

Culture, essentialism, and agency: Are individuals universally believed to be more real entities than groups?

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Abstract

Are human individuals universally seen to be more real entities (or more entitative, to use Campbell's, 1958, term) than social groups? Although the individual may be seen to be more entitative than social groups in the West, it is unclear whether this is the case in other cultures, especially in East Asia. Two aspects of perceived entitativity are distinguished: psychological essentialism (belief in the presence of essence-like unchangeable properties) and agency (perception that a social entity is an agent), and examined for four social targets (individual, family, friendship group, and society) in three English-speaking cultures (Australia, UK, and USA), three East Asian cultures (Hong Kong, Japan, and Korea), and two continental European cultures (Belgium and Germany). In all cultures, the individual person was seen to possess essence-like unchangeable characteristics more than social groups (i.e. essentialized). As for agency, the individual person was seen to be more agentic than groups in Western cultures, but both individuals and groups were conferred an equal level of agency in East Asia. Individuals may be universally more essentialized than friendship groups and societies, but not always seen to be more agentic, than social groups. Implications of the results for conceptions of individualism and collectivism are discussed. Copyright © 2004 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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In his enigmatic paper, Donald Campbell (1958) raised the question about the ontological status of social groups. According to him, 'there are certain [human] aggregates which meet criteria of being 'entities,' and other aggregates which do not (p. 15).' Entitativity, defined by Campbell (1958, p. 17) as '[t]he degree of having the nature of an entity, of having real existence', was a concept coined to capture the extent to which a human aggregate is a real entity. However, Campbell later on in the same paper hinted at an analogous question that can be raised about the ontological status of individual persons, that is, whether individual persons are real entities or not. By itself, to an untutored eye, this question may seem banal at best, and meaningless at worst. For, despite its theoretical significance for social science (see Lukes, 1973, on methodological individualism), it is often taken for granted by lay people that the individual is a more real entity than a social group. Nonetheless, the question of its universality takes on empirical importance beyond its apparent banality. Namely, are individual persons *universally* believed to be more real entities than social groups?

IS THE INDIVIDUAL PERSON SEEN TO BE A MORE REAL ENTITY THAN GROUPS?

In social psychology, the belief in the ontological primacy of the individual over groups was probably most clearly expressed by Floyd Allport (1924):

There is no psychology of groups which is not essentially and entirely a psychology of individuals. Social psychology must not be placed in contradistinction to the psychology of the individual; *it is a part of the psychology of the individual*, whose behavior it studies in relation to that sector of his environment comprised by his fellows (Allport, 1924, p. 4; emphasis in original).

This belief appears to be commonly shared among lay people—at least in North America. Reviewing experiments on person and group impression formation mainly conducted in North America, Hamilton and Sherman (1996) concluded that participants typically assumed greater entitativity for individuals than for groups (also see Brewer & Harasty, 1996).

One question that this raises is whether individuals are *universally* believed to be more real entities than groups. On the one hand, Campbell's (1958) evolutionary thinking suggests the possibility of the universality of the belief that individuals are more real entities than groups. He surmised that evolutionary processes have endowed humans with the perceptual organs that make 'middle-sized physical entities' such as 'stones and teacups' appear more real than 'social groups or neutrinos (all quotes from p. 17.)' As Campbell implied, it may indeed be the case that individuals are perceived to be more real entities than social groups presumably because it is evolutionally adaptive to perceive objects of the size of a human individual or thereabouts as real entities. Whether one agrees with Campbell's (1958) particular evolutionary reasoning or not, the very fact that an individual person appears to human senses to be coextensive with a solid body may be a sufficient ground to hypothesize the universal significance of the individual person for humans. Indeed, the significance of the individual person's embodiment has been commented on from time to time (e.g. Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Mauss, 1938/1985; Geertz, 1984). On the other hand, a decade of research on individualism and collectivism (for reviews, see Kağitçibaşı, 1997; Kashima, 2001; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1995) points to the possibility that this may not be a universal pattern. The primacy of the individual over groups may be an implicit ontology of individualist cultures, of which North America is a primary example (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989). In non-individualist cultures in East Asia, for instance, people may hold a different implicit ontology.

ESSENTIALISM AND AGENCY: TWO ASPECTS OF PERCEIVED ENTITATIVITY

In light of the complexity of the concept of entitativity (Yzerbyt, Judd, & Corneille, 2004), it is useful to clarify how we use this term in this paper. In Campbell's (1958) terminology, entitativity is an ontological concept, which is to indicate the extent to which a group is a real entity (Kashima, 2004). *Perceived* entitativity, then, has to do with *perceptions* of a group as a real entity. Although Campbell listed several perceptual cues that may be used to measure entitativity, they do not necessarily exhaust all the aspects of perceived entitativity. Indeed, recent theory and research point to two aspects of perceived entitativity: *essentialism* and *perceived agency* (Brewer, Hong, & Li, 2004). First of all, psychological essentialism (Leyens et al., 2000, 2001, 2003; Medin & Ortony, 1989; Rothbart & Taylor, 1992; Yzerbyt, Corneille, & Estrada, 2001; Yzerbyt, Estrada, Corneille, Seron, & Demoulin, 2004; Yzerbyt, Rocher, & Schadronek, 1997) may be an aspect of perceived entitativity. Rothbart and Taylor (1992) argued that some social categories such as race and gender are perceived to have their existence deeply rooted in nature. Those social categories may therefore be seen to possess essential properties that give rise to their surface appearances and causal connections among them, and therefore knowledge that an exemplar belongs to the category permits rich inferences about the exemplar (inductive potential), and that cannot be changed by human intervention (unalterability). Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst (2000) found two dimensions that are related to perceived homogeneity and unalterability as main dimensions of psychological essentialism.

In this paper, one aspect of essentialism that is related to inductive potential is measured as *perceived consistency*, namely, the extent to which one observation about a social entity is consistent with another observation about the same entity. The essence, when attributed to a social category, may be seen to make members of the social category similar to each other in their appearance and behaviour. Although this does not exhaust the meaning of inductive potential, in Haslam et al.'s study an item closely related to perceived consistency (what they called uniformity) formed part of a factor that is conceptually closely related to inductive potential. One strand of entitativity research used this as a way of measuring (e.g. Brewer, Weber, & Carini, 1995; McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson, & Grace, 1995) and manipulating (e.g. Dasgupta, Banaji, & Abelson, 1999; Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Fiske, 1998) perceived group entitativity. Perceived consistency is also theorized to mediate the process of group impression formation as opposed to individual impression formation (e.g. Hamilton & Sherman, 1996; McConnell, Sherman, & Hamilton, 1994, 1997; Susskind, Maurer, Thakkar, Hamilton, & Sherman, 1999).

