Effects of self-construal and its relationship with subjective well-being across cultures

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Abstract
The purpose of this study is to test cross-cultural predictions of the associations between goal pursuits and subjective well-being among 601 college students (200 in Japan and 401 in the United States). The results indicated that interdependence in all cultures was associated with socially oriented subjective well-being. In the United States, it was also correlated with social goal pursuit. However, independence in the United States correlated with individual-oriented subjective well-being, while in Hawaii, it also correlated with hedonic goal pursuit. Discussion of these results and their implications are provided.

Keywords
culture, health psychology, path analysis, satisfaction, self-perception, students, well-being

Introduction
Individuals tend to set goals that they believe will help them to live more happy and meaningful lives. Most research supports the theory that the effectiveness of any goal depends on the reasons, or motives, for pursuing that goal (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Sheldon and Kasser, 1998). Researchers often discuss individual preferences, beliefs, and values as optimal sources of goal attainment, pursuit, and motivation. However, this assertion has recently been called into question by cultural psychologists (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, 1994) and pursuant to the investigation of relational reasons for formulating goals related to subjective well-being (SWB) from cross-cultural viewpoints. Particularly, the degree to which people consider the interests of close friends or family members in their reasons for pursuing their goals can be a powerful impetus for action. However, these interpersonal reasons have not been examined extensively in cross-cultural research to date. The question regarding the recent empirical research findings’ effect of goal attainment on well-being is significant in light of cultural variations in goal pursuits and motivations (Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Oishi and Diener, 2001). That is, the question is whether the type of person who benefits most from goal attainment is the same or different across cultures. This study

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tackles this question from a cultural psychological perspective (Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Oishi and Diener, 2001) and examines the role of culture in the relationship between goal attainment and SWB.

This study therefore aims to examine the cultural underpinnings of the benefits (or lack thereof) of perceived goals. Drawing on an independence–interdependence theory of cultural self (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, 1994), we propose that perceived hedonic goals may not always be directly linked to SWB in cultures that favor independence because this perception can compromise the ever-important sense of the self as independent. In contrast, perceived social goals are probably unequivocally beneficial in cultures that favor interdependence. To investigate this cross-cultural prediction of goal pursuits on SWB, we examine individually and socially oriented SWB (ISSWB).

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, we review the differences between self-construal well-being and SWB as delineated in the psychological and communication literature. Second, we explain two moderating factors, hedonic and social goal pursuits, from cross-cultural perspectives and propose the conceptual model specifying their respective influences on ISSWB. Third, we describe a study we conducted to test the conceptual model and our analysis of the results. Implications, limitations, and possible future research directions are discussed in the concluding section.

**Culture and self**

Cultures are characterized by an emphasis on independence and interdependence (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, 1994). In middle-class Euro–American cultural contexts that emphasize independence, the individuals engaged therein are motivated to discover and affirm positive dispositional attributes, using them to guide and organize their thoughts and actions (Heine et al., 1999). In contrast, in many Asian contexts that place emphasis on interdependence, individuals are motivated to fit in and adjust themselves according to the expectations and needs of others in a relationship (Morling et al., 2002). For example, Kitayama et al. (2006) demonstrated that Japanese were more likely to experience socially engaging emotions (which are linked to one’s interdependence, for example, friendly feelings and guilt) than socially disengaging emotions (which are linked to one’s independence, for example, pride and anger). In contrast, Americans were more likely to experience socially disengaging emotions than socially engaging emotions (Mesquita and Karasawa, 2002). Researchers have demonstrated that Euro–Americans take credit for their successes and blame others or contextual factors for their failures. Such a biased attribution pattern is uncommon among Japanese who are more balanced in their assessment of success and failure (Kitayama et al., 1995).

**Cultural variations on well-being**

Health is linked with SWB. According to Chida and Steptoe (2008), there is a relationship between positive psychological well-being and lower mortality in both healthy and diseased populations, which they explored. They found that positive moods and feelings such as joy, happiness, energy, life satisfaction, hopefulness, optimism, and a sense of humor are related to a reduced risk of mortality in healthy populations and predict longevity when controlling for negative states (Chida and Steptoe, 2008).

