Self-Enhancement and Self-Effacement in Reaction to Praise and Criticism: The Case of Multiethnic Youth

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Abstract We conducted research on the independent and interdependent self which points to cultural differences in self-enhancing versus self-effacing perspectives. We investigated members of multiethnic, high school, girls' sports teams and their tendencies to interpret praise or criticism in a self-effacing or self-enhancing manner. Our analysis is in the spirit of Bruner's conceptualization of narrative as cultural interpretation. This investigation differs from other studies on the independent and interdependent self in several respects: (1) it is naturalistic; (2) it focuses on ethnic differences within a multicultural society, rather than on cross-national comparison; (3) primary data sources are qualitative (ethnography, journals); (4) we analyzed cultural perspectives of researchers and participants; and (5) its focus is on adolescence. Euro-American and African American participants shared a more self-enhancing perspective, while Asian American and Latina participants shared a more self-effacing perspective. Differing cultural perspectives produced conflict when participants were faced with contrasting interpretations of praise and criticism. [individualism, independence, collectivism, interdependence, sport, adolescence]

We investigated the relevance of the cultural models of individualism and collectivism for understanding reactions to praise and criticism on multiethnic high school sports teams. We also investigated the implications of contrasting cultural models for interethnic misunderstanding among adolescent teammates. As Bruner (this issue) points out, many cultural norms are implicit rather than explicit. We would go one step farther and assert that the most basic cultural norms are also the most implicit; seeing the valued self as more independent or more interdependent is such a fundamental and implicit cultural norm.

Bruner (this issue) defines culture as "shared ordinariness," the ordinariness of everyday life. By studying girls as they play volleyball and basketball games and have team practices, we, as researchers, have investigated the ordinariness of everyday life. But most central to our study is Bruner's notion that

> a culture must . . . provide its members with means for understanding and tolerating deviations from shared ordinariness. One of the principal ways in which it does so is by framing its representations of the world in a way that renders deviations from shared

ETHOS, Vol. 36, Issue 1, pp. 78–97, ISSN 0091-2131 online ISSN 1548-1352. DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-1352.2008.00005.x.

> ordinariness both conventional and manageable. One of the principle means for doing so is through narrative. (Bruner this issue)

We show how contrasting cultural models lead to conflict and misunderstanding around the issues of self-enhancement and self-effacement on four high school teams. When such misunderstanding or conflict occurs, it is because one party sees the other as having deviated from the shared ordinariness that they take for granted. The journals that we asked the players to keep for us throughout their sports seasons provided a methodology that yields rich instantiations of Bruner's concept; they are full of narrative: stories that function as "accounts of . . . violations of the shared ordinary, and about how such violations are resolved" (this issue). These narratives often describe violations of taken-for-granted norms and recount actions taken in response. As will become clear when we present the data, such actions are intended to restore the norm, often through a negative assessment of the violator (Goodwin 2006). It is also possible for students with different value lenses to create meaningful, yet different, cultural pathways to reach a common end, again restoring the norm (Kernan and Greenfield 2005). We are interested in violations of norms that come about because of differences in normative value systems assumed by different participants.

Mainstream culture in the United States is generally viewed as individualistic, encouraging independence, individual achievement, and personal self-esteem as important developmental goals (Raeff 1997). Individualism is the "ordinariness" of North American life, the norm that is taken for granted by members of the dominant culture. This norm holds, on a deep, unconscious level, even when it is consciously opposed, as by the commune movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Weisner 2001).

Unlike individualism, collectivism emphasizes interdependence (Markus and Kitayama 1991), in-group (especially family) needs and goals (Bradshaw 1994), and personal modesty (Greenfield et al. 2002). Many groups come to the United States bringing a relatively collectivistic value system from their ancestral culture (Comas-Díaz and Greene 1994; Greenfield and Cocking 1994) setting the stage for intergroup misunderstanding and conflict.

It is not that groups are purely individualistic or collectivistic; there is evidence that these approaches are dynamically constructed in the context of cultural practice as interrelated dimensions of self (Raeff 2006; Spiro 1993; Suizzo 2004). It is, however, the *relative* differences in emphasis between value lenses, in context of a particular cultural activity, that are the causes of conflict (Raeff et al. 2000). Sports teams provide an apt natural laboratory for studying these value lenses because they can offer opportunities poised between communitarian and individualistic values (Shore 1996).

Much of the research on individualism and collectivism focuses on Euro-American individualism and East Asian collectivism (e.g., Markus and Kitayama 1991). Latin American cultures are also often seen as collectivistic (e.g., Shkodriani and Gibbons 1995).

