

DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF MODESTY EXPRESSIONS BY EAST ASIANS AND
EUROPEAN AMERICANS IN HAWAII

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Abstract

This study contends that different expressions of modesty can be perceived differently by people from different cultures. This study looked at how (a) self-denigration, (b) other-enhancement, and (c) combination of the two are evaluated differently by individuals in different cultures particularly in East Asia (China, Japan, and Korea) and Western cultures. It was hypothesized that self-denigration will be perceived more favorably by East Asians than Westerners. It was also hypothesized that while other-enhancement will be perceived more favorably than self-denigration in both cultures, Westerners will perceive it less positively when it is used in combination with self-denigration. The hypotheses were tested with European American and Korean participants recruited in Hawaii. Overall, the predicted cultural differences were not found. However, the result of the study suggests that certain expression of modesty is more positively perceived than others. The study found that individuals in both cultures rated other-enhancement most positively, which was followed by combination and self-denigration. As predicted, the evaluation of other-enhancement was undermined when it is used in combination with self-denigration. Limitations and future directions are discussed.

Keywords: expressions of modesty, East Asia, West

Different Perceptions of Modesty in the East and West

Modesty, the tendency to downplay one's favorable traits in public, has been considered by many as largely East Asian phenomena (Akimoto & Sanbonmatsu, 1999; Cai, Sedikides, Lowell Gaertner, Wang, Carvallo, Xu, O'Mara, & Jackson, 2011; Heine Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Researchers have suggested that there is a social pressure in East Asian cultures that stresses the importance of deemphasizing one's success in public (Heine et al., 1999; Kurman & Sriram, 2002). Westerners, on the other hand, are thought to be more concerned about presenting themselves positively in front of others and less about being modest (Kim, Kim, Kam, & Shin, 2003). However, there is evidence that modesty is a valued social norm in the West (Gregg, Hart, Sedikides, & Kumashiro, 2008). Linguists have also suggested that modesty is one of the conversational constraints that governs people's speech act in the West (Leech, 2007).

Thus, it appears that at least some concern for modesty is universal. However, modesty can be expressed differently in different cultures. For example, upon receiving a compliment, Westerners often avoid agreeing with the compliment and instead respond by returning the compliment (e.g., "Oh, you are so kind.") or responding in disbelief (e.g., "Do you think so?") (Tang and Zhang, 2009). On the other hand, East Asians often express modesty by overtly rejecting the compliment (e.g., "No, it's not true."). If modesty is expressed differently in different cultures, individuals' perceptions of different expressions of modesty may also be different. For example, a respondent's rejection to a compliment (as above) could be considered an expression of modesty by East Asians, but not by Westerners. This thesis aims to examine how different expressions of modesty are perceived differently in different cultures.

Cultural Differences: Self-construal and Self-enhancement Motive

Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested that individuals conceptualize the self differently across different cultures. The two self-construals introduced by Markus and Kitayama are *independent* and *interdependent* construals. In Western cultures, it is believed that each individual organizes their thoughts and behaviors based on their unique internal attributes such as individual desire, preference, or ability, and that these remain constant across situations. In these cultures, the goal of the self is to gain independence and distinction from others. This construal of self is referred to as an *independent construal* of self. On the other hand, in East Asia, individuals are proposed to have *interdependent construal* of self, meaning they see themselves closely connected with others as part of a larger collective group (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). Individuals with interdependent construal of self also have internal attributes or tendencies, but these attributes are controlled and adjusted depending on social contexts or perceived thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others. In these cultures, the goal of the self is to maintain connectedness to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Some researchers have argued that different self-construals lead to different consequences in motivation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Heine & Yuki, 2009). They have suggested that interdependent East Asians are less motivated to make favorable self-evaluations than independent Westerners. Indeed, researchers have repeatedly found support for the argument. (Heine et al., 1999; Heine & Yuki, 2009; Falk, Heine, Yuki, & Takemura, 2009). For example, Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, and Hankin (2004) conducted a meta-analysis, and found that there are significant differences in self-serving bias between cultures. Self-serving bias refers to the tendency of individuals to attribute positive events to themselves while attributing negative events to external factors. Their meta-analysis revealed that individuals from the U.S. and other Western cultures (i.e., Canada, Australia, Britain New Zealand, and Western Europe) showed a

significantly larger self-serving bias than East Asians. They also found that East Asians displayed markedly low self-serving bias. Additionally, Heine and Lehman (1999) found that Japanese people reported a larger discrepancy between self-assessments and ideal self-assessments than Canadians. While Canadians evaluated the current self to be close to their ideal self, Japanese evaluated their current self to be far away from their ideal self. The researchers interpreted the findings as East Asians having low need for positive self-regard and/or a low self-enhancement motive.

Scholars who believe self-enhancement motive is far weaker for East Asians argue that self-enhancement may not be beneficial for interdependent selves, as showing self-serving bias can have negative consequences on maintaining harmonious relationships (Heine & Buchtel, 2007). Furthermore, with a stronger desire to attend to the standards of others, interdependent individuals are thought to be more self-critical, and thus constrained in their ability to view the self positively (Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, Takata, Ied, Leung, & Matsumoto, 2001).

Others, however, argued that the need for positive self-regard is universal (Kurman, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, and Toguchi, 2003; Cai, Wu, & Brown, 2009). They have suggested that East Asians are also motivated to evaluate themselves positively, but that they deemphasize their positive qualities or accomplishments due to the dominant cultural norm of modesty (Kim, Chiu, Peng, Cai, & Tov, 2010). Modesty refers to the tendency to deemphasize one's positive traits in front of others (Cialdini, Wosinska, Dabul, Whetstone-Dion, & Heszen, 1998). Kim et al. (2010), for example, argued that East Asians would engage in self-enhancing behaviors if a modesty norm was not salient. They conducted a study where they had Chinese and European American participants take a set of tests. After the first test, they gave all participants positive feedback and told them they scored above average. They then asked participants to estimate how they would do

on a similar test they were about to take in both private and public settings. They found that Chinese participants made more favorable estimates in the private condition than in the public condition, whereas European Americans made favorable estimates in both conditions. They also found that Chinese participants rated themselves more favorably when questions were formed in a way that was not overtly positive (e.g., “I am not not intelligent,” rather than “I am intelligent”)—in other words, in ways that would not be seen as immodest.

Modesty in East Asia

Modesty has been considered by many as largely East Asian phenomenon (Cai et al., 2011; Heine et al., 1999; Heine, 2005). Researchers have suggested that there is a social pressure in East Asian cultures that stresses the importance of deemphasizing one’s success in public (Kurman & Sriram, 2002; Heine et al., 1999). Cai et al. (2011), for example, found that modesty can be a source of self-esteem for East Asians. The researchers found that perceiving oneself as a modest person induces high implicit self-esteem among Chinese people, but not among U.S. participants. In a study conducted with Chinese and U.S. participants, the authors found that modesty was negatively associated with explicit self-esteem in both cultures, but positively related with implicit self-esteem only among Chinese participants. They also found that Chinese participants reported lower implicit self-esteem when they were instructed to adopt a persona of immodest person. Chinese participants showed higher implicit self-esteem in a modest persona condition. The implicit self-esteem of U.S. participants, on the other hand, varied little across different modesty conditions. The authors suggested that the expression of modesty seems to be self-enhancing for Chinese participants. By adopting a modest disposition highly emphasized in East Asian culture at an explicit level, Chinese, paradoxically, would enhance their self-esteem at an implicit level.