The concept of SWB is considered to be a broad category, which has diverse phenomena. According to Keyes (2007), mental health may be more than the absence of mental illness. Keyes (2007) suggested at the very least that our researchers need to consider two factors to be influenced by SWB—positive or negative. Richman et al. (2005) found that patients who have hope are less likely to have a chance of experiencing diabetes mellitus beyond the effects of negative emotions.
With respect to SWB across cultures, the "self" is a topic of central significance in social and personality psychology. However, only recently has this field recognized cultural and ethnic variations in certain methods in which the self is constructed and practiced (Kim, 2002). Furthermore, it is gradually becoming clear that the construction of the self is socially mediated; that is, it occurs in conjunction with the construction of social relationships. To feel good or live a good life requires the ability to achieve culturally favored ways of being. Therefore, although well-being may be a "collaborative project," it also requires engaging a system of consensual understandings and practices, and it relies on the nature of one’s social relationships with others in the realm of interpersonal relationships (Kitayama and Markus, 2000).

This study draws on an expanding trend of literature about cultural and psychological differences between European–American and East Asian populations. Particularly, this study explores, in European–American cultural contexts, how well-being relates to the person as an active, independent agent who influences other people. It is more relevant to self-esteem, optimism, and self-efficacy, which is cultural affordance, than with self-criticism and discipline. Thus, well-being is related to self-esteem and the pursuit of one’s own happiness. In addition, it is inevitably subjective, personal, or individual in scope (Kitayama and Markus, 2000). In contrast, in East Asian cultural contexts, well-being relates to the person as an active, interdependent agent who adjusts to other people. It has less to do with self-esteem, optimism, and efficacy and more to do with self-criticism and discipline. These critical stances on the construct of the self involve sympathy and relational orientation, which is cultural affordance—both to and from others—and therefore, they may be crucial for the construction of an interdependent agent. Thus, well-being, in this context, is related to self-criticism and discipline. Moreover, it is certainly more relational, intersubjective, communal, and collective in scope (Kitayama and Markus, 2000).

Because this study primarily concerns whether cultural variation influences on SWB, individual-oriented subjective well-being (ISWB) and socially oriented subjective well-being (SSWB) (Lu and Gilmour, 2006) are used as analytical tools. Since we mentioned the cultural validation of Western and Eastern cultures, such as the United States and Japan, based on cultural validations, we need to clearly distinguish ISWB and SSWB. ISWB is considered to be independent SWB, which is mainly influenced by independent hedonic goal pursuit, such as aiming for a goal because of the enjoyment, fun, and sense of self that it provides. Therefore, our study explained that according to ISWB, White North Americans, whose culture includes Euro–American perspectives of SWB, have two characteristics: personal accountability and explicit pursuit (Lu and Gilmour, 2006). In this study, ISWB is associated primarily with personal accountability and explicit pursuit (Lu and Gilmour, 2006). In the social context, social welfare, social harmony, and social trust are maintained in such societies. In contrast to North American individuals with high self-enhancement and independent self-construal (IND), East Asians are more likely to express higher levels of taking criticism (Heine et al., 1999; Heine and Lehman, 1999; Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Lu and Gilmour, 2006). Therefore, Japanese individuals most probably desire goal pursuits that are socially desirable and achievable by maintaining prestige and function rather than
striving for personal goal pursuits, motivation, and accomplishment (Lu and Gilmour, 2006). In our study, SSWB is tied to the individual’s role obligations; that is, it is possible that “a self-cultivated person diligently performing his or her moral duties to pursue happiness for the society with the cooperation of others, thus, best captures the essence of the East Asian cultural conceptions of subjective well-being” (Lu and Gilmour, 2006: 38).