Like Asians, Mexican and Central American immigrants bring these cultural orientations with them (Vasquez 1994), although the orientations are transformed in their expression between successive generations in the United States (Delgado-Gaitan 1994).

Whereas African cultures are frequently collectivistic in emphasis (Nsamenang and Lamb 1994), African American culture is often seen as mixing collectivistic and individualistic elements (Boykin and Toms 1985; Lewis 1975). To a great extent this may be historical; slavery followed by segregation maintained a collectivistic orientation generations longer than for voluntary immigrant groups. However, with decreasing discrimination and increasing integration, it appears as though the collectivism of small isolated communities has waned and the individualism of the broader society has waxed among African Americans. We argue that, in the domains of interest of this study, African Americans behave more individualistically. That is, African American culture mixes an emphasis on group interdependence and ethnic solidarity with an emphasis on personal distinctiveness, improvisation, and originality (Greene 1994).

This pattern of research findings would lead us to expect that in a multiethnic high school team situation, Asian Americans and Latinos would operate from a more collectivistic perspective, while Euro-Americans and African Americans might operate from a more individualistic perspective. Conflict and misunderstanding occur when behavior valued in one perspective is negatively evaluated by others (Greenfield et al. 2002).

Self-Enhancement versus Self-Effacement

A major difference between those with independent vs. interdependent conceptions of the self is that of self-presentation. This difference is between self-enhancement and self-effacement (also called "self-enhancement" and "self-criticism" by Kitayama et al. 1997).

Self-enhancing perspectives are more aligned with the independent self; individuals want to be seen as strong and self-sufficient (Heine and Lehman 1995). People in Western cultures may be especially sensitive to positive self-characteristics because everyday practices socialize them to take credit for successes and present themselves in a positive light (Kitayama et al. 1995). In the United States, people favor self-enhancers over self-deprecators in a variety of contexts (Heine and Lehman 1995; Robinson et al. 1995; Solomon et al. 1983).

African Americans may share the Euro-American, individualistic tendency to present oneself in a more positive light. African Americans report having higher self-concepts around ability than their white peers (Hare 1980), and "expressive individualism" is important in African American culture (Boykin and Toms 1985); this quality involves cultivating distinctiveness and unique self-expression.

However, people from interdependent cultures strive to maximize their sense of belongingness by minimizing their differences through self-effacement (Heine and Lehman 1995). For example, modesty is a key part of self-image in Chinese culture (Chen 1993). Unlike the United States, in China, self-effacing people are better liked than self-enhancing ones (Bond et al. 1982). The tendency to value modesty increases with age among children in Japan (Yoshida et al. 1982).

Lack of self-enhancement does not necessarily mean a lack of self-esteem in those with interdependent selves. Feeling good in Japan is not associated with self-enhancement based on exposing one's internal attributes, as it is in mainstream U.S. culture (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Rather, positive feelings are developed through patterns of behavior associated with being interdependent with relevant others.

What about Latinos? Modesty and shame are also socially desirable traits among people in Mexico and are sometimes expected as a moral imperative (Aguilar 1982). They are important child-rearing values for Mexican immigrants to the United States (Greenfield et al. 2000). Latino culture appears to be similar to Asian American culture in valuing self-effacement, although the Asian roots of self-effacement are thought to lie in Buddhism and Confucianism (J. Tsai, personal communication, July 11, 2000). Catholicism, with its emphasis on humility and personal responsibility (esp. as practiced in Mexico and Central America), may fulfill a similar role among Latinos.

The Case of Praise and Criticism

We investigated how differences in modesty—self-deprecation versus self-enhancement—might affect people's reactions to comments on doing a job well or being praised and making a mistake or being criticized. Praise and criticism are especially interesting because they are often given in the presence of others. Thus, it is an excellent opportunity to witness all involved: the praiser–criticizer, the praised–criticized, as well as outside observers' reactions.

Based on individualism–collectivism theory, we expected that Euro-Americans and African Americans might accept praise and deflect criticism because of an emphasis on self-enhancement. In mainstream U.S. culture, compliments are almost expected when one performs well on a task, and one may feel disappointed when none are offered (Chen 1993). In this case, self-denigration or effacement may be seen not as modesty, but as self-humiliation (Chen 1993). Asian Americans and Latinas, in contrast, might deflect praise and accept criticism because of an emphasis on self-effacement. Rong Chen (1993) found that Chinese speakers prefer to lower themselves in response to compliments in the belief that a modest self-presentation creates a positive self-image by enhancing "face."

