RUNNING HEAD: SAUDI ARABIAN CULTURE

In the *Middle* between East and West:

Implicit Cultural Orientations in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Arabian cultures are of historical and contemporary importance, yet little is known about their psychological characteristics. We hypothesized that the importance of memberships in kinship groups in Arabian culture leads to both strong interdependent tendencies via group identification, but also strong independent tendencies regarding self-dignity and experience of independent emotions (pride, anger) as a result of kinship group rivalries. Using a cultural task analysis to assess implicit behavioral markers of cultural orientations, we found that – compared to individuals in the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Germany – Saudi Arabians were relatively interdependent on measures of attention, social judgment, and happiness. However, on two measures tapping self-evaluation and emotional experience, Saudi Arabians emerged as highly independent. No gender difference was found. Altogether, Saudi Arabia clearly defies the currently dominant classification of cultures (independent or interdependent), thereby posing important challenges to extant theories of culture.

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In a famous scene in the movie, "Lawrence of Arabia," T.E. Lawrence, an agent for the British Army, meets Auda Abu Tayi, the chief of an Arab tribe whom Lawrence wants to recruit as an ally in the first World War. Lawrence first tries to persuade Auda to join him by speaking of how fighting the Ottomans would unite the Arabs. But Auda replies: "The Arabs are nothing to me; my tribe is the Howeitat." Lawrence tries again, challenging Auda's ego by suggesting that he doesn't make his own decisions. Enraged, Auda insists that his tribe's welfare means everything to him. Finally, Lawrence succeeds by appealing to Auda's self-pride, suggesting that Auda will comply simply "because it is his pleasure."

In this paper we argue that this scene –which is entirely fictional and not based on a real event–actually reflects many important aspects of Arab culture. These aspects reflect a unique and until now, unstudied profile in the cultural psychology literature: namely, strong tendencies toward both *cultural independence* (exemplified in Auda's sense of individual pride, and expressions of contempt and anger) as well as strong simultaneous tendencies toward *cultural interdependence* (characterized by Auda's strong identification with his tribe). The hypothesis of communal commitment alongside intense individuality is worthy of serious empirical scrutiny. If borne out, it would belie the conventional wisdom in the current literature of cultural psychology, which has until now identified cultures as being either predominantly independent or predominantly interdependent (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In particular, numerous studies over the past two decades have shown that North Americans and Western Europeans are highly independent, disengaging themselves from ingroups and showing positive self-regard and strong self-enhancing tendencies; on the other hand, East Asians have been shown to be relatively interdependent, strongly engaging with their ingroups as well as keeping modest, self-effacing, and self-critical

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demeanors (for a recent review, see Heine, 2010). However, Arabian culture may represent a novel, non-monolithic pattern of cultural orientations in between these two extremes, containing aspects of both independence and interdependence.

Origins of independent and interdependent tendencies

Arabs may be defined as those individuals who identify themselves with Arab culture and share a common language (Arabic) or heritage (Patai, 2007). Although we know of virtually no previous psychological research on Arab populations, historians, anthropologists, and observers largely agree that affiliation to a kinship group (family, tribe, clan, or by extension, a region) is a fundamental characteristic of traditional Arab society (e.g., Allen, 2006; Berque, 1974; Bourdieu, 1958; Ibn Khaldun, 1377/2002; Lancaster, 1981; Lawrence, 1935/2008). The salience of kin groups subsequently fosters two competing motivations: a strong commitment to one's own kinship group, but also rivalries with other kinship groups. For example, Lawrence (1935/2008, p. 181) noted that "innumerable" prestige contests and local rivalries between tribes characterized Arabian society in the early 20th century.

However, Arab culture puts a high premium not only on ingroup solidarity and cohesion (*asabiyya*), but also on maintaining individual self-respect (*ihtiram al-nafs*) and self-dignity (*karam*) which are seen as essential to maintaining the honor and reputation of the whole group, and thus its survival. Indeed, it is telling that *individual-level* identity in Arabian cultures typically arises through differentiation of kinship *groups*, such that group members derive their individual honor and reputation by emphasizing their membership in and opposition to other groups (Bourdieu, 1958; Patai, 2007; Thesiger, 1964). Historians note that this tension between self and group has been a "basic motivating force" in Arab behavior throughout history, which dates

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back to pre-Islamic Arabian societies (Armstrong, 2006; Ibn Khaldun, 1377/2002; Watt, 1968).

This mixture of kinship spirit and emphasis on self-dignity might have further evolved from the harsh physical environment –desert and steppe– where the Arab ethos was originally formed, especially among the Bedouins living in the Arabian peninsula. Indeed, despite subsequent urbanization throughout the Arab world, Bedouins have continued to be seen as the "guardians" of traditional Arabian culture (Armstrong, 2006; Hourani, 1991; Ibn Khaldun, 1377/2002), in much the same way that the ethos of the ancient *samurai* continues to shape individuals' behavior in modern Japan (Benedict, 1946).