A second aspect of essentialism is conceptualized here as *perceived unalterability*, that is, the belief that the properties of a social entity cannot be changed by human intervention because its essence is seen to be so deeply entrenched in nature that it is beyond human control and manipulation. Perceived unalterability of a group is typically discussed (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992) and measured (Haslam et al., 2000) in terms of the permeability of a group boundary, namely, the extent to which a person can easily become or quit being a member of a group. However, this conceptualization and operationalization of unalterability cannot be extended to the perceived immutability of individuals. In the present paper, therefore, we adopt the conception of unalterability based on Dweck's (1999) notion of entity theory. Those who hold entity theory believe that the underlying characteristic of a social entity is unchangeable. It is surmised that to the extent that a social group has an unchangeable underlying essence that gives rise to its members' appearance and behaviour, a member cannot change his or her group membership easily. Levy and her colleagues highlighted this aspect of psychological essentialism in their research, showing that those who believe that the nature of a social group cannot be changed tended to form stronger stereotypes (e.g. Levy & Dweck, 1999; Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998; Levy, Plaks, Hong, Chiu, & Dweck, 2001).

A second major aspect of perceived entitativity may be *agency* (Abelson, Dasgupta, Park, & Banaji, 1998; Hamilton, Sherman, & Lickel, 1998; Yzerbyt, Castano, Leyens, & Paladino, 2000). That is, when a social being is seen to be agentic, it may be seen to be more entitative. Agentic social beings are then goal-directed, and therefore can carry out actions in pursuit of the common goals, responsible for their actions, and may potentially be praised or blamed for their actions. Agentic social beings that exhibit activities directed towards a common goal, that are under a common fate, and that consist of differentiated but interacting parts may be seen to be entitative. Also in line with this conception is Hamilton, Sherman, Lickel, and their colleagues' (Hamilton et al., 1998; Lickel et al., 2000) notion of entitativity as the extent to which an entity consists of differentiated parts that are interdependent of each other and work in coordination with one another to approach a shared goal.

Perceived agency is conceptualized here as the extent to which a social being is attributed mental states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions. In general accord with this notion, Morris, Menon, and Ames (2001) argued that people hold implicit theories of agency (ITA), according to which an entity such as an individual, a group, or a supernatural being can be seen to possess intentionality and autonomy. According to D'Andrade (1987), an implicit theory holds that intentionality reflects the operation of the mind that enables people to believe, want, and intend, though emotionality is often seen as an aspect separate from, but interacting with, it. Morris et al. suggested that a being with agency is attributed intentionality that equips it with the capacity to believe, want, and intend. To the extent that a group is attributed agency, it is seen to be responsible for its action. In line with this reasoning, Welbourne (1999) found that expectations about shared intentions and group goals (i.e. perceived agency) increased perceived entitativity as measured by the extent to which perceivers attributed dispositional tendencies. More recently, Lickel, Schmader, and Hamilton (2003; also see Lickel, Hamilton, & Sherman, 2001) showed that when a group is perceived to be entitative, a member of the group is seen to be responsible for a different member's action, again implying a conceptual link between entitativity and agency.

There is empirical evidence to suggest that essentialism and agency capture interrelated aspects of perceptions of social objects as real entities. Lickel et al. (2000) examined North American and Polish students' judgments of various collections of people being 'very much like a group'; they regarded this judgment as a measure of perceived entitativity. Rendering support for the contention that agency is an aspect of entitativity, their measure correlated strongly with the extent to which social entities were seen to have a shared goal, a common outcome, and frequent interactions among their members. Also supporting the notion of essentialism as an aspect of entitativity, Lickel et al. reported that perceived entitativity correlated positively with perceived similarity among group members and negatively with perceived permeability. These dimensions are clearly related to perceived similarity and unalterability as discussed above, although the size of these correlations was smaller than those involving agency related dimensions such as common goal and common fate.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED ENTITATIVITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP

There can be two forms of hypotheses about cultural differences in perceived entitativity of the individual and group. According to a *strong thesis*, the individual is perceived to be more entitative than social groups in Western individualist cultures, but some social groups are perceived to be more entitative than the individual in East Asian cultures. A *weak thesis* suggests that the individual is perceived to be more entitative than social groups in all cultures, but the relative degree of perceived entitativity may differ across cultures. That is, the individual may be perceived to be more entitative

than social groups to a greater extent in Western cultures than in East Asian cultures. It is unclear which thesis holds in the current literature. The weak thesis holds that the individual is universally perceived to be more entitative than groups, but the strong thesis denies this.

Chiu, Hong, Menon, and Morris (Chiu, Morris, Hong, & Menon, 2000; Menon, Morris, Chiu, & Hong, 1999) conducted pioneering work on cultural differences in an aspect of perceived entitativity, namely, perceived agency, of individuals and groups. In Hong Kong and the United States (US), they examined the blameworthiness of an individual and a group, arguably an aspect of perceived agency, when the individual member of the group committed a negative act. Some of their results are consistent with the strong thesis. Menon et al. (1999, Study 1) examined the content of newspaper articles about rogue traders, and showed that a Japanese newspaper referred to the organization for which the trader worked more often than the trader himself, but a US newspaper referred to the individual more often than the organization. Chiu et al.'s (2000) experiments also showed a similar pattern. They gave American and Hong Kong students stories in which a group member caused some negative outcomes, and asked them to evaluate the responsibility of the individual member and the group as a whole. American students blamed the individual more than the group, but Hong Kong students blamed the group more than the individual. Nonetheless, other results were more in line with the weak thesis. Menon et al. (1999) conducted experiments in which American and Hong Kong Chinese participants were given a story where a group member's behaviour caused negative consequences to the group. They were asked to judge the extent to which the group as a whole and the individual group member were responsible and blameworthy for the negative consequences. Although American students consistently blamed the individual more than the group, Hong Kong students blamed the individual and group equally in Experiments 2 and 3.

The past investigation has not examined cultural variation in psychological essentialism about the individual and group. In fact, if the tendency to make dispositional attributions to a target is regarded as a measure of psychological essentialism (e.g. Yzerbyt et al., 1998), evidence for cultural differences is mixed even for the individual. Some cross-cultural comparisons of dispositional attributions have shown that the individual person is more likely perceived to be the source of a behaviour in Western European cultures than in East Asian cultures (also see Miller, 1984, for a comparison between North America and South Asia). This pattern was observed by Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka, and Kashima (1992) in comparing Japanese and Australians, and by Morris and Peng (1994) in their comparison of Chinese and Americans. However, Choi and Nisbett (1998) in examining Korea and the US, and Krull et al. (1999) in their comparisons of Chinese and Americans found that East Asians and North Americans inferred a similar internal attribute from the observation of a behaviour, implying that the psychological essentialism about the individual may not vary so dramatically across cultures (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). Nevertheless, Zárate, Uleman, and Voils (2001) recently suggested that there may be a cultural difference if spontaneous inferences are examined.

PRESENT STUDY

The present study extended previous research in order to examine whether the individual is universally perceived to be more entitative than social groups. University students in three East Asian cultures (Hong Kong, Japan, Korea), three English-speaking cultures (Australia, the UK, the USA), and two continental European cultures (Belgium, Germany) reported their perceptions of entitativity in terms of both psychological essentialism (perceived consistency and unalterability) and agency for the individual and three social groups (family, friendship group, and society). In particular, we tested between the strong and weak theses about cultural differences in perceived entitativity of individuals and groups.

