Correlates of Self-Construals among Asian and Caucasian Undergraduates in Canada

Cultural Patterns and Implications for Counselling

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed between- and within-group patterns of interdependent and independent self-construals in a sample of Asian Canadian, Asian International, and Caucasian Canadian undergraduate students. It examined various correlates of self-construals, including gender, socioeconomic status, English reading comprehension, length of stay in Canada, perceived interpersonal stress, collective coping, avoidance coping, and engagement coping. These correlates were used to predict interdependence and independence, using multiple regression analyses. The patterns of self-construals and their predictors were found to differentially predict criteria across the three cultural groups. The findings have implications for integrating culture-based self-construals into counselling practice with culturally diverse populations, particularly Asians.

In the last decade, cultural psychology has explored cultural variations of self-construals in terms of interdependent and independent self—a distinction that often exemplifies Asian collectivism and Western individualism at the individual level (Kitayama, 2002; Singelis, 1994). Interdependent self-construal represents a flexible, variable, and socially defined self that has collective, contextual, connected, and relational qualities (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Markus and Kitayama posit that independent self-construal, on the other hand, represents a bound, unitary, stable, and socially separated self that has individualistic, autonomous, and self-contained qualities. Evidence has pointed to the usefulness of applying self-construals and the broader concepts of individualism-collectiv-

ism to understanding the psychological adjustment and well-being of culturally diverse individuals (Williams, 2003). However, research in this area is sparse. Yeh and Hwang (2000) have noted a general de-emphasis of interdependence in Western-based counselling and psychotherapy in favour of independence; that is, a lack of attempts within traditional therapeutic interventions to conceptualize the self from a relational and contextual perspective.

The current study investigates the cultural and predictive patterns of sociodemographic, acculturation, and stress-coping correlates of interdependent and independent self-construals in Asian and Caucasian undergraduate students in Canada. We discuss the implications for providing and practicing counselling with multicultural clients.

Research on cross-cultural comparisons of self has evidenced a strong case for a cultural distinction between Asians and North Americans (European Canadians and Americans) on self-construals (Heine, 2001; Triandis, 2001). The differential impacts of self-construals on emotions, behaviours, and motivations between these two cultural groups have been noted in the literature (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Williams, 2003). For instance, empirical studies have linked Asians' interdependent tendency to emotion (Liem, Lam, & Liem, 2002); self-esteem and embarrassability (Singelis, Bond, Sharky, & Lai, 1999; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995); self-disclosure tendency (Barry, 2003); acculturation (Abe-Kim, Okazaki, & Goto, 2001; Tata & Leong, 1994); coping approaches (Cross, 1995; Yeh, Inose, Kobori, & Chang, 2001); and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help (Tata & Leong, 1994; Yeh, 2002).

Our review of the self-construal literature on Asians suggested two limitations. First, the prevailing research paradigm of a cross-cultural self-system appears to focus either on comparisons across ethnic groups (e.g., between Japanese and

Americans; see Singelis & Sharkey, 1995, for an example) or on a single ethnic group examination (e.g., see Barry, 2003). As a result, there is little research on self-construals that investigates patterns between ethnic groups and within an ethnic group at the same time. There appears to be no research that compares interdependence and independence across different cohorts of Asian Canadians (North American-born vs. foreign-born and immigrants vs. international students). The second limitation is that given that interdependent and independent self-construals are typically treated as predictors of psychological outcomes (see Triandis, 2001), little empirical attention has focused on the contextual and behavioural correlates of self-construals. This gap exists despite appeals from prominent cross-cultural researchers in the area. For instance, Singelis (1994) advocated the need to examine "the determination of cultural definitions of situations that guide the individual to reference the independent or the interdependent self" (p. 589).

More recently, a number of theorists highlighted the importance of conceptualizing self-construals as "person-in-actual-cultural-contexts" phenomena, stressing the interaction among personal and contextual factors (Kitayama, 2002; Yeh & Hwang, 2000). In response to these methodological and empirical gaps, the current study compared self-construals between two Asian cohort groups and across Asian and Caucasian groups. The study also examined the correlates of self-construals in terms of sociodemographic, acculturation, and stress-coping variables.

