Cultural Variation in the Motivation of Self-Expression

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From what I have seen of Americans, I think that life would not be worth living to them without this freedom of self-expression.

—Albert Einstein (as shown in Updike, 2007)

Self-expression, the expression of one’s own personality traits, feelings, or ideas, is a notion particularly prevalent in American culture. Central and positive in many American contexts, whether it is through speech, artistic creation, or personal choice, self-expression is constitutive of particular patterns of perceptions, actions, interactions, and institutions that foster individuals’ willingness and commitment to engage in the act. Such an emphasis on expression is one of the most integral aspects of individualism (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985), as people in these cultural contexts are urged to express themselves in order to assert “a unique core of feeling and intuition” (Bellah et al., 1985, p. 334).

Although self-expression is considered fundamental in many individualistic cultural contexts, the same cultural emphasis is not found in other cultural contexts. For example, in more collectivistic cultures, the act of self-expression is in general neither central nor important, and consequently, common patterns of perceptions, actions, interaction, and institutions do not encourage or endow great meaning to self-expression. The goal of the present review is to summarize and discuss some of the cultural variations in the motivation behind and effect of self-expression. We will discuss how people from different cultures practice self-expression in their actions and interactions and the psychological implications that result from these expressions.
CULTURE AND THE DEFINITION OF THE SELF

Extensive research has shown that the dominant model of the self in more individualistic cultures, such as in the United States, is an independent self in which a person is viewed to be a unique entity that is bounded and fundamentally separate from its social surrounding. This view holds that the individual is understood, practiced, and uniquely defined as a separate or distinct entity whose behavior is determined by some amalgam of internal attributes, such as thoughts, preferences, motives, goals, attitudes, beliefs, and abilities (Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998). These attributes enable, guide, and constrain behavior and motivate the expression of personal thoughts and the pursuit of personal goals and well-being (Kitayama & Markus, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Markus, Mulfally, & Kitayama, 1997; Morris & Peng, 1994). In these contexts, individuals are expected to make decisions based on their own volition, rather than on external influences or social constraints (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In addition, these assumptions also shape the model of social relationships, which are assumed to be freely chosen and carry relatively few obligations (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990). Thus, people view relationships to be a benevolent resource in which they can engage with relatively little caution (Adams, 2005; Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006).

By contrast, in more collectivistic cultures, such as in many Asian cultures, an interdependent view of the self pervades. In these cultures, social relationships define the self, and the basic motives for a person's behaviors are sought externally, rather than internally (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Shweder & Bourne, 1984; Triandis, 1989). Thus, a person is regarded as a flexible, connected entity who is bound to others, conforms to relational norms, and views group goals as primary and personal beliefs, needs, and goals as secondary (Kim & Markus, 1999; Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In these cultures, people assume that social factors, such as norms, roles, tradition, and a sense of social obligation, guide behaviors (Fiske et al., 1998; Kitayama & Uchida, 2005). Therefore, the motivation to maintain social equilibrium, to enhance others' evaluation of oneself, and to minimize social conflict takes precedence over the enhancement and assertion of individuality (Kim & Sherman, 2007; Leung, 1987; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The model of relationships also takes an interdependent form in which relationships with others are less voluntary but more "given" and carry greater expectation of obligations (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Miller et al., 1990). In interdependent relationships, there is a more shared sense that relationships can and do have a central impact on one's life than is assumed in independent relationships (Adams & Plaut, 2003). Therefore, one has to be relatively more cautious in this context because of the greater implications that social relationships have (Adams, 2005; Kim et al., 2006).

These different self-constructs stemming from one's participation in a given cultural context can implicate a multitude of psychological processes. For instance, people from East Asian cultural contexts tend to attribute more causal explanations of social events to situational and external factors, whereas European Americans tend to attribute explanations to internal and personal factors (Morris & Peng, 1994).

