

REGULAR ARTICLE

Comparing self-esteem discrepancies in Pakistan and Canada  

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Abstract

The cross-cultural universality of people's pursuit of positive self-esteem is frequently disputed. Most research in this area has contrasted cultures of dignity (Western) and face cultures (East Asian), but less attention has been given to other cultures' views of self-esteem. In the present work, we examined Pakistan as uniquely influenced by honour culture and South Asian argumentation culture principles, and we contrasted it with Canada (a Western culture of dignity). Across two studies, Pakistanis had less positive self-esteem discrepancies (i.e., Pakistanis had minimal or no desire for higher self-esteem) compared to Canadians (who desired much higher self-esteem than they actually had). Pakistanis also believed less in the agentic benefits of high self-esteem but more in the communal benefits of high self-esteem than did Canadians. Differences in each cultures' beliefs about self-esteem's causal powers partially accounted for the differences in self-esteem discrepancies. These findings suggest unique conceptualizations of the value of self-esteem in distinct cultures.

KEY WORDS

cultural differences, culture of dignity, culture of honour, self-esteem discrepancies, self-esteem importance

1 | INTRODUCTION

“Success is liking yourself, liking what you do, and liking how you do it.” –

Maya Angelou, American poet

“By the Self the seed of hostility is sown in the world: It imagines itself to be other than itself...Forget thy self, if thou art wise! If thou dost not forget thy self, thou art mad.” –

Muhammed Iqbal, Pakistani poet

As shown in the preceding quotations, people can endorse radically different beliefs about the self. Some people view the pursuit of positive self-esteem as very important (e.g., “Success is liking yourself...”), whereas

others perceive dangers in an excessive prioritization of the self (e.g., “Forget thy self, if thou art wise!”). The beliefs expressed in these quotations may relate in part to differences in the poets' respective cultures. Indeed, the notion that cultures may value self-esteem differently has captured psychologists' attention for decades. However, the vast majority of this work has contrasted cultures in the “independent West” (e.g., the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada) against cultures from the “interdependent East” (e.g., China, Japan, Korea), neglecting the pursuit of self-esteem within other cultures (e.g., Pakistan). We argue that Pakistan is a unique culture in that it integrates several distinctive cultural threads, which suggests a unique conception of self-esteem. We examine the unique beliefs about self-esteem in Pakistan (a South Asian honour culture) by contrasting it with Canada (a Western dignity culture).

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1.1 | Culture and the pursuit of positive self-esteem

Different cultures promote unique conceptions of the self, which may alter the degree to which people idealize and pursue positive self-esteem (Hornsey et al., 2018; Kitayama et al., 2022; also see Heine et al., 1999) and how they approach the pursuit of self-esteem (Leung & Cohen, 2011). Cultures often are categorized into one of three groups: cultures of dignity, face, and honour (Leung & Cohen, 2011; Severance et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2021; Uskul et al., 2013).¹

In *cultures of dignity*, such as Canada or the Northern United States, people are expected to like themselves by fulfilling internal standards of worth. Being satisfied with oneself is a central, indispensable life goal. Though social acceptance matters in dignity cultures (Leary, 2005; Leary et al., 1995), such cultures foster an ideology of self-independence whereby “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words may never hurt me” (Leung & Cohen, 2011, p. 509; also see Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Cohen et al., 1996). In other words, reputational threats from other people are regulated by the understanding that self-esteem is greatly derived from fulfilling valued, internal standards.

In contrast, *face cultures*, such as China and Japan, prioritize the maintenance of social “face,” or the regulation of external perceptions of oneself (Hamamura et al., 2009; Heine, 2001; Leung & Cohen, 2011; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). These cultures value a desire for social harmony and a preference for modesty (the value of not overreaching on status claims; Cai et al., 2011; Kim & Cohen, 2010). Although much research concludes that East Asians value and pursue self-esteem less than do North Americans and Europeans (Heine et al., 1999, 2000; Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Heine & Lehman, 1999; Kim & Cohen, 2010; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), Sedikides et al. (2003, 2005, 2007) have offered a different perspective, to be addressed later.

Cultures outside of East Asia and North America, including most *honour cultures*, are infrequently studied. Honour cultures conceptualize self-esteem as socially negotiated based on honour principles: social perceptions of one's moral integrity, the behaviour of one's family, and one's reputation. As a result, people in honour cultures value and prioritize a reputation of power and strength (as opposed to social harmony) and often are willing to engage in risky behaviour to protect their reputation (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994; Cohen et al., 1996; Leung & Cohen, 2011). Regions higher in honour culture include the Southern United States (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994), Turkey (Uskul et al., 2012), and Pakistan (Severance et al., 2013).

Complicating this taxonomy of cultures, recent theoretical work by Kitayama et al. (2022) proposed an intriguing taxonomy for understanding culture and the self. Specifically, they proposed that non-Western cultures

might be divided into (at least) four groupings: *self-effacing cultures* (i.e., much of East Asia), *self-assertive honour cultures* (i.e., Arab regions), *emotionally expressive cultures* (i.e., Latin America), and *argumentative interdependence cultures* (i.e., South Asian cultures). Importantly, these groups each may have distinct views on the self. For example, honour cultures (e.g., Saudis, Lebanese) are self-assertive, cultivating self-esteem as high as typical self-esteem among Western cultures (San Martin et al., 2018). However, argumentative interdependent cultures like India cultivate self-effacement (Kitayama et al., 2022; Nanakdewa et al., 2022). Pakistani people's psychology is likely influenced by more than one of these cultural influences.

Recently, Dufner et al. (2019) recommended that researchers direct more attention to understudied cultures to gain a more complete understanding of cross-cultural psychology (also see Henrich et al., 2010). Despite being the sixth most populous country in the world (United Nations, 2017), there is little psychological research concerning Pakistan. Nonetheless, the limited research on Pakistan indicates that it may provide a distinct perspective on the pursuit of positive self-esteem (compared to traditionally studied WEIRD populations; Henrich et al., 2010; also see Rudy & Grusec, 2006; Severance et al., 2013). Pakistan has a unique sociohistorical past, driven primarily by the 1947 partition of modern South East Asia into India and Pakistan (Gilmartin, 1998). Pakistan was formed from several Muslim-majority regions looking to establish independence, and at least partially stimulated by the Pakistan Movement led by Muhammed Ali Jinnah in the 1940s. It thus seems likely that Pakistani people's sense of self would be influenced in part by broader Indian culture, as what is now India was once jointly ruled alongside what is now Pakistan by the same British government. At the same time, it is undeniable that Pakistani people's modern sense of self is also shaped by their Islamic identity and cultural distinctiveness, which was birthed from their struggle for independence.