ACCULTURATION AND SELF-CONSTRUALS

The relationship between acculturation and self-construals has been tested in Asian American samples, but with mixed conclusions (Abe-Kim et al., 2001; Tata & Leong, 1994). For instance, in a sample of East Asian immigrants in the United States, Barry (2000) found weaker independent self-construal among those who adopted the separation acculturation style (rejec-

tion of the dominant culture and acceptance of one's heritage culture) and who held a stronger East Asian ethnic identity. Stronger interdependence, however, was found among those who identified strongly with their East Asian heritage. Similarly, Liem et al. (2002) found greater interdependence, as reflected in endorsing more other-focused emotions, among Asian Americans who chose a separation strategy. A higher level of independence, as reflected in endorsing more ego-focused emotions, was revealed among Asian Americans who chose an assimilationist strategy (rejecting one's heritage culture and accepting the dominant culture). However, in Abe-Kim et al.'s study of Asian American college students, no significant relationship was found between self-construals and acculturation; the non-significance persisted whether acculturation was measured by nativity status (foreign- versus American-born Asian) or acculturation categories (i.e., among assimilation, bicultural, and traditional modes).

In view of the mixed results, further verification of the relationships between acculturation and self-construals is needed. Existing acculturation literature has demonstrated that socioeconomc status, length of residence in the host country, and English proficiency were among the key demographic predictors of acculturation for Asians in North America (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004). On the basis of these findings, we measured these three variables and used the latter two variables as acculturation indicators in the analyses of the present study.

STRESS-COPING AND SELF-CONSTRUAL

It has been noted that self-construals have critical implications for the evaluation of social relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and stress responses (Cross, 1995; Kuo, 2004), particularly for individuals of Asian heritage. Interdependent individuals are more concerned than independent individuals about their social image and evaluations by others. For instance, embarrassibility (i.e., a threat resulting from negative evaluation by others) has been found

to be positively related to interdependence and negatively related to independence in Asian American students (Singelis et al., 1999; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995). It can thus be postulated that interpersonal discord and relational conflicts are particularly threatening and straining for individuals with a strong interdependent orientation. To verify this proposition empirically, the current study examined the relationship between participants' self-construals and their perception of a problematic interpersonally scenario.

In a sample of East Asian International students in the United States, Cross (1995) found that higher levels of independent self-construal were related to using more direct (self-focused) coping strategies. On the other hand, interdependent ethnic minorities who scored high on collectivism, social support, collective self-esteem, and fusion with others were found to adopt more collective (other-focused) coping patterns in dealing with stress (Yeh, Chang, Arora, Kim, & Xin, 2003). These collective coping strategies are characterized by keeping problems in the family; seeking assistance from families, friends, and social groups; engaging in social and familial activities (Yeh et al. 2001; Yeh & Wang, 2000); appealing to cultural values as a reference; and selecting avoidant responses (Kuo, 2004). These strategies reflect the relationally and contextually defined self that is predominant among Asians. In view of the existing literature, we included perceived interpersonal stress, and the three coping factors of the Cross-Cultural Coping Scale—collective coping, avoidance coping, and engagement coping—as predictors of self-construals.

HYPOTHESES

The purposes of the current study are two-fold. First, we compared Asian Canadian, Asian International, and Caucasian Canadian university students on the dimensions of interdependent and independent self-construals. Then, we examined the predictability of eight variables on interdependent and independent self-construals

for the entire sample and for the individual cultural groups. The existing literature about Asian-Caucasian differences on self-construals (Cross, 1995; Heine, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) led us to posit four hypotheses:

1. On interdependent self-construal scores, Asian Internationals will score significantly higher than Asian Canadians. Asian Canadians will score higher than Caucasian Canadians on independence.
2. On independent self-construal scores, Asian Internationals will score significantly lower than Asian Canadians. Asian Canadians will score lower than Caucasian Canadians on independence.
3. Gender, socioeconomic status, English reading comprehension, length of stay in Canada, perceived interpersonal stress, collective coping, avoidance coping, and engagement coping will significantly predict participants' interdependent self-construal scores.
4. Gender, socioeconomic status, English reading comprehension, length of stay in Canada, perceived interpersonal stress, collective coping, avoidance coping, and engagement coping will significantly predict participants' independent self-construal scores.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The sample was comprised of undergraduate students in a mid-sized university in southwestern Ontario. There were 174 participants: 46 (26%) Asian Internationals, 63 (36%) Asian Canadians, and 65 (37%) Caucasian Canadians. Male and female participants represented 46% ($n = 80$) and 54% ($n = 94$) of the sample, respectively. There was no significant difference in male-female gender representation across the three groups, χ^2 (2, $N = 174$) = .14, *ns.* nor was there any gender effect on the self-construal scores or the scores of the predictors measured. Participants had a mean age of 22 ($SD = 3.53$). Over half of the sample (52.9%, $n = 92$) was

