Interdependence and Relationality Across Dimensions of Culture And Gender

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Comparisons of relationship experience across dimensions of cultural setting and gender reveal inconsistencies in conceptions of interdependence and relationality. Comparisons across cultural settings associate interdependent constructions of self with *lower* emphasis on emotional intimacy and self-disclosure. In contrast, research on gender differences associates interdependence with *greater* emphasis on emotional intimacy and self-disclosure. Which perspective on "interdependence" is correct? To address this question, we induced an experience of interdependence among university students in the U.S. and Ghana, and examined consequences for measures of self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction. Results associated interdependence with lower emphasis on emotional intimacy and self-disclosure. The implication is that growth-oriented tendencies of emotional intimacy and self-disclosure are not a manifestation of (women's) interdependence, but instead reflect engagement with sociocultural affordances for independence and affective individualism. Mainstream valorization of growth-oriented relationality as a normative standard constitutes a case of neocolonialism in psychological science with broad implications for human well-being.

One of the most significant developments in psychology during the past two decades has been growing attention to the cultural constitution of psychological experience. An important contribution to this effort has been the framework that Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed for understanding cultural variation in constructions of self. Drawing upon both cross-cultural research and work on gender differences, Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that theory and research in psychological science have taken historically particular patterns of experience associated with *independent self-construal*—that is, an atomistic understanding of self as a bounded entity that is inherently separate from physical and social context—and elevated these patterns to the status of a (descriptively and prescriptively) normative human standard. In contrast to this elevation of an "imposed etic" (see Berry, 1969), Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested that the more typical patterns in human communities across time and space have been understandings of self-in-relation, which they referred to as *interdependent self-construal*.

CULTURAL VARIATION IN SELF AND RELATIONALITY

The theoretical framework of Markus and Kitayama (1991) prompted a wave of research comparing psychological experience across cultural settings. This research not only elaborated implications for cognition, motivation, and emotion but also extended attention to implications for personal relationship.

Contrary to stereotypes about solitary, relationship-disdaining individualists, the more relevant feature of independent constructions for personal relationship is a *growth-oriented* experience of relational belonging as a somewhat voluntary, effortful choice of atomistic "free agents" who strive to create connection in contexts of inherent separation (Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004). Independent constructions of the self afford open, uninhibited pursuit of pleasurable companionship and a sense of freedom both to choose attractive partners and to avoid burdensome obligations (e.g., to care for relatives). These constructions find expression in many relational tendencies that conventional scientific wisdom portrays as optimal standards: for example, creation of a relatively large network of intimate friends (Adams & Plaut, 2003); a sense of freedom from enemies (Adams, 2005); an emphasis on verbally oriented, emotional intimacy as the essence of social support (Adams & Plaut, 2003; Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008); patterns of authoritative parenting characterized by verbal give-and- take (Baumrind, 1989); an emphasis on self-disclosure as a mechanism for establishing intimacy and communion across the space of inherent interpersonal separation (Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010), and an emphasis on intense dyadic connection as a safe haven and secure base for exploration (Bowlby, 1988).

Contrary to stereotypes about connection-valuing collectivists, the relevant feature of interdependent self for personal relationship is a *maintenance-oriented* experience of relational belonging as embeddedness in environmentally afforded connection. Interdependent constructions afford painstaking management of obligations as the essence of social support (Kim et al., 2008; see also Adams & Plaut, 2003) and foster acute awareness of the potential hazards of embeddedness in overlapping networks of enduring interpersonal ties (Adams, 2005). In the West African settings that inform much of our research, these conceptions find expression in tendencies for people to report a relatively small number of friends (Adams & Plaut, 2003), to be vigilant for attacks from envious personal enemies (Adams, 2005), to emphasize the materiality versus emotionality of care and support (Coe, 2011; see also Kim et al., 2008), to emphasize silence and concealment rather than self-disclosure and revelation (e.g., Ferme, 2001; Shaw, 2000) and to emphasize cautious connection to tightly knit relational networks (Weisner, Bradley, & Kilbride, 1997).

SELF-DISCLOSURE

In the present paper, we examine the relationship implications of independent and interdependent constructions of self in the context of a phenomenon—namely self-disclosure—that psychological science portrays as essential to the production and maintenance of intimacy. Self-disclosure refers to the verbal communication of one person's thoughts, feelings, and self-defining information to another person. Mainstream

psychological accounts consider self-disclosure as the primary mechanism through which inherently separate partners probe each other's beliefs and desires to create a sense of intimate common ground for mutual understanding. This sense of common ground is especially important as a basis for connection given the relatively wide intersubjective gap and the absence of ecological affordances for connection in the Western, Educated Industrialized, Rich, Democratic (i.e. WEIRD; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010) settings that inform mainstream scientific imagination. Indeed, processes of self-disclosure are so powerful that researchers can use the technique of mutual disclosure as a mechanism for the experimental induction of closeness (Aron, Mellinat, Aron, Vallone, & Bator, 1997). Moreover, research within WEIRD cultural settings finds that self-disclosure is one of the key factors associated with the quality of intimate relationships (Hendrick, 1981; Hendrick & Hendrick, & Adler, 1988; Reis & Shaver, 1988).