In such harsh environments, then, life was deprivation, and kinship solidarity was a necessity for survival; however, individual honor also had utility by serving to motivate individuals to perform brave or selfless acts for the group (Armstrong, 2006; Hourani, 1991; see also Thesiger, 1964). This is exemplified in the Bedouin concept of *muruwah*, which encompassed the ideas of endurance, toughness, and generosity as opposed to material need, as well as a dedication to protecting the honor (*sharaf*) of any tribe member including through verbal sparring matches and vendettas (Armstrong, 2006; Patai, 2007), a dynamic strongly suggestive of the honor cultures of the American south and the Mediterranean region (Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, & Schwartz, 1996; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Peristiany, 1966). Thus, a type of honor culture may have arisen in Arabian societies as mechanism for the kinship group to survive in an environment characterized by constant physical harshness and scarce resources (e.g., see Nisbett & Cohen, 1996), a culture that seems still influential in modern Arabian societies. For example, pre-Islamic Arab poetry known as *Mu'allaqât*, which included as favorite themes self-praise, commitment to one's

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kinship group, verbal criticizing of opposite kinship, and depiction of life in the desert (Larcher, 2000; Patai, 2007), is still referred to today throughout the Arab world.

The present research

We hypothesized that Arabian culture is characterized by strong elements of both interdependence and independence. To examine this idea, we measured the implicit cultural orientations of individuals in one of the prototypical regions of the Arab world – Saudi Arabia. The modern state of Saudi Arabia has only come into being in the last 100 years, and has rapidly evolved from a traditional society into a modern state in the 20th century (Holden & Johns, 1992; Metz, 1992). Thus, not only is it central to Arabian history in terms of its central location geographically and historically, it may offer a reasonably good representation of the Arab world: rapidly evolving, but still shaped by traditional Arab society (e.g., El Tahri, 2004).

We chose a "cultural task analysis" (Kitayama et al., 2009; Kitayama & Imada, in press) to measure implicit (rather than explicit) cultural orientations in Saudi Arabia. Such a paradigm avoids the now well-acknowledged methodological problems that exist when using survey-type, self-report instruments to measure cultural orientations (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Singelis, 1994). In cross-cultural contexts, self-report scales have been shown to lack predictive validity (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Kitayama et al., 2009), are prone to response bias (Heine Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002; Kitayama, 2002; Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997), and tend to measure individual beliefs and values rather than cultural norms and societal mandates, the latter of which may be much better predictors of individual behavior (Shentyberg, Gelfand, & Kim, 2009; Zou et al., 2009). Indeed, psychologists increasingly acknowledge the necessity of behavioral observation in making accurate

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inferences accurate inferences about underlying psychological orientations of individuals across different cultures (for a review, see Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008).

The cultural task analysis is a series of measures of perception, judgment, and memory that act as unobtrusive markers of cultural independence and interdependence (Kitayama et al., 2009; Kitayama & Imada, in press). The analysis is composed of five tasks assessing cognitive, emotional, and motivational tendencies. The first task is a basic perceptual task – the framed line task – which measures the extent to which individuals perceive focal objects and backgrounds analytically (i.e., the focal object and background are inherently separate) or holistically (i.e., the focal object and background are inherently interrelated). The second task is a measure of social judgment tendencies; in particular, whether individuals tend make dispositional attributions or situational attributions for social behavior. The third measure assesses symbolic self-representations by asking participants to draw themselves in relation to others. The fourth task surveys a variety of social situations and measures the extent to which individuals experienced individually-centered emotions (i.e., "socially disengaging emotions" such as pride and anger; Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006), or other-centered emotions (i.e., "socially engaging emotions" such as friendly feelings and guilt; Kitayama et al., 2006) during these situations. The last measure determines whether the experience of socially engaging or socially disengaging emotions better predicts individuals' happiness.

Cultural independence is suggested when individuals, 1) show dispositional (vs. situational) bias in social judgment; 2) demonstrate analytic (vs. holistic) attention and, 3) exhibit more (vs. less) symbolic self-inflation; 4) experience disengaging (rather than engaging) emotions; and, 5) experience personal (vs. social) correlates of happiness. The opposite pattern suggests cultural interdependence. These

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implicit measures have been shown to have better predictive and theoretical validity in assessing cultural orientations than is the case with explicit individual difference scales of cultural orientations (Kitayama et al., 2009).

Based on the arguments above, we expected Saudi Arabians to exhibit both interdependent and independent tendencies. On the one hand, the interdependent elements were predicted to be those characteristic of interdependent cultures which value group solidarity, in particular: 1) situational (vs. dispositional) bias in social judgment; 2) holistic (vs. analytic) attention; and 3) social (vs. personal) correlates of happiness. On the other hand, independent elements were also expected to emerge based on the individual pride and self-respect that emerges in types of honor cultures, such as: 1) more (vs. less) symbolic self-inflation; and 2) greater experience of disengaging (vs. engaging) emotions.

Method

Participants and Procedure. One hundred twenty-eight (50% female) at Prince Sultan University, a large private university in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, were recruited from a number of social sciences and business administration courses. All students were Saudi Arabian nationals (average age = 19.87 years).

Participants completed a paper-pencil survey, ostensibly on social relationships and cognitive style. The university was gender segregated, so one male experimenter supervised the study in the male classes, and one female experimenter supervised the female classes. The questionnaire packet consisted of the five cultural task analysis measures (Kitayama et al., 2009). [1] All materials and instructions were presented in English, which is the language of instruction for all classes at the university, and which all participants were fluent in.