We predicted that self-enhancement and self-effacement would also play important roles in people's reactions to criticism. Those in more interdependent cultures are often socialized to be sensitive to negative feedback, so that they may self-correct and achieve normative

behavior (Greenfield et al. 2000; Kitayama et al. 1995). For example, when confronted with criticism, Japanese are more likely than Westerners to make apologies to maintain relationships; they are also less likely to respond by denying culpability that might strain relationships (Hamilton and Hagiwara 1992). By the same token, we might expect people with individualistic perspectives to be more interested in preserving self-esteem by asserting their own point of view in the face of criticism.

The Extension of Past Research

Issues of self-effacement and self-enhancement have been studied in the past (e.g., Chen 1993; Heine and Lehman 1995; Kitayama et al. 1997). We extended the existing findings in the following ways: First, we extended the research outside of the experimental arena into naturalistic field settings. Second, most studies of self-enhancement versus self-effacement focus on cross-national comparisons, rather than comparisons within multiethnic communities. Third, we used qualitative ethnography and journaling rather than experimental methods. Fourth, data was collected from researchers as well as student participants, allowing for a multivocal methodology.

Finally, we extended this research topic into the developmental period of adolescence by focusing on high school sports teams to provide examples of conflicts that occur as a result of differing cultural models concerning praise and criticism.

Methods

This research takes advantage of multiethnic, multivocal perspectives from both research observers and high school team players, in which field observers as well as players became study participants. While empirical articles often take note of the match or mismatch between the ethnicity of researchers and that of study participants, researcher ethnicity has not in the past been used as a variable in its own right. We utilize researcher ethnicity as a variable that can affect the cultural lens of a researcher, just as participant ethnicity can affect the cultural lens of a participant.

Participants

Student participants for this study were girls participating in volleyball and basketball teams in two multiethnic Los Angeles area high schools. Four teams participated and all teams had members from three or four major ethnic groups: African Americans, Asian Americans, Euro-Americans, and Latinas. Three teams had students from three of our ethnic categories; one team had students from all four groups. These ethnically mixed teams reflected the ethnically mixed but predominantly middle-class neighborhoods in which the two schools were located. Based on parental occupation, team members came from predominantly lower-middle to middle-middle class families, with a smattering of working-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds. We chose to focus on adolescent girls, who are at an age where self-presentation and social acceptance are especially relevant.

There were 50 different high school girls on the four teams. Thirty-six players participated in our study. We excluded three girls whose mixed ethnicities crossed individualism–collectivism lines, and one girl for whom we had no ethnicity data. Eliminating the former participants acknowledges the complexities that come from mixed cultural heritages in which parents are likely to have different cultural values. A discussion of such cases is found in Claudia Kernan and Patricia Greenfield (2005). The mean age of the player participants was 16.06 based on 34 girls for whom age data were available. There were eight field researchers who were college students, graduate students, and one postdoctoral fellow. The field researchers were also multiethnic, consisting of Asian Americans, African Americans, Latinas, and Euro-Americans. Table 1 shows the distribution of ethnic group membership on each team for players and field researchers.

Most of the Asian American (87.5 percent) and half of the Latina student participants had at least one member of the immediate family who was not born in the United States. The Euro-Americans and African Americans were predominantly from families born in the United States.

The researchers came from a roughly similar mix of immigrant and U.S.-born families (see Table 2). Of player participants who were immigrants themselves or who had at least one immigrant parent, Chinese constituted the largest immigrant group, with the overwhelming majority from Taiwan. The next largest source of immigrant families was Korea, with Japan

TABLE 1. Ethnic Membership of Player Participants and Research Observers on Each Team

	JV Basketball		JV Volleyball		Varsity Basketball		Varsity Volleyball	
	Player	**Researcher**	**Player**	**Researcher**	**Player**	**Researcher**	**Player**	**Researcher**
African Am	1	1	2**	1	0	2	0	1
Asian Am	5	1	4	0	7	2	4	0
Euro-Am	1	2	0	1	3	2	1	2
Latina	3*	0	3*	1	0	1	5*	1
Totals	10	4	9	3	10	7	10	4

*Self-identification of one girl in this category as Hispanic and Native American was counted as Latina because of the strong mestizo element in Mexican and other Latino ethnicities.

**Self-identification that included black among other ethnic labels was counted as black, following the "one drop" convention instituted in slavery. This convention meant that "mixed" individuals were always counted as black. Today, mixed-race individuals often identify as such. The complexities of a mixed heritage have been dealt with in another article from this same research program (Kernan and Greenfield 2005).