However, the authors argued, the expression of modesty would not enhance implicit self-esteem in the West as modesty is not as emphasized as a cultural norm.

Similarly, Bond, Leung, and Wan (1982) posited that the norm of modesty would influence how East Asians evaluate others as they describe their performance. They argued that in East Asia, where modesty exerts strong influence on people's behavior, those who self-efface and attribute their success to luck or other's help will be liked more than those who attribute it to one's internal factors such as ability. They indeed found that Chinese participants rated self-effacing individuals more likable than self-enhancing individuals. Muramoto, Yamaguchi, and Kim (2009) also found that East Asians rated those who attributed their success to luck more positively than those who attributed it to their own ability. With a strong cultural emphasis placed on modesty, East Asians seem to perceive those who behave in modest way more favorably than those who do not.

Modesty in the West

Although modesty is often considered to be largely East Asian phenomenon, it is also a valued, everyday social phenomenon in the West (Gregg et al., 2008). Studies have shown that individuals in Western cultures who overtly promote the self are not positively regarded. Kim et al., (2003), for example, hypothesized that Westerners with independent self-construal would perceive those who engage in overt self-enhancement, in this case, bragging presentation, more likeable than would East Asians. However, the study found that both Westerners and East Asians rated the bragging presentation least likable. Western individuals rated the bragging presentation even less positively than they rated a negative presentation which involved expression of embarrassment. The study also found that Westerners rated the individual who attributed their success to the effort as the most likable. On the other hand, East Asians rated the individual who downplayed their success by expressing embarrassment as the most likable.

In another study conducted with U.S. participants, Tetlock (1980) found that a teacher who attributed his success to a student and failure to himself was evaluated more positively than a teacher who did the opposite. In the study, participants read a statement describing an experiment where a school teacher was invited to the lab and asked to teach an 11-year-old student 25 commonly mistaken words. The student took a test at the end of the teaching, and the teacher received either failure or success test report. In each failure and success condition, participants were put into one of 5 different conditions that varied on how the teacher described the result of the teaching task (no attribution, highly defensive attribution, moderately defensive attribution, highly counter-defensive attribution, moderately counter-defensive attribution). In the defensive attribution condition, the teacher attributed the success of the student to themselves, but denied responsibility for failure. In the counter-defensive condition, the teacher claimed responsibility for student's failure, and attributed the success to the student. In the more defensive or counter-defensive condition, the teacher denied or accepted the responsibility or credit to a greater degree. After reading the statement, participants rated the teacher on competence, self-confidence, and social evaluation factors. Social evaluation factors included items such as likeability, sincerity, and creativity. The result showed that participants rated the moderately counter-defensive teacher most favorably on all three factors. The participants in highly counter-defensive condition also rated the teacher highly on competence, but rated the teacher less positively on self-confidence and social evaluation factors. Tetlock (1980) suggested that participants may have perceived the highly counter-defensive teacher to be not honest or sincere in their attributions. These findings suggest that, although extreme modesty can have people question the sincerity of the speaker, Westerners also value modesty and evaluate those who enhance others in describing success more positively than those who seek to enhance the self (particularly at others' expense).

In order to understand how Westerners construe modesty, Gregg et al. (2008) had U.S. and U.K. participants to list traits they believe characterize a modest person. Then the researchers measured the frequency and the priority of the exemplars generated by the participants. The result showed that most of the traits that are perceived to be prototypical of a modest person were positive (e.g., humble, solicitous, not boastful, honest, likeable, confident etc.), and only a few appeared to be negative (e.g., shy, attention avoiding, self-effacing, and insecure). They confirmed the validity of the traits through impression formation task in which they gave participants different mix of exemplars and asked them to rate the perceived degree of modesty. The results supported their classification of traits, with traits from the central categories yielding higher modesty ratings than the traits from the peripheral categories, and the traits in the peripheral categories yielding higher ratings than marginal category traits. The researchers concluded that modesty is a more positively regarded social value in the West than is commonly believed.

Modesty as a Politeness Phenomenon

Another way to look at modesty is to conceptualize it as an expression of politeness. Linguists and psycholinguists have studied modesty as a politeness phenomenon. In this work, they generally assume that there are set of politeness principles that govern people's speech acts, and have sought to compare them across cultures or to find universal features of politeness in language (Meier, 1995). Introducing politeness theory in 1978, Brown and Levinson posited that there are some general mechanisms that govern language use of expressing politeness (O'Driscoll, 2007). They argued that the universal function of politeness is to save face. According to Goffman (1967, as cited by Gu, 1990), face can be defined as positive social value individuals claim for themselves during a particular contact. Brown and Levinson understood face as a part of self-worth that is operative in interaction (O'Driscoll, 2007). They claimed that everyone has face needs, that

the need for maintaining one's as well as interlocutor's face, and the social pressure to attend to it is universal (Meier, 1995). They argued that people have two face wants: negative face want and positive face want. Negative face want refers to the desire to be unimpeded during the interaction, and positive face want refers to the desire to for approval. Individuals engage in negative or positive politeness strategies to save addressee's face in conversations. While negative strategies involve the expression of restraint and formality, positive strategies can be carried out through the expression of intimacy and familiarity. Brown and Levinson's idea of universality of politeness in language use had led many researchers attempt to identify and quantify politeness, looking for certain syntactic constructions or lexical items that constitute (universal) politeness.

Leech (1983, cited by Gu, 1990), however, argued for relative politeness. He believed that the shared norm for politeness can be different depending on the context. He argued that politeness is a goal-oriented behavior that individuals display to avoid communicative offense. He posited that there are six maxims in the principle of politeness: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy (Leech, 2007). Each maxim presents constraints and typical speech-act types. The modesty maxim, he said, encourages that speakers place a low value on one's own qualities in verbal expressions. For example, in the West, instead of agreeing with a compliment upon receiving one, individuals may return the compliment ("*Gee, It's nice of you to say that*"), thank the complimenter ("*Thank you. It's nice of you to say that, but...*") or respond in disbelief ("*Oh, do you really think so?*"). However, in East Asian societies, individuals display modesty by disagreeing with a compliment. For example, when complimented on a success on recent exam ("*You did really well!*"), East Asians may respond with denial ("*No, no. They don't mean much...*"). He also cited luck attribution ("*I was lucky enough to win the first prize*") as part of the

modesty maxim, but said it could be perceived less favorably by East Asians than Westerners, as it can sound boastful.