Experimental Tasks

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Focused versus Holistic Attention. We used the Frame Line Task (Kitayama et al., 2003; Kitayama et al., 2009) to measure analytic/holistic attention. In this task, participants are first presented with black line drawn vertically from the top middle of a gray background square. On a subsequent page, participants are asked to reproduce the original line within a different, blank square. For the "relative" version of the task, participants were instructed to draw the line so the length within the new background square was proportionally equivalent to the relative length of the original line. In the "absolute" version of the task, participants were asked to reproduce the absolute length of the original line (see Figure 1). Independence is demonstrated by less error on the absolute versus relative task, indicating facility in separating focal objects from the background. Interdependence is demonstrated by relatively less error on the relative task compared to the absolute task, suggesting a tendency to perceive a stronger interconnection of the background and foreground. Participants were presented with nine different versions of the absolute and relative tasks, respectively, and the order of presentation was counterbalanced across participants.

Dispositional bias in attribution. Participants were presented with four social scenarios (e.g., a soccer player holding free training camps; a surgeon covering up a major mistake) and were asked to what extent they agreed that a) the protagonist caused each event, b) the features of the situation caused the event; c) the protagonist would have acted differently if his/her disposition was different; and d) the protagonist would have acted different if the situation was different (Kitayama et al., 2009). Scale responses ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Independence is indicated by a greater relative weight given to dispositional factors (a, c) and interdependence by a greater relative weight given to situational factors (b, d) (e.g., Morris & Peng, 1994).

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Symbolic self-inflation. Participants drew their social network, using circles to represent individuals and lines to represent interpersonal connections. The larger the size of the circle representing the self compared to others, the more independence (vs. interdependence) is suggested (Kitayama et al., 2009).

Experience of disengaging versus engaging emotions. We administered the Implicit Social Orientation Questionnaire (ISOQ; Kitayama & Park, 2007), in which participants are asked to recall 10 different social situations and report the extent to which they experienced a variety of different emotions during the events. Socially disengaging emotions are predicated on achieving/failing at personal goals (e.g., pride, anger, contempt) and suggest cultural independence; socially engaging emotions are related to success/failure at interpersonal goals (e.g., friendly feelings, guilt) and suggest cultural interdependence (Kitayama et al., 2006). Response options for each emotion ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very strongly*).

Personal versus social correlates of happiness. For the 10 social situations in the ISOQ, we also measured the extent to which happiness was experienced in each situation, with options ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very strongly*). We then analyzed the extent to which disengaging versus engaging emotions experienced across these situations predicted happiness. Independence is suggested by stronger correlation between happiness and the experience of disengaging emotions; interdependence is suggested by a stronger correlation between engaging emotions and happiness.

Results

Across all analyses, we compared results with previously published findings from comparable samples in Japan, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany (Kitayama et al., 2009). Since gender effects in those samples have been

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reported elsewhere (Kitayama et al., 2009), we did not include gender as a factor except for separate analyses on the Saudi Arabia data (see below).

Analytic/holistic attention. We first ran a 5 (Culture) X 2 (Task Type: relative vs. absolute) mixed-model ANOVA on results on the framed line task. The average error in (in *mm*) was our dependent measure. Results indicated a significant Culture X Task Type interaction, $F(4,635) = 7.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .056$. We then computed a difference score subtracting errors on the absolute task from errors on the relative task to get a single index representing performance across both absolute and relative tasks. Planned mean comparisons indicated that Saudis showed more holistic attention (indicating better performance on the relative compared to the absolute task) compared to participants in the U.S., U.K., and Germany (all *p*s < .02). However, there was no difference between Saudis and Japanese ($p = .18$) (see Figure 2). Thus, in terms of basic perception, Saudis emerged as highly interdependent.

Dispositional bias in attribution. We ran a 5 (Culture) x 2 (Causal Locus) mixed-model ANOVA. Results indicated a significant Culture x Causal Locus interaction, $F(4, 640) = 11.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .069$. We then computed a difference score subtracting the mean level of causal responsibility ascribed to all situations from causal responsibility ascribed to the disposition of the actors across all situations. Planned mean comparisons indicated that Saudis showed significantly less dispositional bias compared to Americans, British, and Germans (all *p*'s < .002.) However, there was no difference in dispositional bias between Saudis and Japanese, $p = .15$ (see Figure 3). Thus, in terms of social judgment, Saudis again emerged as relatively interdependent.

Symbolic self-inflation. We computed a difference score by subtracting the average width of participants' friends' circles from the width of participants' self-

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circle (Kitayama et al., 2009). A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect for Culture, $F(4,634) = 8.03$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .048$. Planned comparisons indicated that Saudis showed more symbolic self-inflation compared to Japanese, $p = .001$. However, there were no differences compared to the three Western cultural groups ($p = .19$ compared to Americans, $p = .15$ compared to British, $p = .36$ compared to Germans) (see Figure 4). Thus, in terms of symbolic self-inflation, Saudis emerged as relatively independent.

Experience of disengaging versus engaging emotions. We computed the means of participants' experience of disengaging and engaging emotions across the 10 social contexts in the ISOQ. We then subtracted the mean level of engaging emotions from the mean level of the disengaging emotions to arrive at an overall index for each participant that captured the relative experience of socially engaging compared to disengaging emotions. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant overall effect for Culture, $F(4,571) = 30.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .175$. Planned mean comparisons indicated that Saudis' experienced significantly *more* disengaging emotions (relative to engaging emotions) compared to Japan, the U.K. and Germany (all ps $< .001$). However, there was no significant difference between Saudis and Americans ($p = .30$) (see Figure 5). Thus, Saudis experienced a relatively high level of disengaging emotions, suggestive of cultural independence.

Personal versus social correlates of happiness. To measure which type of emotions (disengaging, engaging) best predicted happiness, we regressed the mean level of happiness experienced in each of the 10 ISOQ situations with the mean levels of disengaging and engaging emotions, then used the size of the unstandardized regression coefficients for each individual participant as our measure of independence/interdependence (Kitayama et al., 2009).