Note. Two Latinas and one Asian American played JV volleyball and JV basketball. Therefore, the number of players shown in Table 1 adds up to 39, although there were actually only 36 different player participants. Similarly, some researchers observed more than one team. Therefore, the number of field researchers shown in Table 1 is 18, although there were actually only eight different researchers in all. The sole African American player on the varsity basketball team chose not to participate in the study, leaving an all Asian- and Euro-American group of participants for that team only, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 2. Distribution of Participants by Ethnic Group and Immigrant Generation

	African American		Asian American		Euro-American		Latina		Totals
	Player	**Researcher**	**Player**	**Researcher**	**Player**	**Researcher**	**Player**	**Researcher**	
Player and both parents born in US	2	1	2	1	5	2	4		17
Player born in US and 1 or both parents born abroad	1	1	9	2			3		16
Player and both parents born abroad			5				1	1	7
Missing data			3				1		4
Totals	3	2	19	3	5	2	9	1	44

TABLE 3. Coaches' Ethnicity and Gender

Ethnicity	JV Basketball	JV Volleyball	Varsity Basketball	Varsity Volleyball
African American	2 male		1 female	
Euro-American	1 male*	1 male	1 female	1 female
Latino				1 male**

*Born and raised in Africa to U.S. citizens.
**Emigrated from Mexico as an adult.

and Mexico close behind. However, parents of participating players and some players were also born in China, Hong Kong, Thailand, Cambodia, Samoa, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, and Belize.

The head coaches and all but one assistant coach were nonimmigrant Euro-Americans and African Americans. One assistant coach was an immigrant Latino from Mexico (see Table 3).

Data Collection

We investigated incidents from both the researchers' points of view (through ethnographic observation) and that of participants (through player journals). The ethnographic observations of the researchers privilege overt behavior. The journal entries also provided observations about the behavior of others and a unique glimpse at an internal, subjective world. In this way, we analyzed interpretations of multiple researchers and journal writers to understand conflict from multiple perspectives.

Players and researchers were simply instructed to write about their thoughts and feelings of everyday experiences and observations relating to conflict and harmony on their teams. Neither the players nor the researchers knew at that time that reactions to praise and criticism would become a focus of the research.

Ethnographic observation by researchers. Researchers took extensive field notes on interactions of team members during games, practices, and team events. On average, the sports season lasted 3.5 months, and each team was visited an average of 15.5 times during the season. At each visit, there were up to three researchers present, taking independent notes, who generally stayed for the entire practice (1.5–2 hours), game (2–3 hours), or team event (e.g., end-of-season awards banquet). Researchers also interacted with players, parents, and coaches. As ethnographers, we settled on the participant role of team supporters.

Player journals. Participating team members were asked to keep journals of their team activities, focusing on examples of conflict and harmony amongst themselves and with the coaches. The journal writing averaged ten weeks, including the awards banquets, with nine or ten journal writers per team (see Table 1).

Data Analysis

The journal entries and the ethnographic observations were treated as discourse and were thematically coded and analyzed for patterns. The unit of analysis in our study was a reaction by a player to an event. This methodology was developed by psychological anthropologists Beatrice and John Whiting and their colleagues (Seymour 1999; Whiting and Edwards 1988; Whiting and Whiting 1975) for analyzing systematic ethnographic observation using descriptive statistics to provide a qualitative overview.

As a first step, incidents gathered from journal entries and field notes were entered into a customized Filemaker Pro database. There were 1,576 incident records for the four teams, averaging 394 per team. Approximately half were from journals and half from researcher observations.

All incidents were given descriptive keywords for retrieval purposes, according to the content of the event described. Keywords were added to a pop-down list available to all ethnographer–coders. Two frequently occurring themes were empirically identified: reactions to praise or to doing a good job and reactions to criticism or to making mistakes. We selected all the entries that were labeled with one or more of ten keywords: attitude toward praise, self pride versus modesty, self-promotion, self-esteem, self-centered, standing out versus fitting in, attitude toward mistakes–criticism, blaming others versus taking responsibility, remorse for personal actions, and handling disappointment.

We were interested in how behaviors might be misinterpreted by people with differing cultural perspectives. Thus, we further reduced the data set by including only data records that described an instance of player reactions to being praised–doing a good job, or to being criticized–making a mistake.

Selecting the praise incidents. Of the 162 incidents retrieved by the keywords on praise, 20 percent were randomly selected to test interrater reliability. Two raters had 87.5 percent agreement on whether the incidents belonged in the category of praise reactions (against a chance agreement rate of 50 percent). Once reliability was established, the other 80 percent of the data was categorized by a single coder blind to participant ethnicity and to the hypotheses of the study, yielding 89 incidents.