Pakistan is often considered an honour culture (Severance et al., 2013); however, as we noted earlier, Pakistan is also South Asian, sharing deep historical links with India (the culture concerning whose evidence base Kitayama et al. [2022] used to conceptualize argumentative interdependent culture, specifically Mercier & Sperber [2011], Nanakdewa et al. [2022], and Savani et al. [2008, 2010, 2011, 2012]). Thus, it is unclear whether Pakistani people should have high self-esteem (like other honour cultures) or low self-esteem (like other argumentative interdependent cultures).

1.2 | Self-esteem discrepancies and culture

People often can distinguish between their actual attributes versus attributes that they wish they possessed; such

gaps are called self-discrepancies (Higgins, 1987, 1989; Higgins et al., 1985). These wishes concerning such attributes (“X”) can be experienced as ideals (i.e., a personal desire to be X) and/or as oughts (i.e., a sense of duty to be X), collectively termed desired attributes. Discrepancies are mismatches between one's aspirations and one's present reality and typically feel aversive (Higgins, 1987).

Within this conceptual framework, *self-esteem discrepancies* can be defined as people's desire to have more favourable or unfavourable self-views than they currently possess (DeMarree & Rios, 2014). Ideal self-esteem is how much one personally desires to like oneself, whereas ought self-esteem is how much one feels they ought to like themselves. Self-esteem discrepancies are distinct from actual self-esteem (i.e., “how much do I like myself?”) and capture the following related question: “Compared to how much I like myself, how much more (or less) do I want to like myself?” Gaps between one's desired and actual selves are associated with lessened self-concept clarity (Campbell et al., 1996; DeMarree & Rios, 2014). Cultural psychologists most often study actual self-esteem and less often examine desired self-esteem (but see Hornsey et al., 2018).

When an individual's ideal or ought self-esteem is more positive than her actual self-esteem, we term this difference a *positive self-esteem discrepancy*. DeMarree and Rios (2014) found that almost all Americans with self-esteem discrepancies had positive self-esteem discrepancies, consistent with Western dignity cultures' high valuation of positive self-views. DeMarree and Rios also wondered about the universality of self-esteem discrepancies and their relationship to the self-concept.

Earlier, we argued that Pakistan, being a product of both honour culture and argumentative-interdependent culture, might have either higher or lower actual self-esteem (compared to Western cultures), making it challenging to form a single hypothesis for this variable. Despite this, we hypothesize that Pakistanis have less positive self-esteem discrepancies than do Canadians because both honour cultures and argumentative-interdependent cultures should reduce positive self-esteem discrepancies.²

First, Pakistan might have less positive self-esteem discrepancies because Pakistan is an honour culture. In honour cultures, people seek reputation, not self-esteem, an important conceptual difference. Reputation is the esteem that other people have towards one, where self-esteem is one's privately positive or negative opinion of oneself (Kitayama et al., 2022). Reputation's function is to guarantee safety by communicating that one is strong and can protect oneself, loved ones, and personal resources (Severance et al., 2013). Whereas in dignity cultures a positive self-view in one's own eyes is sufficient, in honour cultures one needs *social validation of one's self-image* (Cross et al., 2014; Novin et al., 2015; Pitt-Rivers, 1997; Uskul et al., 2019). Indeed, “a

person who claims honor but is not paid honor does not in fact have honor” (Leung & Cohen, 2011, p. 509). As Kitayama et al. (2022) have argued, whereas high self-esteem is an intrinsic goal in Western cultures (“the affirmation of the self is primary”), in honour cultures “the affirmation of the self is conditional to and thus secondary to the respect accorded on the self by others” (p. 1002). In short, honour cultures (in which self-esteem is at most a byproduct of reputation) should be less likely to desire extremely high self-esteem compared to dignity cultures (in which self-esteem is an intrinsic goal).

Second, Pakistan might have less positive self-esteem discrepancies because Pakistan is an argumentative-interdependent culture, which are self-effacing rather than self-enhancing (Kitayama et al., 2022). Self-effacing cultures do not promote the desire for very high self-esteem because high self-esteem is seen as arrogant (Cai et al., 2011). Avoiding excessively positive self-regard may be strategically oriented towards pursuing implicit self-esteem motives (i.e., fulfilling modesty standards to ironically increase one's positive self-regard) (Cai et al., 2011). But at least with respect to consciously held wishes (as we study here), desiring very positive self-esteem seems antithetical to the goals of people in self-effacing cultures. Indeed, Hornsey et al. (2018) found that ideal self-esteem was lower in China, Hong Kong, India, and Japan (broadly considered self-effacing cultures) relative to Australia, Chile, Peru, Russia, and the United States – although these authors did not analyse actual self-esteem.

Finally, Pakistan might be lower in self-esteem ideals because dignity cultures such as Canada cultivate broad lay theories about self-esteem which are unique – and probably not held in honour or argumentative-interdependent cultures. A common Western belief is that self-esteem is causally responsible for one's positive life outcomes (Thomaes et al., 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2009). Indeed, Kitayama et al. (2022) pointed out that dignity cultures are unique in positioning self-esteem as causing social approval, for instance. Related to the idea of self-esteem as valued because it is perceived as causal, Vaughan-Johnston et al. (2020) and Vaughan-Johnston and Jacobson (2021a, 2021b) have operationalized people's naïve theories about high self-esteem causing good outcomes as *self-esteem importance*. Most work on self-esteem importance has been conducted using Western samples; the only research examining the role of culture revealed that self-esteem importance was lower among Canadians of East Asian descent compared to Canadians of European descent (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021a). Compared to people believing less in self-esteem importance, people who believe in self-esteem's importance more actively pursue positive self-esteem (Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020; Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021b). Furthermore, higher self-esteem importance is linked with higher ideal and ought self-esteem (Vaughan-Johnston &

Jacobson, 2021b) but is almost unrelated to actual self-esteem (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021a, 2021b). Thus, cultures higher in self-esteem importance might be expected to have high desired self-esteem but no higher actual self-esteem, leading to larger positive self-esteem discrepancies in such cultures.