People from North American cultural contexts show a stronger self-enhancement tendency—the tendency to view oneself in a positive light—compared to East Asians (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Moreover, it appears that for North Americans, a sense of self-worth is more strongly tied to possessing positive abilities, psychological traits, and uniqueness, whereas for East Asians, a sense of self-worth is more strongly tied to having good relationships and maintaining face (Heine et al., 1999; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005). Consequently, the well-being of the self depends on one's own beliefs about oneself (hence "subjective well-being") in more individualistic cultures (Diener & Diener, 1995), whereas in collectivistic cultures, judgments of one's happiness are more normatively and objectively determined, and one's beliefs about one's own happiness are less relevant (Diener & Diener, 1995; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Combined, these different cultural views on what constitute the core of the self and relationships influence the motivation to assert and express one's personal feelings and thoughts.

CULTURE AND SELF-EXPRESSION

The need to belong, to be accepted, and to be valued by one's relevant social groups is considered to be one of the most basic human needs (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Consequently, people are motivated to become a good and valued member of their social groups and to be viewed by themselves and others as such. We argue that when people are given the goal of being accepted and valued, it is crucial for them to not only possess positive characteristics but also project and highlight one's characteristics in a manner that reflects both positively and at least somewhat accurately on the self (cf. Dunning, 2003; Kunda, 1990).

Although this motivation to be valued and accepted might be universal, studies in cultural psychology have shown that what constitutes "being a good member" varies across cultures (Heine et al., 1999; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). For example, the ideal characteristics of a good person in individualistic cultures include uniqueness, positive self-regard, and expressiveness, whereas in collectivistic cultures they include positive social relationships, social standing, reputation, and consideration for others (Heine et al., 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This divergence in ideals implicates culturally specific ways in which people enhance their sense of self-worth and project their self-image. To be a "good person" in a collectivistic culture, one should be motivated to maintain one's or her social standing and relationships. To be a "good person" in an individualistic culture, one should be motivated to convey independent viewpoints and ideas, as these are the contents of self-views one should aspire to have in each respective culture.

At the same time, differences in the content of psychological tendencies should inform and shape psychological processes as well (Shweder, 1991), resulting in cultural differences in the process by which people enhance their sense of self-worth. Thus, in cultures emphasizing independence and agency, having a dual desire both to conjoin and belong to a social group but also to appear unique as an individual seemingly poses a contradiction. To resolve this cultural paradox, the need to belong in this cultural context engenders a requisite motivation for self-expression, a form of communication with an understated notion of "others." A person
is in charge of projecting one's thoughts and feelings, whether with intention of asserting one's individuality or of seeking understanding and empathy from others. Through their words and actions, people reveal their internal attributes, such as preferences, beliefs, and values considered core to a person (Kim & Markus, 2002; Kim & Sherman, 2007), and thus show their individuality and uniqueness. At the same time, in so doing, people can satisfy the other motivation of social recognition and appreciation, as these self-expression acts enable individuals to make their private thoughts and feelings concrete, tangible, and socially recognizable to others and to themselves. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) suggests that people come to know their own internal states by observing their own actions and behaviors. Self-expression through words may serve as an additional avenue of insight to one's internal state. In fact, previous research conducted in the U.S. culture shows that people were more confident of and committed to their attitudes after verbally expressing them (Higgins & Rhoes, 1978; Kiesler & Sakamuru, 1996). This process of self-expression takes on particular importance within a culture that emphasizes internal attributes in defining the self. Essentially, self-expression is a process by which individuals assert their individuality.

However, self-expression through explicit means, such as one's words and actions, might not be as effective when one's goal is to enhance self-worth via one's possession of positive social attributes, such as social consideration and good social relationships. In cultures where these social traits are emphasized, the motivation to enhance self-worth and belongingness might take a very different form. For example, to the extent that those from more collectivistic cultures express themselves, their attributes are conveyed through actions occupying and fulfilling particular social roles and having good social standing. Moreover, acts of self-expression should be less prevalent and central, and the psychological consequences of self-expression should be less positive. Instead, the effort to enhance self-worth might take more indirect, inconspicuous, and communal forms in these cultures. In the present chapter, we shall review the empirical evidence for cultural differences in the ways in which people express and communicate themselves, focusing on a few psychological domains, namely, self-expression through speech, choice, and social support seeking.