Based on Leech's principle of politeness, Gu (1990) looked at Chinese language use and proposed a set of politeness maxims. Concerning modesty, he proposed self-denigration maxim which consists of two components of (a) self-denigration and (b) other-elevation. For example, when introducing each other, a Chinese person would ask, "What is your precious surname?" to elevate the other, and give his name by saying "My worthless surname is Zhang" to denigrate the self. Denigrating others would be considered impolite while elevating the self would be considered arrogant. In a study that compared compliment responses of Australian and Chinese participants, Tang and Zhang (2009) found that Chinese participants were more likely than Australians to reject ("*It's not, Don't say so*") or evade ("*It's nothing, It wasn't hard*") compliments than to accept them ("*Thanks, I am glad you think so*"). Australians, on the other hand, mostly accepted compliments. Even when accepting a compliment, Chinese participants preferred indirect expressions, combining acceptance with evading ("*Thank you. Actually, I was very nervous.*") or rejecting ("*Not really. You can do it very well, too.*") expressions. The authors argued that while rejecting or evading compliments can be considered hypocritical or insulting by Australians, they are considered expressions of modesty among Chinese people.

Haugh (2004) suggested that Japanese and English speakers conceptualize politeness differently. He argued that while English speakers' understanding of politeness is other-oriented (showing consideration of others' feelings), Japanese understanding of politeness is more self-oriented (concerned with how modest oneself behaves in front of others). He argued that such a difference would lead English and Japanese speakers respond differently to compliment. While

English speakers are more likely to thank the other to show respect for the kindness, Japanese speakers might downplay their own accomplishment in an attempt to show modesty.

Expressions of Modesty

Expressions of modesty have been operationalized differently by different researchers. For example, researchers who studied attribution practices of both East Asians and Westerners have viewed self-effacement, the tendency to attribute success to external factors such as luck and other's help, as an expression of modesty (Bond et al., 1982; Muramoto et al., 2009; Hareli & Weiner, 2000). Some have also viewed effort-attributions as an expression of modesty (Kitayama, Tkagi & Matsumoto, 1995, as cited by Kim et al., 2003), but others have argued that effort-attributions are self-enhancing, as they attribute one's success to an internal factor (Muramoto et al., 2009). Linguists, who have conceptualized modesty as a part of politeness maxim, have focused on self-denigration and/or other-enhancement as expressions of modesty. Leech (2007), for example, viewed self-denigration as an expression of modesty while Gu (1990) considered both self-denigration and other-enhancement both as expressions of modesty.

The goal of this study is to understand how different expressions of modesty are perceived differently by individuals in different cultures. Although modesty is a valued social norm in both East Asian and Western cultures, the way it is construed by individuals can be different across different cultures. Of different forms that expressions of modesty can take, this study will focus on two: self-denigration and other-enhancement. These were chosen because they are expected to elicit different patterns of perceptions: given past research findings, it is anticipated that self-denigration is likely to be perceived positively in East Asia but not in the West, and other-enhancement is likely to be perceived positively in both cultures. In addition to looking at how

each of these forms is perceived alone, this study will also look at how the combination of these two forms is perceived.

Self-denigration

Leech (2007) defined self-devaluation, or self-denigration, as a verbal expression that places low value on the self. Leech (2007) suggested that in the West, self-denigration would be practiced by returning the compliment or responding in disbelief, but East Asians would practice it by disagreeing with a compliment. Tang and Zhang (2009) also found that Chinese participants often responded to a compliment with rejection, while Australians are more likely to accept or return the compliment. In this study, self-denigration will be operationalized as rejection of a compliment.

With independent self-construal that places high value on achieving distinctiveness and expressing one's thoughts clearly to others, Westerners might understand self-denigrating remarks at face value. This could result in their viewing the speaker as incompetent. A study conducted by Schlenker and Leary (1982) with U.S. students also found that individuals who predicted their own performance to be inferior were less liked than those who predicted successful performance (as cited by Akimoto & Sanbonmatsu, 1999). East Asians, however, might respond to self-denigrating remark differently, as it is a commonly used expression of modesty in East Asian cultures (Gu, 1990; Leech, 2007). Therefore, East Asians would understand it as an expression of modesty, and would be less likely to take it at face value. However, they may also perceive the speaker less honest than Westerners, as they recognize the speaker does not really mean what he or she says. Despite this, because they understand self-denigration as an expression of modesty, they would evaluate the speaker more favorably in terms of likability and competence. Therefore, in this study, it is hypothesized that self-denigration will be evaluated more favorably by East Asians than

Westerners in terms of likability and competence. East Asians, however, will evaluate it to be less honest than Westerners.

H1: Self-denigrating individuals will be evaluated as (a) more likable and competent, but (b) less honest by East Asians than by Westerners.

Other-enhancement

As a self-effacing expression that attributes one's success to external factors, other-enhancement refers to the expression that elevates others (Bon et al., 1982). Chen, Bond, Chan, Tang, and Buchtel (2009) found other-enhancement to be positively related to interdependent self-construal of East Asians who have high concern for relational harmony. However, evidence suggests that other-enhancement is also positively perceived by Westerners. Tetlock (1980), for example, found that Westerners perceived the teachers who attributed their success to students more likable and competent. Gregg et al. (2008) also suggested that modest individuals are perceived to be likable, considerate, and honest in the West. Therefore, it is hypothesized in this study that individuals who seek to enhance others upon receiving compliment would be perceived more positively than self-denigrating individual by both East Asians and Westerners. East Asians will also evaluate other-enhancing individual more favorably than self-denigrating individual as it can be seen benefiting the group as opposed to the self, which is considered important in collectivistic cultures.

H2: Other-enhancing individuals will be evaluated more positively than self-denigrating individuals by both East Asians and Westerners.

However, Westerners are expected to perceive other-enhancement less favorably if used together with self-denigration than when it is used alone. Tetlock (1980) pointed out that teachers who attributed their success to students in a highly counter-defensive way, denying all the credit

or responsibility, were evaluated less favorably (by Western participants) than those who made moderately counter-defensive attribution. The researcher suggested that those who denied all the credit could have been perceived not completely honest in their remarks. However, this interpretation emphasizes taking remarks at face value.

If East Asians understand both self-denigration and other-enhancement as (positively valued) expressions of modesty, using both types of expression in combination should not produce a different effect than using each one alone. In East Asian culture, self-denigration is often used in combination with other-enhancement. Gu (1990), who studied the language use of Chinese people, for example, proposed self-denigration maxim that consists of (a) self-denigration and (b) other-enhancement. Therefore, it is hypothesized that when other-enhancement is used in combination with self-denigration, Westerners would evaluate it less favorably than other enhancement alone, and less favorably than East Asians in terms of likability, competence, and honesty.

H3: Individuals who use other-enhancement together with self-denigration will be evaluated less favorably by Westerners than by East Asians.

H4: Westerners will evaluate those who use other-enhancement together with self-denigration less favorably than those who use only other-enhancement.

Method

Participants

The study was conducted with 68 participants. Thirty four European American students were recruited from an online participant pool and another 34 East Asian adults over the age of 18 were recruited both via email and face-to-face. In order to make sure that the East Asian participants were not only ethnically East Asians, but are from the East Asian cultural

background, those who had school education throughout high school in East Asian countries were considered East Asians. This criterion was chosen because evidence suggests that internalization of modesty starts from early age and becomes stronger with age. Yoshida, Kojo, and Kaku (1982, as cited by Genyue, Heyman, and Lee, 2011), for example, found that Japanese children between 7 to 11 years old evaluated themselves more positively in private condition than in public condition. Lee, Cameron, Xu, Fu, and Board (1997) also found that Chinese children between the age 7 and 11 evaluated a child who denied credit for good deeds more favorably than a child who didn't. They also found that the tendency to evaluate the one who behaves modestly increased with age.