Canadian-born; the remaining 47.1% (*n* = 82) were foreign-born. Among the latter group (exclusively Asians), 12 Asian countries were reported as the place of birth. Forty-three percent of participants reported backgrounds in at least the middle class; the majority (57%) reported below this level. With respect to participants' parent's education, 47.1% of fathers and 39.6% of mothers were reported to have university/college or higher education.

PROCEDURE

Participants were recruited from various sources including the psychology department's research participant pool, the international student office, and various East Asian student organizations on campus. All participants completed an individual consent form prior to the study. Participants completed the questionnaire either in the psychology department in a group format facilitated by the researcher, or they completed the questionnaire on their own and mailed it back to the researcher.

MEASURES

Demographic Information. Participants provided demographic information about age, sex, place of birth, age of arrival in Canada, residence status in Canada, type of school attended, grade level, generation status, ethnic self-designation, parents' countries of origin, accompanied versus unaccompanied status, parents' occupations, parents' education levels, and family's social class standing. In the analyses, the variables of parents' education levels and family social class were combined to form the participants' socioeconomic status (SES) for subsequent analyses.

Self-Construals Scale (SCS). The SCS was designed to measure interdependent and independent self-construals (Singelis, 1994). The scale assesses respondent's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours with respect to others versus oneself. There were 24 items in the original scale, with 12 items on the interdependent self (e.g., "I will sacrifice my self-interest for the ben-

efit of the group I am in") and the other 12 items on independent self (e.g., "I am comfortable with being singled out for praise or rewards"). The reliability coefficients of the interdependent and independent subscales were $\alpha = .74$ and $\alpha = .70$, respectively, in the original scale development study. On the recommendation of the test developer, six new items, three on each of the two scales, were added to the original SCS to increase the scale's overall internal reliability (T.M. Singelis, personal communication, October 2, 2002). Respondents rated the SCS items on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Coefficient alphas for the interdependent and independent subscales were $\alpha = .72$ and $\alpha = .77$, respectively.

· Cross-Cultural Coping Scale (CCCS). The CCCS is a 20-item, scenario-based coping scale designed to assess the collectivistic and individualistic aspects of coping (Kuo, Roysircar, & Newby-Clark, 2005). The scale was originally developed and tested with a sample of Chinese Canadian adolescents with varying degrees of acculturation levels (Kuo et al., 2004). The authors reported a three-factor structure of the scale: collective coping (e.g., "I take the course of action that seems most acceptable to my family"), avoidance coping (e.g., "I tell myself that my problems will go away on their own"), and engagement coping (e.g., "I rely on myself to take action [e.g., finding out solutions] to deal with the situation"). The internal consistency reliabilities of the subscales were tested with two separate stress scenarios and yielded $\alpha = .74$ and $\alpha = .78$ for collective coping, $\alpha = .63$ and $\alpha = .74$ for avoidance coping, and $\alpha = .59$, and $\alpha = .62$ for engagement coping. The scale demonstrated criterion validity with acculturation levels. Less acculturated respondents reported more collective coping and avoidance coping than more acculturated respondents.

A hypothetical stress scenario was chosen on the basis of its representation of experiences common to undergraduate students in carrying out a group assignment. The scenario depicted conflicts resulting from having to work with an

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Length of stay in Canada	13.91	9.00	—	.17*	.52**	-.02	-.19*	-.11	.69	-.14	.29**
SES	2.77	.78		—	.11	-.12	-.02	.05	.04	-.08	.19*
English reading comprehension	5.57	.86			—	.12	-.08	-.15*	-.01	-.02	.10
Perceived interpersonal stress	1.78	.68				—	.09	-.17*	-.10	.18*	-.10
Collective coping	3.56	.89					—	.04	.12	.35**	.05
Avoidance coping	2.91	.89						—	.01	.17*	.03
Engagement coping	4.62	.68							—	.17*	.24**
Interdependent self-construal[a]	4.64	.65								—	.14
Independent self-construal[b]	4.86	.67									—