In addition, we examined whether essentialism about a social category is linked to a belief in a biological basis of the category. Some researchers (e.g. Gil-White, 2001) suggest that social groups are essentialized when they are believed to have biological or genetic bases. In line with this, Martin and Parker (1995) showed that North Americans who believe biological factors underlie sex and racial differences tended to perceive greater homogeneity within a sex or racial category. However, it is possible that the perceived essence of a social category does not have to be biological. For instance, some non-biological factors such as religion may be seen to be an essence of a social category. We examined whether Martin and Parker's finding can be generalized to other cultures.

Method

Participants

Three East Asian cultures (Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong), three English-speaking cultures (Australia, UK, and USA), and two continental European cultures (Francophone Belgium and Germany) were sampled. Participants were all undergraduate students: 112 (54 men and 58 women; 19.7 years old) from Seoul, Korea, 140 (74 men and 66 women; 19.9 years old) from Tokyo, Japan, 105 (34 men and 71 women; 20.2 years old) from Hong Kong, 104 (40 men and 64 women; 18.9 years old) from Melbourne, Australia, 110 (35 men and 75 women; 20.4 years old) near Washington DC, the USA, 86 (16 men and 70 women; 20.4 years old) from Falmer, UK, 111 (47 men and 64 women; 21.7 years old) from Würzburg, Germany, and 114 (57 men and 57 women; 20.8 years old) from Louvain la Neuve, Belgium (Francophone). Participants were randomly assigned to four conditions depending on the specific target that was the focus of the questionnaire: individual, family, friendship group, and society.

Measures

The measures were initially constructed in English, and translated into the main language used by each sample (i.e. Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean, and German) by a bilingual researcher. The equivalence of the measures was checked by back translation. The measures were then administered as part of a larger study. Demographic variables including age, gender, and ethnicity were examined. Some participants in Australia, the US, and the United Kingdom (UK) identified their ethnicity as not Western European. Analyses were conducted excluding these participants. In addition, one question was asked to gauge the participants' subjective estimate of their socio-economic status (subjective SES) in their country. They were asked to state whether the income of the main income earner of their family is highly above (1), above (2), about (3), below (4), or highly below (5) the national average.

In order to ascertain cultural differences in individualism and collectivism among the samples, in the individual target condition, 28 of the items that Kashima et al. (1995) used to measure cultural differences in self-conception were included with some modification. In the original study, the items generally described a situation in which goals of a 'group' and one's own goals were in conflict with each other. In the present study, the phrase 'group' was replaced by 'other people.' Of these items, 14 were relevant to the individual self, with seven relevant to agency and the other seven to assertiveness. Seven items aimed at tapping the relational self. Finally, seven items measured the collective self. Recall that there were altogether four target conditions (individual, family, friends, and society), and the self measures were included only in the individual condition. In the other conditions, the same self-conception questions were asked with regard to specific groups (family, friendship group, and society). These were part of a different study, and are not reported here.

Measures designed to tap perceived entitativity were administered in all four conditions. For each target condition, three types of measures were included. First, a six-item scale of entity theory (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997) was included to tap perceived unalterability, and responses were collected on 5-point Likert-type scales anchored by agree and disagree. Those who endorse entity theory about a social target (e.g. person, group) would consider it to possess unalterable characteristics, whereas those who hold incremental theory (or disendorse entity theory) would see it as changeable. Examples of the items for the entity theory measure are 'A person has his or her basic and ingrained characteristics, and you really can't do much to change them,' and 'Even the most basic qualities of a person can be changed (reverse-scored).' The same items with appropriate target entities were used for different target conditions. The six items were mixed with seven other items, which are not included in this report.

Second, a ten-item measure of perceived consistency was also included. Participants were asked to suppose that a particular target is observed to behave in a certain way in one occasion, and to make a likelihood judgment (0–100) that the same target (i.e. the same person in the individual condition, and a different member of the same group in other group conditions) would behave in a similar way on another occasion. Each item reflected two trait markers of each of the big five dimensions of personality taken from Goldberg (1992): organized, disorganized, intellectual, unintellectual, warm, cold, talkative, shy, moody, and unemotional. For instance, the perceived consistency of the individual was measured by the likelihood that, if a person is observed to behave in a warm way in a certain situation, the same person will behave in a warm way in a different situation. The perceived consistency of a group was measured by the likelihood that, if a member of the group is observed to behave in a warm way in a certain situation, another member of the group will behave in a warm way in a different situation.

Third, nine items were constructed to tap the extent to which each target is perceived to possess agency. On the basis of D'Andrade (1987), nine predicates were constructed, which described internal states of thinking (two items), feeling (three items), wanting (two items), and intending (two items). Thinking items were 'thought about,' and 'planned'; feeling items were 'enjoyed,' 'feared,' and 'felt a pain'; wanting items were 'wanted,' and 'wished'; and intending items were 'intended' and 'decided'. This measurement was predicated on the view that agency presupposes intentionality. That is, if a social entity is seen to possess agency, it is attributed mental states such as beliefs, desires, and intentions. As Morris et al. (2001) noted, agency is implied by the attribution of such mental states (for empirical demonstration, see Kashima, McIntyre, & Clifford, 1998; Malle & Knobe, 1997). It was reasoned that the greater is the degree of agency attributed to a target, the more normal and less odd it would be to use these mental predicates with the target. Although this is not a typical judgment examined in social psychology, cognitive linguists such as Langacker (1987, 1991) often rely on this type of intuitive judgment to explore a mental representation implied by a sentence. If a person judges a syntactically correct sentence as odd, this implies that the semantics involved in the sentence is intuitively wrong. The meanings of the concepts referring to mental states or processes often vary across cultures (Lillard, 1998); however, some of the basic concepts (e.g. thinking, wanting, and feeling) appear to be fairly universally shared (Wierzbicka, 1992). A judgment was reported on a 5-point scale anchored by 'somewhat odd' and 'perfectly normal.' Although 'somewhat odd' is not the bipolar opposite of 'perfectly normal,' a scale that exaggerates the normal end of an 'odd-normal' scale was used. This is because a pilot study found that people tend not to use the 'odd' end of an odd-normal bipolar scale.

Finally, seven questions were asked to explore what type of causal beliefs may determine the perceived entitativity of social targets. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agree (5) or disagree (1) that each of the seven factors makes a social target (person, family, friends, or society) what it is. Factors included biological factor (genetic factors, genes and heredity),

socialization, economic factor (wealth, asset), education, natural environment (climate), social environment (political climate), and relationships with others.

Results

First, we report results pertaining to the self-concept and entitativity measures to establish that there are expected cultural differences among the eight samples, and to examine the relationships among the self-concept and perceived entitativity measures. These analyses use the sample in the individual target condition, which is approximately one quarter of the entire sample. Second, we report main results about cross-cultural differences on perceived entitativity of individuals and three different types of groups, to examine whether individuals are believed to be more entitative than the groups. Third, the results pertaining to causal beliefs are reported.

Preliminary Analyses

Before conducting cross-cultural comparisons, we examined whether there were any cultural differences in age and subjective SES. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) on each variable with culture as the factor revealed a main effect of culture, $F(7, 874) = 32.22$ for age, and $F(7, 855) = 14.47$, for subjective SES. In order to rule out the possibility that the demographic variables account for any cultural differences, subsequent analyses were conducted with and without the demographic variables as covariates. Both analyses yielded the same significant results; the results of the analyses without these covariates are reported below.