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We then subtracted the unstandardized regression coefficients of the engaging emotions from those of disengaging emotions for each participant to obtain an overall index measuring the extent to which different emotions predicted happiness. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant overall effect for Culture, $F(4,552) = 8.04$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .057$. Planned mean comparisons indicated that Saudis were not significantly different from Japanese and Germans (*p*s > .43), but showed significantly lower mean levels than Americans and British participants (*p*s < .001). In other words, although results above suggested that Saudis experienced a relatively high level of disengaging emotions, they tended to be happier when experiencing socially engaging emotions (see Figure 6).

Gender differences. Finally, we examined male/female differences in Saudi Arabia. However, no significant gender differences emerged on any of the cultural task analysis measures, though a non-significant trend toward more symbolic self-inflation emerged for Saudi women compared to Saudi men ($p = .13$; all other *p*s > .40). Although non-significant, the direction of this effect is contrary to most previous research, which has tended to find men being more independent than women (Cross & Madson, 1997), but might be explained by the fact that Saudi women, especially those attending a university, need to assert their independence and prove themselves to a greater extent than men to succeed in a highly conservative society (Sabbagh, 2003).

General Discussion

This study is one of the first to examine psychological characteristics of individuals in an Arab culture, and the first to measure the implicit cultural orientations of individuals in Saudi Arabia. Overall, we predicted and found that Saudi Arabians demonstrated elements of both implicit cultural independence and

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implicit cultural interdependence: Whereas Saudis exhibited interdependent tendencies in measures of basic perception (highly holistic) social judgment (tendency to make situational attributions), they also demonstrated self-representations (self-inflated) and experienced emotions (social disengaging) that were typical of cultural independence.

Previous research in cultural psychology has tended to classify countries and regions as either independent or interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Kitayama et al., 2009). Although this view is widely accepted today, the current results show that elements of both cultural independence and cultural independence can also be combined to define one relatively coherent cultural ethos. Indeed, the particular hybrid of independence and interdependence that was observed here in one Arab culture (i.e., Saudi Arabia) is theoretically significant. Note that Saudi Arabians emerged as strongly interdependent in terms of basic perception and social judgment, a pattern that is likely due to the country's group-oriented, tribal history. However, Saudi Arabians also showed additional cultural elements that are strongly characteristic of independence: namely, tendencies to inflate the sense of the self as well as a greater experience of socially disengaging emotions like pride and anger, a pattern that is likely due to a dire need for protecting the kin in harsh ecological environments. Interestingly, although Saudis are happier when experiencing engaging emotions, they experience disengaging emotions more frequently, demonstrating an interesting dissonance between what is culturally normative and what is culturally valued (e.g., Zou et al., 2009). Only future research can tell us whether Saudi individuals might experience any psychological conflicts due to their tendency to experience emotions that are not linked to their happiness.

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It is notable that no systematic gender differences emerged despite the fact that Saudi Arabia is largely gender segregated, and women and men evolve in different social worlds, at least outside the home. These results may speak to the strong influence of the socioecological factors historically influencing both genders simultaneously, and perhaps also the commonality of the home environment across genders; thus, both women and men may be more strongly defined by their family and extended family affiliation than by their gender (e.g., Patai, 2007; Sabbagh, 2003). In addition, the absence of gender differences might be attributed to the gender-segregated setting in which participants completed the study; it is plausible that female participants might have displayed different psychological tendencies in the presence of male, especially kin-related, participants.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One important limitation of the current study was that our sample was limited to Saudi Arabians; thus, not all results may extend to the Arab world as a whole. There might be, in particular, important differences between the Mashreq (i.e., Middle East) and the Maghreb (i.e., North Africa). However, we would argue that our hypotheses about the origins of cultural orientations of Arabs, in terms of a strong commitment to, as well as active, assertive protection of, the kinship group, is a common element in various parts of the Arab world (e.g., Algeria, Bourdieu, 1958; Iraq, Thesiger, 1964; Jordan, Lancaster, 1981; Palestine, Atran et al., 2007; Saudi Arabia, Lancaster, 1981). Thus, we suspect that the present results might reasonably generalize to other Arab cultures outside of Saudi Arabia, although future work is obviously required to test this speculation.

Another limitation of the current study was that materials were in English, rather than in Arabic, which was the native language of most participants. In

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particular, although all participants were fluent in English (which was the exclusive language of instruction at the university) it is possible that the English language and associated Western concepts could have primed Saudis to respond as more independent than they typically are (e.g., Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). However, we believe that this issue is mitigated by the considerable variance in the actual findings: Saudis did indeed emerge as highly independent on the measure of emotional experience, but they also showed the strongest interdependent tendencies of any cultural group on basic perception and social judgment, a pattern of results which suggests that the English language medium did not overly bias the results in an independent direction.

Although cultural psychology has flourished over the past two decades, psychologists still know very little about the cultural orientations in countries outside of East Asia, North America, and Western Europe (c.f., Uskul, Kitayama, & Nisbett, 2008). Indeed, the ongoing social and political unrest in the Arab world (i.e., Tunisia, Egypt) in early 2011 strongly suggests that it is becoming more important than ever for psychologists to gain a better understanding of the psychological dynamics present in the Middle East and other under-studied areas of the world so that cross-cultural conflicts can be better understood and prevented.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1: Example of an item from the frame-line task. The figures on the left represent the same original example. The figures on the right represent the correct answers for the relative and absolute tasks, respectively.