In contrast to the valorization of intimate disclosure in mainstream psychological science, research outside of WEIRD settings reveals a cautious ambivalence about self-disclosure (Adams, 2005; Adams, Anderson, & Adonu, 2004; Adams & Plaut, 2003; Kim & Sherman, 2007; Kurtiş, 2010; Shaw, 2000; Ferme, 2001). In mainstream psychological imagination, one might regard reservations about intimate disclosure as "avoidant attachment" (Collins & Read, 1990; Dion & Dion, 1985; Mikulincer & Nachshon, 1991) or interpret practices of caution as a form of *self-silencing* (Jack, 1991): inhibition and suppression (rather than indulgence and expression) of personal thoughts and feelings (see Harper & Welch, 2007). In contrast to this pathologizing account, a cultural psychology analysis suggests two ideas.

First, a cultural psychology perspective holds that the cautious ambivalence about emotional intimacy and mutual disclosure observed in West African and other "majority world" (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1995)[2] settings does not reflect a deficit of relationality defined in some context-transcendent manner. Instead, a cultural psychology perspective suggests that such cautious ambivalence reflects broader systems of maintenance-focused relationality that are adapted or tuned to local circumstances of embedded interdependence. In worlds where embedded interdependence scaffolds relationship experience, the construction of emotional intimacy through self-disclosure may be less imperative for well-being than mainstream research suggests (Chen, 1995). For example, practices of mutual disclosure for the production of intimacy may be unnecessary to the extent that dense, relatively stable networks of connection provide people with an inherent experience of relatedness. In these worlds, the experience of embeddedness may afford a more-or-less implicit sense of common ground with relationship partners, so that people may have less motivation to self-disclose (see Schug, Yuki, & Maddux, 2010). Moreover, to the extent that such overlapping networks of connection afford greater possibility for harm through violations of privacy, people may have motivations against self-disclosure. In these

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[2] We use the term "majority world" to refer to people associated with the "developing world" who represent the majority of humankind. While phrases such as "developing world" or "Third World" are commonly used in globalizing discourses, they often carry a connotation of inferiority or deviation from a presumed standard. Instead, the term "majority world" emphasizes the extent to which these settings constitute the descriptive norm for human experience.

worlds, practices of self-restraint, silence, and guarded management of information may not necessarily constitute a threat to well-being. Instead, psychological well-being may even be associated with silence and guarded management of information rather than open disclosure (Ferme, 2001; Kurtiş, 2010; Shaw, 2000).

Besides providing a normalizing account of caution about relationship in West African worlds, a parallel contribution of a cultural psychology analysis is to denature or denaturalize the growth-focused relationality that seems "natural" in mainstream psychology. Rather than naturally superior, a cultural psychology analysis proposes that the valorization of disclosure is one manifestation of broader, growth-oriented forms of relationality adapted to cultural ecologies of abstracted independence that inform psychological imagination. From this perspective, practices of mutual disclosure are cultural innovations for the production of emotional intimacy in worlds where people must strive to create relationships rather than experience them as environmentally afforded connection. To the extent that everyday realities provide them with an inherent sense of insulation, people might have greater motivation to self-disclose in order to "manufacture" relationships and establish a sense of common ground. Moreover, to the extent that these worlds afford greater opportunities to avoid or exit relationships, people may have less concern about potential downsides of disclosure (e.g., rendering oneself vulnerable to possible relational dangers; (Adams, 2005) or burdening relationship partner with obligations to provide social support; (Kim, Sherman, Ko, & Taylor, 2006). The self-expressive and relationship-constructive functions of self-disclosure —especially in the relative absence of caution regarding the dark side of disclosure in particular and relationality in general— may promote individual and relational well-being.

GENDER AND RELATIONSHIP: AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONALITY

Although the majority of the work derived from the framework of Markus and Kitayama (1991) has explored cross-cultural variation, a significant source of inspiration for their theoretical framework came from feminist theorizing on gender differences. Feminist scholars have long noted the extent to which prescriptive models of self and agency that inform mainstream psychological science are not 'just natural'. Instead these models constitute an androcentric conception that valorizes separateness and personal agency typical of dominant male experience and tend to pathologize the connection and relational agency associated with women's experience (e.g., Gilligan, 1982). In response to these androcentric understandings of self and person, feminist scholars examined the benefits of relational selfhood and 'women's ways of knowing' (Belenky, Clinchy, & Goldberger, 1986) more generally.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) drew heavily on this theory and research in their 1991 classic, and subsequent work applied the distinction between independent and interdependent self-construal to examine gender differences in psychological experience (Cross & Madson, 1997). In particular, this work suggests that men's experience of separation reflects and promotes independent constructions of self, and women's experience of connection reflects and promotes interdependent constructions of self. For

example, Cross and Madson (1997) provide a compelling argument that many gender differences in cognition, motivation, and emotion may be a reflection of women's greater interdependence than men, and they link this gender difference in self to various gender differences in relationship that researchers have observed primarily in WEIRD settings. Most directly relevant to the purposes of the present paper, researchers find that men tend to be less expressive and adept at providing sensitive emotional support (Bank & Hansford, 2000; Burleson, 2003) and engage in less intimate self-disclosure with relationship partners than women (Dindia & Allen, 1992).