Cultural Differences in Self-Expression Through Speech

The act of speech, perhaps the most direct form of communication and expression, carries different meanings and importance across cultures. The reasons for speaking and the values of speaking vary across cultures in how they are incorporated and practiced in everyday life. When people speak, they have assigned sufficient value to their thoughts and beliefs to be expressed and shared with others. Thus, when self-expression is intertwined with a positive opportunity to assert one's individuality, as in the American cultural context, talking is seen as a valued act and is regarded as a sign of power and control. It is an art that requires skill and practice and can also serve significant artistic, social, and entertainment functions. Even in its negative forms, talking is revered as a rare attribute—a used-car salesman is a crafty artist with words just as a shifty lawyer is a quick thinker with a sharp tongue. By contrast, in cultural contexts where expression is tied to maintaining social harmony, the power and control implicated through speech tend to carry more negative connotations. Speaking out in class, talking back to authority figures, or asking questions out of one's turn can be seen as a disruption to one's social fabric. In fact, the Vietnamese word for talkative, nhieu-chuyen (literally meaning "full of verse"), is synonymous with troublemaker (Nguyen, 1995). In these cultural contexts, silence conveys attentiveness and encouragement to the speakers and is a highly valued response.

When asked to list the primary functions of talking, European American participants are more likely to include self-expression (i.e., expression of thoughts and feelings) than Korean participants, who more often endorse social coordination and maintenance of harmony as the primary functions (Kim & Sherman, 2007). Given that the predominant function of speech in the American cultural context is to express one's mind, people tend to assume a closer connection between a person's thoughts and speech compared to those from East Asian cultural contexts. Classic studies in social psychology show that those from the U.S. cultural context tend to exhibit a robust "correspondence bias" (Jones, 1979) in which they infer that corresponding thoughts exist when people talk about their ideas, even when the situational constraints that lead to making such speech are clear. This correspondence bias is considerably weaker among East Asians, who are less likely to assume corresponding attitudes based on spoken words than European Americans (Choi & Nisbett, 1998; Miyamoto & Kitayama, 2002). Consequently, the importance of being "truthful" in conversation also differs cross-culturally. As the assumption of the correspondence between what is said and what is in mind becomes relatively weaker, deceitful communications, such as the telling of white lies and exaggerations, are more commonly practiced and condoned in collectivistic cultural contexts (Almamey & Ahwan, 1982; McLeod & Carment, 1987).

The actual effects of speech on psychological functioning also differ. One such difference can be observed in the domain of thoughts. Thoughts are often considered the core of a personhood in the Western cultural tradition (e.g., Descartes, 1637/1993). At a basic level, even thoughts that are as impersonal sounding as thought processes involving cognitive problem solving are affected by speech differently as a function of the cultural background of a speaker. Speech is more strongly linked to thoughts in Western cultural contexts, especially as a way in which one could hone and sharpen one's mind, whereas such an assumption is, by and large, absent in Eastern cultural contexts (Kim, 2002; Kim & Markus, 2002). Research on the effect of verbalization on thinking shows that people differ in how they are affected by verbalizing their thoughts as a function of their cultural background.

A series of studies (Kim, 2002) examined how verbalization of thoughts (i.e., thinking aloud) affects thinking itself (i.e., cognitive problem solving). In these studies, East Asian American and European American participants were randomly assigned either to verbalize their thoughts or to stay silent while they were working on a cognitive problem set. Results on performance (i.e., the number of items answered correctly) in the verbalization condition versus the silent condition showed that verbalization of the problem-solving process impaired performance.
on a reasoning test for East Asian Americans, whereas verbalization did not affect the performance for European Americans. East Asian Americans and European Americans further differ in the ways in which they respond to verbalization biologically (Kim, 2008). In this study, East Asian American and European American participants were prompted to verbalize their thought processes as they solved cognitive problems in the procedure described above while their salivary cortisol levels were being measured at different time points (i.e., baseline, stress response, and recovery). Results show that verbalization had a positive effect for European Americans in that cortisol response to the task was lower when they verbalized their thoughts than when they worked on the problems in silence. Among East Asian American participants, such a benefit was absent (Figure 4.1).