Figure 2: Cultural differences in basic perception on the frame-line task (relative task results – absolute task results). Larger negative numbers indicate relatively more holistic (interdependent) perception; smaller negative numbers indicate relatively more analytic (independent) perception.

Figure 3: Cultural differences in social judgment. Larger positive numbers indicate bias toward dispositional attributions; smaller positive numbers indicate bias toward situational attributions.

Figure 4: Cultural differences in symbolic self-inflation. Larger positive numbers equal more self-inflation.

Figure 5: Cultural differences in emotional experience. Positive numbers indicate tendency to experience more disengaging emotions. Negative numbers indicate tendency to experience more engaging emotions.

Figure 6: Cultural differences in correlates of happiness. Positive numbers indicate more happiness is dependent upon disengaging emotions; negative numbers indicate happiness is dependent upon engaging emotions.

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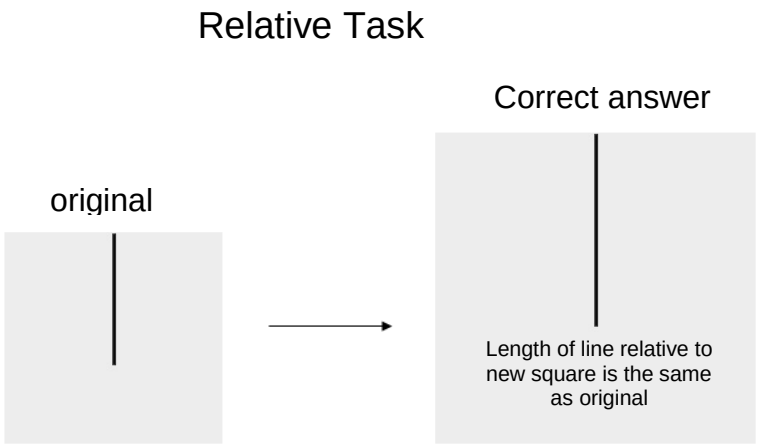

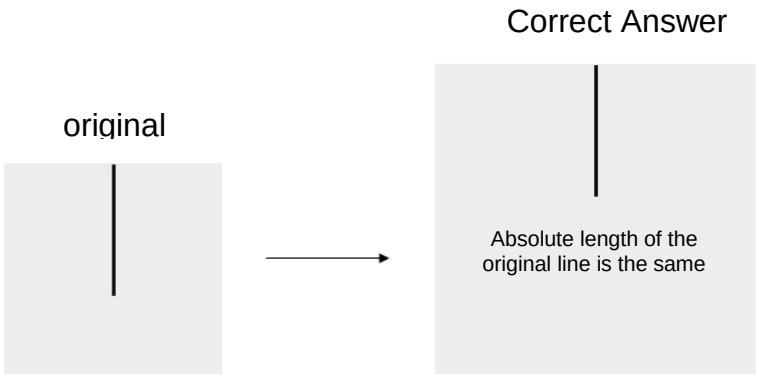

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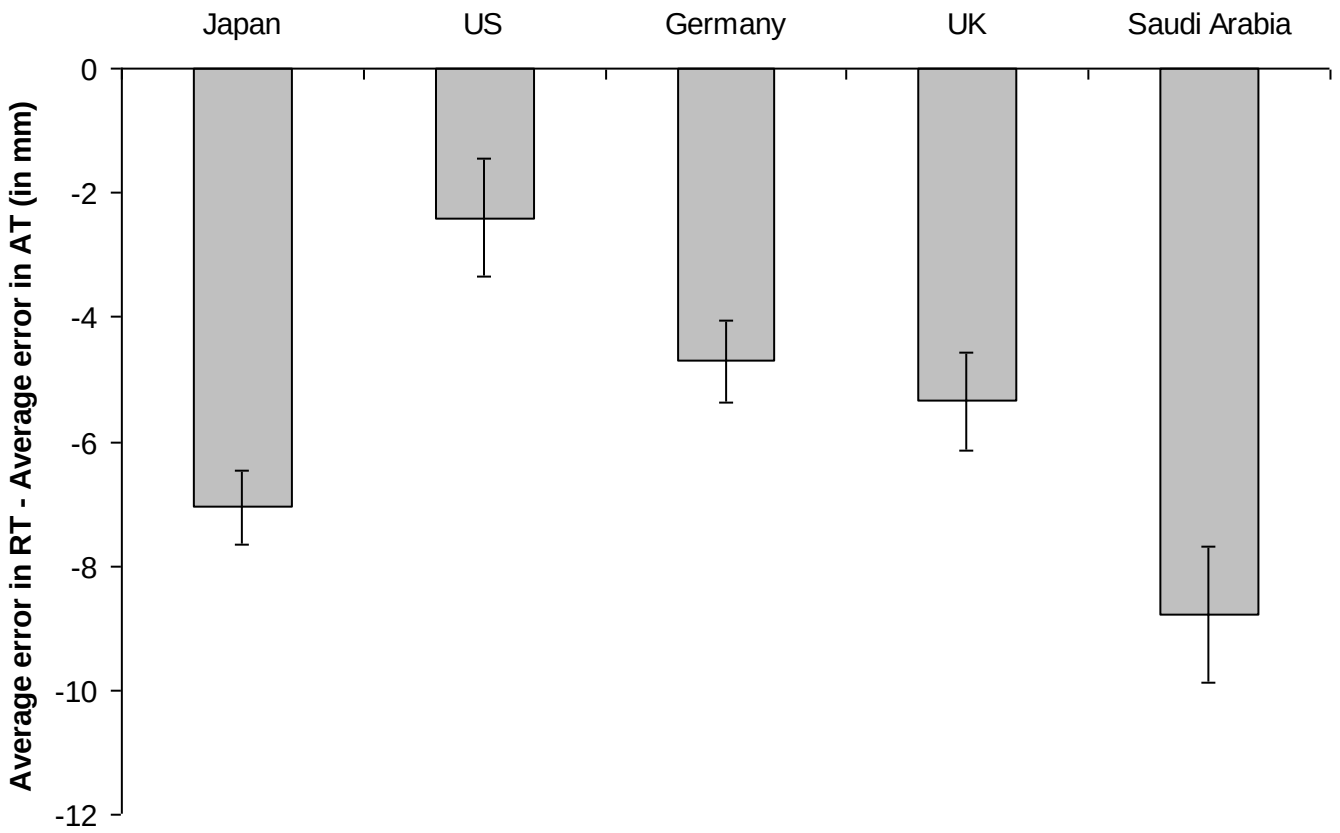

