

# Who Do You See in the Mirror: Cultural Differences in Identity Perspectives

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## Introduction

Self-categorization theory explains that our process of self-relevant information is more context-dependent rather than a reflection of our self-schema. This theory proposes two types of identities (a personal identity and a social identity), and a salience of the identity can void the effect of self-schema. Those two identities are thought to show antagonism (Turner, 1982; Onorato & Turner, 2004); however, because the levels of both identities vary depending on the population and on the degree of self-awareness, the hypothesis is questionable (e.g., Tiliopoulos & McVittie, 2010; Mullen, Migdal, & Rozell, 2003; Eidelman & Silvia, 2010). Meanwhile, many studies pointed out differences in self-perception between different cultures (e.g., Heine et al., 2008; English & Chen, 2011). The current study focuses on different characteristics between an individualistic culture (the U.S.) and a collectivistic culture (Japan) in order to test the validity of antagonism. The experiment is conducted via the Internet using a carefully designed computer mediated communication (CMC), extended from the model used by Yao and Flanagin (2006), to deal with the minority ethnicity effect and a false identity construction. This study expects that within collectivist cultures, people tend to increase both the social identity and the personal identity, so no antagonism will be observed.

## Method

### Participants

Eighty-four college students, 32 from America (53 % female) and 52 from Japan (50 % female), participated in exchange for course credit (Americans) or the opportunity to participate in a raffle for one of 3 \$15 gift certificates (Japanese). Forty participants were randomly assigned to the self-awareness condition and 44 were assigned to the control condition.

### Design

The experiment was a 2 × 2 × 2 mixed factorial design. The three independent variables were whether or not the participant was self-focused based on seeing their face via webcam, culture between groups, and the type of identity (personal or social) tested as a repeated measure.

### Procedure

Participants, both American and Japanese, signed up to participate in the survey online. They were randomly assigned to a one of two conditions: the experimental condition where they would view their face via webcam while filling out the survey or the control condition where they filled out the survey without seeing their face. For the participants living in Japan, the questionnaire was translated into Japanese. Participants were asked to complete the survey on a computer as opposed to a mobile phone or tablet, and those in the experimental condition were asked to have access to a web camera while participating in the experiment. The survey took approximately ten to fifteen minutes to complete. At the end, a photo was taken by the web camera to be sure the participant had not blocked their web camera in order to avoid viewing their face.

Level of personal identity was measured using 22 variables and tested using Cronbach Alpha ( $\alpha = 0.77$ ). Level of social identity was measured using 19 variables and tested with the same measure ( $\alpha = 0.88$ ).

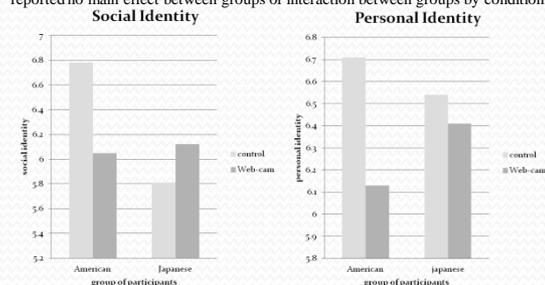
## Results

### Social identity analysis

Data were tested using a 2 (Japanese or American culture) × 2 (heightened or normal levels of self-awareness) ANOVA to measure levels of personal and social identity. In analyzing social identity, there was a significant interaction between groups by condition,  $F(1,80) = 4.18, P < .05$ . When seeing their face on a webcam, American participants experienced a decrease in social identity ( $M = 6.05, SD = 1.13$ ) as compared to not seeing their face on a webcam ( $M = 6.78, SD = 1.07$ ). Japanese participants experienced an increase in social identity when seeing their face on a webcam ( $M = 6.12, SD = 1.19$ ) and a decrease when there was no webcam ( $M = 5.81, SD = 1.12$ ). There was only a marginally significant main effect between groups  $F(1,80) = 3.13, p = 0.08$ , indicating that the overall degrees of social identity among American participants ( $M = 6.45, SD = 1.15$ ) was higher than the Japanese participants ( $M = 6.0, SD = 1.16$ ), and no main effect between conditions.

### Personal identity analysis

In analyzing personal identity, there was a significant main effect between conditions,  $F(1,80) = 4.55, P < .05$ . Both American and Japanese participants in the control condition did not see their face while taking the survey and experienced an increase in personal identity ( $M = 6.60, SD = 0.75$ ) as compared to those who saw their face on the webcam ( $M = 6.30, SD = 0.75$ ). The Type III Sum of Squares Analysis reported no main effect between groups or interaction between groups by condition.

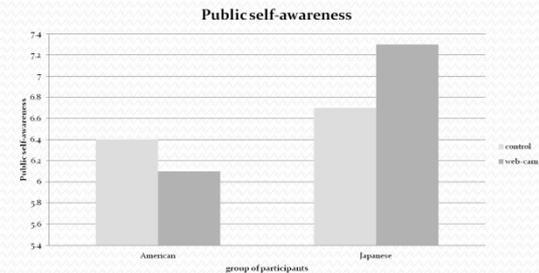


### Dependent variable analysis

The identity types measured during the study were also submitted to ANOVA testing. Results showed that levels of personal and social identity were significantly different,  $F(1,80) = 4.11, p < .05$ . Overall, personal identity means were higher ( $M = 6.4$ ) than the means of social identity ( $M = 6.1$ ). However, both cultures experienced levels significantly different,  $F(1,80) = 4.23, p < .05$ . American participants experienced both personal identity ( $M = 6.4, SD = 0.78$ ) and social identity ( $M = 6.5, SD = 1.15$ ) at similar levels, while the Japanese participants experienced higher levels of personal identity ( $M = 6.5, SD = 0.75$ ) than social identity ( $M = 6.0, SD = 1.16$ ).

### Public self-awareness analysis

Finally, the scores of apparent public self-awareness were submitted to a 2 (culture) × 2 (level of self-awareness) ANOVA test. Results showed a significant main effect between American and Japanese cultures and their reaction to public self-awareness,  $F(1,80) = 5.95, p < .05$ . American participants in the experimental condition using their webcam exhibited lower levels of public self-awareness ( $M = 6.1, SD = 0.95$ ) when compared to the American participants in the control condition who could not see their face via web cam ( $M = 6.4, SD = 1.25$ ). Japanese participants in the experimental condition experienced a higher degree of public self-awareness ( $M = 7.3, SD = 1.57$ ) when compared to the Japanese participants in the control condition ( $M = 6.7, SD = 1.54$ ).



## Discussion

Before beginning the study, we hypothesized that American participants who could see their face via web cam would experience a decrease in social identity while Japanese participants in the same condition would experience an increase, as found in past studies using a mirror. These expectations were met; however, both American and Japanese participants in the control condition where they did not see their face experienced an increase in personal identity. Due to these results, we can come to the conclusion that the use of a web cam did not completely replicate the use of a mirror during the study.

## References

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