Social norms that celebrate self-esteem are particularly common in Western cultures (Brown, 2008; Heine et al., 1999; Sheldon et al., 2001; Twenge & Campbell, 2009), and such norms may cause high self-esteem importance (i.e., Thomaes et al., 2017; Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020). Cultural differences in the endorsement of self-esteem's consequentiality may, therefore, be partially responsible for cultural differences in positive self-esteem discrepancies.

In contrast, Pakistani culture appears to express scepticism about the value of positive self-esteem – the Urdu words closest to “high self-esteem” include “selfishness,” “egotism,” and “arrogance,” and others (Saleem & Mahmood, 2011). Thus, Pakistanis may believe less in the benefits of high self-esteem than do Canadians. Pakistanis' less positive views of self-esteem should be linked with lower desired self-esteem. If Pakistanis do not also have much lower self-esteem than Canadians, this would yield less positive self-esteem discrepancies among Pakistanis than Canadians.

1.3 | Agentic versus communal benefits of self-esteem

The comments in the preceding discussion suggest that people in Pakistani culture may have less motivation to increase their self-esteem (less positive self-esteem discrepancies). However, the relationship between culture and self-esteem may be more complicated than this simple hypothesis. The idea that face cultures are less motivated by self-esteem than dignity cultures has been challenged, and the basis of this argument may also apply to a contrast between dignity and honour cultures. Specifically, Sedikides et al. (2003, 2005, 2007) developed the SCENT-R model, which argues that people in more collectivistic cultures may, rather than simply not desiring higher self-esteem, desire to pursue different “tactics” in the pursuit of self-esteem. For example, people in individualist cultures might value *agentic* traits such as being very intelligent, whereas people in collectivist cultures may value *communal* traits such as desiring to be very empathic (Gaertner et al., 2008; also see Gebauer et al., 2013).

Extending this notion, people in honour cultures may view self-esteem as having specific kinds of favourable consequences that might weigh against our hypothesis that Pakistani people (honour culture) will endorse self-esteem importance less than Canadians (dignity culture) do. For example, even if someone in an honour culture doubts that self-esteem will cause the

sorts of desirable agentic benefits examined in earlier self-esteem importance research (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021a), they might view self-esteem as bestowing communal benefits in leading others or being interpersonally effective. If we assume that believing self-esteem causes communal benefits increases people's motivation to gain more self-esteem, then this effect might statistically suppress (MacKinnon et al., 2000) the relationship between culture and positive self-esteem discrepancies.

1.4 | The present research

In sum, we hypothesized that Pakistanis would have less positive self-esteem discrepancies than Canadians. Specifically, this would arise from Pakistanis having lower ideal and ought self-esteem than Canadians, but no less actual self-esteem. We further proposed that these differences in positive self-esteem discrepancies would be partially explained by culturally based differences in how much self-esteem is perceived as important for securing positive, agentic outcomes. Pakistanis should believe that self-esteem causes positive, agentic outcomes less than do Canadians, because such beliefs are encouraged in Western cultures of dignity (e.g., Canada) but not in cultures of honour or self-effacing argumentation cultures like Pakistan. Such beliefs are related to more ideal and more ought self-esteem (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021b) but not to any difference in actual self-esteem (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021a, 2021b). Consequently, the lack of these beliefs in Pakistani culture should decrease the positivity of ideal/actual and ought/actual self-esteem discrepancies among Pakistani people. However, Pakistanis might also see self-esteem as causing positive, communal outcomes more, which may promote an increased desire for higher self-esteem among Pakistanis.

2 | STUDY 1

In Study 1, we assessed self-esteem discrepancies among Pakistanis and Canadians, anticipating less positive self-esteem discrepancies among Pakistanis versus Canadians. We also examined participants' self-esteem importance beliefs as a potential explanation for the predicted cultural difference.

2.1 | Method

We obtained ethics approval from Queen's University in Canada and obtained participants' informed consent before they participated.

2.1.1 | Participants

Due to the exploratory nature of our research, we used a time-based stopping rule collecting all the data we could in one semester. We provide open materials for each study in the Supplementary Online Materials (SOM-1), and data and syntax for both studies are available at <https://osf.io/5j2f4/>. Pakistani university students in Islamabad ($N=367$) completed the study online for course credit. We removed 56 participants for taking under 2 min to complete all materials, and we excluded 25 for not completing either of our dependent variables, leaving $n=286$ participants. The study was conducted in English because English is used by these Pakistani participants for all their academic activities. Canadian university students in Southern Ontario ($N=223$)³ completed the questionnaires online for course credit. We eliminated seven participants for not completing either of our dependent variables, leaving $n=216$ Canadians. A sensitivity analysis using the pwr package (Champely et al., 2017) in R (R Core Team, 2022) indicated that we had 80% power to detect $d_s > 0.25$. Table 1 contains more details about the samples. In SOM-4 and SOM-5 we re-analysed data with different or no cuts, and our conclusions remained almost identical (i.e., no significant differences became non-significant or vice versa).

TABLE 1 Sample Demographics (Study 1).

	Canadians	Pakistanis
<i>N</i>	216	286
Gender (of valid)	87% female	95% female
Median age	–	21.0 ($SD=2.3$)
Age range	–	16–36
Ethnicity	75% European, 7% East Asian, 6% mixed, 4% South Asian, 4% Asian (unspecified), 4% other	69% Pakistani, ^a 19% Asian (unspecified), 3% Malik, 2% Awan, 7% other

Note: Age was omitted from the Canadian sample, but participants were from a similar but non-overlapping population as Study 2 (where we did measure age for Canadians).

^aA substantial proportion of the Pakistani group reported their ethnicity as Islamic (their religious identity) or Punjabi (their provincial identity) in the open-ended prompt.

TABLE 2 Study Variables Across Cultures (Study 1).

