

Perceived Malleability of Self versus the World and Its Impact on Youths' Control Orientation and Well-Being in Four Cultures

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Primary/Secondary Control Orientation

- > Perceived discrepancy between self's resources and the world's demands induces stress, which calls for changes in either self or/and the world
- > **Primary Control:** changing the world to fit the self's needs
 - self as agent, change in social and physical environment as outcome
- > **Secondary Control:** changing the self to fit the world
 - people not always try to influence their environment, but often flexibly adapt to and accept existing realities
 - emphasizes functionality of flexibility in a (Western) culture that prioritizes determination and autonomous behavior
 - can SC be purposeful, intentional, planned, and “in your control”?
- > Why do different individuals (and cultures) tend to emphasize and use different kinds of control?

Implicit Theories

> **Implicit theories of self:** Intelligence, personality

Entity theory: Performance goal; when setbacks occur → primary control, or helplessness when the world is NOT changeable

Incremental theory: Learning goal; when setbacks occur → tendency to exert more effort to change self

> **Implicit theories of the world**

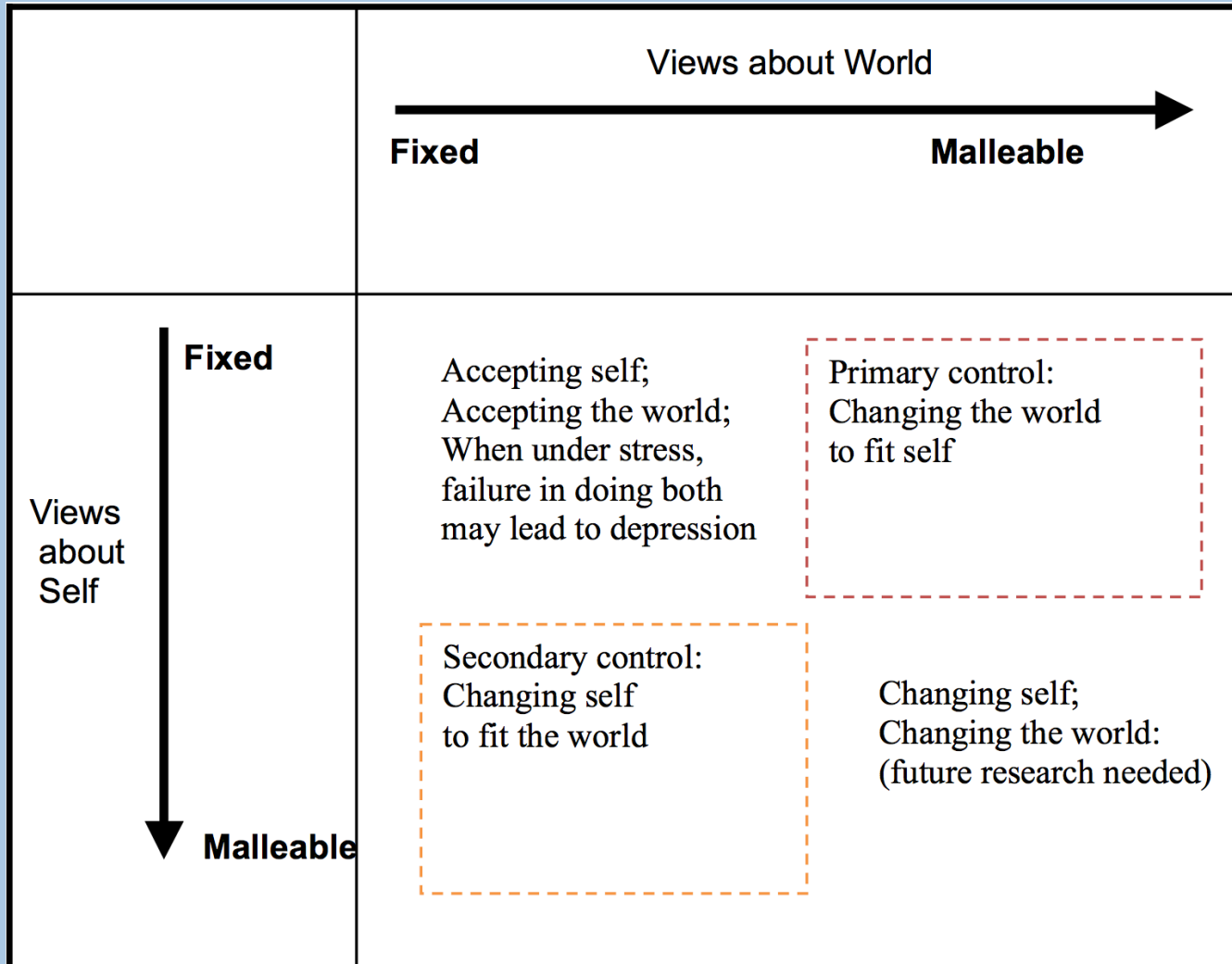
Monolithic view: self and world as either changeable or unchangeable („world“ seen as abstract, all encompassing, incl. other selves)