This presents a puzzle. On one hand, the theoretical framework associated with research on gender differences links the concept of interdependent constructions of self to greater openness and emphasis on intimate disclosure among women than men. On the other hand, research in the West African settings that inform our research links interdependent constructions of self to less openness and cautious ambivalence about disclosure than are typical in WEIRD settings. So, do cultural affordances for interdependence promote stronger or weaker tendencies of openness and emotional intimacy relative to cultural affordances for independence?

THE PRESENT STUDY

One strategy to investigate this question might be to measure independent and interdependent constructions of self and then evaluate whether responses to the measure of self-construction are associated in hypothesized ways with variation in self- disclosure. However, this research strategy poses multiple problems (e.g. Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002; Kitayama & Imada, 2010). Most important for present purposes, conventional measures assessing interdependent self are likely to carry a growth-oriented construction of interdependence and relationality (e.g., with an emphasis on openness and intimate disclosure) that resonates with experience in WEIRD settings. This construction of "interdependence" is at odds with the experience of embeddedness that constitutes the forms of interdependence (and maintenance-oriented relationality) that we have observed in our emerging from research outside of WEIRD settings.

In light of these concerns, we opted for an alternative strategy that resonates more fully with traditions of experimental social psychology. We conducted a simple experiment in which we manipulated the experience of interdependence and then measured the effects of this manipulation on relationship experience. More specifically, we examined the impact of our experimental treatment on levels of intimate self-disclosure within dating/mating relationship among men and women across North American spaces (associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted independence) and West African spaces (associated with cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence).

Effects of Experimental Manipulation: A Test of Competing Hypotheses

The account that arises from research on gender differences associates "interdependence" with an emphasis on openness and intimate self-disclosure. This account suggests the hypothesis that levels of self-disclosure will be higher among participants exposed to a

manipulation of embedded interdependence than among participants who are not exposed to this treatment. In contrast, the account that arises from research on the cultural-psychological foundations of relationality associates "interdependence" with cautious ambivalence and guarded restraint rather than an emphasis on openness and intimate disclosure. This account suggests the alternative hypothesis that levels of self-disclosure will be lower among participants exposed to a manipulation of embedded interdependence than among participants who are not exposed to this treatment.

Implications of Self-Disclosure for Relationship Satisfaction

Besides assessing levels of self-disclosure, we also included a measure of relationship satisfaction to test hypotheses about the importance of self-disclosure for well-being. Conventional perspectives of mainstream psychological science valorize openness and self-disclosure as an important tool for the production of satisfaction and well-being. Abstracting this idea from WEIRD settings and applying it as a context-general law, conventional perspectives tend to pathologize the guarded restraint and cautious ambivalence about disclosure that many researchers (including we) have examined in majority world settings. This universalist perspective of mainstream psychological science suggests the hypothesis that self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction will be positively correlated within any cultural setting.

In contrast to this universalist perspective, research on the cultural-psychological foundations of relationality suggests that the importance of self-disclosure for satisfaction reflects particular forms of expansion-oriented relationality—rooted in affordances for abstracted independence—that prevail in the WEIRD settings that inform scientific imagination. Self-disclosure may be less relevant for the experience of satisfaction or well-being give the more maintenance-oriented forms of relationality—rooted in affordances for embedded interdependence—that are prevalent in many settings of the majority world. The alternative hypothesis that emerges from this cultural-psychological perspective suggests a moderating effect of context, such that the association between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction will be stronger among participants within cultural ecologies of abstracted independence (i.e. North American participants) than among participants within cultural ecologies of embedded interdependence (i.e. West African participants).

METHOD

Participants:

Participants included students from a Ghanaian university (*n* = 120; 47% female; mean age=23.38) and an American university (*n* = 141; 62% female; mean age= 19.66).

Procedure:

We invited students to participate in a study about relationships. Students who agreed to participate completed a questionnaire (printed in English, the language of instruction at

both universities) individually or in small-group settings. American participants received partial course credit for their participation.

Manipulation of relationship constructions:

We based our procedure upon an earlier experiment in which Kitayama and his colleagues used a wall poster depicting several schematic faces to manipulate the experience of interdependence (Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004, Experiment 4). Specifically, researchers placed a poster in front of participants so that the schematic faces appear to be "watching" them while they complete procedures. The researchers present strong evidence that this treatment activates an experience of embedded interdependence among participants and a sense of objective self-awareness that the "eyes of others" are watching them. Rather than a poster, we adapted the procedure by embedding similar schematic faces into our response scales. Participants in the *faces/interdependence* condition completed measures using response scales that included schematic faces (see Appendix). Participants in the *no-faces* condition completed the same measures using response scales that did not include schematic faces.