Variable	Group means		<i>t</i> -test	Effect size (<i>d</i> , $CI_{95\%}$)
	Canada	Pakistan		
Self-esteem importance	4.70 (0.77)	4.29 (0.66)	$t(500)=-6.34^{***}$	-0.57 [-0.75, -0.39]
Actual self-esteem	4.89 (1.09)	5.21 (1.35)	$t(497)=2.84^{**}$	0.26 [0.08, 0.43]
Ideal self-esteem	6.31 (0.92)	5.22 (1.44)	$t(497)=-9.70^{***}$	-0.88 [-1.06, -0.69]
Ought self-esteem	6.12 (0.90)	5.20 (1.39)	$t(497)=-8.48^{***}$	-0.77 [-0.95, -0.58]
Ideal/actual	1.42 (1.23)	0.01 (1.48)	$t(497)=-11.28^{***}$	-1.02 [-1.21, -0.83]
Ought/actual	1.23 (1.17)	-0.01 (1.55)	$t(497)=-9.81^{***}$	-0.89 [-1.07, -0.70]

Note: Cells are defined as mean (*SD*). $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.

2.1.2 | Measures and procedure

Participants completed the self-esteem discrepancy and self-esteem importance measures in randomized order. In the following list of internal consistency values, the coefficients refer to values obtained in the cited works (e.g., scale development papers); values for our present samples are in Tables 2 and 3, separated by culture. Several additional measures, reported in SOM-1, were collected for other research purposes.

Self-esteem discrepancies

We used three items from DeMarree and Rios (2014, Study 1). First, actual self-esteem was assessed: "Indicate the extent to which you like yourself" (1 = *dislike strongly*, 7 = *like strongly*). Following DeMarree and Rios, we briefly introduced the notion of ideal and ought self-esteem, and participants rated the extent to which they would "IDEALLY" and "OUGHT TO" like themselves, using the same scaling. Discrepancies were scored as ideal minus actual self-esteem and ought minus actual self-esteem.

Self-esteem importance

We used Vaughan-Johnston and Jacobson's (2021a) measure of self-esteem importance beliefs, which averages eight items rated from -3 (*strongly disagree*) to +3

TABLE 3 Sample Demographics (Study 2).

	Canadians	Pakistanis
<i>N</i>	110	135
Gender (of valid)	69% female	91% female
Median age	20.5 (<i>SD</i> =5.7)	21.0 (<i>SD</i> =2.4)
Age range	17–49	18–40
Ethnicity	84% European, 11% mixed, 3% East Asian, 3% South Asian	47% Pakistani ^a , 15% Asian (unspecified), 10% Pashtun, 8% South Asian, 5% Kashmiri, 4% mixed, 12% other

^aThe Pakistani group again consists partially of participants who also reported their ethnicity as Islamic or Punjabi in the open-ended prompt.

TABLE 4 Study Variables across Cultures (Study 2).

Variable	Group means		Statistical significance (<i>t</i> -test)	Effect size (<i>d</i> , <i>CI</i> _{95%})
	Canada	Pakistan		
Self-esteem importance (Agentic)	4.89 (0.77)	4.60 (0.75)	<i>t</i> (229)=−2.89**	−0.38 [−0.65, −0.12]
Self-esteem importance (Communal)	3.53 (1.02)	4.09 (0.93)	<i>t</i> (230)=4.34***	0.57 [0.31, 0.83]
Actual self-esteem	4.70 (1.31)	4.94 (1.49)	<i>t</i> (231)=1.29, <i>p</i> =0.199	0.17 [−0.09, 0.43]
Ideal self-esteem	6.23 (0.79)	5.40 (1.38)	<i>t</i> (231)=−5.51***	−0.72 [−0.99, −0.46]
Ought self-esteem	5.88 (1.04)	5.30 (1.28)	<i>t</i> (231)=3.78***	−0.50 [−0.76, −0.24]
Ideal/actual self-esteem discrepancy	1.53 (1.27)	0.47 (1.48)	<i>t</i> (231)=−5.86***	−0.77 [−0.104, −0.50]
Ought/actual self-esteem discrepancy	1.18 (1.38)	0.36 (1.65)	<i>t</i> (231)=−4.08***	−0.54 [−0.80, −0.27]

Note: Cells are defined as mean (*SD*). ***p*<0.01; ****p*<0.001.

(*strongly agree*) with no neutral (midpoint) option, to assess beliefs about self-esteem causing good outcomes (e.g., “I need to have a positive view of myself to be at peace with who I am”, $\alpha=0.85$). Scores were recoded to 1–6 for analysis.

2.2 | Results and discussion

Although gender was unbalanced across culture samples (especially in Study 2; see Tables 1 and 3), results of culture remained consistent when gender was added as a covariate. SOM-2 provides correlations among measured variables for each study (Table S1).⁴ We report statistics separately by dependent variable (DV), with full statistics provided in Table 2 (Study 1) and Table 4 (Study 2).

2.2.1 | Self-esteem discrepancies

We conducted a 2 (Culture: Pakistan vs. Canada) × 3 (Self-esteem type: Actual versus Ideal versus Ought) mixed-design ANOVA. The Culture × Self-esteem type interaction was significant, $F(2, 994)=83.61$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=0.14$. As expected, self-esteem discrepancies were less positive for Pakistanis than for Canadians (Figure 1). More specifically, using paired-samples *t*-tests, we found

that Pakistanis did not differ in their ideal versus actual self-esteem, $t(282)=0.12$, $p=0.904$, $d=0.01$ [−0.11, 0.12], or ought versus actual self-esteem, $t(282)=−0.12$, $p=0.908$, $d=−0.01$ [−0.12, 0.11]. Indeed, the responses were quite evenly divided across the range with 33.9% of Pakistanis reporting they ideally would have (31.1% ought to have) lower self-esteem, 35.3% ideally would have (39.9% ought to have) the same self-esteem as their actual self, and 30.7% ideally would have (29.0% ought to have) higher self-esteem.

Consistent with prior research on North Americans, Canadians had substantially higher ideal versus actual self-esteem, $t(215)=16.95$, $p<.001$, $d=1.15$ [1.02, 1.28], and higher ought versus actual self-esteem, $t(215)=15.42$, $p<.001$, $d=1.05$ [0.91, 1.18]. Unlike the Pakistanis, most Canadians wanted higher self-esteem. More specifically, only 3.7% of Canadians said they ideally would have (4.6% ought to have) lower self-esteem, 18.1% ideally would have (19.0% ought to have) the same self-esteem as their actual self, and 78.2% ideally would have (76.4% ought to have) higher self-esteem.

