SELF-CONCORDANCE AND SUBJECTIVE
WELL-BEING IN FOUR CULTURES

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Sheldon and colleagues have recently focused research attention on the concept of self-concordance, in which people feel that they pursue their goals because the goals fit with their underlying interests and values rather than because others say they should pursue them. Self-concordant individuals typically evidence higher subjective well-being (SWB). But is this also true in non-Western cultures, which emphasize people's duty to conform to societal expectations and group-centered norms? To address this question, this study assessed goal self-concordance and SWB in four different cultures. U.S., Chinese, and South Korean samples evidenced equal levels of self-concordance, whereas a Taiwanese sample evidenced somewhat less self-concordance. More importantly, self-concordance predicted SWB within every culture. It appears that "owning one's actions"—that is, feeling that one's goals are consistent with the self—may be important for most if not all humans.

Keywords: motivation; goals; well-being; culture

Recently, Sheldon and colleagues (Sheldon, 2002; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001) have proposed the idea of *self-concordance* as a way of conceptualizing optimal goal-striving. Self-concordant individuals are people who pursue life goals with a sense that they express their authentic choices rather than with a sense that they are controlled by external forces over which they have little say. Thus, self-concordant goals are ones that represent people's actual interests and passions as well as their central values and beliefs. In contrast, nonconcordant goals are ones that are pursued with a sense of "having to," as the person does not really enjoy or believe in the goals. For example, a student's goal

of learning to play the piano may be self-concordant; that is, the student has an interest in music and a genuine desire to master the instrument. Or, it may be non-self-concordant; that is, the student has little natural inclination or interest for the piano and practices only because his or her parents insist.

To measure self-concordance, Sheldon (2002) has drawn from self-determination theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1991, 2000) and its concept of the "perceived locus of causality continuum" (PLOC). The question is, does a person engage in goal-pursuits with a sense that "I" chose them (an internal perceived locus of causality, or I-PLOC)? Or does a person pursue goals with a sense that his or her situation is the source of the goals (an external perceived locus of causality, or E-PLOC)? Research focusing on Western samples has shown that self-concordance (i.e., greater I-PLOC than E-PLOC) is associated with concurrent subjective well-being (SWB; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995). In addition, self-concordance also predicts longitudinal increases in SWB by way of the greater goal-attainment inspired by self-concordance (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Kasser, 1998). In terms of the aforementioned example, the student who practices piano with a sense of interest and conviction is typically a happier person than the student who practices with a sense of pressure and obligation, and this student would also tend to improve his or her playing more rapidly, perhaps becoming an even happier person. Based on such findings, Sheldon (2002) suggested that self-concordance—that is, the sense of "owning" one's personal goals—might be a culturally invariant need or benefit for human beings. However, Sheldon reported no cross-cultural goal data to support this idea.

Relevant to Sheldon's claim, researchers working within the SDT tradition have now published considerable data demonstrating the importance of internal motivation within non-Western samples. For example, Chirkov, Ryan, Kim, and Kaplan (2003) showed that although different types of social behaviors were differently internalized within four different cultures, having an I-PLOC regarding behavior predicted SWB in every culture. Hayamizu (1997) found that in a sample of Japanese high school students, internal motivation was related to positive coping, whereas external or "controlled" motivation was associated with maladaptive coping. Yamaguchi and Tanaka (1998) recently reported more adaptive learning styles and positive experiences in Japanese students with an I-PLOC for academic behavior. In addition, Deci et al. (2001) found in a sample of Bulgarian adults that I-PLOC on the job predicted work engagement, job performance, and psychological well-being (see Deci & Ryan, 2000, for a more comprehensive consideration of this emerging literature).

In the current work, we sought to generalize these cross-cultural results to the case of self-generated personal goals. Indeed, there is reason to suspect that the above-cited effects may not generalize to personal goal constructs. Idiographic goals represent people's self-generated initiatives for positive change and life improvement, and it may be that not all cultures support such proactive initiatives. For example, Markus and Kitayama (1994) suggested that in interdependent or collectivist cultures (Triandis, 1997), goals undertaken to "fit in" and have harmonious relationships with others should be most conducive to SWB, whereas goals undertaken to advance self-interests or achievements may actually be harmful to SWB. Similarly, Oishi (2000) has also argued that goals associated with independence and self-expression may be less beneficial within collectivist cultures than in individualist cultures. In this vein, Oishi and Diener (2001) reported that relative to European American college students, Asian college students did not benefit as much emotionally by attaining goals pursued "for fun and enjoyment," whereas achieving goals undertaken to "please

friends and parents" resulted in greater emotional benefits for participants within collectivist cultures.