Measure of self-disclosure:

We used 8 items from Miller, Berg, & Archer's (1993) *Self Disclosure Index* (SDI) to assess the extent to which participants (would) openly disclose information about themselves to romantic (i.e. marriage-like, courtship, or dating) relationship partners. Participants rated the extent to which they (would) discuss intimate topics with romantic relationship partners using a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (discuss not at all) to 4 (discuss fully and completely). A principal components analysis with varimax rotation revealed a two-factor solution. The first component consisted of 4 items: *things I have done which I feel guilty about*, *my deepest feelings*, *what I like and dislike about myself*, and *my personal habits* (in order of decreasing item loadings; overall α= .75; US sample, α= .82; Ghanaian sample, α=0.64). The second component also consisted of 4 items: *what is important to me in life*, *what makes me the person I am*, *my worst fears* and *things that I am proud of* (again, in order of decreasing item loadings; α= .73). Although there is considerable conceptual overlap, the first component appears to concern personal secrets or topics with implications for negative *self-evaluation*. In contrast, the second component appears to emphasize *self-definition*.

Measure of relationship satisfaction:

We used an adaptation of *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS; Diener et al; 1985) to assess participants' global satisfaction in their romantic relationships. The SWLS is a short, 5-item instrument designed to measure individuals' global evaluation of their life. In our version, we asked participants to think about their romantic relationships and use a 7-point scale (from 1 = *strongly disagree*) to 7 = *strongly agree*) to rate their agreement with each item (e.g., "I am satisfied with my relationships"; overall α = .82; US sample, α = .88; Ghanaian sample, α = .75).

RESULTS

The design of the study included three dimensions of variation in relationship construction along the dimension of independent and interdependent constructions of self that served as between-subjects factors: national context (U.S. and Ghanaian), gender (men and women), and experimental manipulation (*no-faces* and *faces/interdependent*). We tested hypotheses about effects of the manipulation using factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA).[3]

Mean Differences in Self-Disclosure and Relationship Satisfaction

A 2 (Nation: USA or Ghana) x 2 (Gender: Male or Female) x 2 (Condition: *no-faces* or *faces/interdependent*) ANOVA on the measures of self-disclosure revealed no main effects or interactions for the first self-disclosure component, negative self-evaluation, $Fs(1, 261) <$ 1.31, $ps > .1$. All participants, regardless of condition, tended to report low levels of disclosure about personal secrets associated with negative self-evaluation (Table 1). However, the ANOVA for the second self-disclosure component, self-definition, revealed three significant main effects (see Table 1). The interaction effects were not significant, $Fs(1, 261) < 2.44$, $ps > .1$. Consistent with previous research on the cultural-psychological foundations of relationality, there was a main effect of national setting, $F(1, 261) = 14.35$, p <.001; specifically, American participants ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .71$) reported greater disclosure about self-defining topics then did Ghanaian participants ($M = 2.78$, $SD = .84$). Consistent with previous research on gender differences in self-disclosure, there was a main effect of gender, $F(1, 261) = 10.15$, p = .002; specifically, women ($M = 3.13$, $SD = .75$) reported greater self-disclosure about self-defining topics than did men ($M = 2.79$, $SD = .81$).

Most important for our test of competing hypotheses, the ANOVA revealed a main effect of the experimental manipulation, $F(1, 261) = 5.97$, p =.015. Participants in the *no- faces* condition reported greater disclosure about self-defining topics ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .67$) that did participants in the *faces/interdependence* condition ($M =2.87$, $SD= .89$), who completed measures while exposed to the "eyes of others" (see Kitayama et al., 2004). This pattern is consistent with the hypothesis that derives from research on the cultural-psychological foundations of relationship, which associates interdependence with cautious ambivalence about open self-disclosure. This pattern is inconsistent with the hypothesis that derives from both research on gender differences and conventional understandings in mainstream psychological science, which associate interdependence with greater openness and self-disclosure. We return to this point in the *Discussion* section.

The same 2 x 2 x 2 ANOVA on relationship satisfaction revealed no main effects or interactions involving gender or condition, $Fs(1, 264) <0.73$, $ps > .1$ (see Table 1).

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[3] Within our US sample, 74.4% of participants reported *European American*, 8.5% of participants reported *Asian American*, 7% of participants reported *African-American*, 5% of participants reported *Hispanic*, and 5% of participants reported *multiracial/other* racial/ethnic identification. Within our Ghanaian sample, participants reported African ethnic backgrounds. We conducted analyses with and without filtering for ethnicity in the American sample. There were no differences in the patterns of results due to inclusion or exclusion of participants on the basis of ethnicity, hence we report analyses using all participants.