A subsequent study utilizing the methods and theory of self-affirmation research (Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988) tested the effect of speech on feelings of self-worth by contrasting verbal expression and silent and private reflection of one's important values. For European Americans, verbally expressing personal values made them more affirmed and more secure about themselves (i.e., less self-servving. Dunning, Leuenberger, & Sherman, 1995), but merely reflecting on their values without expressing them led to greater self-threat. In contrast, for East Asian Americans, verbalizing their values led to increases in self-threat and self-serving responses, whereas merely reflecting on their values without talking did not. In sum, the evidence gathered by contrasting these different culture groups demonstrates that the utilization, benefit, and purpose of speech greatly vary as a function of cultural ideals.

**Figure 4.1** Mean cortisol level changes from baseline as a function of culture and verbalization. (From Kim, H. S., "Culture and the cognitive and neuroendocrine responses to speech," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 92, pp. 32–47. Published 1999 by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.)

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**Cultural Differences in Self-Expression Through Choice**

Another way in which individuals can express their thoughts and values is through choice. Choice making is a psychological domain in which self-expression motivation implicates its contents and processes. Americans value their freedom to choose and psychologically invest in what they choose (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Snibbe & Markus, 2005; Tafarodi, Mehranvar, Panton, & Milne, 2002). This cultural emphasis stems from the fact that choice, an inherently agentic act that presumes freedom, is a way to express oneself (Kim & Drolet, 2003). Thus, it is an expression of one's free will and a reflection of one's preference, opinion, and values. Every choice one makes imparts his or her own self in this cultural context. And because choice is an observable act, it becomes an act through which a person expresses oneself for social recognition.

In the American cultural context, people are motivated to make choices that enhance their individuality and uniqueness. This motivation affects both how and what people choose. European Americans generally prefer and choose objects that represent uniqueness (Kim & Markus, 1999) and tend to respond more positively to messages that focus on uniqueness (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kim & Markus, 1999). They also show stronger tendency for variety seeking, a tendency associated with the need for uniqueness (Ariely & Levav, 2000; Drolet, 2002).

In contrast, people from collectivist cultures generally do not value the notion of standing out and highlighting their differences from others, but rather they prefer blending in and emphasizing their similarity with others. Consequently, they tend to avoid choosing objects that represent uniqueness, gravitate toward objects that represent sameness (Kim & Markus, 1999), and respond positively to messages that emphasize harmony (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001; Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kim & Markus, 1999). People from Asian cultural contexts show considerably weaker variety-seeking tendency than European Americans (Kim & Drolet, 2003).

Cultural differences in the importance of self-expression also influence how choice affects psychology. Many classic social psychological studies using the free-choice dissonance research paradigm show that people tend to increase liking for a chosen object and decrease liking for a rejected object, compared to their liking for the same objects prior to choice making (Brehm, 1956; Steele, Spencer, & Lynch, 1993). This "spreading alternatives effect," a result of self-commitment through choice (Kiesler & Sakumura, 1966), is most strongly found among those from European American cultural contexts. For people from Asian cultural contexts, the same act of choice making does not lead to the same spreading effect (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004).

In this research paradigm, what is expressed through choice is assumed to be one’s preference. For those from cultural contexts where people place emphasis on thoughts and feelings, expressing preference through choice implicates a core aspect of themselves and speaks to their character. Therefore, making a choice leads to greater investment and commitment to the chosen option and, thus, motivates people to justify their choice. In contrast, for those from cultural contexts where people do not emphasize internal attributes, what is expressed through
choice does not carry much cultural importance and, therefore, does not stir up the same level of motivation to justify their choice.