In sum, although some theoretical perspectives and cross-cultural data suggest that pursuing self-concordant personal goals should be beneficial within any cultural context, other perspectives and data suggest that it may always not be the case (Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996).[1] The current research sought to shed new light on these issues by assessing personal goals, self-concordance, and SWB within four different cultures: the United States, China, Taiwan, and South Korea. Based on past findings concerning the current measure of self-concordance, our primary hypothesis was that self-concordance would be positively associated with SWB in many, if not all, of these cultures. However, we also believed that the effects of self-concordance might to some extent be moderated by culture; we sought to uncover any such cultural differences. In addition, we wished to examine cultural mean differences in self-concordance. However, we had no theoretical reasons for making hypotheses concerning mean differences.

SECONDARY ISSUES

Below, we briefly consider each of the four types of motivation that together constitute the self-concordance concept and measure; we will also present data regarding each type separately. According to SDT, motivations can be located on a continuum of internalization, ranging from external motivation (the person acts with a feeling of being controlled by external pressures or contingencies) to introjected motivation (the person acts with a feeling of being controlled by his or her own internal processes) to identified motivation (the person acts with a sense of choice and volition, even if he or she does not enjoy the action) to intrinsic motivation (the person acts because the activity is inherently interesting and challenging). External and introjected motivations are classified as nonconcordant and potentially problematic motivations because the person does not fully assent to his or her own behavior. In contrast, identified and intrinsic motivations are classified as concordant and more beneficial motivations (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Connell, 1989) because the person fully accepts them and because these motivations typically represent more central and stable aspects of the person.

According to SDT, intrinsic motivation is the prototypical self-concordant motivation as it represents the organism's self-initiated attempts to learn about the world and master new skills. We believed it might be very illuminating to examine this motivation by itself as some cross-cultural research calls into question the invariant association of intrinsic motivation with positive outcomes (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Oishi & Diener, 2001). Nevertheless, we hypothesized that intrinsic goal motivation, defined in terms of people's sense of interest and engagement in their personal goals as well as the enjoyment associated with those goals, should tend to be beneficial in every culture. We ventured no hypotheses concerning cultural differences in intrinsic motivation as we believe that people can find ways to be intrinsically motivated in almost any context.

Identified motivation, the second form of self-concordant motivation, may be a particularly important motivation to examine in a cross-cultural context because it represents the extent to which external prescriptions have been internalized into the self. In fact, SDT maintains that people can follow tradition, obey rules, and defer to others to no harmful effect as long as they identify with the behavior and enact it willingly—indeed, in this case, pursuing externally-mandated goals may even be positive (Chirkov et al., 2003). Based on this

reasoning, we hypothesized that identified motivation should tend to be beneficial in every culture. We ventured no hypotheses concerning cultural differences in mean levels of identified motivation.

Introjected motivation, the sense that "I must force myself" to do a behavior, is also an important motivation to examine in a cross-cultural context, given likely cultural differences in the strength of social pressures, obligations, and expectations. Although one might expect greater introjection in more traditional or collectivist cultures, it is also possible that prosocial norms in such cultures help people to more fully internalize imposed motivations, leading to less introjection overall. Thus, although we expected introjection to be associated with lower SWB in most if not all cultures, we ventured no hypotheses regarding cultural mean differences in introjection.

Finally, external motivation is also worthy of examination in its own right. Although Oishi and Diener (2001) assumed that "striving to please my parents" is an external motivation, again, we believe it depends on the person's PLOC for the behavior. According to SDT, one might strive to please one's parents with a sense of being controlled by unassimilated forces or with a sense of wholeheartedly wanting to please them; as noted above, positive relations with SWB are expected to the extent that the latter is true. Again, because the internalization process might actually be better supported in non-Western than in Western cultures, we ventured no hypotheses regarding cultural mean differences in external motivation. However, we did expect that external motivation would be associated with lower SWB in most if not all cultures.