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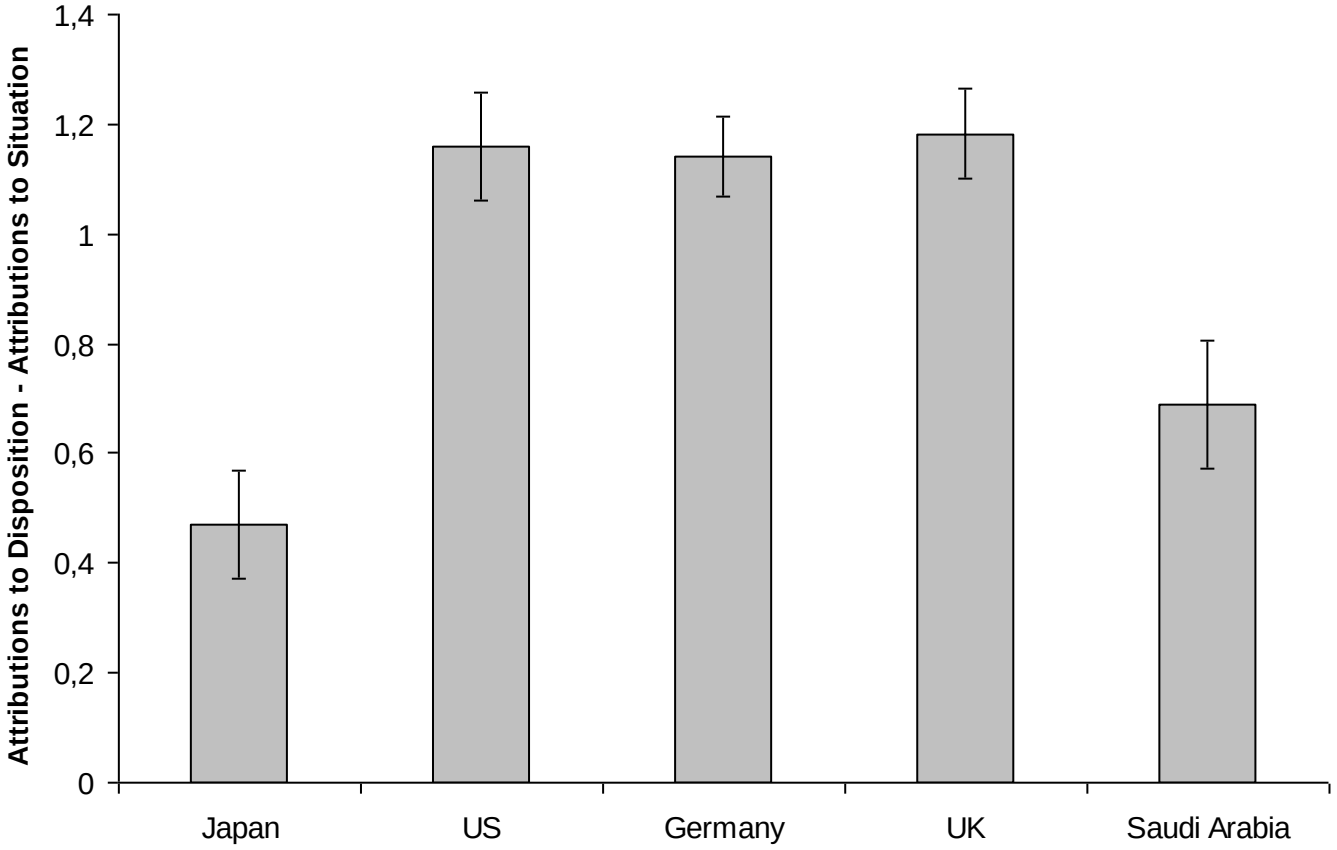