Note: [a] and [b] were measured by the interdependent self-construal and independent self-construal subscales of the SCS, respectively.
*p < .05.
**p < .01.

uninvolved partner in class who has failed to share the workload for a joint class project. The respondents first read the vignette, then indicated on a 6-point scale the extent to which each CCCS item accurately describes how they would cope, with 1 = very inaccurate description of what I would do, and 6 = very accurate description of what I would do. The Cronbach alphas for collective, avoidance, and engagement coping scores were .78, .71, and .52, respectively.

Perceived Interpersonal Stress. To ascertain participants' perception on the relative importance of interpersonal relationship, participants were asked to assess their reactions toward the social situation described in the CCCS scenario. They were asked: "If the situation described were to happen to you, how stressful would you say it may be for you?" The item was scored on a Likert scale with 1 = not at all stressful and 6 = extremely stressful. Higher scores on perceived interpersonal stress indicate greater stress associated with social disharmony and interpersonal conflicts; lower scores were associated with minimal stress.

English Reading Comprehension. Participants' English comprehension was assessed using their responses to this question at the end of the questionnaire: "How well do you understand the English used in this questionnaire?" There were six incremental options, with 1 = "I understand about 50% or less" (scored 1), representing the lowest comprehension level, and 6 = "I understand completely," representing the highest comprehension level.

RESULTS

Pearson correlations among the predictors and the interdependent self-construal and independent self-construal scores were first examined. For the entire sample, a stronger interdependent tendency was significantly related to perceiving the hypothetical interpersonal scenario as being more stressful, endorsing more collective coping, avoidance coping, and using engagement coping to deal with the interpersonal conflicts (see Table 1). On the other hand, a stronger independent tendency was significantly related to having lived in Canada for a longer period of time, holding a higher socioeconomic status, and responding to interpersonal stress by endorsing more engagement coping strategies. Interdependent and independent self-construals also formed a positive but non-significant relationship, r(166) = .14, ns.

Subsequently, two ANOVAs were used to compare the three cultural groups on the two self-construal scores. Group differences on self-construals were found. There were overall group differences on interdependent self-construal, F(2, 164) = 3.88, p < .05, as predicted by hypothesis 1. A LSD post-hoc test showed that Asian Canadians and Asian Internationals were significantly more

	Interdependent Self-Construal							
	Entire Sample		Asian Canadian		Asian International		Caucasian Canadian	
Predictor Variables	b value	(β)	b value	(β)	b value	(β)	b value	(β)
Gender	.04	.03	.01	.01	.16	.12	−.13	−.11
SES	−.03	−.04	−.08	−.11	.10	.10	−.01	−.00 [b]
English reading comprehension	.03	.04	−.06	−.05	.06	.10	−.22	−.19
Length of stay in Canada	−.01	−.10	−.00 [a]	−.01	.02	.07	−.02	−.06
Perceived interpersonal stress	.11	.20**	.12	.22	.06	.11	.19	.35**
Collective coping	.21	.29***	.17	.27	.15	.16	.28	.40**
Avoidance coping	.12	.17*	.14	.25	−.05	−.06	.13	.16
Engagement coping	.16	.17*	.17	.19	.05	.05	.31	.33**
F	5.42***		1.87		.59		4.00**	
R^2	.22		.23		.13		.37	
Adjusted R^2	.18		.11		−.09		.28	
t	4.15***		2.17*		2.53*		2.17*	

Table 2
Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for the Key Variables in Predicting Interdependent Self-Construal

Note. b values represent the unstandardized coefficients. b values represent the standardized coefficients. Dependent variable is interdependent self-construal scores as measured by the SCS.
[a]actual value = -.001. [b]actual value = -.004.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

interdependent than Caucasian Canadians. However, no significant difference was found between the two Asian groups on interdependence. On the other hand, significant group differences on independent self-construal were found, $F(2, 168) = 8.55, p < .001$, as predicted by hypothesis 2. Unexpectedly, however, the post-hoc test showed that Caucasian Canadians and Asian Canadians were significantly more independent than Asian Internationals. The two Canadian groups did not differ on this domain.