Finally, as an additional measure, in each culture we also asked participants to rate the extent their goals are self-focused (undertaken primarily to serve the needs and preferences of the self) versus other-focused (undertaken primarily to serve the needs and preferences of social groups, such as family, team, club, or friends). This allowed us to directly assess the extent to which goals are perceived as addressing individual interests and achievements, relative to collective interests and achievements—an important distinction according to Markus and Kitayama (1994) and many other cultural theorists. Notably, however, self-determination theorists have argued that the individualism/collectivism distinction is largely independent of the concordance/nonconcordance distinction (Chirkov et al., 2003; Deci & Ryan, 2000). In other words, one might engage in either collectivist or individualist behaviors with either a sense of self-ownership or with a sense of being controlled by nonassimilated forces. Thus, we expected few or weak correlations of self-focus with self-concordance. If a positive association emerged, we intended to control for self-focused goals in the self-concordance-to-SWB analyses to ensure that self-concordance effects involve more than a tendency to pursue primarily self-interests.

SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES

Again, our primary hypothesis was that self-concordant motivation would be associated with SWB in most, if not all, of the cultural groups studied. In terms of the four constituent dimensions of self-concordance, external and introjected motivation should tend to be negatively associated with SWB, and intrinsic and identified motivation should tend to be positively associated with SWB. We ventured no a priori hypotheses regarding cultural mean differences for either the aggregate self-concordance measure or for the four individual motivation measures.

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

Five hundred and fifty-one college undergraduates participated in the study, all of them students at large universities. There were 194 South Korean students from Hanyang University in Seoul, South Korea;[2] 153 U.S. students from the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri); 163 Taiwanese students from the National Sun Yat-Sen University, in Kaohsiung, Taiwan; and 41 Chinese students from the Guangdon Commercial College in Guangzhou, South China).[3] Participants were drawn from a variety of majors and courses of study. All participants were volunteers, although Missouri participants received credit toward their introductory psychology experimental requirement for participating. The data collections occurred between November 1999 and December 2001. Participants attended small group questionnaire sessions. During these sessions participants first completed SWB measures, then goal measures, then demographic measures.

An English version of the questionnaire was created for use with the U.S. sample. Chinese, Taiwanese, and South Korean versions were created by a process in which a bilingual psychologist/native to the country translated the questionnaire into the appropriate language, after which it was translated back by a second individual proficient in both English and the language in question. The equivalence of the original and the back-translated versions of the questionnaire was evaluated, and minor revisions were made to arrive at the final versions of the questionnaire.

MEASURES

Personal goals. All participants completed a standard personal-strivings assessment (Emmons, 1989) in which they were first told, "We are interested in the things that you typically or characteristically are trying to do in your everyday behavior. Think about the objectives that you are typically trying to accomplish or attain. We call these personal strivings." Participants were given examples of strivings and were then asked to list eight personal strivings of their own.

Next, we asked participants to rate the extent to which they pursue each striving for external, introjected, identified, and intrinsic reasons, using a Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all for this reason*) to 7 (*completely for this reason*; Ryan & Connell, 1989; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999, 2000; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001; Sheldon & Kasser, 1995, 1998). Again, the former two reasons are conceptualized as nonconcordant forms of motivation, and the latter two reasons are conceptualized as self-concordant forms of motivation (see Table 1 for the specific item wordings). As in prior research, we computed an aggregate self-concordance score for each participant by summing the eight identified and the eight intrinsic ratings and then subtracting the eight external and the eight introjected ratings. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for this 32-item variable ranged between .70 and .80 across the four samples. Below, we present data for this composite as well as for the four individual motivation dimensions.

In addition, participants were asked to rate the extent to which their goals were self-focused versus other-focused. The following wording was used:

> Goals can be adopted primarily to serve the needs and preferences of the *self* ("self-focused" goals), or to serve the needs and preferences of *social groups*, such as family, team, club, or

TABLE 1
Item Wordings for the Four Motivation Dimensions

Wording	Dimension
External (nonconcordant)	You are pursuing this striving because somebody else wants you to or because your situation seems to demand it. Stated differently, you probably wouldn't have this striving if you didn't get some kind of reward, praise, or approval for it (or avoid some kind of punishment, criticism, or disapproval). For example, you might try to "go to church more regularly" because others might criticize you if you didn't, or because you need to be seen at church for your job.
Introjected (nonconcordant)	You are pursuing this striving because you would feel ashamed, guilty, or anxious if you didn't. Rather than having this striving just because someone else thinks you should, you feel that you "ought" to strive for that something. For example, you might try to "go to church more regularly" because you would feel bad about yourself if you didn't.
Identified (concordant)	You are pursuing this striving because you really believe that it's an important goal to have. Although others may have urged you to pursue this striving in the past, now you endorse it freely and value it for personal reasons. For example, you might try to "go to church more regularly" because you genuinely feel this is the right thing to do, even if you don't really enjoy it.
Intrinsic (concordant)	You are pursuing this striving because of the fun and enjoyment which the striving provides you. While there may be many good reasons for the striving, the primary "reason" is simply your interest in the experience itself. For example, you might try to "go to church more regularly" because being at church is inherently interesting and enjoyable to you.