Complementarity view: **fixed self** corresponds to **malleable world** and vice versa („world“ as social structure = what the individual has to come to terms with)

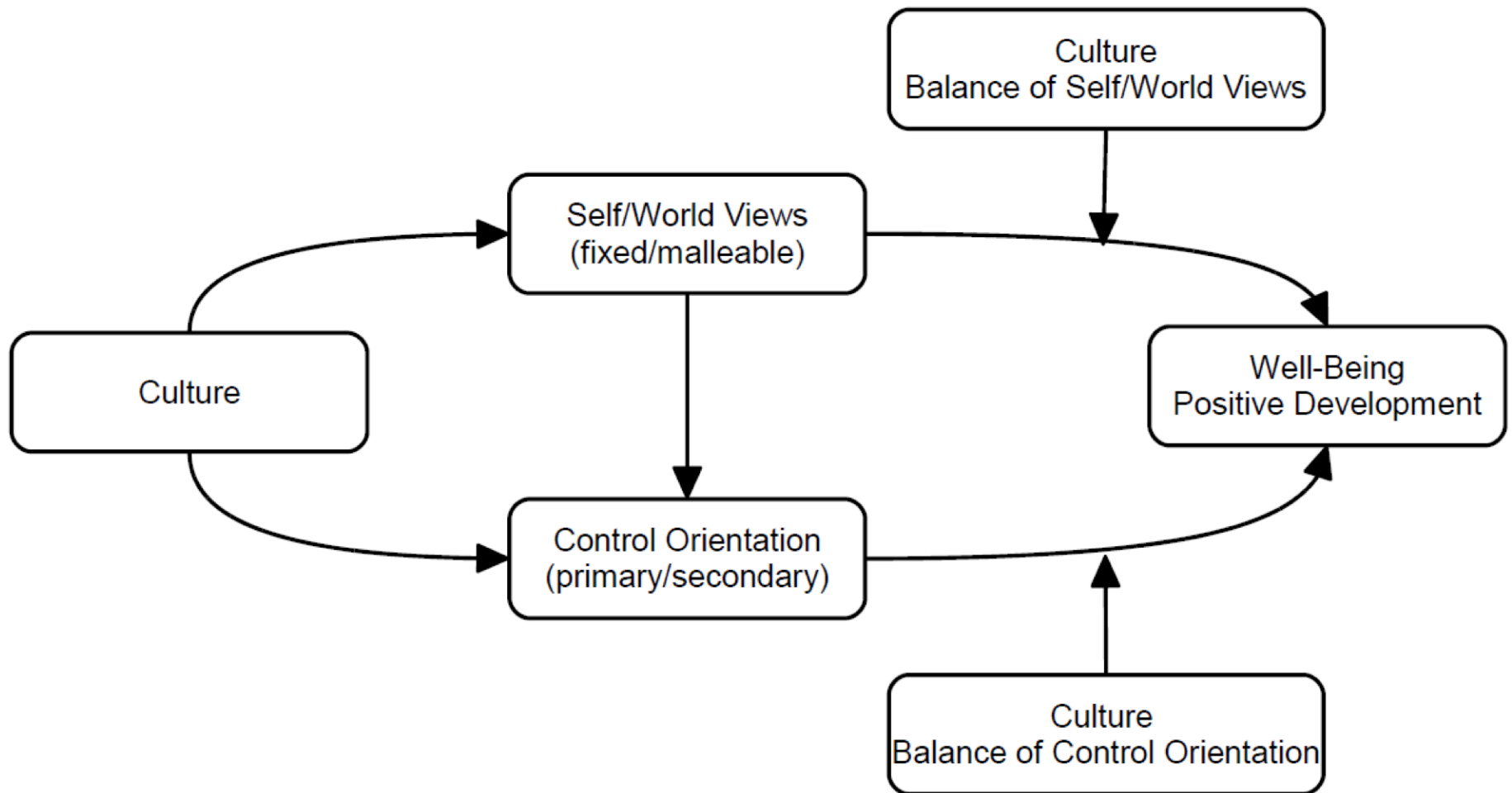
> **East Asian cultures:** “Individual self fits the world”