Further research has aimed to address the role of expression more directly by experimentally manipulating whether one’s choice gets expressed (Kim & Sherman, 2007). In these studies, East Asian American and European American participants were asked to make a choice among a variety of different pens. Half of the participants were randomly assigned to indicate their choice by writing down their pen choice, whereas the other half were instructed to make a choice without indicating their pen choice in any way (i.e., keeping it in their mind). Then, the experimenter usurped the choice and offered an alternative pen that was not chosen by participants, and participants were asked to evaluate the unchosen pen.

The results show that this manipulation of expression significantly impacted subsequent preference among European Americans, as they liked the pen given to them less after they expressed their choice than after they did not express their choice. In contrast, whether East Asian Americans expressed their choice or not did not have a significant impact on their liking of the pen that was given to them (Figure 4.2). Moreover, a subsequent study showed that how much a person is impacted by the expression of choice is predicted by what the person views as the core aspect of the self. That is, those who think that thoughts and feelings are the most important component of the self tend to justify their choices more. These findings suggest that self-expression, specifically the expression of internal attributes through choice, leads people from individualist cultural contexts to feel more invested in the choice as it implicates themselves, whereas the same act does not have as much psychological significance to those from collectivist cultural contexts.

However, choices not involving internal and individuating aspects of a person may be assigned different levels of importance. In cases where choice indicates more external and social components of the self (i.e., social status or relationships), choice acts more as a marker of an individual’s social attributes. For example, because brand-name products are generally perceived to have higher quality and higher price, they can signal higher social status. The choice of a brand-name product over a generic product indirectly conveys information that consumers who can afford higher priced products, ultimately, belong to higher social status groups.

A set of studies (Kim & Drolet, 2009) examined cultural differences in how Asian Americans and European Americans respond to choices that potentially reflect their social attributes, specifically brand-label options over generic-label options. In multiple studies, Asian Americans consistently chose brand-name options more frequently than European Americans. Furthermore, the positive relationship between self-consciousness and choice of brand-name options was found only among Asian Americans and not among European Americans. Therefore, it is inferred that Asian Americans are more concerned than European Americans about their choices if those choices reflect aspects of the self that are more culturally emphasized. This is consistent with previous findings that showed that Asian Canadians experience greater postdecision dissonance if the decision has interpersonal consequences than European Canadians (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005) and are more motivated by choice if it is made by a close other (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

It is also important to note that many of these choice patterns change if alternate means to express culturally important aspects of oneself are present prior to choice making. For example, engaging in a task that allows one to express one’s personal attributes (e.g., preference or values) prior to choice making reduces the tendency of variety seeking (Kim & Drolet, 2003) and individual dissonance (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005). Similarly, engaging in a task that allows one to express one’s social attributes (e.g., values or characteristics of important social groups) prior to choice making reduces the tendency of brand choice (Kim & Drolet, 2009) and interpersonal dissonance (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005).

In summary, these reviewed studies show that there are meaningful cultural differences in the practice and effect of self-expression through speech and choice, in terms of both what people in different cultures typically express and the centrality of self-expression in their lives. So far, the reviewed findings focus on the effect of relatively intrapersonal self-expression—that is, self-expression with oneself as the primary target or with only implicit others. Yet, we view self-expression as a way in which individuals gain the sense of self-worth and ultimately seek to affirm their secure positions in social surroundings. Thus, in the next section, we turn to the psychological effect of the self-expression in more interpersonal contexts.

![Figure 4.2](image-url)
express some aspects of themselves, has positive psychological and interpersonal impacts. "Publicizing" the self in any form makes the self recognizable and observable to people, including the self, and its mostly positive effect shows the importance of self-expression in psychological processes of individuals. The speaker's act of opening up and disclosing personal information indicates a motivation to enhance interpersonal closeness in individualistic cultures (Hendrick, Hendrick, & Adler, 1988).

In contrast, for those from more collectivistic cultures, talking about one's feelings, and thoughts is more often seen as irrelevant, inappropriate, and disagreeable, as it can potentially violate conversational norms or create disagreements with others (Kim & Markus, 2002). Thus, people in collectivist cultures tend to develop the habit of paying closer attention to cues from social contexts when disclosing self-relevant information, of using more implicit forms of communication such as nonverbal cues (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988), and of relying on indirect forms of speech (Holtgraves, 1997).