friends ("group-focused" goals). For example, one might pursue the goal "get very high grades" because this is what one wants for oneself or because this is what one's family deems important. As another example, one might pursue the goal "get into good physical condition" because this is what one wants for oneself or because this is what one's sports team needs. Of course, a goal may also represent both at the same time. Please rate the extent to which each goal represents your own needs and preferences or the needs/preferences of important social groups.

A Likert-type scale was used in which 1 = *primarily group needs*, 3 = *represents both equally*, and 5 = *primarily personal needs*. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the self-focus variable ranged between .50 and .66 across the four samples. These coefficients are rather low, suggesting that participants viewed their eight goals as varying considerably on their degree of self versus group focus.

Subjective well-being. In addition, all participants rated the 20 mood adjectives of the Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (Watson, Tellegen, & Clark, 1988), indicating how much they have felt each emotion "in the past month or so." A Likert-type scale from 1 (*very slightly or not all*) to 5 (*extremely*) was employed, and positive affect and negative affect scores were derived by averaging the appropriate items. Participants also completed the five items of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), also with reference to the past month or so, using a Likert-type scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). These items were averaged to create a life-satisfaction score. Alpha coefficients ranged between .60 and .82 across the four samples for positive affect, between .63

TABLE 2
Variable Means for the Entire Sample and for Each Subsample

Variables	Sample				
	Total Sample	United States	South Korea	Taiwan	China
Aggregate SWB	3.51	4.73_a	3.16_b	2.78_c	3.41_b
Positive affect	3.12	3.49_a	2.99_b	2.90_b	3.29_a
Negative affect	2.44	2.10_a	2.56_b	2.56_b	2.64_b
Life satisfaction	2.82	3.34_a	2.73_b	2.44_b	2.77_b
Self-concordance	3.04	3.57_a	3.43_a	2.39_b	3.41_a
External motivation	2.93	2.88	2.82	3.03	3.17
Introjected motivation	3.86	3.82_a	3.39_b	4.35_c	4.22_{ac}
Identified motivation	5.35	5.61_a	5.31_b	5.20_b	5.19_{ab}
Intrinsic motivation	4.59	4.66_a	4.34_a	4.57_a	5.60_b

NOTE: SWB = subjective well-being. Subsample means not sharing subscripts are significantly different from each other at the .01 level.

and .83 for negative affect, and between .75 and .81 for life satisfaction. As in other recent studies (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001; Elliot, Sheldon, & Church, 1997; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), we also computed an aggregate measure of SWB by first standardizing all scores and then subtracting negative affect from the sum of positive affect and life satisfaction (Diener, 1994).

Demographics. At the end of the questionnaire participants rated their family income, using a 5-point Likert-type scale adjusted to each nation's currency and range of income levels. In addition, they rated their mother's level of education and their father's level of education from 1 (*some high school or less*) to 5 (*postgraduate degree*). We intended to control for these variables to ensure that they could not account for the primary results.

RESULTS

SAMPLE-WIDE MEANS IN SWB AND SELF-CONCORDANCE

Table 2 presents the overall sample mean for the SWB and motivation variables. The mean for aggregate self-concordance was positive, indicating that on the whole, participants felt that their personal goals were more internally than externally caused. Also, participants seemed generally happy, with means on life satisfaction and positive affect above the midpoint of the scale and the negative affect mean falling below the mid-point (Myers, 2000).

MEAN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CULTURES IN SWB AND SELF-CONCORDANCE

Table 2 also presents means for the 10 variables and separately for each sample. We conducted one-way ANOVAs on each of the 10 variables, with cultural group as a four-level factor. Significant omnibus effects emerged in nine cases (*F*s ranging from 6.02 to 193.1, all *p*s < .01; external motivation was the exception). For these nine variables, we then conducted a

series of *t* tests to compare each sample to each other sample. Because so many tests were conducted, we employed a .01 alpha level. Table 2 contains the results.

