative (and hence presumably competent to judge them) paid no more attention to their peers' opinions than did participants who thought their peers were uncreative (and presumably unqualified to judge them).

### Meta-Analysis of Effects Among Dignity Culture Participants: Sovereignty Through Opposition?

The three experiments above all focused on how face culture participants absorbed what others knew about them into their self-definition, whereas dignity culture participants did not do so. Dignity culture participants seemed to do more than simply willfully ignore their peers, however. As observant readers may have noticed, there was always a small- to medium-size tendency—not significant—for dignity culture participants to define themselves against what others knew about them, rating themselves better when others thought less of them and rating themselves worse when others thought well of them. As described below, a meta-analysis of these effects across experiments shows that this oppositional tendency was in fact significant.

### Effects Across Studies

The effect sizes for dignity culture participants were as follows: effect of public versus private performance  $r = .14$ , public versus

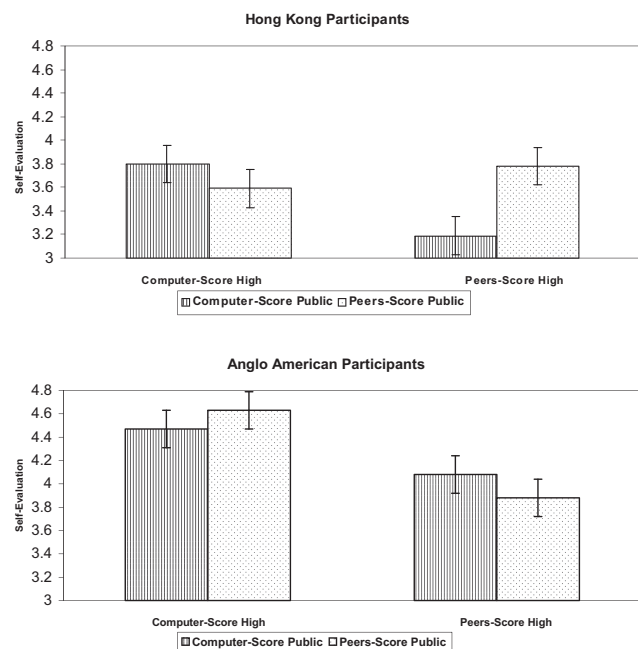


Figure 3. Self-evaluation as a function of the public manipulation (computer-score public vs. peers-score public) and score manipulation (computer-score high vs. peers-score high) for Anglo American and Hong Kong participants. Error bars correspond to  $\pm 1$  standard error.

<sup>8</sup> We assume the logic of "It takes one to know one" overrides the belief that "Those who cannot, teach. And those who cannot teach, become critics."

private difference in calibration between participants' ratings and their actual performance  $r = .15$  in Experiment 1; effect of the high score versus low score being known by the confederate  $r = .09$  in Experiment 2; deference to the computer's score rather than the peers' judgments  $r = .28$ ; effect of high public ratings versus low public ratings,  $r = .09$  in Experiment 3. For these combined meta-analytic effects  $Z = 3.07$  (weighted by study  $n$ ) or  $Z = 2.77$  (unweighted by study  $n$ ), with the two effects in Experiments 1 and 3 combined for each study.

### Implications

If dignity culture participants' ignoring of their peers is in fact a studied response, this is perhaps its logical (though irrational) conclusion. Is there a better way to demonstrate to the self that one's self-definitions are independent of peers' judgments than by defining the self in ways opposed to those peers' judgments? In this case, one is not merely ignoring or rejecting peers' judgments but is actually opposing them when one constructs one's self-definition. Such may be the course people are forced to take if they want to prove to themselves that they are sovereign in defining themselves.

The irony should not be lost here. That is, in order to prove to myself that I am sovereign and not controlled by what you think of me, I must find out what you think of me and then go the other way. Whereas this may be a good way to convince myself that I am sovereign, it is also a way that I am giving up my actual sovereignty because I must oppose your judgments of me, whether positive or negative.

### General Discussion

Across three studies with different experimental paradigms, people from face cultures versus dignity cultures differed in the way they privately defined the self. For face culture participants, their private self-definition was shaped by what others knew about them (Experiments 1 and 2). Further, it is perhaps most interesting that private self-definition was most shaped by consensually shared public information—that is, by information that was publicly known and known to be publicly known. Thus, information acknowledged as on the table and publicly known to one's peers became even more self-defining than the actual, initial privately held opinions of those same peers (Experiment 3). The public representation (rather than some aggregate of their peers' initial private opinions) defined the self. (See also Miller & Prentice, 1994, on collective representations vs. aggregates.)

Dignity culture participants showed a very different pattern across the three experiments. At the very least, they showed a studied indifference to their peers—refusing to abide by the jury of their peers regardless of whether the verdict was public or private, was positive or negative, or was made by those who were competent or incompetent to judge them (Experiments 1 through 3). The meta-analytic result showed that this actually went beyond ignoring: Dignity culture participants showed some tendency to actively oppose their peers' judgments, defining themselves against what their peers thought of them.