Self-Conceptions Across Cultures. The 28 item measure of self-conceptions was examined. These items were first standardized within each culture to remove any potential mean differences among cultures because mean differences may confound item correlations (see van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). The within-culture standardized items were submitted to a principal component analysis. A scree test suggested a four-factor solution, which was consistent with our expectations, given that the original measure had four subscales. A principal-axis factor analysis followed by a varimax rotation showed a pattern generally consistent with the original study for three of the factors. The first factor was concerned with agentic self, the extent to which one's self is regarded as a goal-directed agent, which had six of the seven original items loading on it above 0.40. The second factor was relational self, the emotional relatedness of oneself with others, with five of the seven items loading above 0.40. The third factor was assertive self, the self as expressing one's attitudes consistently in words, with six of the original seven items loading above 0.40. However, the fourth factor included only two original items of the collective self with above 0.40 loadings. Reliability was examined with the items that loaded above 0.40 on each of the factors. Cronbach's α was 0.69, 0.71, and 0.76 for agency, assertiveness and relational self, respectively. However, the α coefficient was 0.47 for the collective self factor. Because of its low reliability, this factor was dropped from further examination. The reliability of the other scales is reported for each culture in Table 1.

Using raw scores *without* the within-culture standardization, the items with loadings above 0.40 were averaged for each of the three remaining factors to construct the measures of two individual selves (agentic self and assertive self) and the measure of relational self. The three self measures were subjected to a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with culture (eight cultures) and gender as two independent variables. Culture and gender main effects were both significant at 0.01, $\Lambda = 0.71$ and

Table 1. Means and reliability of the agentic, assertive, and relational selves across eight cultures

	Agentic self		Assertive self		Relational self		
	<i>M</i>	α	<i>M</i>	α	<i>M</i>	α	
					Men	Women	
Japan	3.2 _{ab}	0.77	3.4 _b	0.60	3.7	4.2	0.71
Korea	3.2 _{abc}	0.69	2.7 _a	0.67	3.8	3.8	0.67
Hong Kong	2.8 _a	0.66	3.4 _{ab}	0.67	4.3	3.8	0.52
Australia	3.7 _b	0.48	3.5 _b	0.51	3.3	4.5	0.92
UK	3.6 _{bc}	0.62	3.6 _b	0.83	3.2	3.9	0.80
USA	3.6 _c	0.77	3.6 _b	0.76	3.4	3.9	0.81
Belgium	3.5 _{bc}	0.35	3.6 _b	0.68	3.2	3.7	0.79
Germany	3.4 _{bc}	0.47	3.7 _b	0.70	3.6	4.3	0.58

Note: Within each column of agentic and assertive self, numbers with the same subscript were not significantly different from each other by Tukey's HSD ($p < 0.05$).

0.93, $F(21, 597.814) = 3.64$, and $F(3, 208) = 5.26$, $\eta^2 = 0.11$ and 0.07, respectively. A culture by gender interaction effect was also significant at 0.05, $\Lambda = 0.86$, $F(21, 597.814) = 1.58$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$. Follow-up univariate analyses showed that the culture effect was significant only for agentic and assertive selves, $F(7, 210) = 4.44$ and 5.11, $\eta^2 = 0.13$ and 0.15, $p < 0.001$ for both. A gender main effect was significant for relational self, $F(1, 210) = 14.82$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.07$. However, this effect was qualified by a gender by culture interaction effect, $F(7, 210) = 2.50$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$. Relevant means are reported in Table 1.

To shed further light on the culture main effects on our three measures of self, a series of planned contrasts was conducted comparing English-speaking, continental European, and East Asian cultures (for this expectation, see Hofstede, 1980; Oyserman et al., 2002). All in all, the patterns were consistent with our expectations. First, the three East Asian cultures were compared with the five Western European-based cultures. The results suggested that the East Asian means were significantly lower than the Western means for agentic and assertive selves, $t(218) = 5.62$ and 5.08, respectively, $p < 0.001$ for both. Then, the three English-speaking cultures were compared to the continental European cultures (French and German speaking cultures). The English-speaking culture means were significantly higher than the continental European culture means for agentic self, $t(218) = 2.04$, $p < 0.05$, but not for assertive self, $t(218) = 0.34$, ns. Finally, the two continental European means were compared to the three East Asian means for agentic self, yielding a significant difference between them, $t(218) = 3.40$, $p < 0.01$. Taken together, on agentic self, the English-speaking cultures were highest, followed by the continental European cultures, and then by the East Asian cultures. On assertive self, both the English-speaking and continental European cultures were higher than the East Asian cultures. In subsequent analyses, three cultural clusters will be distinguished, English-speaking, continental European, and East Asian cultures.

With regard to relational self, consistent with previous research, women were generally more relational ($M = 4.0$) than men ($M = 3.6$). However, the gender by culture interaction effect, though small, suggests that the gender difference in relational self may depend on a culture. Inspection of the means in Table 1 suggests that there is no gender difference in Korea, and that there appears to be a reversal of the trend in Hong Kong. Nevertheless, the reliability of the relational self scale was relatively low in Hong Kong (0.52), suggesting a need for a cautious interpretation.

Entitativity as Perceived Consistency, Unalterability, and Agency. The measures tapping consistency (ten items), unalterability (six items) and agency (nine items) were factor analysed. In a cross-cultural analysis, however, potential cultural differences in mean levels could confound individual-level correlations; likewise, potential mean differences across target conditions may mask individual-level correlations among the items. For this reason, every item was standardized within each target condition in each culture (see van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). All items were subjected to a pan-cultural principal component analysis. A scree test suggested a three-factor solution. A principal-axis factor analysis was conducted by specifying three factors, followed by varimax rotation. The rotated factor loadings showed a clear three factor pattern with the items for perceived consistency, unalterability, and agency loading on three separate factors. Similar analyses for each culture with and without standardization showed similar three-factor solutions. The factor structure of the pan-cultural analysis is reported in Table 2.

Both the items for the perceived consistency and unalterability measures clearly formed separate scales, with all item loadings exceeding 0.40. However, three of the items for the perceived agency measure loaded on its factor below 0.40. These items were related to the mental states of feeling (i.e. feel, enjoy, and fear), which D'Andrade (1987) suggested were not closely related to the concept of agency. To ascertain the reliability of each scale, a Cronbach's α coefficient was computed based on the items with factor loadings greater than 0.40. They were all greater than 0.7, suggesting adequate

Table 2. Factor loadings of the items for inductive potential, unalterability, and attributed agency

	F1	F2	F3
Talkative	53		
Shy	65		
Warm	45		
Cold	62		
Organized	46		
Disorganized	60		
Unemotional	55		
Moody	59		
Intellectual	48		
Unintellectual	56		
Entity 1		55	
Entity 2		58	
Entity 3		61	
Entity 4		69	
Entity 5		53	
Entity 6		66	
Intend (Agency 1)			57
Decide (Agency 2)			49
Want (Agency 3)			65
Wish (Agency 4)			46
Think (Agency 5)			62
Plan (Agency 6)			57
Feel (Agency 7)			29
Enjoy (Agency 8)			37
Fear (Agency 9)			15
α	0.84	0.76	0.79

Note: All loadings above 0.10 are shown. Coefficients are based on the items with loadings greater than 0.40.

levels of reliability across cultures (reported in Table 2), and within each culture (except for 0.51 for mental state items in Hong Kong, and 0.52 for unalterability items in Korea). Although those exceptions need to be treated with some caution, not all measures were unreliable in one culture, suggesting that translations were generally adequate for the purpose. Across the entire sample, perceived similarity correlated with unalterability, $r = 0.15$, and agency, $r = 0.16$ (both significant at 0.001). Perceived unalterability and agency were uncorrelated, $r = 0.00$.