However, there was a main effect of national setting on satisfaction, $F(1, 264)= 4.55$, $p=.034$; specifically, American participants ($M=4.79$, $SD= 1.28$) reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction than did Ghanaian participants ($M=4.44$, $SD=1.27$).

Associations between Self-disclosure and Relationship Satisfaction

Correlations between each self-disclosure component and relationship satisfaction within each national context appear in Table 2. To examine the moderation hypothesis (i.e., proposing a stronger association between self-disclosure and relationship satisfaction among American than among Ghanaian participants), we conducted separate regression analyses using nation and each self-disclosure component score (which we first centered around the mean) as predictors of relationship satisfaction.

The regression analysis with the first self-disclosure component as a predictor of relationship satisfaction confirmed main effects of nation ($b = -.73$, $se = .38$, $p = .054$) and disclosure with the potential for negative self-evaluation ($b = 2.11$, $se = .43$, $p < .001$). In addition, the analysis revealed a significant interaction, ($b = -.93$, $se = .43$, $p = .03$), a plot of which appears in Figure 1. Consistent with the moderation hypothesis, the association between disclosure and relationship satisfaction was stronger among American participants, $r(140) = .41$, $p <.001$, than among Ghanaian participants, $r(119) = .17$, $p = .06$.[4] Resonating with a cultural psychology analysis, this result suggests that the implication of disclosure for relationship satisfaction is a sociocultural-historical particularity associated with affordances for independence, rather than a context-general fact.

The regression analysis with the second self-disclosure component as a predictor of relationship satisfaction revealed only a main effect of disclosure about self-defining characteristics ($b = 1.78$, $se = .50$, $p < .001$). The effect of nation and the interaction term were not significant predictors ($ps > .19$). In this case, national context did not moderate the relationship between disclosure of defining characteristics and relationship satisfaction, which was relatively small but significant within both American, $r(140) = .23$, $p < .01$, and Ghanaian settings, $r(119) = .20$, $p = .03$.

DISCUSSION

Research on implications of interdependence for personal relationship across dimensions of culture and gender reveal competing accounts. On one hand, comparisons across cultural settings associate cultural affordances for interdependence with *maintenance-oriented* forms of relationality, characterized by an emphasis on the materiality of care (Coe, 2011), guarded restraint for the preservation of harmony, and a relative de-emphasis on emotional intimacy and self-disclosure. Consistent with this perspective, we observed that participants in Ghanaian settings (associated with cultural affordances for embedded interdependence) reported lower levels of self-disclosure, particularly about self-defining

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[4] Higher order analyses including gender, condition, and/or corresponding interaction terms as predictors in the regression equation did not moderate this pattern or reveal other significant effects. As a result, we report the simpler model for reasons of parsimony.

topics, than did participants in US settings (associated with cultural affordances for abstracted independence). This pattern replicates results of previous research (Adams, 2005; Adams & Plaut, 2003) and is consistent with the idea that worlds of embedded interdependence promote cautious ambivalence about open disclosure and guarded management of information (Ferme, 2001; Shaw, 2000) that we have referred to as maintenance-oriented relationality.

On the other hand, research on gender differences (typically conducted within WEIRD settings) associates interdependence with *growth-oriented* forms of relationality that include an emphasis on emotional intimacy, self-disclosure, and mutual exploration. Consistent with this perspective, and replicating previous research (e.g. Bank & Hansford, 2000; Caldwell & Peplau, 1982; Dindia & Allen, 1992), we observed that women in both national contexts reported higher levels of self-disclosure—again, particularly about self-defining topics—than did men. Conventional understandings of this pattern suggest that it reflects gendered constructions of self and relationship—and particularly more interdependent varieties of self-construal—that lead women to value emotional expression and intimate disclosure to a greater extent than men do (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997).

To test competing hypotheses associated with these different accounts of the implications of interdependence for personal relationship, we borrowed an experimental treatment designed to instantiate the experience of "the eyes of others" associated with situations of embedded interdependence. We then examined the effects of this treatment on levels of self-disclosure. Results suggested that participants in the *faces/interdependence* condition reported lower levels of self-disclosure—yet again, particularly for disclosure about self-defining topics—than participants in the *no-faces* condition did. This pattern of results is consistent with comparisons across cultural settings which associate interdependence with maintenance-forms of relationality. The pattern is inconsistent with comparisons across gender which associate interdependence with growth-oriented forms of relationality. Accordingly, results of the experimental manipulation provide fairly unambiguous support for the cultural psychological account which links cultural affordances for interdependence with cautious ambivalence and guarded restraint rather than an emphasis on openness and intimate disclosure.

Of course, this summary statement is not without qualifications. Perhaps the biggest qualification is that we observed mean differences (albeit as a function of all three independent variables) for only one of two components of self-disclosure. To our knowledge, previous research using this measure of self-disclosure has not reported separate components. Yet, results of the present study revealed discernible components that emerged in both settings, and these components were associated with distinct patterns of results (i.e., extensive mean differences in one component, but not the other). A definitive investigation of this measure and its structure across settings remains a topic for future research.