> **Western cultures:** “The world accommodates individual self”

Relation Between Implicit Theories and Control Orientation

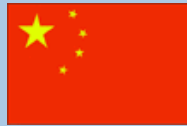


Tentative Model Including Culture and Positive Development



Sample

China



N = 100 (M = 66 & F = 34)

Age 18 – 28 years

$M_M = 20.41$ $M_F = 20.76$

Switzerland



N = 103 (M = 50 & F = 53)

Age 19 – 28 years

$M_M = 23.10$ $M_F = 22.21$

USA



N = 95 (M = 63 & F = 32)

Age 18 – 22 years

$M_M = 19.50$ $M_F = 19.48$

India



N = 100 (M = 50 & F = 50)

Age 18 – 25 years

$M_M = 20.86$ $M_F = 20.36$

Scenarios Primary/Secondary Control

❑ Problems with Likert scales

- Reference group effect
- Culture-specific response tendencies

❑ Possible solutions

- Concrete behavior in concrete situations
- Forced choice item format, here combined with probability of choice
 - allows differentiated response (e.g., equally strong tendencies)
 - + perceived difficulty to carry out the respective behavior (5-point scale)
 - + overall stressfulness of situation

❑ Situations especially relevant for youths/students

- University / Living together / Friendship / Work / Partnership

Scenario Example: „Partner“

Your romantic partner/spouse is fond of criticizing you in public and you do not like it at all.

What will you do in this situation?

- (a) Try to change my partner's habit.
- (b) Try to accept that it's my partner's nature to be straightforward and he/she does not have any bad intentions.