All the East Asians recruited in this study were Koreans. Of Korean participants, those who did not complete one or more of their education from elementary to high school outside Korea were excluded. Of the Western participants, only those who identified themselves as ethnically European American were included in the analysis. In the end, 30 Koreans and 23 Westerners were included in the analysis. Of Korean participants, 33.3% were male and 66.7% were female. The mean age of Korean participants was 24.47 years ($SD=5.06$). Of Western Participants, 30.4% were male and 69.6% were female. The mean age of Western participants was 20.65 years ($SD=3.77$). All the participants will participate in the study on voluntary basis.

Design and Procedure

The study was 2 (Culture: East Asia, U.S.) x 3 (expression of modesty: self-denigration, other-enhancement, combination) mixed factorial design. Participants from each culture (East Asian, Western) were provided with three dialogues and answered a set of questions following each dialogue. Each dialogue was created in two versions (see Appendix A) to prevent repeating phrases that are used in *self-denigration* and *other-enhancement* (alone) conditions in the *self-*

denigration + other-enhancement condition. One of the two versions of dialogues was randomly assigned to each participant. Before being given the dialogues to read, participants were first introduced to a following vignette explaining the situation in which the dialogue takes place:

A UH Manoa debate team won the first place in the recent debate competition. In each debate session, each member had to speak a minimum of 5 minutes to ensure equal participation from all team members. A classmate named Kate heard the news and congratulated each one of them as she ran into them at the campus. The following dialogues were the conversation between her and each individual member. They were not with other team members when the dialogue took place.

Next, participants were given three dialogues before answering questionnaire for each respondent of three dialogues . After answering questionnaire for dialogues, participants answered modesty and self-construal questionnaire. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

Measures

Likability. The likability measure was adapted from Chen and Jing (2012)'s likeability scale. Participants evaluated how *likeable, pleasant, nice, agreeable, sociable, and friendly* each respondent in the dialogues is with 9-point Likert scale (6 items, 1=not at all, 9= extremely). Ratings of the 6 items were averaged to create a composite likability scale. Table 1 has the reliability scores for each scale.

Competence. Measure for perceived competence was adapted from Chen and Jing (2012)'s competence scale. Participants evaluated how *intelligent, capable, competent, knowledgeable, accomplished, and skillful* each respondent on the dialogues is with 9-point Likert scale (1=not at

all, 9= extremely). Ratings of the 6 items were averaged to create a composite Competence scale. Table 1 has the reliability scores for each scale.

Honesty. Measure for perceived honesty was adapted from Burgoon and Hale (1987)'s Relational Communication Scale. Participants evaluated how honest the respondent is perceived to be on a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree). Two items were included in the measure (*He/she was honest in communicating, He/she was not honest in communication*). However, because the reliability was not consistently high (see Table 1), only one item (*He/she was honest in communicating*) was used in the analysis reported.

Modesty. To evaluate the importance of modesty to participants, 20 items from Modest Response Scale of Whetstone, Okun, and Cialdini (1992, cited by Tassell, 2004) were used. Participants evaluated how desirable modesty is as a social norm (e.g., "*I believe it's impolite to talk excessively about one's achievement, even if they are outstanding*") and their tendency to behave modestly (e.g., "*If I've played a big role in bringing about some kind of success, I don't feel reluctant telling people about it*") on a 7-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree, $\alpha = .88$). Mean score for Koreans and Westerners were 3.79 ($SD = .78$) and 4.06 ($SD = .87$) respectively.

Self-construals. To evaluate self-construal of participants, Kim and Leung's (1997) independent self-construal scale (15 items, 1 strongly agree, 5 strongly disagree, $\alpha = .88$) and interdependent self-construal scale (14 items, 1 strongly agree, 5 strongly disagree, $\alpha = .73$) were used. The mean independent self-construal for Koreans and Westerners were 3.51 ($SD = .54$) and 3.96 ($SD = .54$) respectively. For interdependent self-construal, the mean scores for Koreans and Westerners were 3.29 ($SD = .38$) and 3.39 ($SD = .54$) respectively.

Results

To test hypotheses 1 and 2, mixed ANOVA was conducted with culture (Western/East Asian) and dialogue (two versions) as between-subject factors, and types of response (self-denigration, other-enhancement, combination) as a within-subject factor. Hypothesis 1 stated that self-denigrating individuals will be evaluated as (a) more likable and competent, but (b) less honest by East Asians than by Westerners. No significant cultural difference was found for likability. Westerners found the self-denigrating individual slightly more likable ($M = 5.89, SD = 1.38$) than Koreans ($M = 5.42, SD = 1.78$), but this difference was not significant, $F(1, 49) = .60, p = .444, \eta_p^2 = 0.12$. However, an unexpected three-way interaction was found among dialogue, culture, and types of response $F(2, 98) = 3.34, p = .039, \eta_p^2 = 0.064$ with Koreans rating dialogue version 1 more likable ($M = 6.18, SD = 1.40$) than Westerners ($M = 5.22, SD = 1.09$), but Westerners rating dialogue version 2 more likable ($M = 6.41, SD = 1.39$) than Koreans ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.84$) (see Figure 1.1, Figure 1.2). No significant difference was found for competence. As in likability, Koreans rated self-denigrating individual slightly more competent ($M = 5.53, SD = 1.86$) than Westerners ($M = 5.09, SD = 1.21$), but the main effect of culture was not significant, $F(1, 49) = .04, p = .841, \eta_p^2 = 0.001$ (see Figure 2). No significance difference was found for honesty. Koreans rated the self-denigrating individual to be slightly less honest ($M = 3.77, SD = 1.76$) than Westerners ($M = 4.22, SD = 1.78$), but the main effect of culture was not significant, $F(1, 49) = 2.30, p = .136, \eta_p^2 = 0.045$ (see Figure 3). Therefore, for likability, the hypothesis was supported only in version 2 dialogue, but not in version 1 dialogue. For competence and honesty, mean directions were in the direction predicted by the hypothesis 1, but not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2 stated that other-enhancing individuals will be evaluated more positively than self-denigrating individuals by both East Asians and Westerners. Hypothesis 2 was

supported. Both Koreans and Westerners rated other-enhancing individuals more likable, competent, and honest. Koreans rated other-enhancing individual more likable ($M = 7.47$, $SD = 1.32$) than self-denigrating individual ($M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.78$). Westerners also rated other-enhancing individual more likable ($M = 7.90$, $SD = .96$) than self-denigrating individual ($M = 5.89$, $SD = 1.38$). The main effect of response type (self-denigration, other-enhancement) for likability was significant, $F(1, 49) = 151.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.756$. For competence, the main within-subject effect of response type was also found, $F(1,49) = 58.01$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.542$, with both Koreans and Westerners rating other-enhancing individual more competent than self-denigrating individual. Koreans rated other-enhancing individual more competent ($M = 6.50$, $SD = 1.28$) than self-denigrating individual ($M = 5.52$, $SD = 1.87$), and Westerners also rated other-enhancing individual more competent ($M = 7.14$, $SD = 1.25$) than self-denigrating individual ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 1.21$). For honesty, a significant main effect of response type was found, $F(1, 49) = 32.22$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.397$ with both Koreans and Westerners rating other-enhancing individual more to be more honest ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.26$ for Koreans; $M = 5.61$ $SD = .988$ for Westerners) than self-denigrating individual ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 1.76$ for Koreans; $M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.83$ for Westerners).