A more conceptual qualification concerns the validity of our manipulation. We opted to investigate effects of an experimental manipulation of interdependence on self-disclosure rather than examine correlations between a measure of interdependence and self-

disclosure. We did so, in part, because of our sense that existing measurement techniques would not capture the quality of embeddedness in context that we see as the defining feature of interdependence in the West African settings that inform our work. Instead, we thought that we could better test our hypothesis by using the "eyes of others" manipulation (Kitayama et al., 2004) to impose an experience of embeddedness that approximated the conception of interdependence that prevails in the West African settings that inform our work. However, we acknowledge that one could raise the same objection to our manipulation that we have raised against existing measures: specifically, that it promotes a context-particular (or emic) construction of interdependence rather than a context-general (or etic), essential experience of interdependence. This discussion illuminates a basic point of our investigation, which is that conceptions of relationality and interdependence are rooted in particular cultural affordances that vary across setting. We return to this idea in a later subsection.

Implications for Well-Being

Besides examining implications of interdependence for levels of self-disclosure, results of the present study also provide data that bear on the question of well-being. Mainstream health science regards growth-oriented relationship tendencies in general—and emotionally intimate disclosure, in particular—as a defining feature of relational well-being. Against this standard, mainstream psychological accounts suggest that maintenance-oriented relational tendencies, like those that observers note as normative across a variety of African spaces (Adams, 2005; Adams et al., 2004; Adams & Plaut, 2003; Ferme, 2001; Shaw, 2000), are a less optimal form of relationality and therefore pose a threat to well-being. In contrast, a cultural psychology analysis proposes that any association between growth-focused relationality and overall well-being is the product of particular cultural ecologies rather than a context-general law of human nature.

To investigate this question, we examined whether national context moderated the association between self-disclosure and an indicator of well-being, relationship satisfaction. Results provided evidence for the moderation hypothesis, but only for the component—disclosure of sensitive information with potential for negative self-evaluation—that exposes the disclosing person to greatest threat of vulnerability. Consistent with the moderation hypothesis, disclosure of such information was more strongly associated with relationship satisfaction among American participants than among Ghanaian participants.

How is one to interpret the strong relationship between disclosure of sensitive information and relationship satisfaction in American settings? Conventional accounts in mainstream psychological science suggest that the relationship arises because disclosure produces satisfaction (via intimacy). If so, then disclosure of information that exposes a person to vulnerability may produce satisfaction, provided that partner validates and does not exploit that information. Alternatively, the provisional phrase in the preceding sentence suggests another possibility: namely, that relationship satisfaction promotes disclosure. That is, people may be more willing to disclose, especially about information that exposes them to vulnerability, to the extent that they already experience relationship satisfaction.

Whatever its source, the same association between disclosure of sensitive information and relationship satisfaction was not evident among Ghanaian participants to the same degree. We have discussed this idea in terms of the dynamics of disclosure: particularly, ambivalence about the potential for disclosure to yield good and bad outcomes. An additional possibility, not exclusive of the first, has to do with measures of relational well-being. The conventional emphasis on relationship satisfaction as a measure of relationship well-being may make sense in the WEIRD settings that inform mainstream psychological science. In these settings, mutual satisfaction is one force that holds the relationship together in the face of high mobility and the absence of environmental affordances for connection. However, the emphasis on satisfaction may be less relevant in worlds of embedded interdependence in which choice (and satisfaction, as a basis of choice) is less relevant in experience of relationship. Instead, the more appropriate indicator of relational quality in such contexts may be something like relationship harmony (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997).

Although the association between disclosure (either component) and relationship satisfaction was not strong among Ghanaian participants, it was not negligible and bordered on conventional levels of statistical significance. This non-negligible association may be an artifact of measurement (covariation due to common method). Alternatively, taken at face value, the pattern suggests that relationship satisfaction may be somewhat related to disclosure—either as outcome or precondition—even in the Ghanaian settings in which we conducted this research.

In this context, it bears emphasis that we drew our "Ghanaian" sample from university students in Ghana. The cultural micro-ecology of this setting—like university settings across the world—promotes the high mobility and sense of abstraction from context associated with independent constructions of self. Accordingly, any association between disclosure and satisfaction that we observed among Ghanaian students may reflect engagement with the everyday ecology of university student life. Indeed, given the degree of overlap in the everyday ecology of university life across national settings, the remarkable feature of the present study is not that we observed an association between disclosure and satisfaction among Ghanaian students, but instead that we observed the hypothesized difference in the strength of this association across settings.

High Disclosure among Women: Interdependent Self or Affective Individualism?

The effect of our interdependence manipulation is consistent with our research on cultural-psychological foundations of relationality and the differences that we observed across national settings, both of which indicate that people who inhabit spaces that afford embedded interdependence report less disclosure than people who inhabit spaces that afford abstracted independence. However, the effect of the interdependence manipulation appears to be at odds with research on gender differences (including the present study) in which women report greater self-disclosure than men. How is one to make sense of this apparent paradox, in which more interdependent women show less evidence of the interdependent pattern than less interdependent men? The solution to this apparent

paradox lies in different understandings of interdependence and relationality.