Between-group comparisons supported the notion that the difference in self-esteem discrepancies was partially due to Pakistanis reporting lower ideal and lower ought self-esteem than Canadians (Table 2). Pakistanis also reported higher actual self-esteem than did Canadians. In sum, the overall pattern of results clearly supported our hypothesis that Pakistanis had

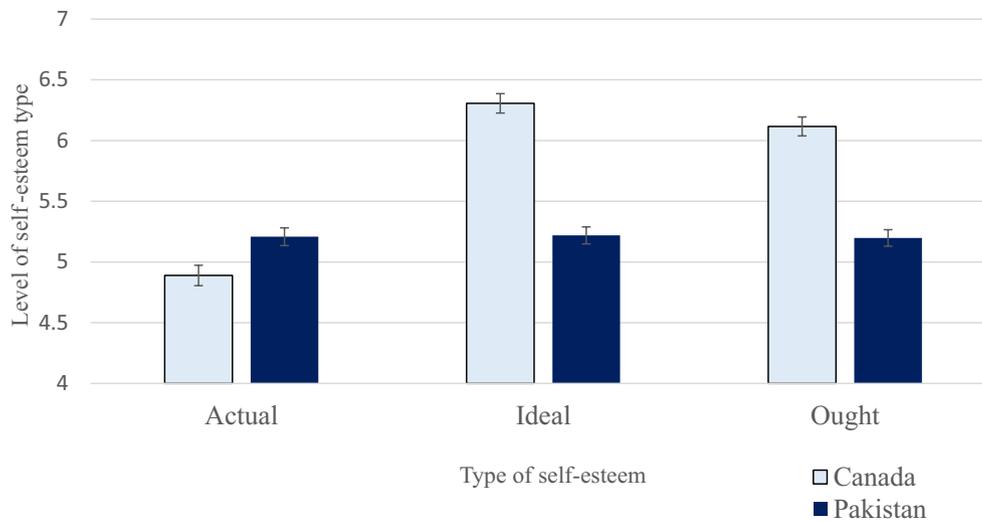


FIGURE 1 Self-esteem scores as a function of self-esteem type (actual versus ideal versus ought) and culture (Study 1). *Note:* Error bars indicate standard errors

smaller (indeed, nil) self-esteem discrepancies than Canadians, who showed a robust preference for more positive self-esteem.

2.2.2 | Beliefs about self-esteem's importance

As reported in Table 2, Pakistanis held significantly less favourable views about the benefits of high self-esteem than did Canadians.

2.2.3 | Mediation analyses

We conducted mediation analyses to explore the indirect effect of culture (coded Pakistan=+0.5, Canada=-0.5) on self-esteem discrepancy through self-esteem importance. For the DV, we calculated discrepancy scores by subtracting the actual self-esteem from the ideal or ought self-esteem. We then ran PROCESS version 3.5 (Hayes, 2017) Model 4 with 10,000 percentile bootstrapped samples using SPSS, setting a constant seed for the two mediation analyses.

As seen in Figure 2a,b, for the *a* path, Pakistanis reported significantly lower self-esteem importance agentic beliefs than did Canadians, $b = -0.41$ [-0.53, -0.28], $t(497) = -6.34$, $p < .0001$. As predicted, for the *b* paths, lower self-esteem importance beliefs were related to significantly lower ideal-actual self-esteem discrepancies, $b = 0.37$ [0.20, 0.54], $t(496) = 4.34$, $p < .0001$, and lower ought-actual self-esteem discrepancies, $b = 0.39$ [0.22, 0.56], $t(496) = 4.47$, $p < .0001$. Based on neither the joint-significance test (Yzerbyt et al., 2018) nor the bootstrap confidence interval containing 0, the indirect effects of agentic self-esteem on ideal-actual, -0.15 [-0.25, -0.07], and ought-actual self-esteem discrepancies, -0.16

[-0.25, -0.08], were significant. Thus, self-esteem importance beliefs mediated cultural differences in self-esteem discrepancies. For the *c'* paths, controlling for self-esteem importance, culture still was significantly related to ideal-actual self-esteem discrepancies, $b = -1.25$ [-1.50, -1.00], $t(496) = -9.86$, $p < .001$, and ought-actual self-esteem discrepancies, $b = -1.08$ [-1.33, -0.83], $t(496) = -8.39$, $p < .001$.

2.2.4 | Summary

Pakistanis do not show the classic desire for enhanced self-esteem that has been shown across a diverse range of cultures (DeMarree & Rios, 2014, Study 2). Canadians, however, replicated the classic preference for higher self-esteem, with more than three-quarters desiring more positive self-esteem. This finding supports cross-cultural variance in people's pursuit of positive self-esteem, highlighting an intriguing boundary condition to the prevalence of these discrepancies and connecting with past work (Gebauer et al., 2015; Heine & Hamamura, 2007).

Compared to Canadians, Pakistanis were less inclined to see benefits in having high self-esteem, which in turn was related to lower self-esteem discrepancies. Thus, differences in self-esteem importance helped explain, in part, cultural differences in self-esteem discrepancies. Self-esteem importance has been connected to a variety of phenomena including punitive responses to social rejection and increased negative emotions caused by negative self-relevant feedback (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021a, 2021b). However, the present work shows that self-esteem importance can be validly studied in a substantially different culture, Pakistan, and can help to account for cross-cultural differences concerning self-esteem.