Goals and cultural variations
The present work aims to test the cross-cultural predictions of the associations between goal pursuits and SWB. This study examined the role of goal attainment and motivation in the individual- and social-oriented well-being of college students across cultures. Following Sheldon and Kasser (1998) and Lu and Gilmour (2006), this article defined independent goal pursuit (hedonic goal pursuit) as aiming for a goal because of the enjoyment, fun, and sense of self that it provides. This article defined interdependent goal pursuit (social-oriented goal pursuit) as striving for a goal in order to make parents and friends happy and to fulfill the expectations of others. The college students in this article rated their feeling of well-being and their degree of goal attainment. Individuals with higher interdependent self-construal (INT) are more likely to describe their personality as highly communal, indicating that they see themselves as warm, connected, and kind in their relationships with others (Cross et al., 2000). Individuals with higher INT are more likely to consider the needs of family and friends in decision making (Cross et al., 2000). Thus, INT has an impact on the self’s primary motivations by fostering a focus on close relationships. To promote harmony and connection with others, individuals who are higher in INT are more likely to include others’ goals (including important relationship goals) in their own core goals. For example, if someone’s mother wanted him or her to excel athletically, it would be more important for an individual higher in INT to meet this goal than it would be for someone who is relatively lower in INT (Cross et al., 2000).

Proposed model: Integrative framework
The present work aims to test the cross-cultural predictions of the associations between goal pursuits and SWB. On one hand, among Euro-Americans, the relationship between perceived hedonic goal pursuits and SWB would be strong and positive; even when such a relationship existed, it would be entirely mediated by hedonic goal pursuits. On the other hand, among Asians, the relationship between perceived social goal pursuits and socially oriented SWB would be strong and positive; furthermore, this relationship would not be mediated by hedonic goal pursuits. This study tested college students from one independent culture (the United States) and one interdependent culture (Japan). Our prediction was that perceived goal pursuits would have much smaller effects on well-being in the United States than in Japan. This should be the case, particularly, when hedonic goal pursuits and social goal pursuits are statistically controlled.

To date, few studies have attempted to link levels of self-construal with high levels of SWB. A few studies have attempted to link levels of hedonic and social goal pursuits with SWB; however, self-construal has not been associated with hedonic and social goal pursuits in leading to high levels of SWB. Not much research, particularly from an Asian perspective, on the role of cross-cultural goal pursuits and the attainment of SWB has been explored in the cross-cultural context. Finally, few studies have been combined to explain why people systematically pursue hedonic and social goals, which, in turn, leads to high levels of ISSWB.

We hypothesized different relationships among predictors of SWB in different cultures.
We tested our modified version of the cross-cultural validation on SWB model originally proposed by Kitayama and Markus (2000) and Lu and Gilmour (2006) on three samples from the US mainland, Hawaii, and Japan. By focusing on the internal structure of self-construal in these three cultures, this study attempts to extend previous research by examining the culture-specific functions of goals and motivation in SWB. Thus, it is expected that IND will be positively linked to hedonic goal pursuit, leading to a high level of ISWB. In contrast, it is expected that INT will be positively linked to social goal pursuit, leading to a high level of SSWB. After hypothesizing different relationships between these predictors of SWB in different cultures, we tested the proposed simultaneous analysis of several groups in path analysis for the three cultural samples (US mainland, Hawaii, and Japan). A graphical presentation of the conceptual model linking the aforementioned factors is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Methodology**

**Participants and procedures**

The participants in this study consisted of 201 undergraduate students enrolled at a university in Las Vegas, USA (81 males, 120 females, mean age = 21 years, and standard deviation (SD) = 3.50 years); 200 undergraduate students enrolled at a university in Hawaii, USA (89 males, 111 females, mean age = 22 years, and SD = 2.93 years); and 200 mostly undergraduate students enrolled at a university in Kashiwa City, Japan (38 males, 162 females, mean age = 19 years, and SD = 1.54 years). The researchers approached students in several...
courses at the universities and asked them to participate in this study. Volunteers, who were recruited in compliance with the procedures for human subjects, were permitted to withdraw from the study at any time and assured anonymity. In the study, participants first evaluated their personal accountability and role obligations in relation to life satisfaction according to their SWB. Next, the participants listed their five most important goals for the next 12 months and rated the degree to which they pursued these goals for either INDs or INTs. The participants completed a survey composed of self-construals, hedonic and social goal pursuits, and ISWB and SSWB measures. The language in the questionnaires developed for the Japanese sample was translated and back-translated by a bilingual and bicultural professional to ensure cross-cultural equivalence in meaning (Brislin, 1970). When the participants completed the questionnaire, they returned it to the researchers.