Hypothesis 3 stated that individuals who use other-enhancement together with self-denigration will be evaluated less favorably by Westerners than by East Asians. To test this hypothesis, two between-subjects ANOVAs were performed with culture and dialogue as independent variables, and likability and competence as dependent variables. No significant cultural difference was found in terms of likability, competence, and honesty. Koreans rated the individual who use other-enhancement together with self-denigration slightly more likable ($M = 6.51$, $SD = 1.62$) and competent ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.69$) than did Westerners ($M = 6.47$, $SD = 1.66$

for likability; $M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.66$ for competence), but these differences were not significant. No interaction effect between culture and dialogue for likability, $F(1, 49) = .98$, $p = .328$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.020$, competence, $F(1, 49) = .03$, $p = .872$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.001$ or honesty $F(1, 49) = .01$, $p = .933$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.000$ was found. Therefore, hypothesis 3 was not supported.

Hypothesis 4 stated that Westerners would evaluate those who use other-enhancement together with self-denigration less favorably than those who use only other-enhancement. A mixed ANOVA was performed with dialogues as the between subjects factors, types of response as the within subjects factor, and likability and competence ratings as the outcome to test hypothesis 4. Westerners rated those who used the combination statement less likable ($M = 6.48$, $SD = 1.41$) and competent ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.69$) than other-enhancing individual ($M = 7.90$, $SD = .96$ for likability; $M = 7.14$, $SD = 1.25$ for competence). There was a significant main effect of response type for likability, $F(1, 21) = 18.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.473$, and competence, $F(1, 21) = 13.90$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.398$. Therefore, hypothesis 4 was supported.

Discussion

The present study looked at how different expressions of modesty are perceived by individuals in different cultures. In this study, members of Korean and US cultures were randomly given one of the two versions of dialogues in which a respondent gave different responses (self-denigration, other-enhancement, and combination) to a compliment. Overall, the result of the present study showed that the perceptions of different expressions of modesty do not differ significantly across cultures. However, the study showed that certain forms of modesty expressions are perceived more positively than others. Furthermore, even the same form of modesty expression can be perceived differently depending on the way it is worded. In other words, when it comes to modesty, how it is expressed matters.

The study found that certain forms of modesty expressions are perceived more positively than others. Consistent with predictions, and contrary to what previous research has suggested, the present study found that Western participants rated other-enhancing individual most likable and competent. Other-enhancement has often been considered to be a part of self-effacement, a modest behavior that attributes one's success to external factors as opposed to internal factors. Researchers have used luck-attribution or other-enhancement interchangeably to study modesty (see Bond et al., 1982; Muramoto et al., 2009, and Akimoto & Sanbonmatsu, 1999). Whether it is operationalized as luck-attribution or other-enhancement, many researchers have argued that self-effacing attempts at modesty are perceived more positively by East Asians than by Westerners. Chen et al. (2009) also suggested that use of other-enhancement is positively associated with interdependent self-construal. However, in this study, although Koreans showed significantly higher scores on interdependent self-construal than Westerners, Westerners perceived the other-enhancing individual to be likable and competent to a similar degree as Koreans. This suggests that other-enhancement is a positively regarded expression of modesty in both cultures.

This study also found that certain forms of modesty expressions are perceived less positively. Westerners rated self-denigrating individuals least positively, which was followed by combination statement where other-enhancement was used together with self-denigration. A similar result (which was not explicitly predicted) was also found with Korean participants. Thus, it seems that the use of a self-denigrating remark "dragged down" the evaluation of other-enhancement in combination statement. As the non-significant interaction effect of culture suggests, individuals in both cultures may have similar relative perceptions of different modesty expressions. Although a cultural difference was not found, the more negative ratings of a

combination expression (compared to other enhancement alone) suggests that certain modesty expressions (e.g., self-denigration) can undermine the evaluation of other positively perceived expressions of modesty (e.g., other enhancement).

In this study, an unexpected influence of wording was found with self-denigrating expression of modesty. Although the overall likability rating for self-denigrating individual was similar between cultures, an unexpected three-way interaction was found among culture, dialogue versions and response types. This suggests that the likability of self-denigrating individual may be influenced by how self-denigration is expressed. Koreans rated self-denigrating individual more likable than Westerners when the speaker said, “Oh, no, I didn’t do really well,” but less likable when the speaker said, “Oh, no, I messed it up.” Although an interpretation of the result should be made with caution since the sample sizes of both groups were relatively small, Westerners may have found the additional negation of “did not” to be a stronger expression of self-denigration than did Koreans. Koreans, on the other hand, could have found “messed it up” to imply that the speaker “messed it up” not just for oneself but for the entire team. The expression that implies undermining group success could have perceived less favorably by Koreans from collectivistic East Asian culture.

The present study hypothesized that Koreans would rate self-denigrating individuals more positively than Westerners. However, contrary to expectations, both Westerners and Koreans rated self-denigrating individual least positively. Three different interpretations are possible. First, in this study, Korean participants were international students who came to the US for higher-level education or language training. The fact that they chose to come to an individualistic culture to study may suggest that they have more independent self-construal than those who remained in their home country. Furthermore, the experience in a new culture that is

different from one's own may challenge one's existing view of the self and the world (Cross, 1995). As a result, one may be challenged to change or adjust one's behavior or beliefs to fit in with the host culture. Ward and Kennedy (2001) suggested that individuals residing in a different culture away from home make psychological and sociocultural adjustments relative to the host culture in order to fit in. It is possible that in this study, Korean participants have already started making adjustment into the US culture, which could have influenced their evaluation of self-denigrating individual to be less favorable than those who are in Korea would.

Second, Korean participants could have rated the self-denigrating individual least favorably because the survey was conducted in English. Han (1992) argued that development of linguistic competence in a target language is accompanied by increasing sociolinguistic understanding. She conducted a compliment response study with Korean students studying in the U.S either in Korean or English, and found a significant difference from participants' responses. When asked in Korean, 45 percent of the participants answered in rejection, while 20 percent accepted the compliment. Even those who accepted compliments all answered in downgrading their positive attributes rather than agreeing with the compliment. However, when asked in English by American students, 75 percent of them responded in acceptance, this time mostly by showing appreciation, and only 20 percent rejected the compliment by disagreeing with the compliment. The author found in the interview that the Korean participants believed that Americans prefer direct communication style and always accept compliment upon receiving them. The author suggested that such a sociolinguistic knowledge could have influenced their responses. In the present study, it is possible that the participants were influenced by similar sociolinguistic knowledge of English and thus rated the self-denigrating individual least positively.