To provide some preliminary information about validity, the correlations of the perceived entitativity measures with the self measures were computed. Note that this included only the participants in the individual target condition ($N = 226$). Mental states attribution correlated with both the individual self measures: $r = 0.17$ and 0.18 , both $p < 0.01$, for agentic and assertive self, respectively.

Culture and Social Targets

To examine the hypothesis that the individual is perceived to be more entitative than groups across cultures, a series of ANOVAs was conducted on each of perceived consistency, unalterability, and agency, with culture, target (individual, family, friendship group, and society), and gender as independent variables. Cross-cultural variability in perceived entitativity is indexed by a culture \times target interaction effect. Because of the large sample size, the type I error rate was set at 0.01.

Consistency. On perceived consistency, a target main effect was sizable, $F(3, 808) = 44.65$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.14$. The individual was perceived to be most consistent, followed by family and friends, and then by society. This main effect was qualified by a culture \times target interaction effect, $F(21, 808) = 2.34$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$. A one-way ANOVA for each culture showed that, with the exception of Australia, the target main effect was always significant. Where a main effect was significant, Tukey's HSD was conducted with the type I error rate of 0.05. The means and relevant statistics are reported in Table 3.

In all cultures except for Australia, the individual was perceived to be most consistent. However, in Japan, and three English-speaking cultures (Australia, USA, and UK), the individual and family were perceived to be similarly consistent. By contrast, in Korea, Hong Kong, and two continental European cultures (Belgium and Germany), the individual was perceived to be most consistent, with the other three targets (family, friendship group, and society) seen to be equally low.

Table 3. Means of perceived consistency for individual, family, friends, and society in each culture

	Error df	<i>F</i>	Individual	Family	Friends	Society
All Cultures			60.4 _a	50.4 _b	46.7 _{b,c}	44.3 _c
Japan	135	7.85**	58.7 _a	56.5 _a	43.5 _b	44.8 _b
Korea	107	3.04*	55.6 _a	45.1 _b	48.5 _b	47.4 _b
Hong Kong	99	7.91**	62.9 _a	48.0 _b	49.5 _b	42.6 _b
Australia	98	2.19 [†]	54.0	50.7	53.5	45.8
UK	82	7.67**	62.6 _a	52.6 _{a,b}	45.4 _b	43.1 _b
USA	106	7.68**	61.5 _a	59.3 _{a,b}	47.6 _{b,c}	46.0 _c
Belgium	103	21.02**	62.6 _a	42.1 _b	43.0 _b	38.6 _b
Germany	110	13.71**	66.7 _a	48.5 _b	42.6 _b	45.9 _b

Note: In each row, means sharing the same subscript were not significantly different from each other by Tukey's HSD ($p < 0.05$). [†] $p = 0.095$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Unalterability. A culture \times target \times gender ANOVA showed that perceived unalterability varied across cultures, $F(7, 818) = 10.48$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.08$. This culture main effect was not due to individualism, however. The country means did not line up along the East-West line. Although two of the East Asian cultures exhibited generally lower means (Korea, 3.2; Hong Kong, 3.3) than English-speaking cultures (Australia, 3.4; UK, 3.3; USA, 3.4) and one of the continental European cultures (Germany, 3.5), the mean was the lowest in Belgium (3.0), and the highest in Japan (3.8).

There was a target main effect, $F(3, 818) = 5.54$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$. The individual person was perceived to be most unalterable ($M = 3.5$) followed by family ($M = 3.4$), friends ($M = 3.3$), and society ($M = 3.2$). A comparison using Tukey's HSD ($p < 0.05$) showed that the mean for the individual was significantly different from the other means. There was no interaction between culture and target, $F(21, 818) = 0.79$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$, suggesting that the individual is seen to be the most unalterable entity across all cultures.

In addition, this target effect was qualified by gender, $F(3, 818) = 4.00$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$. Women regarded the individual as the most difficult to change ($M = 3.7$), but the other entities were seen as equally unchangeable ($M = 3.3$). However, this pattern was not discernible among men. Men's perception of unalterability was generally similar across all targets with means, 3.3, 3.4, 3.3, and 3.2 for the individual, family, friends, and society, respectively. A comparison using Tukey's HSD ($p < 0.01$) showed that women saw the individual to be significantly more unalterable than all other entities. Nonetheless, this target \times gender interaction should be interpreted with caution as its effect size is small. Further investigation is needed.

Agency. An ANOVA on attributed intentionality revealed a main effect of culture, $F(7, 816) = 12.04$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$, and a main effect of target, $F(3, 816) = 12.40$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$. The culture main effect was primarily due to high levels of agency in English-speaking cultures (Australia, 4.1; UK, 4.0; USA, 4.2) relative to the East Asian (Korea, 3.6; Japan, 3.6; Hong Kong, 3.8) and continental European cultures (Belgium, 3.6; Germany, 3.6). The target main effect was primarily due to the low level of agency attributed to society ($M = 3.5$), relative to the individual ($M = 4.0$), family ($M = 3.9$), and friends ($M = 3.8$).

There was also a significant interaction of culture and target, $F(21, 816) = 1.78$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$. A one-way ANOVA was conducted within each culture. None of the East Asian cultures showed a significant main effect of target, but all of the Western cultures did. Comparisons using Tukey's HSD were conducted to unpack this effect, and these showed that mental states were most likely attributed to the individual person. It appears that in East Asian cultures, the individual, family, friends, and society are all seen to be equally agentic. In contrast, in Western cultures, the large-scale collective of society was not attributed as high a level of agency as (a) the individual and (b) groups with high levels of interaction among group members (i.e. family and friendship group). Means and relevant statistics are reported in Table 4.

Culture Moderates the Target Differences in Perceived Entitativity. In the previous analyses, culture \times target interaction effects were found for perceived consistency and agency. The nature of this interaction effect was further investigated by distinguishing three classes of cultures: English-speaking (Australia, UK, and USA), continental European (Belgium and Germany), and East Asian (Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong) cultures. Recall that the results of the self-concept measures, especially agentic self measure, suggested that English-speaking and continental European cultures may need to be distinguished in terms of individualism.