This study was exploratory in nature. Hawaii provides a unique sample in the sense that it is illustrative of a pluralistic cultural environment with a predominantly Asian and Pacific Islander population. The variety of ethnicities and cultural backgrounds in our study was useful for the purpose of exploring potential cultural factors in the formation of behavioral intentions, as well as in shedding light on further applications and investigations.

Analysis plan

To establish measurement invariance, all scales were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 18.0 (Arbuckle, 2006) and a maximum likelihood estimation. To determine the quality of the scales’ fit in this study, CFA was performed. The outcome of this CFA indicated that the measurement model had an acceptable fit except for the Chi-square test. The Chi-square test, by itself, is not necessarily an indicator of a poor fit (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). Although a nonsignificant goodness of fit $\chi^2$ value is desired, this result may be unlikely with large samples (Kline, 1998). For model fit evaluation, Byrne (2001) criteria were followed; models with root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) smaller than .08, comparative fit index (CFI) greater than .95, and goodness of fit index (GFI) greater than .95, were considered a reasonable fit. In the path model, both moderators—hedonic goal pursuits and social goal pursuits—were included in the analysis, thus providing simultaneous tests. The simultaneous Analysis of Several Groups in path analysis, a type of structural equation modeling (SEM) using AMOS 18.0, was performed to test the moderating role of hedonic and social goal pursuits between self-construals and SWB. In the tested model, only paths with a significance level of .05 or less, based on the standard cut off $t$-value of 1.96, were retained for model parsimony (Hatcher, 1994).

Measures

IND and INT were measured using self-construal scales (Leung and Kim, 1997). The students were asked to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores indicated a higher level of IND and INT. The measurement invariance models fit the data well: RMSEA = .068, CFI = .843, GFI=.850 for IND; RMSEA = .057, CFI = .920, GFI=.920 for INT. Cronbach’s alphas were .73 (IND) and .76 (INT) in US mainland; .70 (INT) and .78 (INT) in Hawaii; .72 (IND) and .73 (INT) in Japan. Thus, the first measurement models were accepted because other indices had good values in this study.

Hedonic-oriented goal pursuits and socially oriented goal pursuits (Oishi and Diener, 2001; Sheldon and Kasser, 1998) consist of 4 items, and respondents were asked to rate the two independent goal pursuits and the two interdependent goal pursuits. A 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was used for the rating. Higher scores indicate a
higher level of hedonic- and social-oriented goal pursuit. The measurement invariance models fit the data well: RMSEA = .032, CFI=.970, GFI=.970 for hedonic-oriented goal pursuit; RMSEA=.087, CFI=.900, GFI=.970 for social-oriented goal pursuit. Cronbach’s alphas were .76 (hedonic-oriented goal pursuits) and .75 (social-oriented goal pursuits) in US mainland; 77 (hedonic-oriented goal pursuits) and .74 (social-oriented goal pursuits) in Hawaii; .78 (hedonic-oriented goal pursuits) and .75 (social-oriented goal pursuits) in Japan. Thus, the first measurement models were accepted because other indices had good values in this study.

**Results**

**Preliminary analyses**

The descriptive statistics in this study are shown in Table 1. Table 1 shows the ranges, means, and SDs for all variables in this study. Correlation analysis was conducted to assess the potential for multicollinearity in the data analysis. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix in this study. Correlation analysis was conducted to assess the potential for multicollinearity in the data analysis. All parameters were significant at $p < .001$, except the relationship between IND and social goal pursuit.

**Test of the path model**

This study attempts to explore the cultural underpinnings of the benefits (or lack thereof) of perceived goals. We assume that perceived hedonic goals may not always be directly linked to SWB in cultures that favor independence because this perception can compromise the ever-important sense of the self as independent. In contrast, perceived social goals will probably be unequivocally beneficial in cultures that favor interdependence. To identify the cross-cultural prediction of goal pursuits on SWB, we examined ISWB and SSWB. Furthermore, we
tested college students in the United States and Japan. We conducted formal path analyses involving three sets of variables (two each of individual-level dimensions of self-construals, goal pursuits, and SWBs). Particularly, it was predicted that the greater the individual’s construal of the self as independent, the more hedonic goal pursuits he or she would have, which would lead to a higher level of ISWB. In addition, it was predicted that the greater the individual’s construal of the self as interdependent, the more social goal pursuits he or she would have, which would lead to a higher level of SSWB. The predictions were tested by analyzing the proposed theoretical path model. The analysis corrects for underestimation of coefficients; thus, it provides us an accurate picture of the relationship among the variables.