Selecting the criticism incidents. There were 408 incidents that were identified by keywords as relating to criticism and mistakes. Because of the large sample size for criticism reactions, we calculated reliability on ten percent of this data. Coders agreed 89.5 percent of the time as to whether or not a scenario referred to an instance of reaction to criticism (against a chance rate of 50 percent). A coder blind to participant ethnicity and the study's hypotheses classified the remaining incidents, yielding 189 criticism incidents.

Selecting players to exemplify the phenomena. We also identified individual players who were frequently mentioned as supporting a particular position (self-effacing or self-enhancing).

These target players provided qualitative examples to illustrate self-enhancing and self-effacing behaviors. (Pseudonyms are used).

Combining player and researcher data. The role of ethnicity in reactions to praise and blame was analyzed for both player participants and researchers as part of the same overall data pool. In our data analysis, we make explicit and take account of the cultural perspectives of researchers, generally ignored or assumed in research rather than studied.

Coding

To code reactions to both praise and criticism, we developed a coding scale of one to five, where five represented a self-enhancing reaction to the incident, one represented a self-effacing reaction, and three was a neutral reaction. In each incident, at least one person, (and often only one), reacted to being praised or criticized.

Coding the praise incidents. The coding scale for reactions to praise were as follows:

Self-effacing (e.g., uncomfortable about being praised, worried about being big-headed)
Mostly self-effacing, some self-enhancement (e.g., talks mostly about not liking praise but somewhat happy about praise)
Neutral (e.g., neutral reaction, matter-of-fact about describing praise)
Mostly self-enhancing, some self-effacement (e.g., focuses more on being happy about praise, but also points out good qualities in others)
Self-enhancing (e.g., thrilled about praise).

Coding reliability was assessed on 20 percent of the praise incidents, randomly selected. We achieved 83.3 percent agreement (compared with a chance rate of 20 percent), and a rater blind to participant ethnicity and the study's hypotheses coded the remaining scenarios.

Coding the criticism incidents. The coding scale for reactions to criticism and mistakes were as follows:

Self-effacing (e.g., takes full responsibility for mistake–criticism, highlights faults)
Mostly self-effacing, some self-enhancement (e.g., upset at personal mistake, good natured about criticism)
Neutral (e.g., neutral, matter-of-fact about criticism–mistake)
Mostly self-enhancing, some self-effacement (e.g., laughs off personal mistake, upset about criticism)
Self-enhancing (e.g., makes excuses for mistakes–criticism, blames others).

Reliability was achieved on ten percent of the data, randomly selected (interrater agreement = 89.5 percent; chance rate 20 percent); a rater blind to participant ethnicity and the study's hypotheses coded the remaining scenarios.

Means and standard deviations of reactions to praise and criticism were calculated for the various ethnic groups. We eschewed inferential statistics because team interaction rendered the data from individuals statistically non-independent.

Results and Discussion

We begin with illustrative examples of self-enhancing and self-effacing reactions to praise from student journals, followed by descriptive statistics.

Reactions to Praise and Doing a Good Job

Accepting praise—self-enhancement perspective. Tammy was an African American team member of a junior varsity girls' volleyball team. She was excited about the possibility of winning the "Most Valuable Player" (MVP) award at the team's awards banquet. She wrote:

> Believe it or not, my head is HUGE with this MVP stuff. I have a dress, and I keep dreaming of walking across the stage holding this big trophy and I go up to the microphone and say, "I wanna thank all my teammates for voting for me. I wanna thank my coach for making our team a better team so thank you for this award. The bruises and scars are worth it." I'm acting like I'm getting those Oscar awards. But I'm not!

As it turns out, Tammy did win the award and wrote, "All I know is that I earned my trophy and I am very very proud of it and myself." She also said,

> I really enjoyed the [banquet]. I got to do a lot of smiling and I was looking all right. I felt like a kid all over again. Smiling, people adoring you, getting awards and walking in front of hundreds of parents, it just felt good.

Tammy's enthusiasm, as revealed in her private journal writings, reveals the valuing of emotional self-expression and an individualistic tendency to promote oneself and readily accept praise from others. Indeed, those with independent selves might interpret her behavior as self-confidence.

Deflecting praise—self-effacement perspective. Not everyone in our study embraced praise with such enthusiasm. Nicole, a second-generation Korean American player on a girls' varsity volleyball team was also in the position of winning MVP. She wrote:

> I kind of didn't like it when people told me that I'll be the MVP because I didn't know how to respond. I didn't want to be conceited and say "I know" and I didn't want to act like I didn't know. I find myself afraid of what others might think of me. I don't want to have the reputation of being conceited in any way.