A third possible interpretation would be that Korean's perceptions of self-denigrating modesty expressions may be changing due to Western influence. A recent quasi-longitudinal study done by Chen and Yang (2010) found a dramatic change in Chinese people's compliment responses. They replicated a compliment response study carried out by Chen (1993) in China, in which 95.73 percent of Chinese participants responded in rejection while only 1.03 percent of the participants accepted compliments. However, when Chen and Yang (2010) went back to the same region several years later to replicate the study, they found a dramatic change in people's response. Only 9.13 percent rejected compliments, and 62.6 percent of participants accepted compliments. Another 28.27 percent of the participants used an evading strategy by choosing to avoid direct response. The researchers suggested that it is possible that the increased language contact with the Western culture have influenced the language use of Chinese people. The result of the present study with Korean participants may be additional evidence for the influence of increased cultural contact on language use.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research has several limitations that should be acknowledged. One of the limitations was sample size that was relatively small due to low Caucasian participants in the online participant pool and difficulty locating Korean participants. Second, in the present study, the survey was only available in English. As discussed above, this raises the question as to whether the Korean participants may have been influenced by their sociolinguistic knowledge of English. Future studies could avoid the possible influence of sociolinguistic knowledge by providing participants with survey in their home language. Also with respect to Korean participants, there could have been a selection bias occurred from recruiting international students. The fact that they came to study in individualistic U.S. culture may suggest that they

have higher independent self-construal than those who are back home. Such a selection bias may be avoided in the future by recruiting East Asians participants in their home countries.

Furthermore, in this study, Western participants were recruited in Hawaii, which raises a possibility that they were more influenced by interdependent Asian culture than would be people in the mainland U.S. Hawaii has its unique culture as it has been heavily influenced by Polynesian, Asian and Western cultures. Kim et al. (2001) speculated that in terms of individualistic and collectivistic dimension, Hawaii may lie between Asian and U.S cultures. The study indeed found that individuals in Hawaii reported independent and interdependent self-construal that was between what was reported by individuals in Korea and mainland U.S. In order to have Western participants who are more representative of individualistic Western culture, future studies may benefit from recruiting participants from mainland U.S where Asian cultural influence is less significant.

Future research can further probe what role culture and language play when it comes to the use and perceptions of modesty expressions. Culture and language are closely related to one another. Languages have co-evolved with human culture by helping people encode and share their thoughts and experiences with one another. The relationship between language and culture has received great amount of scholarly attention (Chiu, 2011). Self-construal provides a useful framework to understand cultural differences in how individuals understand the self in relation to others. However, in this study, it is unclear how the cultural difference in self-construals influences individuals' perception of different modesty expressions in different cultures. For example, although Koreans showed higher interdependent self-construal than Western participants, they both perceived other-enhancing individuals likeable and competent to a similar degree.

Future research may benefit from expanding the research into exploring the use of compliment response in different communication media such as social networking sites (SNSs). SNSs have become a part of everyday lives for many people around the globe. Users of SNSs can present themselves and interact with others via features such as photographs and wall posts. Researchers have suggested that by providing users with various features to present the self, SNSs allow users to engage in strategic and selective self-presentation (Kim & Lee, 2011; Lee, Shim, Joo and Park, 2014; Yoo, 2012). For example, users may engage in positive self-presentation by selectively revealing socially desirable images of themselves. Positive self-presentation is likely to result in frequent compliment remarks made by others, which makes SNSs a useful communication medium to study compliment responses.

Conclusions

Although it is often believed that modesty is a more valued social norm in East Asia, the results of this study suggests that there are not major cultural differences in individuals' perception of different expressions of modesty. However, this study did find that certain forms of modesty expressions are perceived more positively than others in both cultures: individuals' perceptions of modesty are influenced by how it is expressed. Modesty has been operationalized differently by different researchers, and different expressions have often been used interchangeably to study modesty and its effects. However, the present study suggests that more careful attention should be paid to how modesty is expressed, because different expressions of modesty are evaluated differently.

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Tables**Table 1** Reliability (α) of likability, competence, and honesty scales

Evaluation	Self-denigration	Other-enhancement	Combination
Version 1			
Likability	.86	.97	.92
Competence	.95	.94	.92
Honesty	.87	.67	.77
Version 2			
Likability	.94	.95	.95
Competence	.98	.95	.98
Honesty	.66	.85	.90

Table 2 Evaluation of likability, competence, and honesty by culture

Evaluation	Self-denigration		Other-enhancement		Combination	
	Westerners <i>M (SD)</i>	Koreans <i>M (SD)</i>	Westerners <i>M (SD)</i>	Koreans <i>M (SD)</i>	Westerners <i>M (SD)</i>	Koreans <i>M (SD)</i>
Version 1						
Likability	5.22 (1.09)	6.18 (1.40)	7.67 (1.21)	7.73 (1.15)	6.27 (0.99)	6.76 (1.59)
Competence	4.77 (1.13)	6.27 (1.41)	6.60 (1.35)	6.71 (1.22)	5.53 (1.28)	5.91 (1.43)
Honesty	3.50 (1.72)	4.00 (1.73)	5.20 (0.92)	5.40 (0.99)	5.20 (1.69)	4.67 (1.35)
Version 2						
Likability	6.41 (1.39)	4.67 (1.85)	8.08 (0.71)	7.20 (1.46)	6.64 (1.69)	6.28 (1.67)
Competence	5.33 (1.27)	4.79 (2.02)	7.77 (1.03)	6.29 (1.36)	5.58 (1.96)	5.80 (1.97)
Honesty	4.77 (1.69)	3.53 (1.81)	5.92 (0.95)	4.73 (1.44)	5.54 (1.27)	4.93 (1.75)
Total						
Likability	5.89 (1.38)	5.42 (1.78)	7.90 (0.96)	7.47 (1.32)	6.48 (1.41)	6.52 (1.62)
Competence	5.09 (1.22)	5.53 (1.87)	7.14 (1.25)	6.50 (1.29)	5.56 (1.66)	5.86 (1.69)
Honesty	4.22 (1.78)	3.77 (1.76)	5.61 (0.99)	5.07 (1.26)	5.39 (1.44)	4.80 (1.54)