For each index of perceived entitativity, a culture cluster (continental European, English-speaking, vs. East Asian) \times target (person, family, friends, and society) \times gender ANOVA was conducted. An analogous culture \times target interaction effect obtained for each of the indices. As before, for perceived

Table 4. Means of perceived agency for individual, family, friends, and society in each culture

	Error df	<i>F</i>	Individual	Family	Friends	Society
All Cultures			4.0 _a	3.9 _a	3.8 _a	3.5 _b
Japan	136	0.52	3.7	3.4	3.5	3.6
Korea	108	1.39	3.5	3.8	3.5	3.5
Hong Kong	100	2.26	3.9	3.9	3.8	3.5
Australia	99	5.38**	4.4 _a	4.1 _{a,b}	4.1 _{a,b}	3.8 _b
UK	82	4.13**	4.3 _a	3.8 _{a,b}	4.1 _{a,b}	3.8 _b
USA	106	7.08**	4.4 _a	4.4 _a	4.1 _a	3.8 _b
Belgium	107	5.14**	3.7 _a	3.9 _a	3.8 _a	3.1 _b
Germany	110	8.95**	4.0 _a	3.6 _{a,b}	3.5 _b	3.2 _b

Note: In each row, means sharing the same subscript were not significantly different from each other by Tukey's HSD ($p < 0.05$). ** $p < 0.01$.

consistency and mental state attribution, a culture \times target interaction was significant, $F(6, 848) = 3.69$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$, $p < 0.01$, and $F(6, 856) = 3.14$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$, $p < 0.01$, respectively. Again, consistent with the previous analysis, there was no culture \times target interaction for unalterability, $F(6, 858) = 1.15$, $\eta^2 = 0.00$, ns. This suggests that the three-part classification of the eight cultures retained the meaningful aspect of the culture \times target interaction effects previously observed. The relevant means for these interactions are reported in Figure 1. Note that the means plotted here were computed by subtracting the culture cluster mean from the mean for each target. This was done to control for the culture cluster main effect, which as we argued before, does not seem to be meaningfully interpretable as it may reflect any number of factors that may disturb cross-cultural equivalence of the measures (e.g. translation, response scale use). As is well known, the removal of a main effect does not alter the nature of this interaction effect, and in fact increases its interpretability. Generally, the pattern of the means indicates that the weak thesis of the cultural effect on perceived entitativity was supported.

Causal Beliefs and Perceived Entitativity

In order to examine the causal beliefs that are related to the perceived entitativity of the social targets, a series of general linear model analyses was conducted. Of particular interest was whether the biological factor was seen to underlie essentialism in all cultures. Generally, the following analytical strategy was used. For each index of perceived entitativity, first, culture, target, and gender main effects as well as any interaction effects that were significant in the previous analysis were included. Second, all main effects of the seven causal beliefs (biology, socialization, economics, education, natural environment, social environment, and relationships) were entered. Third, all two-way interaction effects involving the causal beliefs and other main effects included in the first set were entered. Although all three-way interaction effects involving the causal beliefs and other interaction effects were included at the fourth step, none were significant. We report significant results ($\alpha = 0.05$) from the analysis including the first three sets.

Consistency. Of the three significant effects in the initial ANOVA, the culture main effect became non-significant, but the target main effect and the culture \times target interaction effect both remained significant, $F(3, 762) = 3.61$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$, and $F(21, 762) = 2.32$, $\eta^2 = 0.06$, respectively. In addition, a

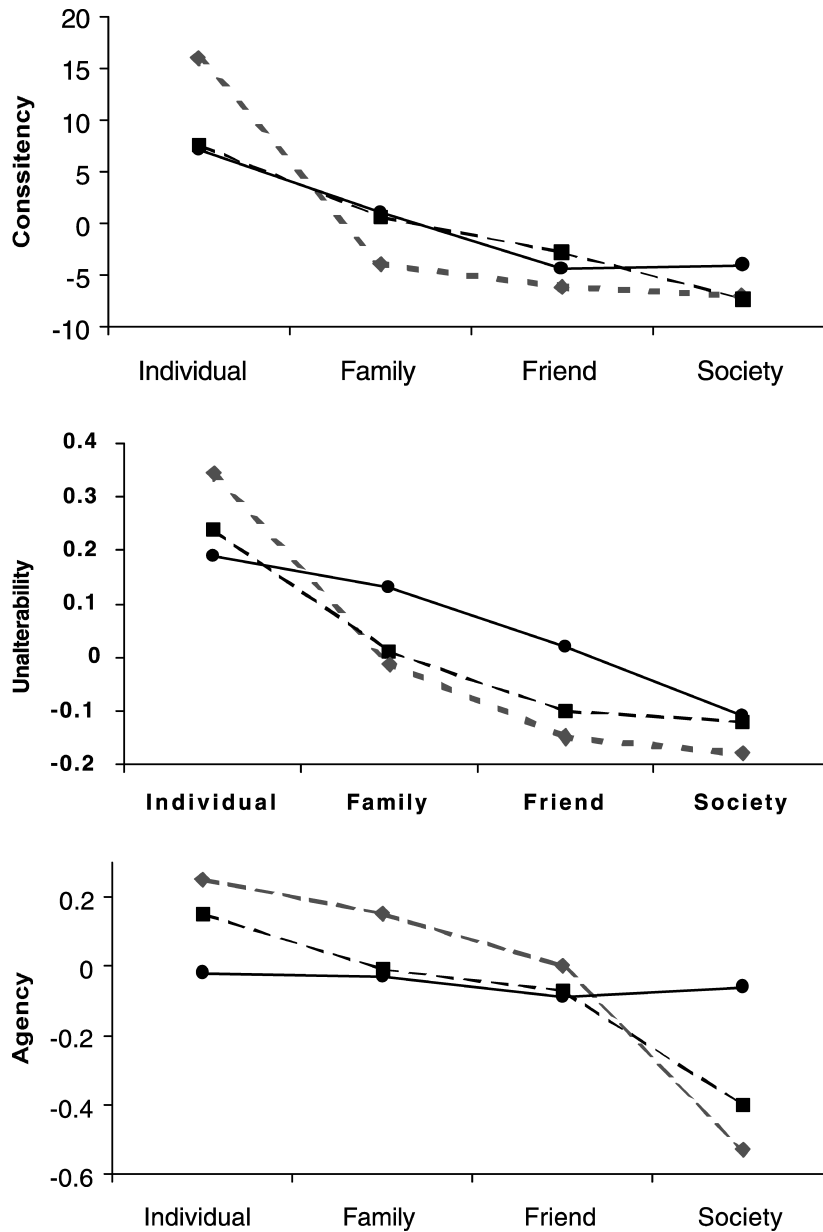


Figure 1. Mean levels of the perceived consistency, unalterability, and agency for continental European, English-speaking and East Asian cultures after removing the culture mean. —◆— Continental European; —■— English speaking; —●— East Asian

main effect of biological causal belief and its interaction with culture were significant, $F(1, 762) = 9.01, \eta^2 = 0.01$, and $F(7, 762) = 2.57, \eta^2 = 0.02$. An interaction of education causal belief and target was also significant, $F(7, 762) = 10.74, \eta^2 = 0.04$.

A series of regression analyses were conducted to examine the biological causal belief x culture interaction effect. First, perceived consistency was regressed on biological causal belief including

Table 5. Unstandardized regression coefficients for regressions of inductive potential on biological causal belief across cultures

Sample	All	Japan	Korea	HK	Aust.	UK	USA	Belg.	German
Coefficient	2.6	1.7	2.7	2.2	0.6	0.3	5.6	2.5	3.9
<i>r</i>	0.21	0.16	0.23	0.18	0.05	0.02	0.41	0.19	0.32
<i>t</i> -value	6.33**	1.85	2.41*	1.88	0.52	0.22	4.71**	2.02*	3.40**

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

all samples, and then the same analysis was done separately for each culture. The unstandardized regression coefficients and their associated *t*-values are reported in Table 5. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported because the culture \times causal belief interaction effect tests the equality of these coefficients across cultures.