The next step involved running two hierarchical multiple regressions by regressing the sociodemographic variables, acculturation indicators, interpersonal stress, and coping strategies on interdependent self-construal and independent self-construal scores, separately. To control for possible gender and SES effect on the dependent variables, these two variables were entered first into the regression equation, followed by the two acculturation indicators, English reading comprehension and length of stay in Canada. Given our specific interest in the relationships between stress-coping responses and self-construals, we entered perceived interper-

sonal stress and then the three coping strategies as a block in the last two steps of the regressions.

Table 2 shows the regression results for the overall sample and for the three groups individually. The regression model for the full sample was significant $F(8, 154) = 5.42, p < .001$ and accounted for 22% of the total variance in interdependent self-construal, supporting hypothesis 3. However, perceived interpersonal stress ($p < .01$), collective coping ($p < .001$), avoidance coping ($p < .05$), and engagement coping ($p < .05$) were the only significant contributors to interdependent self-construal. Gender, SES, English reading comprehension, and length of stay in Canada did not predict interdependent self-construal.

The contributions of the predictors to interdependent self-construal, however, varied across the three cultural groups. The model explained the most variance in interdependent self-construal for Caucasian Canadians, $F(8, 54) = 4$, $p < .01$, with 37% of variance accounted for. Perceived interpersonal stress ($p < .01$), collective coping ($p < .01$), and engagement coping ($p < .01$) were significant predictors for this

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Table 3
Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analyses for the Key Variables in Predicting Independent Self-Construal

Predictor Variables	Independent Self-Construal							
	Entire Sample		Asian Canadian		Asian International		Caucasian Canadian	
	b value	(β)	b value	(β)	b value	(β)	b value	(β)
Gender	.12	.09	.07	.06	.14	.09	.16	.14
SES	.12	.14	.10	.17	.21	.17	.15	.18
English reading comprehension	-.04	-.05	-.37	-.31*	-.09	-.12	.12	.11
Length of stay in Canada	.02	.30**	.00[a]	.05	.12	.29	.05	.19
Perceived interpersonal stress	-.04	-.07	-.06	-.13	-.01	-.02	-.05	-.10
Collective coping	.05	.06	.02	.04	.25	.22	.01	.02
Avoidance coping	.02	.03	-.12	-.22	.18	.15	.08	.10
Engagement coping	.21	.21**	.29	.37**	-.02	-.02	.32	.36**
F	4.40***		2.52*		.85		2.02	
R^2	.18		.29		.17		.22	
Adjusted R^2	.14		.18		-.03		.11	
t	5.30***		4.95***		1.76		.79	

Note. b values represent the unstandardized coefficients. b values represent the standardized coefficients. Dependent variable is independent self-construal scores as measured by the SCS.
[a]actual value = .003.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

group. The regression equation was not significant for either Asian Canadians, $F(8, 49) = 1.87$, *ns*, or Asian Internationals, $F(8, 33) = .59$, *ns*. None of the variables were significant in predicting the interdependence for the two Asian groups.

In terms of independent self-construal, we entered the same predictors into another regression to predict the independent self-construal score. Table 3 illustrates that the regression model on independent self-construal for the overall sample was significant, $F(8, 157) = 4.40$, $p < .001$, and accounted for 18% of its variance, supporting hypothesis 4. Length of stay in Canada ($p < .01$) and engagement coping ($p < .01$) merged as the only two significant predictors for independence.

In terms of each of the cultural groups, the predictive patterns of our model on independent self-construal diverged across the three groups. The regression model was significant only for Asian Canadians, $F(8, 49) = 2.52, p < .05$, accounting for 29% of the variance. For this group, English reading comprehension ($p < .05$) and engagement coping ($p < .01$) were signifi-

cant predictors for independent self-construal. For Caucasian Canadians, engagement coping ($p < .01$) was the sole significant predictor for independence. None of the predictor variables were significant for Asian internationals.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the current study was to examine the cultural variations and correlates of interdependent and independent self-construals in an ethnically mixed undergraduate sample. The study confirmed the hypothesis that clear group differences would emerge between Asian and Caucasian participants on the two self-construals. In line with previous research (Cross, 1995; Heine, 2001), the two Asian groups were found to be more interdependent than Caucasian Canadians. Asians' interdependence might be attributable to Confucian values of interpersonal harmony and an emphasis on respect for social hierarchy (Heine; Kim, Atkinson, & Yang, 1999). However, the study did not find significant differences between Asian Canadians and Asian Internationals on interdependence, de-

spite the fact that Asian Canadians were predominately Canadian-born and Asian Internationals were exclusively foreign-born. This within-group similarity on interdependent self-construal suggests interdependence as a central and enduring aspect of the Asian self-system (Liem et al., 2002). Rosenthal and Feldman (1990) found evidence that familial collectivism (e.g., observance of parental authority by children) can persist across generations of Chinese immigrant youth in Australia and the United States, despite the pressures of being assimilated to the more individualistic values in these countries.