Our major research objective was to propose and test a model that delineates the process through which dimensions of self-construal influence SWB. Moreover, the model incorporates hedonic and social goal pursuits as potential contributors to SWB. The results of the simultaneous Analysis of Several Groups in path analysis in AMOS and hypothesized model tests are reported in Figures 2 to 4. The simultaneous Analysis of Several Groups in one path analysis was conducted to test the integrated model as it relates to the effects of self-construals and hedonic and social goal pursuits on SWB, given the three different locations. The fit of the model presented in Figures 2 to 4 was good except for the Chi-square test, $\chi^2 (45) = 173.62, p < .001$ (RMSEA = .06, goodness of fit (GFI) = .91, and CFI = .93). That is, alternative indices signified an acceptable fit of the observed data. As shown in Figures 2 to 4, all coefficients are significant ($p > .05$) and in the proposed direction. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, for the participants in the United States, specifically for the participants in the US mainland, IND does not significantly influence perceived hedonic goal pursuits ($\beta = -.04, t = -0.64, p > .05$). However, for the participants in Hawaii, IND significantly and positively influences perceived hedonic goal pursuits ($\beta = .16, t = 2.31, p < .05$). Perceived hedonic goal pursuits positively influence ISWB ($\beta = .35, t = 4.35, p < .01; \beta = .30, t = 3.56, p < .01$). IND positively influences ISWB ($\beta = .18, t = 3.35, p < .01; \beta = .18, t = 2.90, p < .01$). INT positively influences perceived social goal pursuits ($\beta = .16, t = 2.41, p < .05; \beta = .20, t = 2.58, p < .01$). Perceived social goal pursuits positively influence SSWB ($\beta = .27, t = 3.32, p < .01; \beta = .29, t = 3.33, p < .01$). INT positively influences SSWB ($\beta = .22, t = 3.86, p < .01; \beta = .28, t = 4.15, p < .01$). As shown in Figure 4, for the participants in Japan, IND does not positively influence perceived hedonic goal pursuits ($\beta = .07, t = 1.15, p > .05$). Perceived hedonic goal pursuits positively influence ISWB ($\beta = .38, t = 4.57, p < .01$). IND does not negatively influence ISWB ($\beta = -.01, t = -1.6, p > .05$). INT does not negatively influence perceived social

### Table 2. Correlation of variables in the path model.

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IND: independent self-construal; INT: interdependent self-construal; HedGoal: both hedind = hedonic independent goal + hedint = hedonic interdependent goal; SocGoal: both socind = social independent goal + socint = social interdependent goal; ISWB: individual-oriented subjective well-being; SSWB: social-oriented subjective well-being.

*p<0.05, **p<0.01.
goal pursuits ($\beta = -0.09, t = -1.30, p > .05$). Perceived social goal pursuits positively influence SSWB ($\beta = 0.47, t = 5.52, p < .01$), INT positively influences SSWB ($\beta = 0.28, t = 4.90, p < .01$).

Overall, these results demonstrate that all hypothesized models are supported. As expected, INT in all three locations is positively correlated with high levels of SSWB; INT in Hawaii and the US mainland is also positively correlated with social goal pursuit, which, in turn, contributed to high levels of SSWB; INT is not correlated with social goal pursuit, which, in turn, contributed to high levels of SSWB. IND in Hawaii and the US mainland is positively correlated with high levels of ISWB; IND in Japan is not correlated with high levels of ISWB; IND in Hawaii is also positively correlated with hedonic goal pursuit, which, in turn, contributed to high levels of ISWB; IND in Japan is not correlated with hedonic goal pursuit, which, in turn, contributed to high levels of ISWB.