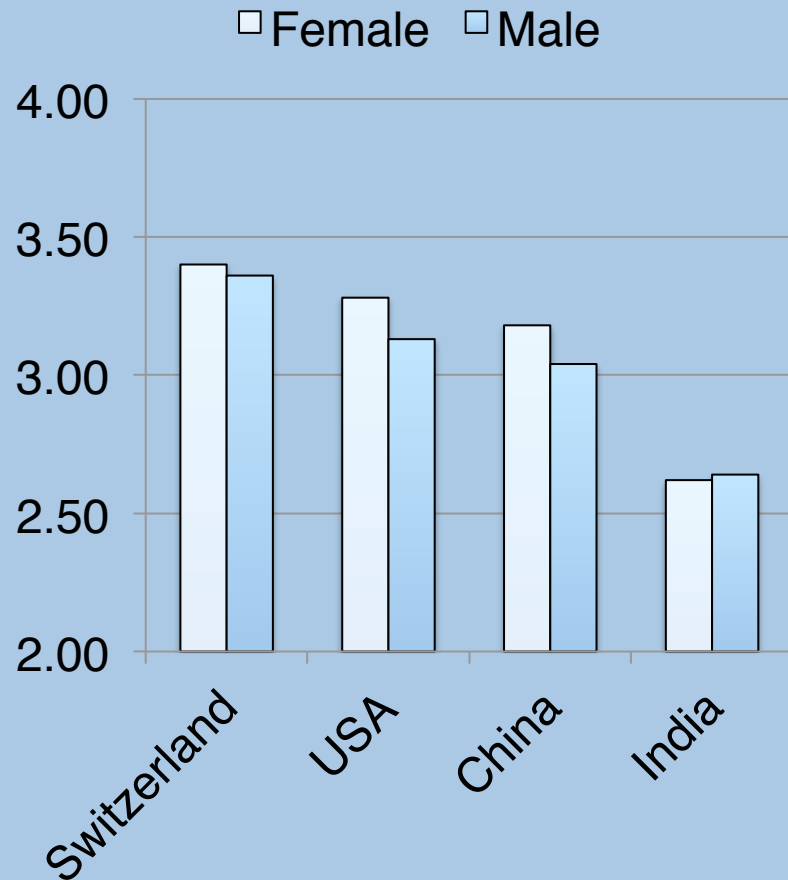
On a scale from 0-100% to what extent do you think it is likely that you will choose (a) and (b), respectively. The two percentages must sum up to 100.

(a) _____%

(b) _____%

Entity Theory of Self (Yang & Hong, 2010)

3 Items; $\alpha = .72 / .55 / .49 / .63$



> Culture

$F(3, 389) = 15.92, p < .001,$
 $\eta^2 = .11$

India < all others

> Gender

$F(1, 389) = 0.95, p = .330$

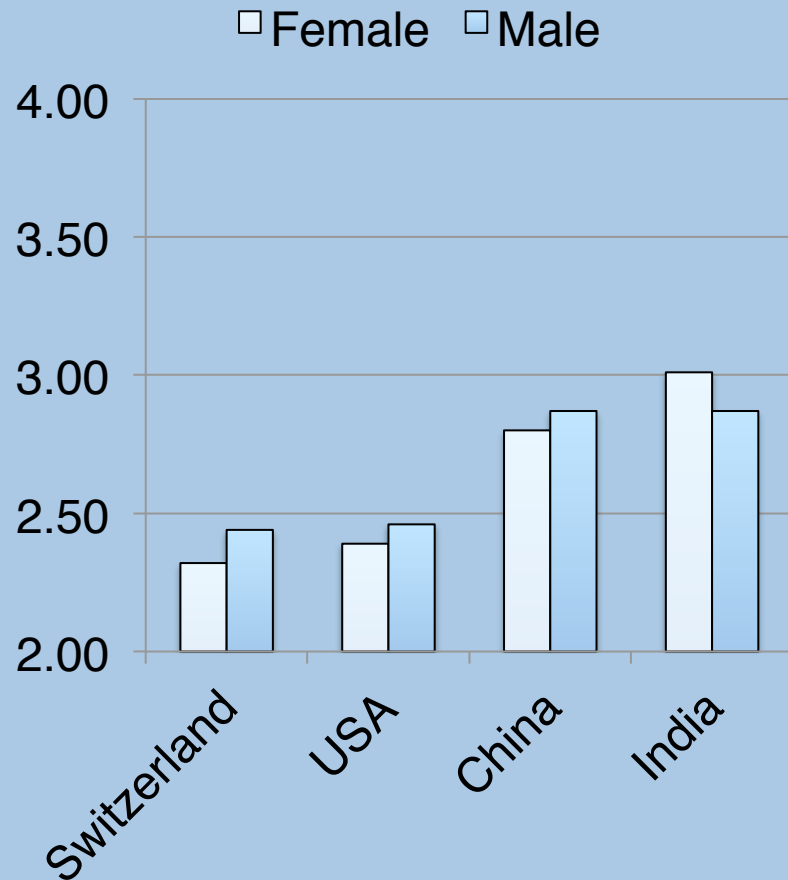
> Culture x Gender

$F(3, 389) = 0.25, p = .858$

„I am a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that.“

Fixed World (Domain Specific)