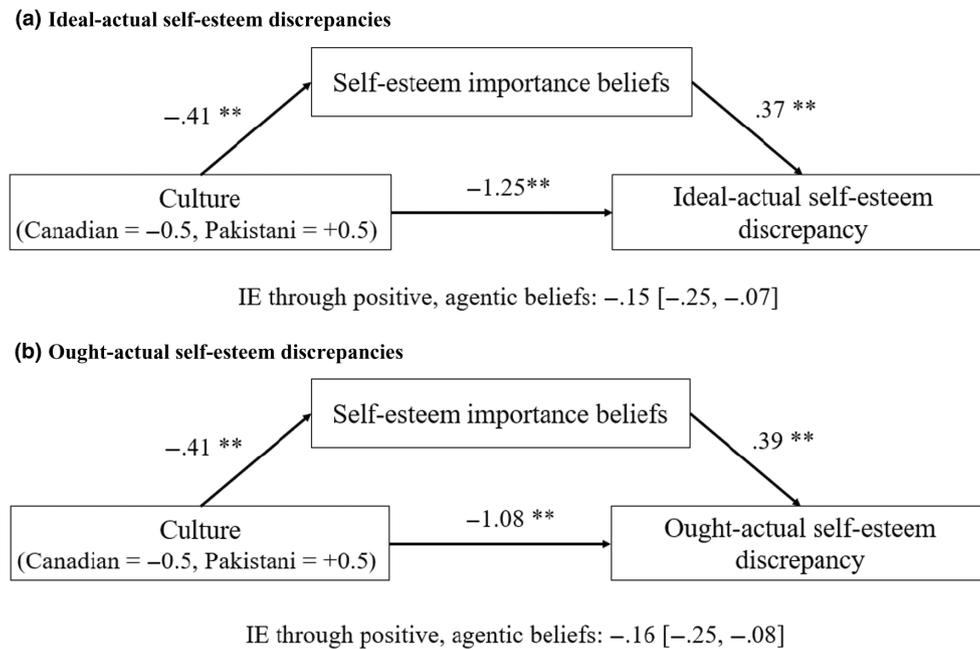


FIGURE 2 Simple mediation models for indirect effect of culture on self-esteem discrepancies through self-esteem importance (Study 1). Note: Models tested via PROCESS version 3.5, Model 4, with 10,000 bootstrapped resamples. Solid lines represent significant paths. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

3 | STUDY 2

In Study 2, we attempted to replicate the core effects of Study 1 while probing alternative explanations for our results. One concern is that our measures may have emphasized ideas that Pakistanis (versus Canadians) would be less likely to care about. For example, *agentic* attributes or traits related to an individual's competence and abilities (e.g., intelligence) may be more central to the self in individualistic cultures. In contrast, *communal* attributes or traits relate to people's ability to harmonize and benefit others (e.g., kindness) and are more self-central to people living in collectivistic cultures (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Gebauer et al., 2013, 2015; Ybarra et al., 2012). Reflecting its Western origins, the self-esteem importance scale emphasizes outcomes that are agentic – specifically, that self-esteem causes one to reach one's goals, maintain one's health, be at peace with oneself, and attain “my success” (likely interpreted by respondents as meaning personal achievement).

Pakistani people tend not to value individualism ($M = 14$ on a 100-point scale), whereas Canadians highly value individualism (80; Hofstede et al., 2010). Thus, Pakistanis may not value the sorts of outcomes that the self-esteem importance scale addresses, but they may instead value more highly communal attributes (also see Kurman, 2001). To better address this distinction between agentic and communal attributes, we also added a new self-esteem importance subscale that emphasizes the communal benefits of having high self-esteem. If the self-esteem importance effects reverse for communal outcomes, this pattern would provide evidence of

the role of cultural individualism/collectivism (as per the SCENT-R model). Indeed, such a reversal of our effect would provide interesting nuance for the SCENT-R model by demonstrating that not only do the collectivist cultures such as Pakistan pursue self-esteem less, but they may also see *unique benefits* in high self-esteem from a communal perspective.

We further propose that differences in positive self-esteem discrepancies may be partially explained by culturally based differences in how much self-esteem is perceived as important for securing positive, agentic outcomes: Pakistanis, by virtue of seeing self-esteem as causing positive, agentic outcomes less, will desire higher self-esteem less. However, Pakistanis might also see self-esteem as causing positive, communal outcomes more, which may promote some increased desire for higher self-esteem among Pakistanis, partially suppressing the cross-cultural differences on self-esteem discrepancies.

As is the case in most cross-country cultural comparisons, Pakistan and Canada differ on many other dimensions besides culture – although few studies address such alternative explanations. Thus, we examined two obvious differences between the countries: religion, and socioeconomic status (SES).

The dominant religion of Pakistan is Islam (Pew Research Center, 2012), which remains deeply engrained in Pakistanis' sense of self (Abdel-Khalek, 2011; Ghorbani et al., 2010; Khaledian et al., 2017), whereas the dominant religion of Canadians is Christianity, followed closely by “none” (Plecher, 2019). Although religiosity is positively associated with self-esteem

(Khaledian et al., 2017; Suhail & Chaudhry, 2004), Islam emphasizes humble self-portrayals and promotes modesty along with a critical lens through which to view the self (Saleem & Mahmood, 2011; Stewart et al., 1999). This interaction may contribute to the patterns we observed in Study 1, namely Pakistanis' enhanced self-esteem but a lack of desire for greater self-esteem (i.e., relatively low self-esteem discrepancies) compared to Canadians.

We also measured subjective SES to determine whether Pakistani (versus Canadian) people might see themselves as more socioeconomically disadvantaged. This difference might matter if, for example, the desire for more positive self-esteem becomes more pronounced when one finds it easier to meet one's basic needs (as suggested in early motivation models; Maslow, 1958). Our cultural interpretation would be undermined if the difference between Pakistanis and Canadians was simply a matter of economic differences.

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants

We used a time-based stopping rule, collecting 255 total participants. Pakistani university students in Islamabad ($N=144$) completed the study online for course credit. We removed six participants for taking under 2 min to complete all materials and four participants for completing under 10% of the study materials, leaving $n=134$ Pakistani participants. Canadian university students in Southern Ontario ($N=111$) completed the questionnaires online for course credit. We eliminated one participant for taking under 2 min to complete all materials, leaving $n=110$ Canadian participants. A sensitivity analysis indicated that we attained 80% power to detect the effects of $d>0.35$, which is smaller than all but one of Study 1's six DVs. In SOM-4 and SOM-5 we re-analysed data with different or no cuts, and our conclusions remained almost identical (i.e., no significant differences become non-significant or vice versa).

3.1.2 | Measures

Self-esteem discrepancies

We measured ideal, ought, and actual self-esteem as we did in Study 1.

Self-esteem importance

We relabelled Study 1's eight self-esteem importance items as *agentive* benefits of self-esteem (SEI-A). We also added six items that capture beliefs that high self-esteem causes favourable *communal* benefits (SEI-C), expanding the conceptualization and measurement of

self-esteem importance (e.g., compared to Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021a). Items on this scale assessed perceptions that one's own high self-esteem benefits other people such as helping one to take care of others, to support others' pursuit of goals, supporting other people generally, being empathic, being at peace with others, and having little effect on interpersonal interactions (reversed).