Discussion and conclusion

This study’s purpose was to examine the following: (1) the effects of dominant self-construal (independent vs interdependent) on ISWB and SSWB and (2) the potential moderating effects of goals (hedonic vs social) on the relationship between self-construal, ISWB, and SSWB within the United States and Japan. The results partially concur with previous research on culture and theoretical models of SWB (Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Lu and Gilmour, 2006). Overall, this study confirms the conceptual well-being model, and our data indicate the existence of a culturally specific
process. The results of this study indicate that INT in all three locations impacted SSWB. Furthermore, INT in the United States was positively correlated with social goal pursuits, which led to high levels of SSWB. In other words, the results indicated that INT has the potential to increase SSWB when mediated by social-oriented goal pursuits. However, IND’s correlation with ISWB was stronger in the United States than in Japan. IND in Hawaii was also positively correlated with hedonic goal pursuits, which led to high levels of ISWB (Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Lu and Gilmour, 2006; Oishi and Diener, 2001). In other words, the results indicated that IND has the potential to increase SSWB when mediated by hedonic goal pursuits. The results from the three locations’ samples suggest that feelings of SSWB may be attributed to an individual’s perception of his or her worth in terms of SSWB. This emphasizes the importance of social goal pursuits as moderators and may indicate that the samples in this study are more prone to implicit or explicit self-criticism, which relates to concepts such as face and social compliance. Particularly, social goal pursuits within social and cultural contexts may result in high levels of confidence, motivation, and satisfaction for maintaining face and function. This would increase individuals’ ability to connect with various social contexts and simultaneously increase trust in social capital. In the Japanese sample, we identified the direct effect of INT on SSWB (Heine et al., 1999; Heine and Lehman, 1999; Lu and Gilmour, 2006). Beyond the cross-cultural differences, the direct effect of INT on SSWB was also identified in the US samples. The results of the simultaneous

**Figure 3.** Final model of cross-cultural goals’ influence on subjective well-being in Hawaii. ISWB: individual-oriented subjective well-being; SSWB: socially oriented subjective well-being; IND: independent self-construal; INT: interdependent self-construal; hed: hedonic goal; hedind: hedonic independent goal; hedint: hedonic interdependent goal; soc: social goal, socind: social independent goal; socint: social interdependent goal.
analysis of several groups in path analysis revealed specific dimensions of self-construal, through which goal pursuits promoted motivational behavior. Additionally, it indicated that college students’ goal-pursuit behaviors, as they relate to ISWB and SSWB, are psychological and transactional processes influenced by goal and motivational resources (e.g. goal pursuits), which promote self-esteem, self-presentation, self-criticism, self-enhancement, or one of the available face maintenance concerns or function mechanisms (Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Lu and Gilmour, 2006; Oishi and Diener, 2001).

We examine whether perceived goal pursuits are positively correlated to ISWB, SSWB, and health in independent and interdependent cultural contexts. We argue that whereas perceived social goal pursuits may always relate directly to SSWB and are more likely to be highly beneficial in cultures that favor interdependence, hedonic goal pursuits may not always relate directly to ISWB and health in cultures that favor independence. Our study supports this theoretical explanation and interpretation. First, perceived hedonic goal pursuits positively affect ISWB and health even in independent Euro–American cultural contexts. Thus, whereas Euro–American college students value hedonic goal pursuits because they signify internal deservedness, worthiness, and independence, Asians, within a wide age range, appreciate social goal pursuits provided by others because they affirm their ever-important sense of the self as interdependent.

In conclusion, we demonstrated that culture mediated the effects of perceived goal pursuits on SWB and health. In independent

![Figure 4. Final model of cross-cultural goals’ influence on subjective well-being in Japan. ISWB: individual-oriented subjective well-being; SSWB: socially oriented subjective well-being; IND: independent self-construal; INT: interdependent self-construal; hed: hedonic goal; hedind: hedonic independent goal; hedint: hedonic interdependent goal; soc: social goal, socind: social independent goal; socint: social interdependent goal.](image-url)
Euro–American cultural contexts, although the effects of IND existed among college students, they were mediated by hedonic goal pursuits for only the Hawaiian sample. In contrast, within interdependent Asian cultural contexts, the link between perceived social goal pursuits and SSWB was more direct. This concurs with the hypothesis that perceived social goal pursuits produce social support and affirm the sense of self as interdependent and connected with others. Importantly, this study provides the first evidence in the literature that cultural variation exists not only among college students in all three locations but also applies to measures of well-being and physical health. Thus, this study adds another piece to a growing body of literature on cultural psychology and intercultural communication that demonstrates the significant role that culture plays in shaping various psychological processes. Particularly, we demonstrate that the effectiveness of perceived goal pursuits in enhancing SWB and health is indeterminate unless the nature of the cultural context is fully considered.