(11 items; $\alpha = .72 / .70 / .53 / .42$)



> Culture

$F(3, 395) = 46.63, p < .001,$
 $\eta^2 = .26$

(India = China) > (USA = CH)

> Gender

$F(1, 395) = 0.48, p = .487$

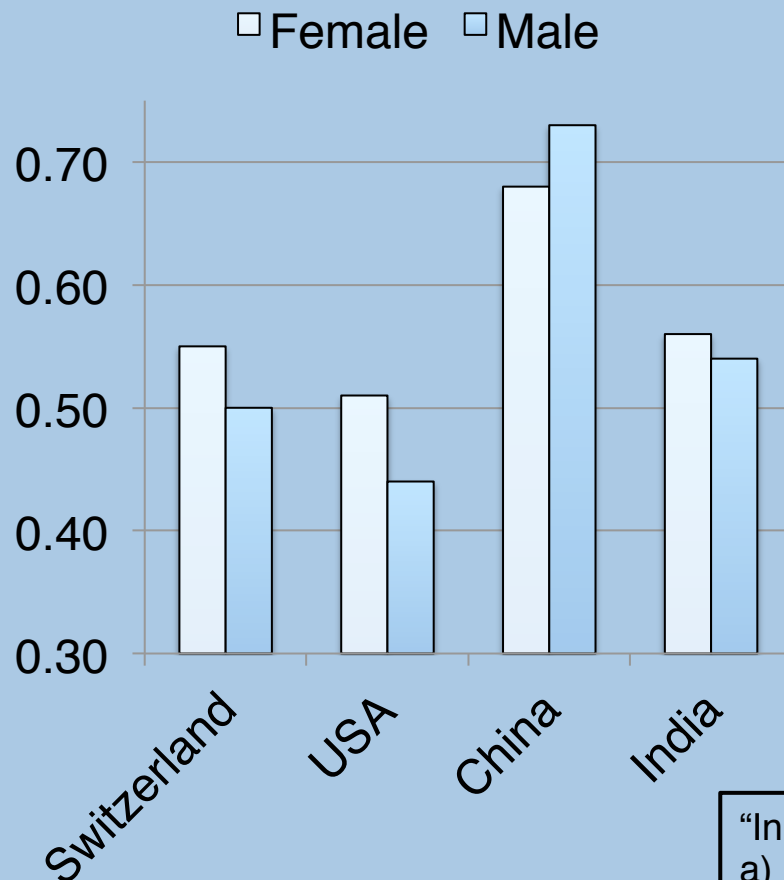
> Culture x Gender

$F(3, 395) = 1.99, p = .114$

“In our society, divorce is something to be avoided under all circumstances.”

Self-Monitoring (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984; Church et al., 2012)

(20 items; $\alpha = .78 / .78 / .70 / .72$)



> Culture

$F(3, 395) = 25.71, p < .001, \eta^2 = .16$

China > (USA = CH = India)

