LETTER

Response to “Underestimation in Self-Assessment”

To the Editor: It is always gratifying when someone voluntarily reads my manuscripts carefully enough to raise insightful criticisms. Dr. Panjwani discusses important boundary conditions of self-enhancement, and I generally agree with her; however, this would not be a proper reply without a counterargument.

As Dr. Panjwani notes and extensive literature attests, self-enhancement is attenuated among more collectivist cultures,^{1,2} but it does not always disappear.³⁻⁵ Kurman found that most collectivists—though to a lesser extent than individualists—believed that they were more academically adept than average.⁴ Furthermore, collectivists and individualists self-enhance equally for communal traits like honesty and cooperation.^{4,6,7} While collectivists and individualists differ in amount and type of self-enhancement, even collectivists could benefit from interventions designed to promote accurate self-assessment.

Additionally, attenuated self-enhancement does not require attenuated self-enhancement motives. Perhaps individualists and collectivists have similar needs to self-enhance, but modesty norms encourage collectivists to keep it to themselves. Indeed, Kurman reaches this conclusion, and several lines of research support her. Japanese students tend to describe themselves more positively in private than in public,⁸ and collectivists show significantly more positive self-regard on implicit measures than on explicit measures.^{9,10} While multiple mechanisms underlie collectivists occasionally attenuated self-enhancement, several lines of research indicate that the attenuation may be partly due to self-censoring.

Without experience in mental health services or clinical/counseling psychology, I am not qualified to discuss imposter syndrome. My only concern is that the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual does not recognize it. To the extent that it overlaps

with depression, it should mitigate some types of self-enhancement.¹¹

While Dr. Panjwani and I may not be on the same page, we are in the same chapter. Self-enhancement varies with time, culture, and mental status, and educators should be sensitive to those variations. Her concluding paragraph expresses this idea better than anything I can think to write, so I will direct the reader back to her letter.

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