### Public Selves in Face and Dignity Cultures

What is publicly seen by others comes to define the self for those from a face culture. For those from a dignity culture, public

evaluations can be a threat—they impinge on the self's autonomy: Other people's judgments must not become the measure of one's worth. Such notions connect to a number of areas of research. Below, we briefly describe how these ideas relate to work on moral sanctions, the meaning of choice, the phenomenology of everyday experience, and contrarianism in judgment and behavior.

**Morality.** In the three experiments above, we manipulated how participants appeared in front of others and how they performed privately in terms of how creative they were and how knowledgeable they were. Suppose we had instead manipulated how virtuous the participant appeared or had induced the participant to commit a moral transgression either in front of others or completely privately. If we found results parallel to those in the experiments above, such results would be consistent with the claim made by some anthropologists that Asia is a shame culture, whereas the United States is a guilt culture (Benedict, 1946; Creighton, 1990; Wong & Tsai, 2007). Shame ("Other people think poorly of me") requires an audience and is in some sense public, whereas guilt ("I think poorly of myself") does not require an audience and is in some sense private. Other people shame us (put us in a state of shame) and, when we feel the emotion of shame, we are looking at ourselves through the eyes of others who hold us in contempt.

The argument cannot be pushed too far. One might feel ashamed in front of an imagined audience ("Other people would think poorly of me if they knew about it"; Smith, 1759/1976). Further, one might feel guilty because one had not fulfilled one's obligations to God, whose Divine eyes are always upon us, even when human eyes are not (Atran & Norenzayan, 2004; Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). Nevertheless, there is something essentially public about the conception of shame and something essentially private about the conception of guilt.

In a very different context, we have in fact explored this issue, inducing participants to either think about their own transgressions or think about how others would view the participant's transgressions. Our dependent variable was indirect—it was whether the participant chose a cleansing hand wipe or a pencil as a free gift for participating in the study. According to Zhong and Liljenquist (2006), choosing the hand wipe seems to indicate a desire to cleanse oneself of transgressions. And in our study (Kim & Cohen, in press), inducing Asian American participants to think about how others would view their transgressions leads them to be relatively more likely to choose the hand wipe, as compared with the condition in which others' assessments are not invoked. Such an effect did not occur for our Anglo American participants. These results suggest that for our Asian American participants, the actual presence of others is not required, but imagining their transgressions through the eyes of others gives those transgressions a greater defiling power and necessitates a greater need for them to be cleansed.

**Choice.** The types of choices that come to define us also illustrate how the public self becomes real in face cultures and becomes unreal—not a face, but a façade—in dignity cultures. A fascinating series of experiments by Kitayama and colleagues (Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005) illustrates this point. Kitayama and colleagues (Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005) argued that for North Americans, true choice is a private act, and it must come from within in order to fill its function of

being self-revelatory or self-expressive. If corrupted by concerns about what others might think, choice ceases to be about the true expression of the self. On the other hand, for Japanese participants, choice is public. It becomes consequential because it involves situating oneself within a social context and making decisions that are subject to scrutiny by others. An elegant line of experiments with the spread of alternatives paradigm from cognitive dissonance supports this argument: When Americans make decisions after first worrying about what others will think or how they might look to others, their decisions become tainted; they no longer reflect the real self and no longer need to be justified (through standard dissonance reduction effects). The reverse was true for Kitayama et al.'s (2004) Japanese participants: Only when participants first worried about what others might think or how they might look to others did their decisions become real or consequential and, hence, need to be justified or defended (through dissonance reduction effects).<sup>9</sup>

**Phenomenological experience.** Data from the experiments of the present article and from the studies described above are also consistent with the general notion that face culture participants are relatively more likely than dignity culture participants to experience the self from a third person (outsider) perspective than from a first person (insider) perspective. This is not simply a metaphor; it also seems to represent a real difference in some of the basic phenomenological experiences of face and dignity culture participants in social situations. Thus, face culture participants (as compared with dignity culture participants) have more memory imagery constructed from the third person (rather than first person) perspective (Cohen & Gunz, 2002). Face culture participants are more likely to mentally model social situations from a third person perspective, whereas dignity culture participants are more likely to mentally model such events from a first person perspective (Leung & Cohen, 2007). Face culture participants are less likely to make some of the egocentric errors that derive from being too immersed in one's own internal experience and projecting it onto the world (Cohen, Hoshino-Browne, & Leung, 2007). The self is partly defined and experienced through the eyes of others in a face culture, whereas the sovereign self is partly defined and experienced in a dignity culture from our own internal perspective and through the struggle against having others define us.

### Being Inaccurate or Retaining Our Sovereignty?

Finally, much has been made of the way people's (Americans') assessments of themselves do not match others' assessments of them, though the range of self–other correlations can vary widely depending on the method and the domain (Shrauger & Shoeneman, 1979; Baumeister, 1998; cf. Heine & Renshaw, 2002). Some of these effects have been attributed to motivated cognition. Some of the effects have been attributed to differences in information available to the self versus others. Some of the effects have been attributed to a mental laziness or general social obtuseness (on the part of either the self or the perceiver). However, the present research provides another possible explanation for the phenomena in a dignity culture. That is, in a dignity culture, it may not be that people are being lazy, obtuse, or intentionally or unintentionally biased; instead, it may be that people are purposely defining themselves and behaving in ways that go against others' representations of them. Thus, because others define one a certain way, one

may define oneself and behave in ways contrary to this, as a way of saying, "Don't fence me in." (See also Cohen & Leung, in press; Leung & Cohen, 2009 on the oppositional stance that makes people go out of their way to defy others' expectations; at the group level, see also Kray, Thompson, & Galinsky, 2001, and Kray, Reb, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004, on stereotype reactance and limiting conditions.)