Consistent with earlier studies of national well-being (i.e. Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1995), the U.S. sample evidenced significantly higher levels of all three first-order SWB measures, the only exception being that Chinese participants did not report lower positive affect than the U.S. sample. Also consistent with past results, the U.S. participants evidenced significantly higher aggregate SWB than the other three samples. In addition, the South Korean and Chinese samples evidenced significantly more SWB than the Taiwanese sample.

Next, we turned to the self-concordance variable. One-sample *t* tests revealed that self-concordance was significantly greater than zero in every sample (all *p*s < .01). This indicates that in every cultural group, people felt more I-PLOC than E-PLOC with respect to their personal goals. There were no significant differences in self-concordance between cultures, with the exception that the Taiwanese sample was lower than the other three samples. Considering the four individual motivation dimensions, no significant differences emerged for external motivation. The South Korean sample reported the least introjected motivation, and the Taiwanese and Chinese samples reported the most, with the U.S. sample in the middle. The U.S. sample reported the most identified motivation, with the other three samples reporting lower levels of identified motivation. Finally, the Chinese sample reported the most intrinsic motivation for goals, with the U.S., South Korean, and Taiwanese samples reporting less intrinsic motivation.

SAMPLE-WIDE ASSOCIATIONS OF SELF-CONCORDANCE WITH SWB

Turning to our primary hypotheses, we next examined the associations between the motivation measures and the SWB measures. Table 3 presents these correlations collapsed across the four samples ($N = 551$; all measures were standardized within sample prior to this analysis). Consistent with prior findings (Sheldon, 2002), aggregate self-concordance was significantly positively correlated with positive affect, life-satisfaction, and aggregate SWB, and it was significantly negatively correlated with negative affect. Table 3 also provides the correlations between the individual motivation dimensions and SWB. As expected, external and introjected motivation correlated negatively with aggregate SWB, and identified and intrinsic motivation correlated positively with aggregate SWB. The same basic pattern emerged for the four motivation variables in relation to the three first-order SWB variables, although not all of the correlations reached significance.

Next, we turned to the control variables—namely, family income, mother's education, father's education, and self-focused goals. Would the association of self-concordance and SWB in the Asian samples be reducible to the effect of these variables? This was a possibility, given that self-concordance correlated positively with both father's and mother's education (rs = .16 and .14, respectively, ps < .05) and with self-focused goals ($r = .07$, $p < .10$); SWB also correlated positively with father's and mother's education (rs = .11 and .15, respectively, both ps < .01) and with self-focused goals ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$).

To ensure that self-concordance has effects on SWB that are independent of these associations, we conducted a hierarchical regression in which the control variables were entered at the first step and self-concordance was entered at the second step. At Step 1, income and mother's education were both significant predictors of SWB (βs = .12 and .13, both ps < .05).

TABLE 3
Correlations of Goal-Motivation Measures With SWB Measures,
Collapsed Across Cultures (*N* = 551)

Predictors	SWB Measures			
	Positive Affect	*Negative Affect*	*Life-Satisfaction*	*Aggregate SWB*
Self-concordance	.20***	–.31***	.18***	.33***
External	–.15***	.26***	–.11***	– .24***
Introjected	–.06	.21***	–.06	–.16***
Identified	.05	–.09**	.02	.08**
Intrinsic	.16***	–.09**	.18***	.21***

NOTE: SWB = subjective well-being.
**p < .05. ***p < .01.

At Step 2, self-concordance accounted for significant incremental variance (R^2 change = .104, $p < .01$; β = .33). In short, it appears the associations of self-concordance with SWB represent more than the effects of family education, family income, or individualist goal-contents.

VARIATIONS IN THE SELF-CONCORDANCE
TO SWB ASSOCIATION ACROSS SAMPLES

Table 4 presents the correlation of aggregate self-concordance with each SWB measure, split by sample. As can be seen, self-concordance correlated significantly and positively with aggregate SWB in every sample and, as expected, was significantly associated with the first-order well-being variables in 9 out of 12 cases. Also as expected, external and introjected motivation were negatively correlated with aggregate SWB in every sample, and intrinsic and identified motivation were positively correlated with SWB in every sample (although 7 of the 16 correlations involving individual motivation dimensions did not reach significance). Notably, none of the 80 correlations presented in Table 4 were significant in the direction opposite from that predicted.