Intrinsic religiosity

Hoge's (1972) 10-item intrinsic religiosity scale captures beliefs that religion is identity-central (e.g., "My faith involves all of my life") and a desire to "try hard to carry [one's] religion over into all [one's] other dealings" (p. 372). Hoge (1972) found good internal consistency (KR-20: 0.90), suggesting a cohesive set of religious beliefs. This measure has shown good psychometric performance in other honour cultures (e.g., Iran; Hafizi et al., 2015).

Subjective social status

To rule out differences in subjective economic status as a confounder, we had participants rate themselves on a socioeconomic "ladder" (Singh-Manoux et al., 2003), where 1 indicated "the people who are worst off" in terms of money, education, and employment and 9 indicated "the people who are best off" on the same dimensions.

3.2 | Results and discussion

Table S2, in the online supplement, shows the correlation matrix between variables. In Study 2 we also included measures of honour culture beliefs, which confirmed that Pakistani people endorsed honour-culture beliefs significantly more than did Canadians (SOM-3).

3.2.1 | Self-esteem discrepancies

Replicating Study 1, the Culture \times Self-esteem type interaction was significant, $F(2, 462)=19.82$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=0.08$. Pakistanis showed a significant but modestly higher ideal than actual self-esteem, $t(123)=3.52$, $p=.001$, $d=0.32$ [0.14, 0.50], and ought versus actual self-esteem, $t(123)=2.44$, $p=.016$, $d=0.22$ [0.04, 0.40]. In contrast, Canadians had much higher ideal versus actual self-esteem, $t(108)=12.63$, $p<.001$, $d=1.20$ [0.96, 1.46], and much higher ought versus actual self-esteem, $t(108)=8.98$, $p<.001$, $d=1.05$ [0.64, 1.08]. Although these results differ from those of Study 1 in that the discrepancies were significant for Pakistanis in this dataset, the discrepancies remained very small, and significantly smaller than Canadians' discrepancies. As predicted, Pakistanis had lower ideal and lower ought self-esteem than Canadians,

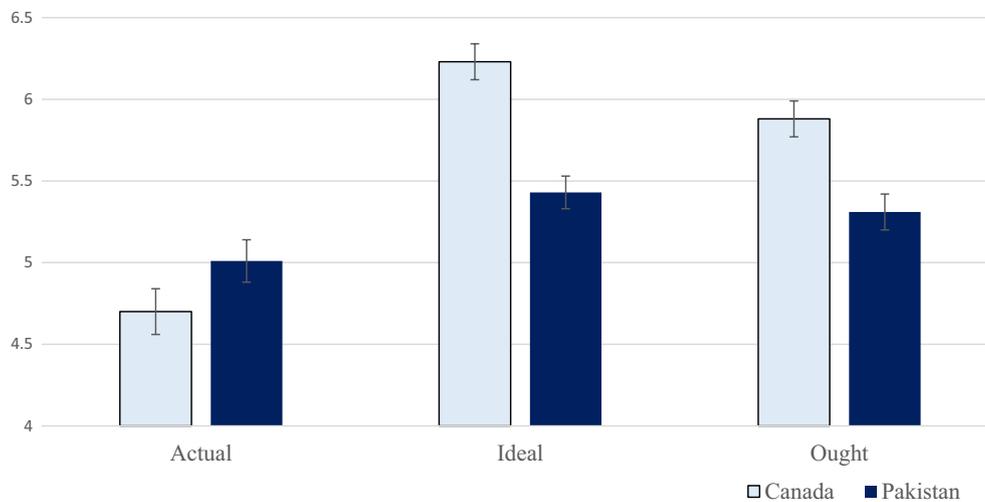


FIGURE 3 Cross-cultural self-esteem comparisons (Study 2). Note: Error bars indicate standard errors.

but, in contrast to Study 1, the two groups did not differ significantly on actual self-esteem (Figure 3).

3.2.2 | Beliefs about self-esteem's importance

As in Study 1, Pakistanis endorsed agentic benefits of self-esteem less than Canadians did. However, and consistently with our predictions, Pakistanis believed more in the communal benefits of self-esteem than did Canadians. Thus, the Study 1 finding that Pakistani people see fewer benefits in high self-esteem relative to Canadians was crucially qualified by the agentic/communal distinction, with Pakistanis expecting greater communal benefits from high self-esteem than Canadians. Furthermore, because the test statistics are in opposite directions, the cultural differences do not reflect a mere response bias difference (Chen, 2008), such as Pakistanis being less acquiescent compared with Canadians, but rather a difference in the perceived value of self-esteem.

3.2.3 | Mediation analyses

We conducted the same mediation analyses as in Study 1 but with agentic and communal self-esteem importance as parallel mediators. Once again, we coded Pakistan = +0.5, Canada = -0.5. For ideal-actual and ought-actual self-esteem discrepancies, we replicated the results of Study 1 for agentic self-esteem importance (Figure 4a,b). Specifically, for the *a* path, we again found that Pakistanis had significantly lower agentic self-esteem importance, $b = -0.28$ [-0.48, -0.08], $t(226) = -2.41$, $p = .017$, and for the *b* paths, agentic self-esteem importance was significantly related both to more positive ideal-actual, $b = 0.48$ [0.24, 0.72], $t(224) = 3.58$, $p < .001$, and more positive ought-actual self-esteem

discrepancies, $b = 0.51$ [0.25, 0.78], $t(224) = 3.85$, $p = .0002$. Thus, based on both joint significance and the 95th percentile bootstrap confidence interval based on 10,000 samples not containing 0, the indirect effect of culture on self-esteem discrepancies through agentic self-esteem importance was significant for both ideal-actual, -0.13 [-0.27, -0.03], and ought-actual, -0.14 [-0.27, -0.01], discrepancies. These mediation patterns are consistent with the idea that Pakistani people showed smaller ideal-actual and ought-actual self-esteem discrepancies insofar as they believed less in self-esteem's positive, agentic consequences.

For communal self-esteem importance's *a* path, Pakistanis had significantly higher communal self-esteem importance than did Canadians, $b = 0.55$ [0.30, 0.81], $t(226) = 3.81$, $p < .001$. For the *b* paths, greater communal self-esteem importance was significantly related to both less positive ideal-actual, $b = -0.31$ [-0.50, -0.12], $t(224) = -3.23$, $p = .001$, and ought-actual, $b = -0.23$ [-0.43, -0.02], $t(224) = -2.19$, $p = .030$. Based on both joint significance and the 95th percentile bootstrap confidence interval based on 10,000 samples not containing 0, these two indirect effects were significant: -0.17 [-0.30, -0.07] and -0.13 [-0.27, -0.01], respectively. Thus, we found no evidence for our hypothesized suppression effect.