Figures

Figure 1.1. Evaluation of likability by culture in dialogue version 1

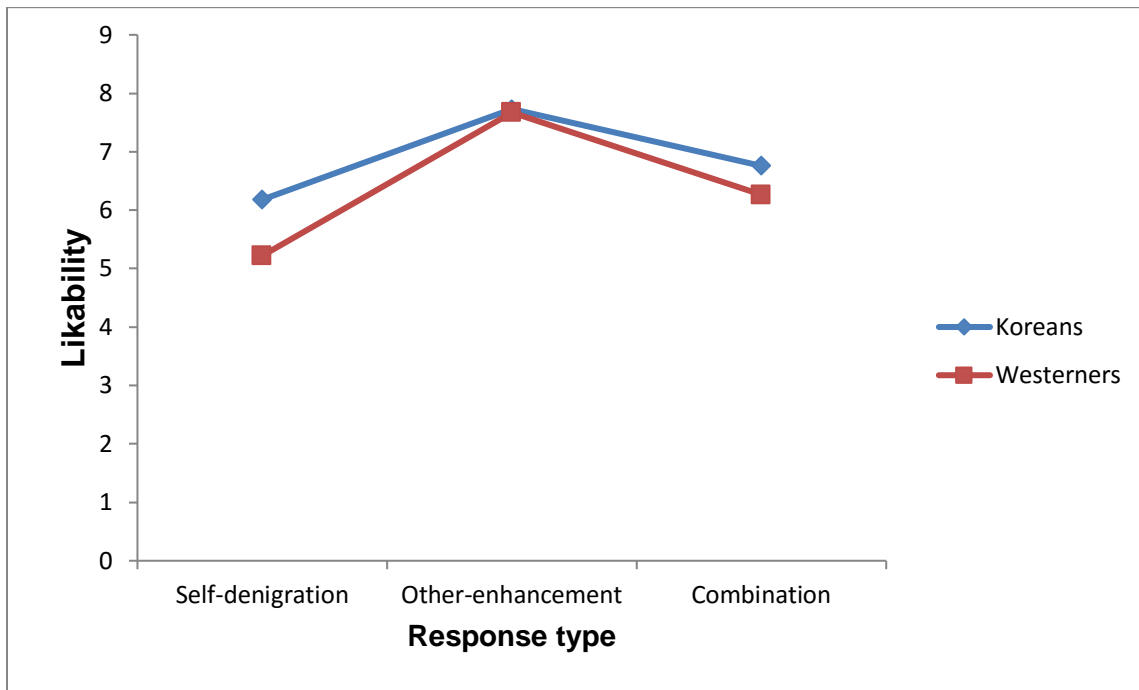


Figure 1.2. Evaluation of likability by culture in dialogue version 2

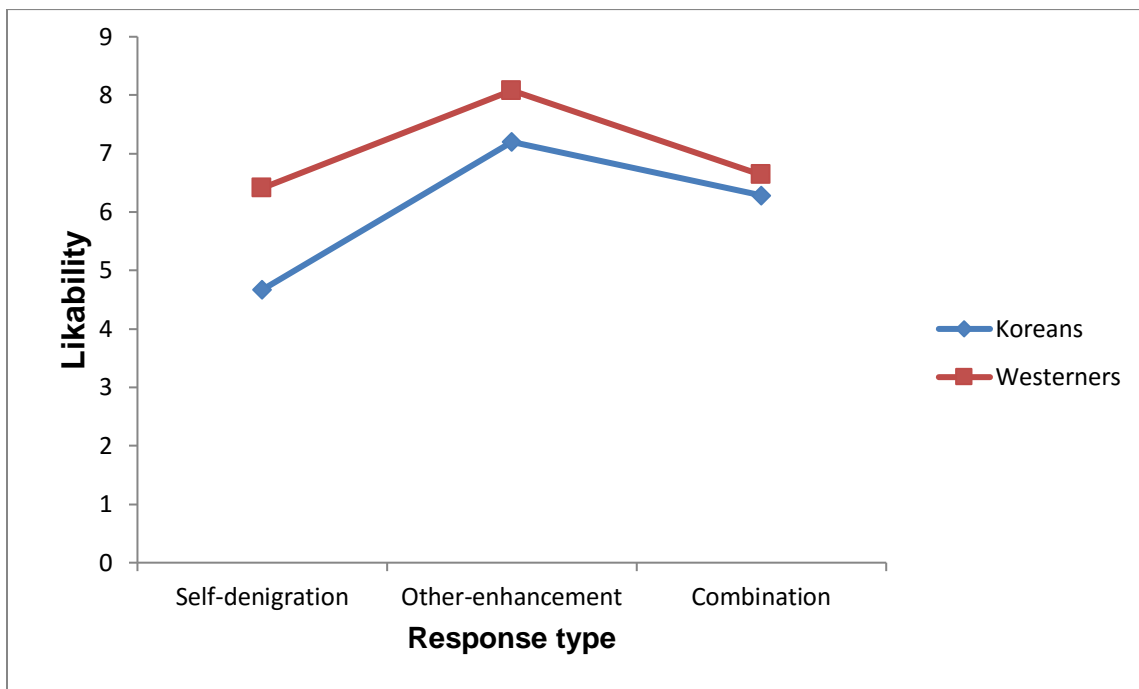
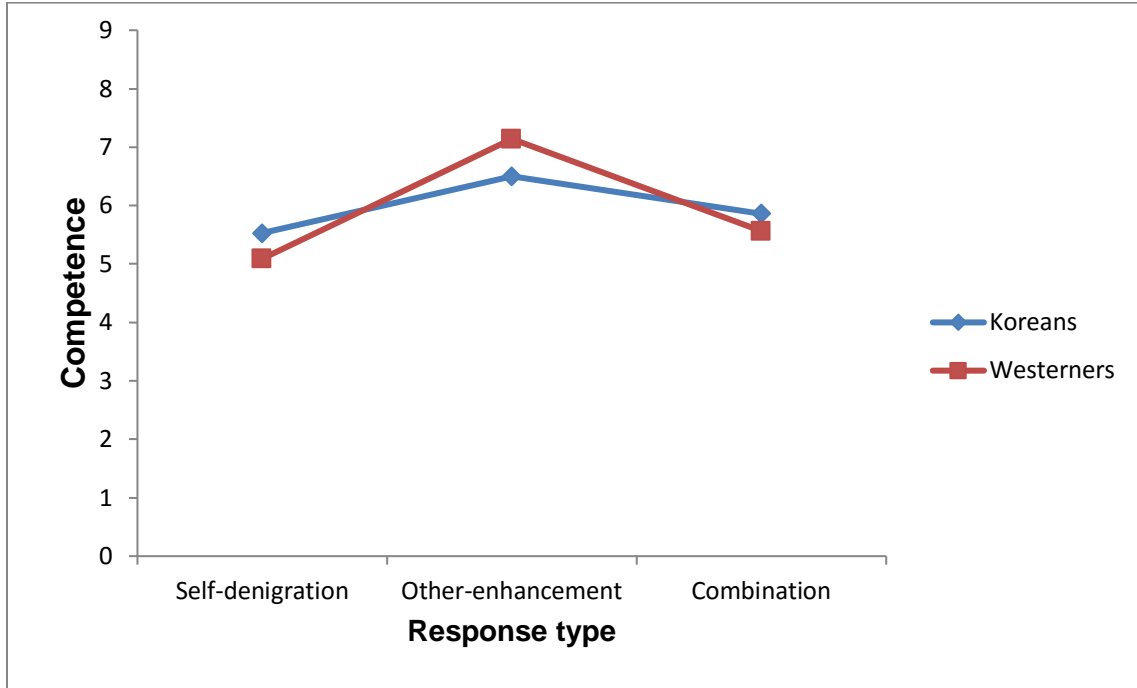
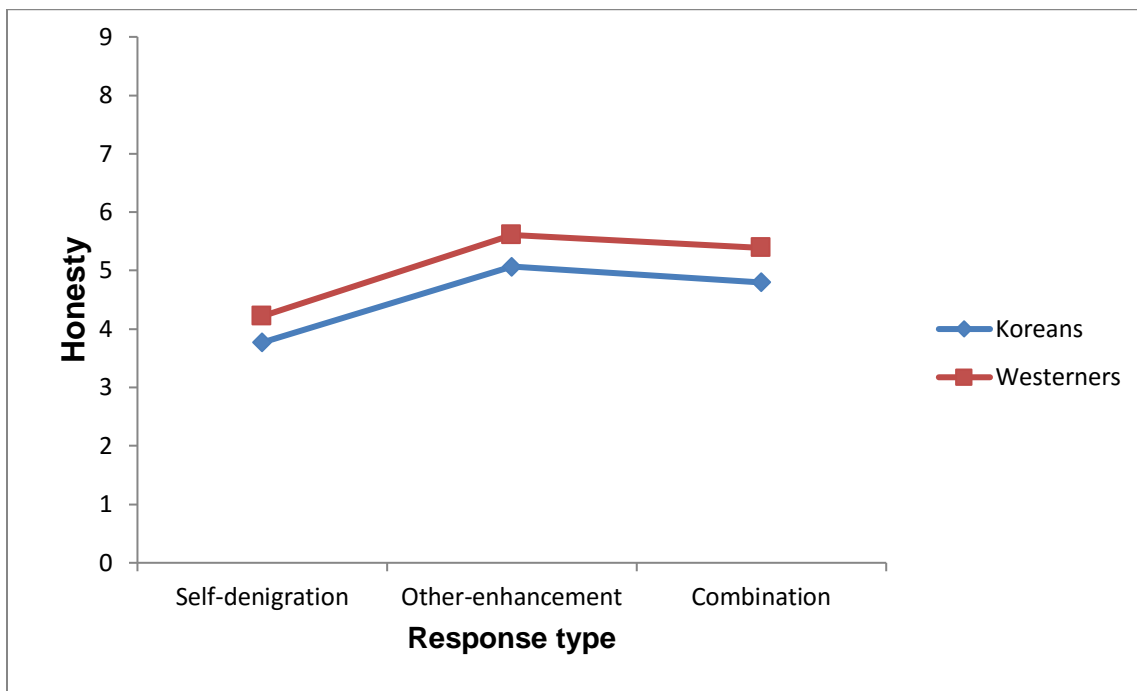