Our discussion thus far has not accounted for the perceiving audience, such as "others" or society, as recognizing agents of one's attributes. The need to be accepted and valued by relevant social groups by striving to be a "good member" is probably relevant in many cultures (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Heine et al., 1999). Clearly, how one is projected to and viewed by others (and by oneself as well) bears psychological importance, and individuals should be motivated to communicate who they are. In individualistic cultures, individuals project their "goodness" through individual expression of positive personal attributes. Regardless of the audience, the clarity and coherence of a message rests primarily on the speaker, and any misinterpretation or ambiguity that is perceived is a result of the speaker's failure to be clear and competent in expressing the thought or belief. For instance, in American cultural contexts, speakers are "held to their words" and encouraged to state intentions directly and unambiguously, for the responsibility of communication is likely to fall on the speaker, not the listener (Gudykunst, Gao, & Franklin-Stokes, 1996; Hall, 1976).

In contrast, people in collectivistic cultures tend to rely more on the mutual recognition of one's attributes. Thus, the act of communication is an inherently interpersonal process that is mutually constructed. The success of communication hinges on successful coordination in relationships, and failed or ill-conducted communication negatively impacts relational harmony. Thus, it carries more social importance as well as costs in this cultural context. Collectivist cultures put more emphasis on the relational function of communication than individualistic cultures, in which the informational function is more greatly emphasized (Scollon & Scollon, 1994). As a result, delivering a message is more cognitively taxing for Japanese than Americans because more cognitive resources must be allocated to tailoring the message to the recipient because of their culture's greater emphasis on relationship goals (Miyamoto & Schwarz, 2006). Thus, it is to the speaker's benefit to convey messages in a manner such that social harmony is maintained. When communication takes a more implicit, ambiguous form, there is a greater likelihood that a socially disruptive message will not be interpreted as such. Here, the burden of interpretation is more likely the responsibility of the listener (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Hall, 1976).

Indeed, research on East Asian communication processes argues that, because of the central importance of maintaining harmonious relations, the processes of face-saving and face-negotiating are recognized in some situations to be more important than honest or truthful negation (e.g., Gao, Ting-Toomey, Gudykunst, & Bond, 1996). Being open, straightforward, or assertive in public East Asian situations rarely has any of the positive connotations of honesty, power, confidence, or competence they have in many American contexts. Instead, actions of this type can threaten the cohesion of relationships and even signal the bad character of the individual involved (Tseng, 1973). What appears as passivity or critical lack of assertiveness from an American viewpoint carries with it, in many East Asian contexts, a whole palette of highly positive associations, including wisdom, flexibility, managing face, cooperativeness, caring, and maturity.

**Cultural Differences in the Use of Social Support**

The review above illustrates cultural differences in how much people are willing to express their thoughts in communication in general. Does this pattern of cultural difference hold true in situations in which people might disclose their thoughts and feelings in order to gain understanding and sympathy from others? Moreover, what type of psychological impact do such disclosures and expressions have?

When an individual encounters a problem or a stressful event, one of the ways in which one can cope with it is through the use of social support. Social support is defined as information from others that one is loved and cared for, esteemed and valued, and part of a network of communication and mutual obligations (Wills, 1991). Social support may come from a spouse or companion, relatives, friends, coworkers, and community ties, such as belonging to a church or club. According to past research, social support takes the form of specific transactions involving the seeking and receiving of help through tangible assistance, informational support, or emotional support (Cohen, 1988; Wills, 1991), processes involving explicit expression of personal distress and needs. Social support has long been known to mute the experience of stress, reduce the severity of illness, and speed recovery from health disorders when they do occur (Seeman, 1996; Taylor, 2007). However, research on culture and expression suggests that there might be cultural differences in how people exercise and are affected by such an expression.