Next, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis to examine a further question; that is, does self-concordance interact with the sample to predict SWB? To simplify the presentation, we analyzed only the aggregate SWB variable, regressing it on self-concordance at Step 1, three dummy variables representing the three Asian samples at Step 2, and three Dummy × Self-Concordance product terms at Step 3 to represent the interactions between sample and self-concordance. At Step 1, self-concordance was significant (R^2 change = .114, $p < .01$; β = .33); at Step 2, the three dummy variables were significant as a set (R^2 change = .204, $p < .01$), and each was significant individually (βs = –.46, –.50, and –.21 for Korea, Taiwan, and China, respectively; all three $ps < .01$). At Step 3, the three product terms were nonsignificant as a set (R^2 change = .002, $p > .50$), and none were significant individually (βs = –.07, .00, and –.06, respectively; all three $ps > .30$). The lack of interactions further supports the hypothesis that self-concordance may have universal benefits.

TABLE 4
Correlations of Goal-Motivation Measures
With SWB Measures

| Culture | SWB Measures | | | |
	Positive Affect	Negative Affect	Life-Satisfaction	Aggregate SWB
United States				
Self-concordance	.26***	–.42***	.12	.33***
External	–.29***	.43***	–.21***	–.39***
Introjected	–.04	.17**	.02	–.07
Identified	.07	–.15*	–.01	.08
Intrinsic	.20**	–.17**	.09	.19**
South Korea				
Self-concordance	.14**	–.20***	.22***	.27***
External	–.09	.11	–.11	–.14**
Introjected	–.04	.27***	–.17**	–.23***
Identified	.06	–.01	.04	.05
Intrinsic	.11	–.01	.15**	.13*
Taiwan				
Self-concordance	.19**	–.35***	.21***	.40***
External	–.10	.29***	–.10	–.27***
Introjected	–.12	.19**	–.04	–.18**
Identified	.00	–.11	.00	.06
Intrinsic	.13*	–.06	.28***	.25***
China				
Self-concordance	.24	–.30**	.05	.33**
External	–.15	.18	.16	–.07
Introjected	.01	.13	.05	–.04
Identified	.18	–.16	.12	.26
Intrinsic	.31**	–.27*	.23	.46***

NOTE: SWB = subjective well-being.
*$p < .10$. **$p < .05$. ***$p < .01$.

DISCUSSION

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

In this research, we tried to compare members of an individualist and three collectivist cultures in their levels of goal self-concordance and SWB. We wished to examine both the cultural mean differences in self-concordance and SWB and the cultural differences in patterns of association between self-concordance and SWB. We reasoned that if self-concordance was correlated with SWB in every sample, this would provide important new support for our assumption that self-concordance is beneficial regardless of one's cultural membership.

Analyses of mean differences revealed that Asian participants were much lower than U.S. participants in SWB, a finding that is consistent with earlier work (Diener et al., 1995; Diener & Suh, 1999). However, there was no strong tendency for the Asians to report less concordant motivation than the U.S. participants. For example, there were no cultural differences in external motivation. Also, the South Korean sample reported less introjected motivation than the U.S. participants, and the Chinese sample reported more intrinsic motivation than the U.S. participants. On the other hand, all three Asian samples reported lesser

identification with their strivings compared to the U.S. sample. Perhaps most importantly, Asians experienced equal levels of aggregate self-concordance in their personal goals (except in the Taiwanese sample, discussed below). Furthermore, mean levels of self-concordance were positive in every sample, indicating that people feel more autonomous than controlled in every culture. Finally, self-concordance correlated only weakly with demographic variables and with a measure of the self-focused (versus group-focused) content of individuals' goals. Taken together, these findings suggest that it is possible for people to "own their goals" everywhere, regardless of their cultural membership, their income, family education, and the concrete focus of the goals.

Directly supporting our primary SWB-related hypotheses, self-concordance was predictive of every measure of SWB in the aggregate sample and was also predictive of SWB separately within every cultural sample by itself. In no culture did self-concordance correlate negatively with SWB as a cultural relativist perspective might predict based on the assumption that self-possessed individuals do not "fit" within collectivist societies. Furthermore, the associations of self-concordance with SWB remained significant when the effects of self-focused goals were partialed out and also remained significant when the effects of demographic characteristics were controlled.