> Gender

$F(1, 395) = 1.37, p = .243$

> Culture x Gender

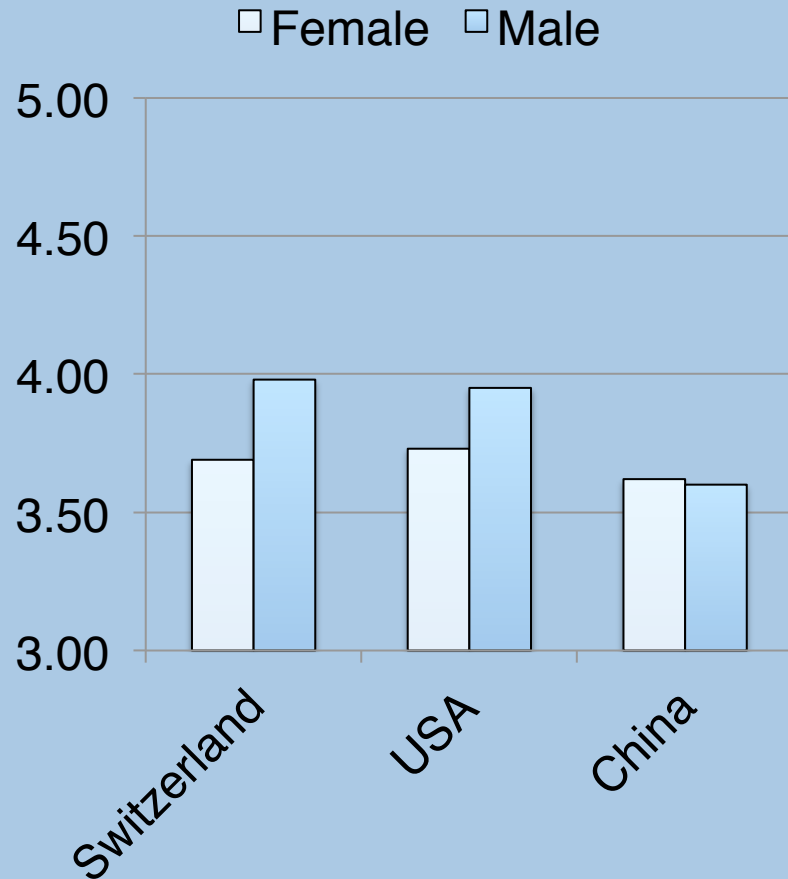
$F(3, 395) = 1.75, p = .156$

“In social situations, I tend to:
a) Maintain behavior that is consistent with my personality.
b) Modify my behavior to fit better into the situation ”

Primary Control / Proactive Coping

(Greenglass & Schwarzer, 1998)

(13 items; $\alpha = .74 / .87 / .79$)



> Culture

$F(2, 286) = 7.19, p < .001,$
 $\eta^2 = .05$

(CH = USA) > China

> Gender

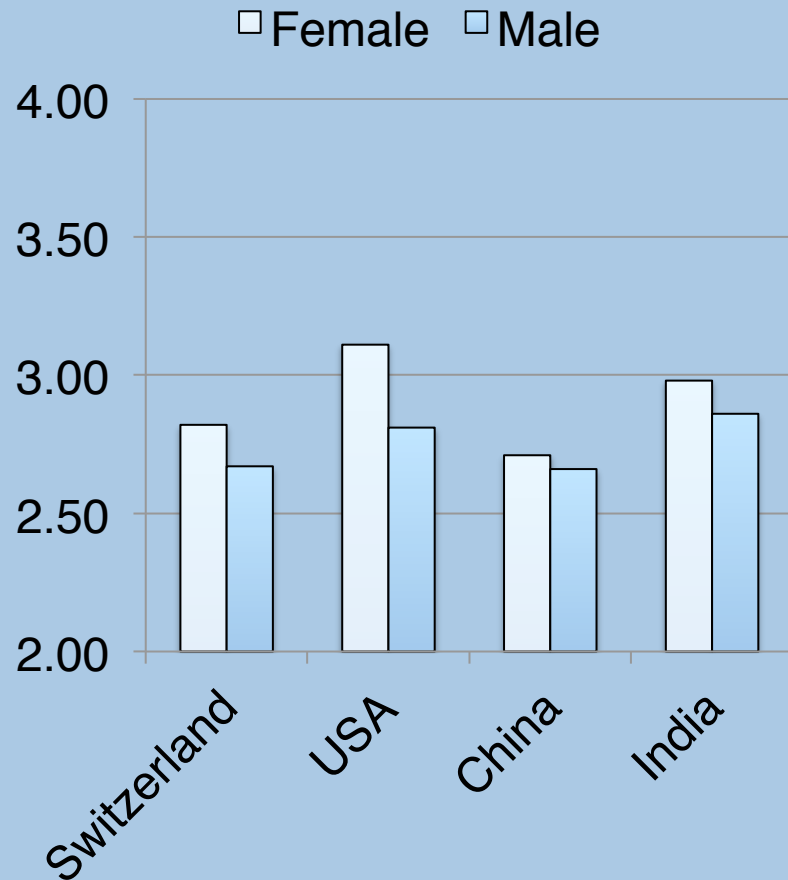
$F(1, 286) = 7.91, p = .005,$
 $\eta^2 = .03$