This is a clear example of someone with an interdependent sense of self. Nicole is worried about disturbing the harmonious relationship she has with her teammates by sticking out and appearing conceited.

Reactions to being praised: Quantitative analysis. Given these two different examples of reactions to praise, how common was it for people in our study to react in these ways?

Euro-American and African American players had more self-enhancing reactions to praise (means = 4.5 and 4.6, respectively, on a five-point scale). Asian American and Latina players were less self-enhancing and more self-effacing (means = 3.0 and 3.6, respectively) than the other two groups. Euro-Americans and African Americans not only have high means but also little variation in their reaction-to-praise scores (SD = 1.2 and 0.5, respectively). On the other hand, Asian Americans and Latinas have means closer to the middle of the scale, and their scores vary more widely (both SD = 1.7).

The patterns may be explained by differences in generational histories in the United States and the dynamics of culture contact. All the Euro-American and African American players and almost all their parents were born in the United States. The more self-enhancing reactions of Euro-Americans and African Americans were predictable in part from a longer generational history in the individualistic United States.

The more self-effacing reactions of Asian Americans and Latinas were also predictable from their collectivistic ancestral roots and more recent immigration experiences. The Asian American and Latina families generally had at least one person—and often more—born abroad. We can infer that they were generally exposed to two cultures, the more collectivistic family culture of collectivism and the more individualistic societal surround of the U.S. host country. This situation would be expected to produce variability in reactions to praise, both because of internal culture conflict and individual differences in the relative psychological strength of the two cultural value systems. This variability was manifest both in means close to the middle of the scale and in larger standard deviations than the African American and Euro-American groups.

In sum, we found a resemblance in reactions to praise between Euro-Americans and African Americans, as well as between Asian Americans and Latinas. The former showed a self-enhancement perspective while the latter were more variable, presumably because of exposure to the self-effacement perspective at home and the self-enhancement perspective in society at large.

Because of these similarities and differences in reactions to praise, we combined Euro-American with African America praise data and Asian American with Latina praise data for further quantitative analysis. However, in so doing, we are not saying that these groups are exactly alike in past histories and present psychology, only that the members of each pair share strong currents of the self-enhancement or self-effacement perspective. Creating pairs of groups in this way enabled us to have a large enough sample to carry out the more differentiated analysis reported in the next section.

Comparative views of self and of others about reactions to praise. We separated our data set of praise reactions into three categories: (1) when people described their own reactions to praise (possible for players only); (2) when they described the reactions of members of a group with similar values on the self-enhancement–self-effacement spectrum; and

(3) when they described reactions to praise of members of groups with contrasting self-enhancement–self-effacement values.

In line with their bicultural perspective and the overall results, Asian Americans and Latina players viewed themselves (mean = 3.5, *SD* = 1.6) as neither self-enhancing nor self-effacing in response to praise. Similarly, Asian American or Latina players and researchers viewed other players from these same ethnic groups as neither self-enhancing nor self-effacing (mean = 3.3, *SD* = 1.9). However, Asian Americans and Latinas viewed Euro-American and African American players as highly self-enhancing (mean = 4.6, *SD* = 1.2).

Euro- and African American players viewed themselves as self-enhancing in response to praise (mean = 4.5, *SD* = 0.5). Euro-American and African American players and researchers viewed other Euro-American and African American players as equally self-enhancing (mean = 4.5, *SD* = 0.8). They viewed Asian American and Latina players as *much* more self-effacing than members of their own group (mean = 2.1, *SD* = 1.7).

There is no difference in reactions to one's own behavior or that of other members of one's own group. However, we saw a stereotyping effect in reactions to other groups. Ethnic groups who subscribed to the dominant culture saw ethnic groups that have a different set of ancestral values as more different than they actually are. In other words, Euro-Americans and African Americans viewed Asian Americans and Latinas as more self-effacing (mean = 2.1) than Asian Americans and Latinas actually saw themselves (mean = 3.5) or saw other members of their groups (mean = 3.3). In contrast, Latinas and Asian Americans were very accurate in their perceptions of groups that subscribe to the dominant value system: they placed Euro-Americans and African Americans high on the scale of self-enhancement (mean = 4.6), just slightly higher than the mean of 4.5 that Euro-Americans and African Americans attributed to themselves and other members of their own groups.