In terms of independent self-construal, the study confirmed the hypothesis that Caucasian Canadians would be the most independent group, and Asian Internationals would be the least independent group. However, Caucasian Canadians and Asian Canadians did not differ significantly on independent self-construal. The absence of between-group differences on independence between these two cultural groups suggests the pre-eminence of individualism in North America (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2001) and its influence on Asian Canadians as a result of acculturation (Abe-Kim et al., 2001). For Asian Canadians, being born and raised in an individualistic Canadian society would have exposed and assimilated them to more independent attitudes, at least in selective domains (e.g., school, career, peer relationships). The fact that Asian Canadians were as independent as their Caucasian counterparts and as interdependent as their Asian International counterparts is intriguing. Such an orientation may be characteristic of this group's bicultural (Asian and Canadian) identity (Yeh & Hwang, 2000). Given these results, counsellors need to acknowledge the fluidity of self, particularly among bicultural individuals (Yeh & Hwang). Counsellors must recognize that the client's prevailing self-construal is a function of an intricate interaction between the client, the issue at hand, and the given cultural and social context (Kitayama, 2002).

Furthermore, perceived interpersonal stress, collective coping, avoidance coping, and en-

gagement coping were identified as the significant predictors for interdependence. Although a number of studies (Cross, 1995; Zaff, Blount, Philips, & Cohen, 2002) have found no relationship between coping behaviours and interdependence, our findings clearly identified a robust association between the two, supporting the findings of other researchers (e.g., Yeh et al., 2001; Yeh & Wang, 2000). The differences may be due to the fact that the current study and Yeh and her colleagues' studies were unique in measuring culture-based coping behaviours that encompassed collective and relational means. We found that interdependent individuals reported mobilizing all three coping strategies—collective coping, avoidance coping, and engagement coping—in responding to the interpersonal stress vignette presented. The strong relationship between collective coping strategies and interdependent self-construal is noteworthy; it highlights the propensity for interdependent participants to prefer parents, family, co-ethnic peers, and their cultural standards as a means of coping. Interdependent individuals also perceived the social scenario described as being more stressful than did more independent individuals. Our findings support the observation that collectively oriented individuals are more sensitive to social rejection (Triandis, 2001) and embarrassment resulting from interpersonal situations (Singelis & Sharkey, 1995).

The predictive model for independent self-construal was significant for the entire sample, with length of stay in Canada and engagement coping emerging as the only significant predictors. Having resided in Canada for a longer period appeared to enhance participants' independent self-construal. This increased independence may be reinforced by the high value placed on self-reliance and self-sufficiency in the more individualistic Canadian society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The fact that more independent participants showed a greater preference for engagement coping, which encompasses direct action, planning, positive thinking, and relaxation, further confirms the relationship between self-focused coping strategies and individualistic tendency. The current results corre-

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spond to Cross' (1995) findings, in that East Asian Internationals who endorsed independence were more likely to use direct coping strategies, involving individual action, effort, strategy and planning.

The results of these predictive models inform counselling practice in various ways. Knowing clients' dominant self-construal can help counsellors interpret the significance of specific stressors to the client and to anticipate client's preferred coping strategies. For instance, counsellors should be aware that interpersonal conflicts, particularly those related to one's in-group members (e.g., parents, family, co-ethnic peers, and even classmates), may be especially perplexing and taxing for interdependent clients. Counsellors must assess the client's prevailing self-system and ascertain the cultural and personal meanings of this self-definition for the client. For instance, when working with a client who holds strong interdependent beliefs, the counsellor might help the client generate and explore coping options that complement his or her self-definition, such as collective and avoidance coping responses. The client should also be helped to judiciously assess the impact of changes arose from counselling may have on significant others, given that collective approvals by in-group members hold supreme importance for interdependent individuals.