## Limitations and Summary

### Sample Limitations

It is important that research be done on different sample populations. First, there is the caution about generalizing too widely across cultures and individuals. The experiments above had students from Hong Kong and Illinois as samples that are relatively comparable but that differ in terms of their membership in a society that is structured more as a face culture versus one that is structured more as a dignity culture. However, variation within Hong Kong and the north of the United States is huge, both because there are subcultures within each and because in any culture people vary in how much (and in what situations) they conform to or reject the values of their culture (Cohen & Leung, in press; Hong & Chiu, 2001; Leung & Cohen, 2009; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Oyserman, Kimmelmeier, & Coon, 2002; Oyserman & Lee, 2008; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). So, sweeping generalizations about Americans or Asians are not called for.

There is also a caution about generalizing across age groups. The young adults in all the experiments above are in a period of their lives in which they are still carving out their identities. Changes in participants' self-definitions were observed in these experiments, perhaps because self-definitions are still reasonably malleable at this stage. Whether the amount of malleability is equivalent in both cultures—and whether cross-cultural comparisons would be diminished or enhanced with participants of different ages—is an open question (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006; Sears, 1986).

There are also complexities that we have not begun to capture. That is, we have described the phenomena as if face culture participants absorb what others publicly know about them, whereas dignity culture participants studiously ignore or react against others' opinions. But who are the others? In the present experiments, the others are an unacquainted peer group. However, surely people have multiple others (peers inside one's reference group, peers outside one's reference group, parents, work associates, etc.) that they react either toward or against, depending on the context, one's personal dispositions, and the stage of life one is at. How such issues play out for people in different cultures seems an interesting direction for future research.

<sup>9</sup> To clarify, the point is not that audiences are irrelevant to Americans' cognitive dissonance effects. The behavior to be rationalized is all the more powerful if it is a public behavior. However, the decision to engage in the behavior must be one that has been made privately and without extensive external pressure. Hence, no choice conditions do not elicit dissonance effects, and in the high choice condition, experimenters try to use the minimum amount of perceptible social pressure, while often reminding the participant that the choice "is completely up to you."

## Conclusion: The Knotted Self in Face and Dignity Cultures

R. D. Laing (1970) wrote a fascinating book called *Knots*, describing the way people's thoughts and behaviors are tangled up recursively with those of others. The above experiments have provided a few examples of how people's selves may be knotted up with those of others in culturally canalized ways.

The case for the knotted self in a face culture is simple enough, though perhaps not as simple as it first appears. "My self is what you think it is" is a knot of the first level. However, the importance of the public representation (rather than peers' initial private assessments) in Experiment 3 actually adds further complexity: "My self is not what you thought it was, but is instead what you know everyone knows is publicly known about me."

The case for the knotted self among dignity culture participants is a bit more complex. The meta-analytic result—suggesting that dignity culture participants actively opposed their peers' judgments—implies they were acting less like a Popeye cartoon character ("I am what I am") and more like Dostoyevsky's (1864/1993) underground man, who sought to demonstrate his freedom by his opposition to rationality, expectations, and norms. Like Dostoyevsky's character, dignity culture participants are sometimes only able to prove to themselves that they are sovereign by reacting in opposition to that which would control them. Thus, the knot: "I am sovereign, because I define myself to be what you think I am not." The self is still knotted for dignity culture participants, but it is a knot of a very different kind than that of face culture participants. (A more moderate version of the dignity knot might involve expressing sovereignty less as contrarianism and more as studied indifference: "I am sovereign because I ignore you," again with sovereignty being defined as freedom from your judgments. This involves slightly more contortions when I must ignore evidence that might be normatively appropriate to consider (as in Experiment 3, in which I learn how qualified peers assess me) or must disregard evidence that I might otherwise let influence my judgment (as in Experiment 1, in which evidence about my performance affects my self-judgments—unless you see it). In this case, the knot is something like, "I am sovereign, because . . . I would define myself a certain way. But you do. So I will not.") Exploring the tangles of these sorts of knots—and many others—for both dignity and face culture participants also seems an interesting direction for future research.

Of course, the richer the web of relationships, the more tangled are the knots that bind us. In the present studies, we examined some very simple situations involving people being judged by their peers. Yet, even in these simple situations, face and dignity culture people responded in very different ways. One responded by absorbing the judgments of their peers into the self, the other responded by rejecting or opposing those judgments. In both face and dignity cultures, participants create a knotted self; the experiments above illustrate just a few of the distinct, culturally appropriate ways the self is knotted up with social judgments and cultural imperatives for being a self in an inherently social world.

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