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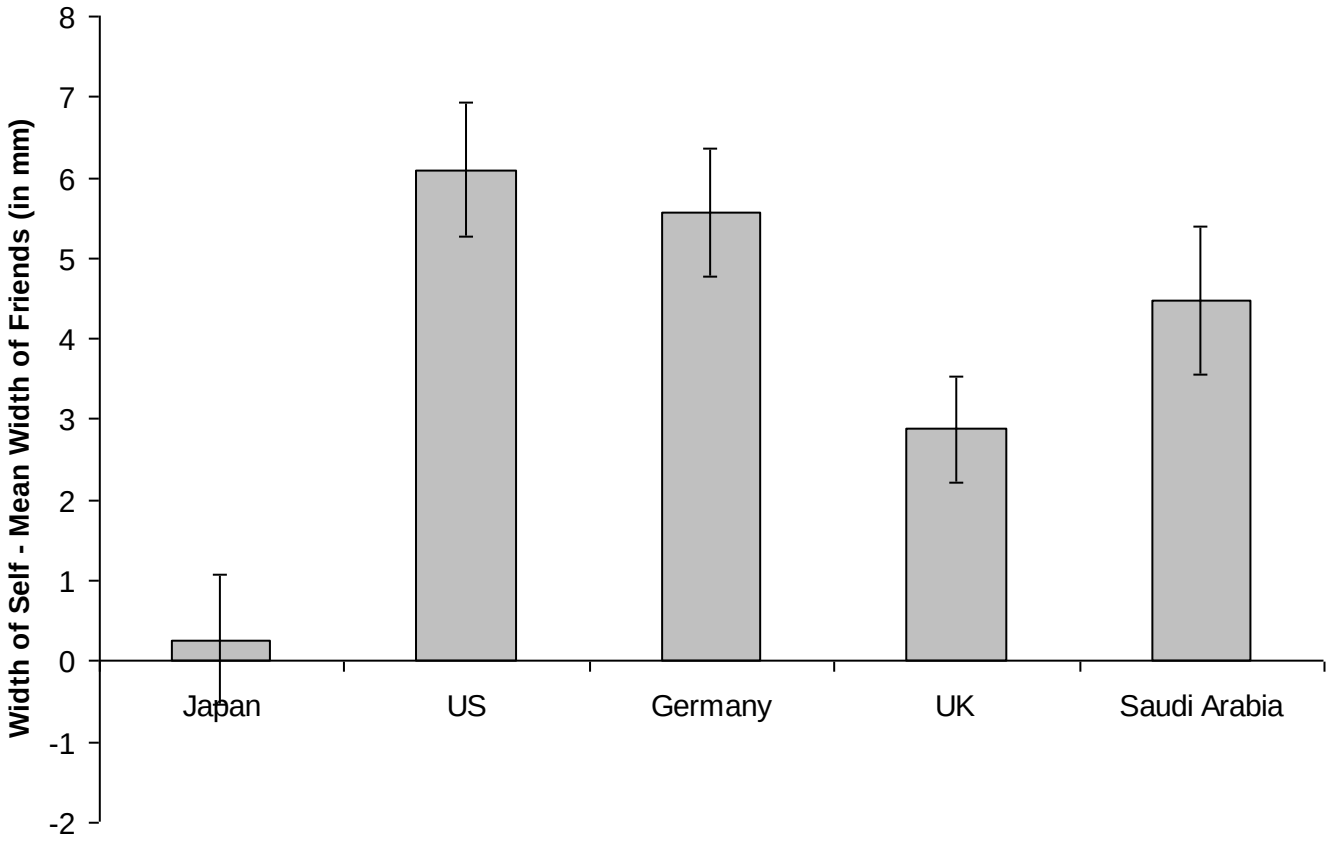

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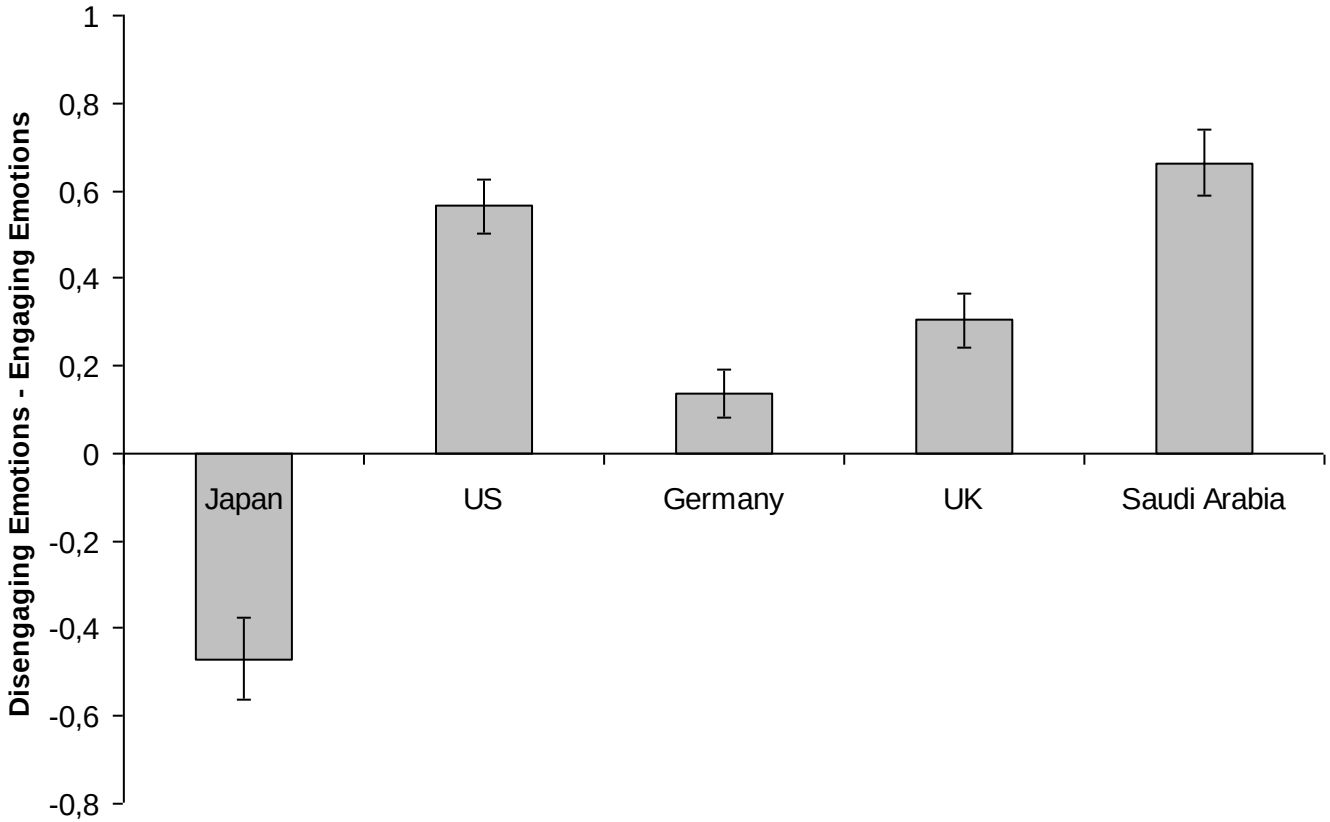