An example of conflict arising from opposing reactions to praise. When viewing the world from such different cultural lenses, misunderstanding and conflict inevitably occur. Melinda, an Asian American teammate, wrote the following about Tammy's reaction to winning the MVP award:

> Tammy thinks very highly of herself and it's obvious. . . . It [bugged] me that she was saying everyone voted for her etc. . . . because she's getting big-headed. . . . After she said all of those things I didn't want her to win anymore. I don't think she deserves it.

Melinda interpreted Tammy's self-enhancing behaviors not as self-confidence but as conceit.

Variation in Reactions to Criticism and Making Mistakes

Accepting criticism—self-effacement perspective: An example. Debbie, a Japanese American player on a varsity girls' basketball team, has a self-effacing reaction to criticism and personal mistakes. Una, a Japanese American teammate, wrote the following comment about Debbie's willingness to accept criticism:

> When Debbie shot it was already behind the backboard so the ball hit the back of the backboard and flew out of bounds. The whole time everybody was yelling at Debbie to pass it. Mainly the crowd and our bench. It was a bad play by Debbie and she apologized to me saying "sorry I should've passed it." I said "don't worry about it," and that was the end of that.

Her team members criticized Debbie for making the wrong play, feedback that she acknowledged in publicly apologizing for her actions. Debbie's tendency to self-deprecate and point out her own mistakes was also observed by a researcher who noted Debbie's disgust at herself when she missed some free throws. She overemphasized her tendency to miss "every free throw" even if she had actually made a few. The observer wrote, "Debbie is making a show of her modesty. She is highlighting her mistakes for all to see." Debbie's pattern of self-effacement—accepting her mistakes and highlighting her blame—may be a collectivistic attempt to emphasize shortcomings, thus using modesty to make herself more acceptable to the group.

Example of deflecting criticism—self-enhancement perspective. Brianna, a Euro-American varsity girls' volleyball player, has a completely different reaction to criticism and personal mistakes. One researcher wrote:

> Brianna and Lily are in the back court of a hitting–blocking drill. The ball rarely comes to them. They discuss some detail about volleyball. The ball does come back there, and they miss it. (The coach says) "You can talk later." (Brianna says) "We're talking about approaches."

This behavior could be interpreted as individualistic: Brianna attempted to protect her self-esteem by dismissing her mistake and justifying why she missed the ball.

Reactions to criticism: Quantitative analysis. Asian American and Latina participants were similar to each other in their reactions to criticism (means = 2.5 and 2.8, respectively; *SD*s = 1.4 and 1.6, respectively). The Euro-Americans and African Americans show themselves to be more self-enhancing and less self-effacing relative to Asian Americans and Latinas in their reactions to criticism (means = 4.2 and 3.6, respectively; *SD*s = 1.2 and 1.5, respectively).

Comparative views of self and of others about reactions to criticism. Based on similarities between Asian-American and Latina perspectives, as well as between Euro-American and African American perspectives, we, again, combined data into two groups for further analysis and

divided the data into three categories: (1) comments about one's own reactions to criticism; (2) comments about the reactions to criticism of members of one's own group or a group with similar values concerning self-enhancement—self-effacement; and (3) comments about members of groups with different values concerning self-enhancement—self-effacement.

Results revealed that Asian Americans and Latinas viewed themselves with a socially desirable trait, of self-effacement (mean = 2.4, *SD* = 1.6). They viewed themselves as more self-effacing than they viewed their Asian American and Latina peers, who were seen as neither self-enhancing nor self-effacing (mean = 3.1, *SD* = 1.4). They viewed their Euro- and African American teammates as self-enhancing (mean = 4.1, median = 5.0, *SD* = 1.3).

Euro-Americans and African Americans viewed themselves and other Euro-American and African American players as somewhat self-enhancing (mean view of self = 3.8 and mean view of other Euro- and African Americans = 4.1; *SD*s = 1.8 and 1.3, respectively). In contrast, they viewed Asian American and Latina peers as self-effacing (mean = 2.2, *SD* = 1.4).

Examples of conflict arising from opposing reactions to criticism. We expected that conflict and misunderstanding would arise when Asian Americans and Latinas reacted differently to criticism than did Euro-Americans and African Americans. Faye, a Euro-American teammate, felt that Debbie's overemphasis on her mistakes was detrimental to the team. She wrote:

> When Debbie reacts in a game over a mistake on her part she needs to learn from her mistake but not make a big deal about it. For one thing it hurts our team by causing us to [lose] mental control of the situation and it also reflects badly on our team.

In this case, Faye viewed Debbie's emphasis on her personal mistakes as unnecessary, not realizing that Debbie may be doing so to depict herself in a more sympathetic, modest light.