In the US most strongly, followed by Germany, Korea, Belgium, Japan and Hong Kong, the causal belief in biological factors predicted perceived consistency. It is interesting to note that this may be seen as a conceptual replication of Martin and Parker (1995) in the USA; however, the biological determinism of essentialism does not appear to be a cross-cultural universal. In cultures that are as similar to the US as the UK and Australia, the biological factor was not a significant predictor.

Second, perceived consistency was regressed on education for all samples. This analysis was then repeated for each of the target conditions to explicate the education \times target interaction. The unstandardized regression coefficients and *t*-values are reported in Table 6. The stronger the educational causal belief, the greater was the perceived consistency for the individual and intimacy groups of family and friends. However, this tendency was reversed for society. Those who believed that education determines the character of a society tended to believe that they cannot infer behaviour characteristics of a person by knowing his or her societal affiliation.

Unalterability. Of the three main and interaction effects found to be significant in the initial ANOVA, the culture and target main effects became non-significant. However, the gender \times target interaction remained significant, $F(3, 783) = 3.33$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$. The main effect of the biological causal belief was the only other significant predictor, $F(1, 783) = 3.96$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$. The regression analysis of the whole sample showed that the unstandardized regression coefficient was 0.09 ($r = 0.15$), $t = 4.45$, $p < 0.01$. Replicating Martin and Parker (1995), the belief that biological factors determine the character of a social target appears to predict the belief in the unalterability of the social target across the cultures; however, this effect is not very strong.

Agency. The culture and target main effects and the culture \times target interaction were significant in the original ANOVA. When the general linear model analysis was conducted, the culture main effect became non-significant, but the other two effects remained significant, $F(3, 771) = 3.19$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$,

Table 6. Unstandardized regression coefficients for regressions of inductive potential on educational causal belief across targets

Sample	All	Person	Family	Friends	Society
Coefficient	1.1	3.6	2.5	1.8	-3.4
<i>r</i>	0.07	0.25	0.17	0.15	-0.21
<i>t</i> -value	2.15*	3.81**	2.53*	2.21*	-3.15**

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

and $F(21, 771) = 1.59$, $\eta^2 = 0.04$, respectively. In addition, target moderated the effects of biological and socialization causal beliefs on agency, $F(3, 771) = 2.84$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$, and $F(3, 771) = 2.77$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$, respectively. Further regression analyses showed that none of the regression coefficients were significantly different from zero for the biological causal belief, except that the sign was negative for society, but positive for all other targets. Regression analyses for the socialization causal belief showed that the regression coefficient was significant only for friends, $b = 0.22$, $r = 0.29$, $t = 4.35$, $p < 0.01$; all other coefficients were smaller than 0.1 ($r < 0.1$). When friendship groups are seen to be based on common socialization, they are seen to be more agentic, perhaps because they are seen to be likely to share the same goals and ambitions.

Discussion

Generally, the individual seems to be perceived to be more entitative than groups in the eight cultures examined in this study. When perceived entitativity is construed in terms of psychological essentialism, individuals were clearly perceived to be more entitative than the other social groups. In particular, in all cultures we examined, individuals' characteristics were perceived to be more consistent between two observations (consistency) and more difficult to change (unalterability) than the characteristics of families, friendship groups, and societies. Nevertheless, as for entitativity as agency, the general pattern of greater perceived entitativity for the individual relative to groups held for English-speaking and continental European cultures, but not for East Asian cultures. Replicating the findings by Menon et al. (1999), participants from East Asian cultures saw a similar level of agency in individuals and other social targets such as families, friendship groups, and societies.

Culture also played some role in moderating the perceived essentialism of social targets. Generally in line with the weak thesis, although the individual was seen to have greater perceived consistency than the group targets in all cultures, this tendency was strongest in continental European cultures followed by English-speaking cultures and East Asian cultures. With regard to perceived agency, the individual was most naturally attributed mental states such as thoughts, wants, and intentions in English-speaking cultures, followed by continental European cultures, and then by East Asian cultures. Nonetheless, as for perceived unalterability, culture did not exhibit a moderating effect. Still, it is interesting to point out that the general pattern did not support the strong thesis.

It is noteworthy that the three aspects of perceived entitativity, perceived consistency, unalterability, and agency, appear to be largely independent of each other. These variables were only weakly correlated with each other (around 0.1), and target, in conjunction with culture, had different patterns of effects on them. Family was often seen as more consistent than the other groups, so much so that it was sometimes regarded as consistent as the individual. Family was, however, no different from the other groups with regard to perceived unalterability. Finally, family as well as friendship groups were seen to be more agentic than society, and sometimes as agentic as the individual. This may mean that perceived entitativity is not a coherent unitary psychological phenomenon, but a collection of diverse attributes of the psychological meaningfulness of a social entity. As Yzerbyt, Judd, et al. (2004) noted, these concepts may be regarded as non-redundant, but conceptually related aspects of group perceptions. The explication of the theoretical links among them is one of the numerous tasks left for future research.

Culture and Entitativity

That the individual is essentialized more than groups in our study implies that the individual may be perceived to be an existence deeply rooted in nature in a number of cultures. That this is so in eight

cultures is hardly a proof for universality and the fact that the samples were all university students does point to the need for expanding the research into non-university populations. Nonetheless, the results go some way towards establishing the universality of the phenomenological primacy of the individual over the collective. In a way, the present finding lends some support to a claim made by Spiro (1993), a doyen of psychological anthropology. In his criticism of what he saw as an over-drawn cultural contrast between individualism and collectivism, and independent and interdependent self-construal, he remarked that in all cultures, people have some sense of the individual. Geertz (1984) also suggested that 'some conception of what a human individual is . . . is, so far as I can see, universal (p. 126).' His well-known characterization of the Western conception of the person as a 'bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole' (Geertz, 1984, p. 126) was meant to be a cultural interpretation of this universal human individual. As Markus and Kitayama (1991) noted, peoples around the world are likely to regard the individual person's body as a focal object. The finding may reflect that embodiment is a universal feature of the human cognition.

And, Geertz's claim may indeed be right. According to him, the conception of the person as 'a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment, and action organized into a distinctive whole' (Geertz, 1984, p. 126), or an agentic being, may be a 'peculiar notion among world's cultures' (Geertz, 1984, p. 126). Our data suggest that, in five of the Western cultures, agency is particularly apportioned to the individual, but not so much to groups. In three East Asian cultures, however, agency is not a property attributed uniquely to the individual person, but equally to persons and groups. The idea that the individual is not the sole locus of agency in East Asia is consistent with the results of the agentic self. In addition to the positive correlation of perceived agency with the agentic self measure, which provides some validation, East Asians regarded themselves as less agentic than their Western counterparts (also see Kashima et al., 1995; Oyserman et al., 2002).