Moreover, our study examined how ISWB or SSWB may be associated with health-related phenomena. Based on our findings, we can contribute that to obtain better mental health status, if the people who have higher IND were mediated by hedonic goal pursuits, they were more likely to obtain better mental health status, such as high level of satisfaction, happiness, and positive emotions. On the contrary, if people who have higher INT were mediated by social goal pursuits, they were more likely to obtain better mental health status, such as high level of satisfaction, happiness, and positive emotions. This concurs with the previous studies. For example, Guven and Saloumidis (2009) found that “German Socioeconomic Panel Study, 1985–2007, N = 11,557. Happiness predicted longevity more strongly for men and the chronically ill. The effects of marriage on longevity appeared to be mediated by happiness.” According to Chida and Steptoe (2008), there is a relationship between positive psychological well-being and lower mortality in both healthy and diseased populations. The authors found that positive moods and feelings such as joy, happiness, energy, life satisfaction, hopefulness, optimism, and a sense of humor are related to reduced risk of mortality in healthy populations and predict longevity when controlling for negative states. Therefore, based on this study’s findings, in order to obtain better health status, the significant role of goal pursuits in cultural validation on ISWB or SSWB is meaningful to keep their healthy life style to reduce their stress and mental health problems.

**Implications**

This study’s findings have several implications for culture in the context of well-being theory by partially supporting, developing, and expanding cultural variation on SWB theory (Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Lu and Gilmour, 2006). In this study, by applying the concept of cultural validation to SWB theory, the theoretical approach develops an integrative theoretical framework to understand significant cultural variation of SWB and cultural underpinnings, including goal pursuits. In addition, this study suggests alternative theoretical explanations and interpretations. According to our findings, Asian subjects are more likely to emphasize or receive social goal pursuits, or they are more likely to be ready to perceive social goal pursuits—either of which could lead to high levels of social support—and as a result, have high levels of SSWB. This study may demonstrate that these alternative explanations and interpretations are highly possible, particularly in Asian contexts, wherein SSWB-related social goal pursuits are more likely to take forms such as sympathy, compassion, and unsolicited support; these behaviors lead to relational orientations from the perspective of cultural affordance, which is consistent with another person’s shortcomings, negative states, and misfortunes (Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Uchida et al., 2008). To extend the findings of this study, further research is needed to explore, in greater detail, when perceived social
goal pursuits and self-compassion—which lead to relational orientations from the perspective of cultural affordance—might have positive effects on SSWB and mental health among Asian subjects. SSWB and mental health are affected by being combined with an effort to affirm an individual’s interdependence. In addition, further research is required when perceived hedonic goal pursuits and self-esteem—which lead to a sense of efficacy and control from the perspective of cultural affordance—might have positive effects on ISWB and mental health among Euro-American subjects. ISWB and mental health are influenced by being combined with an effort to affirm the self’s independence (Kitayama and Markus, 2000; Uchida et al., 2008).

Another theoretical contribution involves the possibility of empirically substantiating cross-cultural differences from various psychological perspectives. Most theoretical approaches are more likely to emphasize individual-level processes from the fields of intercultural communication and psychology. However, we should take note of a conspicuous lack of empirical evidence about the self-systems of people from different cultural backgrounds. It is commonly recognized that culture is an umbrella concept, vague by nature; thus, it is difficult to define and impossible to operationalize. To find better solutions and address controversial issues, the concept of self-construal informs broad dimensions of cultural variability by bringing them to the level of individual analysis. This theoretical approach suggests that a more parsimonious and precise explanation and interpretation may be relevant to identify individual cross-cultural differences with respect to self-construals (Kim et al., 2009).

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