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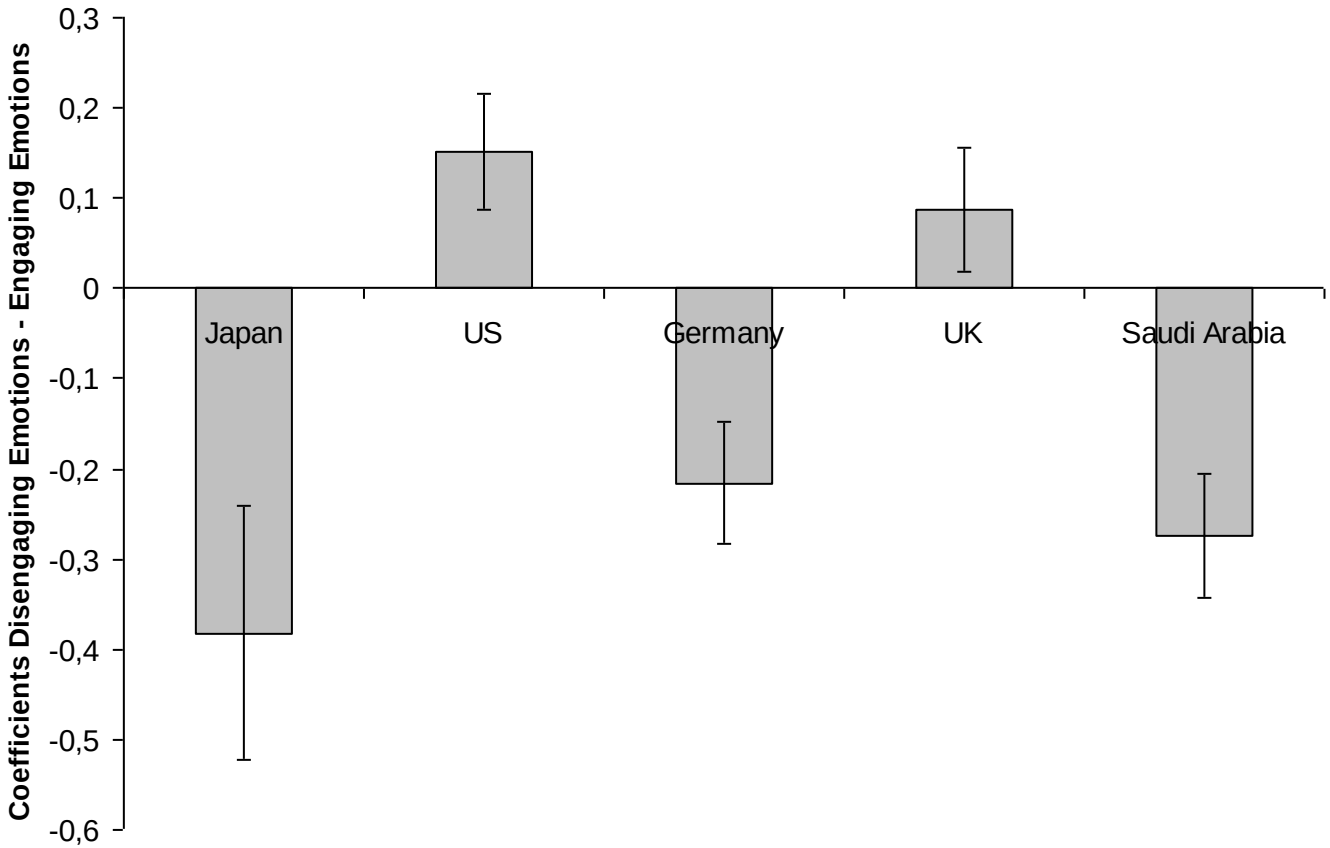

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Footnotes

[1] We also included an explicit, self-report measure of cultural orientations, the Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994). However, consistent with prior research using the cultural task analysis (Kitayama et al., 2009) we found no consistent pattern of results across cultural groups with this measure.

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