The understanding of interdependence that informs the present research reflects its conceptual foundation in the experience of field research in West African worlds. The ecology of everyday life in these settings affords a default experience of embeddedness (for better or worse) in networks of interpersonal connection. These everyday affordances for embedded interdependence promote a construction of the social world in which obligations run deep and people may feel little freedom (or desire) to construct and maintain an abundance of connections (Adams et al., 2004). In turn, these worlds promote forms of maintenance-oriented relationality that de-emphasize openness and self-disclosure.

In contrast, the understanding of interdependence and relationality that informs mainstream research on gender (and other topics) has its foundation in everyday ecologies of abstracted independence, associated with WEIRD cultural worlds. These ecologies of abstracted independence afford a construction of social reality as a "free market" in which people experience extensive opportunities for choice in relationship (see Carrier, 1999; Wiseman, 1986). In turn, these ecologies of abstracted independence afford growth-oriented forms of relationality that emphasize emotional intimacy and open disclosure to produce connections that are sufficiently satisfying to sustain interactions between otherwise unconstrained actors.

This conception of interdependence as growth-oriented relationality is similar to the idea of *affective individualism*—a value emphasis on exploration, expression, and indulgence of unique, individual feelings associated with "independent" constructions of self (Bellah, Madsen, Sulllivan, Swindler & Tipton, 1985)—that sociologists have proposed as a source of gender differences in disclosure and other patterns of relationship (e.g., Oliker, 1998). With the rise of affective individualism, relationship became an important domain for self-expression and indulgence, especially among women, for whom domains of relationship and emotionality were among the few that were open to them for that purpose (Bellah et al., 1985; Oliker, 1998). This implies that tendencies for women to engage in greater self-disclosure than men are not necessarily a manifestation of women's greater interdependence, but instead reflect their expertise in particular forms of (growth-oriented) relationality associated with cultural ecologies of abstracted *independence*.

In the present study, women reported greater self-disclosure than men not only in our American sample, but also in Ghanaian settings with affordances for maintenance-oriented relationality and low self-disclosure. We speculate that this pattern reflects the specific character of our Ghanaian sample. The global neoliberal discourses of affective individualism, growth-oriented relationality, and associated gender differences are not absent from Ghanaian and other African settings, especially among the relatively affluent, upwardly mobile, university students who served as participants in the present research (Cole & Thomas, 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006). The pattern of results suggests that, although these affordances for affective individualism may be sufficiently strong in Ghanaian settings to produce associated gender differences, they may not be sufficiently strong to counteract the more enduring, maintenance-oriented ways of relating that inform

differences across national setting. A definitive test of this speculation awaits future research.

Geopolitical Economy of Relationship

Results have further implications for discussions of liberation, whether for women or people in general. Canonical perspectives in feminist psychology share with mainstream psychological accounts a celebratory understanding of growth-oriented relationality as the liberatory manifestation of women's communal or interdependent ways of being (Belenky et al., 1986; Chodorow, 1978; Cross & Madson, 1997; Gilligan, 1982). In contrast, one implication of the present study is that growth-oriented forms of relationality valorized in canonical feminist psychology might not necessarily yield optimal well-being, and might not constitute the defining features of a universal gender regime rooted in women's inherently relational selves. Instead, results imply that these forms of relationality reflect engagement with broader sociocultural affordances that promote affective individualism, neoliberal economic subjectivity, and ways of being about which feminist-oriented researchers might have second thoughts.

More generally, growth-oriented forms of relationship valorized in mainstream psychological science are not just-natural facts or expressions of universal human condition. From a cultural psychology perspective, these forms of relationship reflect resource-intensive technologies for the production of intimacy in worlds of neoliberal individualism (Adams, Kurtiş, Salter, & Anderson, 2012; Salter & Adams, 2012). Within everyday realities that do not afford people with a sense of enduring connection, these resource-intensive forms of relationality may indeed be "liberatory" or "optimal" for personal growth, self-expansive happiness, and other markers of individual well-being that animate mainstream psychological science. However, a cultural psychology perspective questions whether these forms of relationality should constitute normative standards of psychological science.

First, these forms of growth-oriented relationality may be less suitable for diverse majority world settings that do not afford the experience of abstraction from context (Mullings, 1984). Indeed, research in African settings suggest that people (in particular, women) who forgo the relative security of embedded relationality (with its focus on social distribution of care and materiality) can risk disempowerment and economic hardship when the alluring promises of emotional fulfillment in self-expansive forms of neoliberal-individualist relationality fail to materialize (e.g., see edited volume by Cole & Thomas, 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow, 2006).