When working with Asian clients, counsellors must also be alerted to the fact that deferring one's decision to the opinions and the preferences of family or in-group members (e.g., relational approaches) might still be prevalent, even among highly acculturated Asian clients. Deference in and of itself by no means implies immaturity or indecision. It is important for counsellors to assess the strength of clients' interdependent attitudes and the extent to which these attitudes might influence clients' perceptions of presenting problems and experiences with counselling (Tata & Leong, 1994). Counsellors may explore clients' sense of obligations and duties toward their families and in-groups early in the counselling relationship. Counsellors should also carefully conceptualize clients' concerns from an interpersonal perspective

within their cultural context (Sue & Sue, 2003).

The study's results have another implication for counselling practice. Given that individualism underlies traditional counselling services (Sue & Sue, 2003), counsellors must adapt counselling to bring it in line with the values and worldview of interdependent clients such as Asians. Yeh and Hwang (2000) contend that conceptualizing interdependent clients' presenting problems solely from an "intrapsychic phenomenon" would be culturally inappropriate, if not futile. More effective interventions would entail accessing clients' family and community support; incorporating clients' parents, family, siblings, and co-ethnic peers into the counselling process; and mobilizing co-ethnic peers as a support system (Yeh & Inose, 2002). It would also be beneficial to adopt a multi-layer, team approach to counselling interdependent clients. For example, in school and university settings, this intervention model would include faculty/teachers, staff, students, and administrators in providing collaborative assistance to Asian students (Yeh & Inose; Yeh, & Wang, 2000).

Finally, the current results have implications for counsellor awareness of their own self-orientations and worldviews and their potential impact on counselling relationships. The fact that interdependence and independence lead to differences in perception of stressors and preferred solutions to problems may inadvertently cause conflicts between the counsellor and the client if they are driven by divergent self-construals. A counsellor's overemphasis on client as an autonomous changing agent might contradict the client's interdependent attitudes and beliefs and undermine the counsellor's credibility. In fact, interdependent attitudes on the part of counsellors have been found to predict greater awareness and acceptance of cultural similarities and differences among people (universal-diverse orientation)—a dimension associated with multicultural counselling competence (Yeh & Arora, 2003). Hence, the current findings alert counsellors to the need to be keenly aware of potential differences between their self-construals and those of their clients'. Such sensitivity would enable counsellors to

make necessary adjustments in counselling in order to minimize cultural barriers and optimize therapeutic outcomes.

LIMITATIONS

At the individual group level, the proposed predictor model is less predictive of self-construals in the Asian International group. Being relatively new and in the midst of adjusting to a new culture in Canada (mean length of stay in Canada = 1.61, SD = 1.95), international students' self-systems may be less contingent upon their acculturation and stress-coping experiences. Pragmatic issues related to cultural and academic adjustment may be more pressing and relevant to the immediate experiences of these sojourners. Future research should consider alternative correlates of self-construals for this group, which might include intercultural competency, stresses associated with culture shock and cultural changes, academic adaptation, and perceived discrimination. Furthermore, the current study was based on an undergraduate sample that is typically more homogenous in educational backgrounds and is more resourceful than the general population. Thus, the generalizeability of the results may be limited. Finally, to the extent that Asian participants in the study were not differentiated by their ethnic origins (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese), any conclusions pertaining to Asians in general must be interpreted with caution.

CONCLUSION

The current study pointed to the differential patterns and predictions of self-construals across and within three cultural groups. It confirmed previous findings concerning Asian-Caucasian, between-group divergence on interdependent self-construal. The study sheds new lights on the within-group difference on independent self-construal between Canadian-raised Asians and foreign-born Asian International students. The study also examined the relationships among interdependence and independence, acculturation, and stress and coping, indicating the need

for counsellors to pay attention to the cultural bases of clients' perception of stressors and their coping and problem-solving strategies. Echoing the recent position taken by a number of multicultural counselling theorists (Williams, 2003; Yeh & Hwang, 2000), we believe that professional psychological services to culturally diverse individuals would be enhanced if conscious efforts were made to integrate self-construals into counselling. To this end, the interface of interdependent and independent self-construals with counselling and psychotherapy merits further empirical investigations.

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