Indeed, consistent with findings on culture and expression, studies have shown that European Americans are more likely to ask for and receive social support than Asians and Asian Americans to cope with stressful events (Shin, 2002; Taylor et al., 2004). A series of studies (Taylor et al., 2004) demonstrated that Asian Americans and European Americans differ in their willingness to use social coping to deal with stressors. In the first study, European American and Korean participants provided open-ended responses regarding ways in which they coped with stressful events. Although the two groups did not differ from each other in their use of individual efforts to deal with stressors, significantly fewer Korean than American participants reported using social coping to help them cope with stress. In the second
American participants were asked to discuss stressful events that they had experienced, and their responses were recorded. After the discussion, participants were asked to rate their perceived level of stress and social support. The results showed that American participants rated their level of stress and social support higher than European participants. The study also found that American participants were more likely to seek social support from their friends and family, while European participants were more likely to seek support from their colleagues and neighbors. The study concluded that cultural differences in social support seeking and response may contribute to differences in perceived stress and coping strategies.
The present review focuses on cultural differences in the willingness and motivation for self-expression in the actual context of self-expression and interpersonal communication. We speculate that the motivation for self-expression depends on cultural factors such as the need to communicate one's self-back and the recognition of self-back in social contexts. We also examine the role of self-expression in the process involving the communicative effects of the self. Specifically, we explore whether people balance self-expression and social harmony.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Figure 4.1 Change in cortisol levels from baseline to postchallenge as a function of cultural differences in the impact of social support on psychological and biological stress responses. (From Taylor et al., 2007, with permission.)
independent and agentic. Yet, social recognition can result from not only self-expression but also more communal and mutual forms of self-communication. In these more communal communications, others might play more active roles in the process as recognizing agents or as surrogates or intermediary communicators on behalf of a person. Thus, beyond the examination of cultural differences in the effect of self-expression, it is important to understand whether there are alternative forms of self-communication in different cultures.

Furthermore, we believe that the findings on cultural differences in the effect of expression have implications for mental and psychological health implications. Many forms of psychotherapy are built on the assumption of positive effects of self-expression, whether they are for cognitive reframing or emotional cathartic experiences. Similarly, written emotional disclosure is associated with improvements in physical health and mood (Pennebaker, Kiecolt- Glaser, & Glaser, 1988; Petrie, Booth, Pennebaker, & Davidson, 1995; Smyth, Stone, Hurewitz, & Kaell, 1999). Self-expression through music and art acts as an alternative form of catharsis and has been used in pain management and substance abuse groups as healthier outlets for inner conflicts and emotions (Adelman & Castricone, 1986; Bailey, 1986). The lack of social support seeking and the underutilization of health services are risk factors for mental health problems (Boscarino et al., 2004). In contrast, suppression of self-expression seems to be connected to mental illness, psychopathology, and negative stress responses, as well as to many physical problems such as coronary heart disease (Friedman & Booth-Kewley, 1987; Gross & Levenson, 1993; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986).

Yet, there is some empirical evidence suggesting cultural differences in the effect of expression on stress responses (e.g., Kim, 2008; Taylor et al., 2007). These findings suggest that health benefits of expression (or harms of silence) might not be universally true. Before making hasty conclusions regarding these cultural differences, it is important to recognize that the findings reviewed in the present paper do not specifically examine the effectiveness of psychotherapy or the effect of trauma writing. Thus, it will be important to investigate the effect of expression on health outcomes in broader settings.

The present review aims to contextualize the act of expression and demonstrate cultural differences in the meaning of expression. In so doing, we highlighted the psychological and biological consequences of this difference. Depending on the basic assumptions and configuration in cultural systems, self-expression could have positive or negative psychological, physical, and social impacts. These findings provide evidence for the opening observation made by Albert Einstein that to Americans, self-expression is indeed a central ingredient that gives life meaning and self-worth. Although the extent to which we understand the nature of cultural differences and similarities in the effects of self-expression is still limited, we believe that the evidence is enough to provide a framework for future research on culture and divergent effects of expression and not to take the worth and meaning of expression for granted.

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Cultural variation in the motivation of self-expression