One less consistent finding concerned the Taiwanese sample. Although self-concordance correlated positively with SWB in this sample as in the other samples, Taiwanese participants reported significantly less self-concordance than the other samples as well as reporting significantly less SWB than the other samples. We believe this difference may have emerged because the Taiwanese University (National Sun Yat-Sen) and its city of location (Kaohsiung) are fairly traditional and perhaps more collectivistic. In contrast, the other Asian universities in the sample (Hanyang and Guangdon) are located in more Westernized or cosmopolitan cities (Seoul and Guangzhou). However, future research will be required to establish whether Taiwanese samples from less traditional settings might evidence equal self-concordance as South Korean or Chinese samples and, conversely, whether Korean or Chinese students from less urbanized parts of these countries might evidence lower self-concordance.

Overall, these findings are quite consistent with our hypothesis that self-concordant goal pursuit is important in all cultures. Returning to the ongoing example, students (piano or otherwise) in every culture may benefit more when they strive because they enjoy and identify with the process of learning, rather than because they feel they must or should. In other words, when one goes along with strong social forces, it is likely better to reach a state of agreement with them than to resist or resent them. Indeed, this conclusion is consistent with humanistic, existential, organismic, psychosocial, and psychodynamic perspectives regarding optimal human functioning (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001), which stress the importance of individuals' ability to assimilate and accommodate sociocultural norms, expectations, and constraints.

One positive feature of the current work is that it examined several non-Western cultures rather than just one, as occurs in many cross-cultural studies. Also, several different exemplars of collectivist culture were examined, varying on dimensions such as modern/traditional and democratic/socialist. As noted above, the fact that we found the same basic pattern of results across these different cultural contexts lends added confidence to our study conclusions. Yet another innovation of this research is that it employed a mixed idiographic-nomothetic methodology, which allowed participants to voice their unique concerns while allowing us to directly compare participants based on their ratings of those concerns (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001; Emmons, 1989). This may be especially desirable

in cross-cultural studies where the content of people's goals and activities may vary more than the underlying meanings and purposes they represent.

LIMITATIONS AND UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

Limitations of this study include the fact that only college student samples were employed. It will be important to replicate the findings using older adults as college students may represent the most Westernized segment of many traditional cultures. Also, only self-report data were collected. It will also be important to perhaps eliminate method variance confounds by soliciting observer- as well as self-reports regarding participants' apparent self-concordance and/or SWB. In addition, it will be important to measure and control for stable trait variables such as neuroticism or extraversion as these might account for the self-concordance to SWB effects (but see Elliot & Sheldon, 1998, for evidence that self-concordance effects are not reducible to neuroticism or behavioral inhibition). Future cross-cultural goal research should also examine longitudinal changes in SWB as a function of participants' level of goal attainment during the period of study as such studies might yield different results than those reported here (Oishi & Diener, 2001). Finally, future research should also study self-concordance and SWB in other cultures besides U.S. and Asian cultures as there are many types and styles of collectivism and individualism.

CONCLUSION

At the broadest level, the results of this study suggest a need for greater differentiation and phenomenological specificity in characterizations of autonomy, individualism, and agency. In particular, our results support a view in which humans function more optimally and have more positive experiences when they do what they enjoy and believe in, no matter what their cultural membership. Indeed, one might question the health or sustainability of a culture that did not tolerate this basic expression of human rights (Diener & Suh, 1999).

NOTES

1. Notably, some might view personal goals as an inherently individualistic construct, given that goals, by definition, concern people's proactive personal initiatives (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). However, along with other contemporary goal theorists, we assert that goals are actually among the most important means by which individuals adapt to social contexts and enhance their connectivity with others (Cantor & Sanderson, 1999; Salmela-Aro & Nurmi, 1996). That is, rather than being inherently self-centered, many goals, instead, concern the external world, especially the world of social roles and interpersonal concerns (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Salmela-Aro, Pennanen, & Nurmi, 2001; Sheldon & Elliot, 2000). The fact that many personal goals address social tasks is only logical, given that perhaps the primary adaptive environment for Homo sapiens throughout history has been the social environment (Caporael, 1997).

2. Data from the South Korean sample were used earlier to examine a different set of research questions (Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001).

3. One hundred and sixty-one Chinese participants completed questionnaires. Unfortunately, we were able to match up subjective well-being (SWB) data and goal-data for only 41 of these respondents because of an error of questionnaire administration. Providing some assurance that this subsample was equivalent to the main sample, we found no differences between the 41 final participants and the 120 excluded participants on any of the four SWB measures (all ps > .50). Thus, we decided to include the Chinese data in this article.

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