> Culture x Gender

$F(2, 395) = 2.87, p = .059,$
 $\eta^2 = .02$

“I always try to find a way to work around obstacles; nothing really stops me.”

Difficulty of Using Primary Control (Scenarios) (13 items; $\alpha = .76 / .83 / .78 / .77$)



> Culture

$F(3, 395) = 8.68, p < .001,$
 $\eta^2 = .06$

USA > CH ; India > China

> Gender

$F(1, 395) = 12.33, p < .001,$
 $\eta^2 = .03$

> Culture x Gender

$F(3, 395) = 1.37, p = .252$

“How difficult will it be for you to try to change your partner’s habit?”

Implicit Theories and Self-Monitoring WITH Control Orientation

| Pearson <i>r</i> | | Primary Control (Proactive Coping) | Difficulty of Primary Control (Scenarios) |
|----------------------------------|-------------|--|---|
| Entity Theory of Self | Switzerland | -.03 | -.04 |
| | USA | .00 | -.01 |
| | India | | .00 |
| | China | -.20 | -.01 |
| Fixed World (domain-specific) | Switzerland | -.02 | .36* |
| | USA | -.12 | .23** |
| | India | | .10 |
| | China | -.30** | .14 |
| Self-Monitoring | Switzerland | -.19** | .26** |
| | USA | -.52** | .55** |
| | India | | .05 |
| | China | -.08 | .15 |

Implicit Theories and Self-Monitoring WITH Well-Being

| Pearson <i>r</i> | | Life Satisfaction | Psychological Symptoms |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Entity Theory of Self | Switzerland | .13 | .00 |
| | USA | .01 | .09 |
| | India | .05 | |
| | China | -.02 | .26** |
| Fixed World (domain-specific) | Switzerland | -.30** | .35** |
| | USA | -.08 | .30** |
| | India | -.01 | |
| | China | -.11 | .26** |
| Self-Monitoring | Switzerland | -.31** | .33** |
| | USA | -.23* | .37** |
| | India | .11 | |
| | China | -.16 | .07 |

Control Orientation **WITH** Well-Being

| Pearson <i>r</i> | | Life Satisfaction | Psychological Symptoms |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| | | Proactive Coping | Switzerland |
| USA | .32** | | -.35** |
| India | | | |
| China | .10 | | -.43** |
| Difficulty of Primary Control | Switzerland | -.30** | .47** |
| | USA | -.25* | .31** |
| | India | .10 | |
| | China | -.26** | .24* |

Summary of Results

- **Cultural differences in implicit theories, self-monitoring and primary control** mostly consistent with our hypotheses
- **Entity theory of self**
 - no correlations with control orientation
 - in China related to more psychological symptoms
- **In the West but not in the East:**
 - fixed world views related to more difficulty in using primary control
 - high self-monitoring negatively related to primary control and well-being
 - primary control (proactive coping) related to higher life satisfaction
- **In the West and in China:**
 - primary control (proactive coping) related to less psychological symptoms
 - difficulty in using primary control related to lower well-being

Discussion

- **Entity/incremental theory of self and world**
 - Monolithic, complementary or situation-specific?
- **Adaptiveness of self/world-views and control orientation**
 - Culture matters
 - (Universal) Reality also matters
 - Situation specificity seems to be very strong
- **Caveats and future directions**
 - Preliminary results → Equivalence and moderation analyses follow
 - Only self-report → IAT analyses follow
 - Situation-specific and balance-related analysis of control scenarios

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