Figure 2. Evaluation of competence by culture**Figure 3.** Evaluation of honesty by culture

Appendix A

Version 1

Dialogue 1:

Team Member A: Hi Kate!

Kate: Hey! I heard your team won the debate contest! Congratulations on your win! You must be a really good debater!

A: Oh, no, I didn't do very well.

Dialogue 2:

Team Member B: Hi, Kate!

Kate: Hey! I heard your team won the debate contest! Congratulations on your win! You must be a really good debater!

B: It was thanks to my team members – they did really well!

Dialogue 3:

Team member C: Hi Kate!

Kate: Hey! I heard your team won the debate contest! Congratulations on your win! You must be a really good debater!

C: Oh, no, I messed it up. It was thanks to my team members – they did a great job!

Version 2

Dialogue 1:

Team member A: Hi, Kate!

Kate: Hey! I heard your team won the debate contest! Congratulations on your win! You must be a really good debater!

A: Oh, no, I messed it up.

Dialogue 2:

Team member B: Hi, Kate!

Kate: Hey! I heard your team won the debate contest! Congratulations on your win! You must be a really good debater!

B: It was thanks to my team members – they did a great job!

Dialogue 3:

Team member C: Hi, Kate!

Kate: Hey! I heard your team won the debate contest! Congratulations on your win! You must be a really good debater!

C: Oh, no, I didn't do very well. It was thanks to my team members – they did really well.

Appendix B

Participants will complete the following likability, competence, and relational communication scale after reading each dialogue.

Likability scale (Chen & Jing, 2012)

Indicate on a scale from 1 to 9 how well you think the following qualities describe the Team member (A,B, or C).

(1= not at all, 9= extremely)

Likeable

Pleasant

Nice

Agreeable

Sociable

Friendly

Competence scale (Chen & Jing, 2012)

Indicate on a scale from 1 to 9 how well you think the following qualities describe the Team member (A,B, or C).

(1= not at all, 9= extremely)

Intelligent

Capable

Competent

Knowledgeable

Accomplished

Skillful

Relational Communication Scale (Burgoon & Hale, 1987)

Indicate on a scale from 1 to 7 how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

(1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)

He/she was honest in communicating,

He/she was not honest in communication

Participants will complete the following modest response scale only once after reading all the dialogues. Demographics questionnaire will also be completed only once.

Modest Responses Scale (Whetstone, Okun, & Cialdini, 1992, as cited by Tassell, 2004)

Indicate on a scale from 1 to 7 how much you agree or disagree with the following statements.

(1= strongly disagree, 7= strongly agree)

1. It's difficult for me to talk about my strengths to others even when I know I possess them
2. I think it is rude for a person to brag about himself
3. I dislike speaking about myself in positive terms in the presence of others
4. If I've done something well, I like to tell people about it [R]
5. I get upset at the thought of having to describe my positive traits to others
6. Even if you've "got it", you certainly should not "flaunt it"
7. I feel uncomfortable whenever I have to describe my successes to others
8. It is a real social mistake to show off in public
9. Whenever I accomplish something important, I get excited telling people about it [R]

10. Bragging on oneself in a group is always socially inappropriate
11. Telling people about my strengths and successes has always been an embarrassing thing for me
12. I prefer to keep my accomplishment to myself than talk about them
13. I have a hard time describing myself to others in positive terms, even when I know I've done well
14. If I've played a big role in bringing about some kind of success, I don't feel reluctant telling people about it [R]
15. I've always felt that bragging in the presence of others is one of the best ways to become disliked
16. My friends will tell you that, when I accomplish something, I'm not shy about tooting my own horn [R]
17. When someone asks me to describe a recent success, I tend to downplay what I've accomplished
18. I believe it's impolite to talk excessively about one's achievement, even if they are outstanding
19. When people tell me about one of their successes, I like to tell them about one of mine [R]
20. In describing my positive qualities to another person, I feel awkward

Demographics

1. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Self identify (_____)

Prefer not to answer

2. What is your age? _____

3. How would you classify yourself?

___ Asian

___ Caucasian

___ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

___ Hispanic or Latino

___ African-American

___ Multi-racial

___ Prefer not to answer

4. What is your nationality? _____

5. Where (nation, city) did you go to elementary school? _____

6. Where (nation, city) did you go to middle school? _____

7. Where (nation, city) did you go to high school? _____

8. What was the first language you learned to speak? _____

9. If English is not your first language, how would you rate your English fluency? (1 = not at all fluent, 7 = completely fluent)

Speaking _____

Reading _____

Writing _____