Causal Beliefs and Entitativity

Some folk theories about the causal antecedents of the person and group characteristics appear to be related to the perceived entitativity. In particular, as Martin and Parker (1995) pointed out, folk theories that biological factors determine the essence of social beings seem to be one of the most important. Of the seven causal factors we examined (biology, socialization, economics, education, natural environment, social environment, and relationships), biological causal belief correlated with both measures of psychological essentialism: perceived consistency and unalterability. Generally, those who believe that biological factors determine the characteristics of social beings tend to essentialize them. Haslam et al. (2000, 2002) too found that a belief in a biological basis of social categories is an aspect of essentialism in the US. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that there may be some cultural variability in this regard. The correlation between biological causal belief and perceived consistency was greatest in the USA, and was not significant in some other cultures including the other English-speaking cultures (i.e. Australia, the UK).

Education causal belief also correlated positively with perceived consistency of the individual, family, and friendship group, but negatively with that of society. In other words, those who believe that education can determine the essence of the individuals and small intimacy groups such as family and friendship groups seem to think these social entities are more homogeneous. However, greater emphasis on education as a determinant of the societal essence seems to lead to greater perceived heterogeneity within society. One possible explanation of this is that education within a society may be seen to produce more and less educated groups, and this may lead to a stratification and thus greater heterogeneity. Alternatively, education may be seen to provide people with opportunities to develop

their individual potentials, and to lead to greater variation in their activities and talents. Although this finding needs to be further examined in future research, it implies that people may have sophisticated causal theories about different social targets, and investigation of these implicit theories may provide further insight into the perception of entitativity.

Methodological Consideration

It is important to examine some methodological rival hypotheses before accepting the above conclusions. First of all, might the results be due to some problems of the measures used? The measures of perceived entitativity, that is, perceived consistency, unalterability, and agency, seem to have sufficient face validity. Perceived consistency is gauged by a judgment of likelihood that an observation can be inductively generalizable to another observation; unalterability is examined via a validated measure of entity theory; and agency is examined in terms of the meaningfulness of a sentence implying a target having internal states such as thoughts, desires, and intentions. If these measures are not culturally meaningful, they should exhibit low levels of reliability. However, with the exception of agency in Hong Kong and the entity theory in Korea, the measures showed adequate levels of internal coherence. Even if these results (internal state attribution in Hong Kong and unalterability in Korea) are discounted, the general pattern of results seems consistent enough to discount a possibility that the results are purely methodological artifacts. Nonetheless, some of the weaknesses of the measures should be recognized. First of all, the measures of perceived consistency and unalterability do not exhaust the entire spectrum of psychological essentialism. With regard to perceived consistency in particular, for a group target, we asked people to indicate the likelihood that members of a social category behave consistently with each other in different contexts. Had we asked them about behavioural consistency in the same context, perceived consistency may have been greater than we found in this study. Clearly, various other measures need to be developed to cover the full extent of the meaning of psychological essentialism.

In addition, a question may be raised about the agency measure, which used judgments about how 'odd' or 'normal' a sentence sounded which attributed an internal mental state to a social target. Although this judgment is based on people's judgment of linguistic adequacy, it is not about their knowledge of syntax. Clearly, all the sentences used were syntactically correct. Our reasoning was that when a syntactically correct sentence about a social target is evaluated as odd, it implies that the semantics (or meaning) implied by the sentence does not seem consistent with the mental representation of the social target. The observation that this measure yielded the expected pattern in the English-speaking and continental European cultures in three different languages speaks to the validity of this measure. The finding that this measure showed no difference between the individual and groups in three East Asian cultures that use three different languages seems reasonable evidence for similar levels of agency of individuals and groups in East Asia. Nonetheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that these results may reflect linguistic practice more than social ontology. In future research, it is important to use a variety of perceived agency measures.

Could the results be explained as methodological artifacts associated with the use of Likert-type scales? It is well known that different cultural groups could use response scales differently, and for this reason, cross-cultural differences in mean levels are difficult to interpret in the absence of a theoretical framework such as individualism and collectivism. However, in this study, all the relevant comparisons were made across targets within each culture. Therefore, cultural differences in the use of Likert-type scales should not affect the results of this analysis. Furthermore, to draw an inference about the role of culture in differential perceptions of entitativity about individuals and groups, a culture \times target interaction effect was most critical. To the extent that the measures used are valid

within each culture, the interaction effect due to culture and target should be interpretable even if there are cultural differences in the use of Likert-type scales. The only exception to this general point is the use of the self-concept measures. However, as noted earlier, they were used to check to see whether the present samples indeed differed along individualism. The results were consistent with the theoretical expectation. An additional analysis using within-subject standardized responses also showed the same pattern. The results seem to justify the assumption of the present study, that is, English-speaking and continental European cultures are more individualist than East Asian cultures.

It is interesting to point out that when effects of causal beliefs were controlled, culture main effects on essentialism became non-significant suggesting that cultural differences in essentialism are explained by cultural differences in causal beliefs. However, culture x target interaction effects did not disappear even when causal beliefs were controlled for, implying that cultures differ in the extent to which the individual is essentialized relative to groups.

Individualism and Collectivism

The present findings have some implications for the concepts of individualism and collectivism. In the present study, individualism and collectivism were called on to explain cultural differences in the extent to which the individual was perceived to be more entitative than social groups. Furthermore, if individualism is regarded as a worldview that distinguishes the individual from other social groups, then the individualism of English-speaking cultures and that of continental European cultures seem to be subtly different from each other in that the English-speaking version of individualism places more emphasis on the agency of the individual than the continental European version. It is interesting to note that 'collectivism' in East Asia was not a worldview that regards social groups as more entitative than individuals. Rather, 'collectivism' of East Asia turned out to be a lesser degree of differentiation between the individual and social groups in perceived entitativity, especially, in perceived agency.

This raises an intriguing possibility that individualism may be regarded as a worldview that treats the individual person as a special kind of object, which emerged in Western Europe and began to spread in other parts of the world, and that the so-called 'collectivism' of East Asia may be better regarded as a lesser degree of individualism, rather than its conceptual opposite as an emphasis on groups. This interpretation is consistent with Oyserman et al.'s (2002) finding that some East Asian cultures (Japan, Korea) did not differ from the USA in collectivism, though the USA was still higher in individualism than the East Asian cultures. Nevertheless, it should be noted that East Asians may attribute greater agency to task-oriented groups such as work groups and companies than to individuals (Chiu et al., 2000; Menon et al., 1999). It is clearly necessary to examine task groups as well as intimacy groups before a strong conclusion about the nature of collectivism may be drawn.

Concluding Comments

In the end, are human individuals universally seen to be more real entities or more entitative than social groups? If construed in terms of psychological essentialism, individuals are seen to be more real than groups at least in the eight different cultures studied in this research despite some cross-cultural variability in degree. People appear to perceive essence-like properties and dispositions in a human individual more than in social groups. However, construed in terms of agency, our research suggests that human individuals are not universally perceived to be more agentic than groups. In the current study, the individual was conferred a greater degree of agency than many social groups in the West (despite some exceptions), but this was not the case in East Asia. The East Asian cultural ontology

appears to confer an equal level of agency to social entities whether they are individuals or groups. There may be a strong element in the Western cultural ontology that regards the individual as a social entity with the unique property of intentionality and agency.

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