Second, the mainstream psychological emphasis on growth-oriented relationality may be unsuitable as a prescriptive standard, even within the relatively affluent settings that inform scientific imagination. A cultural psychology analysis not only locates prescriptive forms of growth-oriented relationality within particular cultural ecologies, but also situates these cultural ecologies in broader historical context. That is, it helps to illuminate how the cultural ecologies of unprecedented material abundance and security—and the accompanying forms of growth-oriented relationality within these cultural ecologies— that

people in globally dominant spaces enjoy are products of the same colonial domination that produces poverty and insecurity in many communities of Global Africa and other majority world spaces (see Shaw, 2000). Here, one can extend critiques of the neoliberal growth paradigm from studies of international development (e.g., Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1990, 2006) to studies of human development. To the extent that growth-oriented ways of relating require abundant resources to fuel expression and expansion, they raise concerns about long-term sustainability. To the extent that growth-oriented ways of relating depend on ongoing domination, they raise concerns about social justice. In this intellectual context, the contribution of a cultural psychology analysis informed by experience and epistemological perspectives of African settings is not only to illuminate issues of global power and tendencies of neocolonialism in psychological science, but also to suggest forms of relationality that afford more sustainable and broad-based human liberation and development.

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Table 1. Means and standard deviations

	No-faces				Faces/Interdependent			
	US		GH		US		GH	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Negative Self-Evaluation	2.75 (0.86)	2.54 (0.88)	2.51 (0.90)	2.33 (0.89)	2.44 (0.89)	2.62 (0.85)	2.63 (0.82)	2.42 (1.07)
Self-Knowledge Definition	3.10 (0.59)	3.27 (0.60)	2.79 (0.70)	3.15 (0.65)	3.00 (0.80)	3.14 (0.81)	2.34 (0.92)	2.86 (0.90)
Relationship Satisfaction	4.88 (1.28)	4.77 (1.30)	4.55 (1.27)	4.51 (1.34)	4.62 (1.26)	4.85 (1.32)	4.34 (1.38)	4.35 (1.13)

*Note:* Cells include means (with standard deviation in parentheses).

Table 2. Correlations among variables

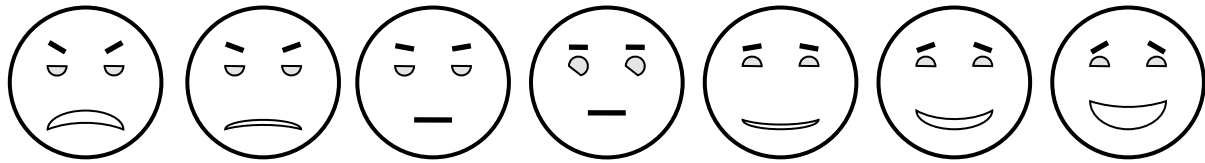|	Variables	1		2		3	
1	Negative Self-evaluation	-		0.66	**	0.41	**
2	Self-definition	0.36	**	-		0.24	**
3	Relationship Satisfaction	0.17		0.20	*	-	

US sample in upper triangle, Ghanaian sample in lower triangle

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$

Figure 1. Implications of disclosure about negative self-evaluation on relationship satisfaction
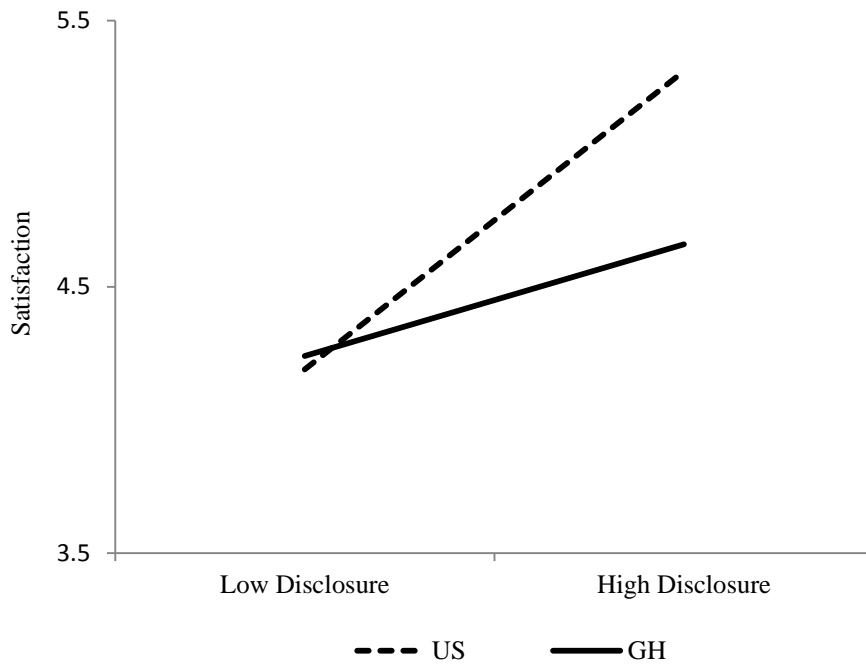
APPENDIX. Experimental manipulation of interdependence

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |

Strongly Disagree   Neutral/Mixed   Agree Strongly