From the opposite perspective, how would someone with a more self-effacing tendency than Brianna view Brianna's self-enhancing behaviors? Wendy, a Latina teammate, wrote of Brianna:

> To me personally and honestly I think that (Brianna) is getting a big head. I also think that another person can do the job better and will do it without complaining and making excuses. Why can't people accept their mistakes without an excuse?

Conclusion

Based on data from four girls' high school sports teams, we were able to identify contrasting reactions to praise and to criticism in real-life settings. Our findings suggest that these cultural models are well ingrained in the everyday behaviors of adolescents. They are two

"ordinarinesses" (Bruner this issue) the basic assumptions of which contrast and sometimes collide. That is, reactions to praise and to criticism are organized into two distinctive cultural models: one more individualistic, the other more collectivistic.

Euro-Americans and African Americans often had reactions to praise and to criticism that fell on the more self-enhancing end of the spectrum: they tended to deflect criticism while accepting praise. Asian Americans and Latinas were relatively more self-effacing, tending to accept criticism while having a neutral stance in reaction to praise.

These findings are consistent with the predictions of individualism–collectivism theory, which proposes that Asian and Latino groups tend to be collectivistic, both in their home countries and as immigrants, whereas Euro-Americans tend to subscribe to the dominant societal culture of individualism. However, about half of the Latinas were born in the United States, leading to more variable reactions to praise, (compared with Asian Americans), and a slightly less accepting attitude toward criticism. Our findings are also consistent with previous findings that African Americans tend to be individualistic on the domain of self presentation (Greene 1994); they were indistinguishable from Euro-Americans in accepting praise. However, African Americans did tend to be slightly more accepting of criticism.

For the African Americans and Euro-Americans, the reactions to praise and criticism seemed closely linked to public displays of self-enhancement and feelings of positive self-esteem. Asian Americans in our study did not seem to connect public criticism and making mistakes with a diminution of self-esteem; on the contrary, self-effacement appeared to be a means to increased self-esteem. Of course, there were individual differences within each ethnic group. While the majority of the Euro-Americans and African Americans were self-enhancers, there were occasional, individual responses that were more self-effacing. There were also Asian Americans and Latinas who displayed more self-enhancing behaviors.

Indeed, Kernan and Greenfield (2005) found that the journals of Asian American and Latino players whose parents were born in the United States generally adopted an individualistic perspective. (The Kernan–Greenfield analysis was based on two additional girls' teams from the same schools.) As a group, more Asian American players had immigrant parents than did the Latina players. It is possible that children of immigrants may be less acculturated to U.S. culture; this may explain why the Asian American girls tended to be slightly more self-effacing and accepting of criticism than the Latina girls.

Perspectives of the role of self-enhancement and self-effacement as valued constructs in the development of the adolescent self are distinct across groups and unfold in varying ways. In studying the players' views of their own and their teammates' responses to praise and criticism, we found a similarity between descriptions of one's own reactions and descriptions of the reactions of others who shared a similar cultural model of praise and criticism. In

contrast, there was a tendency to view the reactions of others who did not share a cultural model as different. These patterns appeared among the observers as well as the participants, indicating the importance of analyzing the cultural perspectives of researchers as well as participants.

Those ethnic groups sharing the mainstream, U.S., independent value lens (Euro-Americans and African Americans) tended to judge teammates from groups who did not share their perspective as being very different from themselves, in other words, very self-effacing, when, in fact, they were only a little different in relative terms. Those ethnic groups (Asian Americans and Latinas) sharing an interdependent lens more accurately judged the relative differences between themselves and the more independent players. Perhaps greater biculturality on the part of the Asian American and Latina players prevented the exaggeration of differences with other groups. Surprisingly, even small, relative differences created tension and conflict among team members.

Relative differences in cultural perspectives caused misunderstandings on boys' sports teams as well, although boys also had other sources of conflict, such as the perceived dominance of African American boys in basketball (Greenfield et al. 2002). We also replicated individualism-collectivism conflicts on two other girls' basketball teams (Kernan and Greenfield 2005). Therefore, we have reason to believe that the underlying phenomena analyzed here are robust and fundamental, with a variety of specific manifestations.

Bruner (2002) notes that, through narrative, human beings construct their reality. The multiple narratives of players and ethnographers on four multiethnic high school teams weave together a complex story of cultural dynamics; jointly they create a reality that would otherwise have remained hidden from view.

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Note

Acknowledgments. We would like to thank the players, field researchers, coaches, and schools who participated in our study for making this research possible, Shirley Brice-Heath for methodological assistance and Jeanne Tsai for

her insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper. We are indebted to the Russell Sage Foundation and to Carnegie Corporation for funding this research.

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