Indeed, the fact that believing self-esteem has communal benefits was related to less positive self-esteem discrepancies is surprising. Intuitively, we reason that any perceived benefit of high self-esteem (whether agentic or communal) should presumably motivate the believer to desire higher self-esteem (i.e., to obtain those perceived benefits). To better understand this result, we examined the correlations between SEI-A and SEI-C with ideal, ought, and actual self-esteem separately (i.e., the components of the discrepancy scores analysed in the mediation models). Greater agentic self-esteem importance beliefs were significantly related to greater ideal self-esteem, $r(226) = 0.27$, $p < .001$, and greater ought self-esteem,

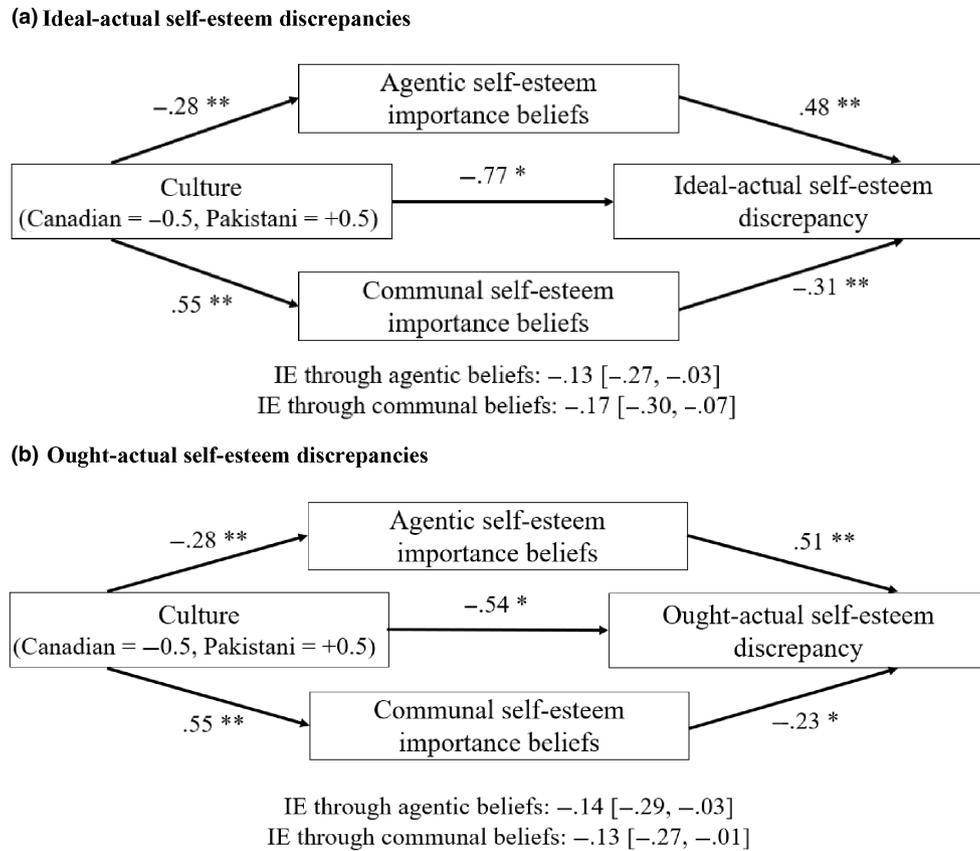


FIGURE 4 Parallel mediation models: self-esteem importance beliefs mediate between culture and self-esteem discrepancies (Study 2). Note: Models tested via PROCESS version 3.5, Model 4, with 10,000 bootstrapped resamples. Dashed lines represent non-significant path, solid lines significant paths. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

$r(226) = 0.30, p < .001$, but were unrelated to actual self-esteem, $r(226) = -0.02, p = .739$. In contrast, greater communal self-esteem importance beliefs were not significantly related to ideal self-esteem, $r(226) = -0.04, p = .564$, or ought self-esteem, $r(226) = 0.06, p = .342$, but were related to greater actual self-esteem, $r(226) = 0.20, p = .003$. Agentic and communal self-esteem importance beliefs were modestly, positively intercorrelated, $r(229) = 0.25, p < .001$. Thus, although both agentic and communal self-esteem importance mediated the effects of culture on self-esteem discrepancies, they did so for very different reasons. Agentic self-esteem importance beliefs help explain why Pakistanis idealize positive self-esteem less than Canadians do. Communal self-esteem importance beliefs are unrelated to desiring positive self-esteem but nonetheless account for variance in self-esteem discrepancies because people who see communal benefits in self-esteem tend to have higher actual self-esteem than people who doubt self-esteem's communal benefits.

3.2.4 | Intrinsic religiosity

To establish whether religious differences could account for our results, we used a simple mediation analysis

to determine whether it was a significant mediator (or confounder). For the *a* path, Pakistanis were significantly higher in religiosity than Canadians, $b = 0.89, t(217) = 12.56, p < .001$, but neither of the *b* paths was significant. That is, religiosity was not significantly related to either ideal-actual discrepancies, $b = -0.20, t(210) = -1.10, p = .273$, or ought-actual discrepancies, $b = -0.17, t(210) = -0.89, p = .374$. The 95th percentile bootstrap confidence intervals $[-0.45, 0.17]$ for ideal-actual discrepancies, $[-0.44, 0.20]$ for ought-actual discrepancies, each based on 10,000 samples, each contained 0. Thus, based on the joint-significance test and the bootstrap confidence interval, religiosity was not a significant mediator (or confounder) of the relationship between culture and self-esteem discrepancies, so we can rule out religious differences as an alternative explanation of our results.

3.2.5 | Social subjective status

We used the same simple mediation analysis to rule out subjective SES as a confounder between culture and self-esteem discrepancies. For the *a* path, Canadians and Pakistanis did not differ significantly on personal SES,

$B_s < |0.09|$, $p_s > 0.746$, and neither of the b paths was significant, $B_s < |0.09|$, $p_s > 0.323$. Therefore, subjective SES was not a significant confounder of our results.

4 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Across two studies, we found consistent evidence that Pakistanis and Canadians differed in their beliefs about and desire for more positive self-esteem. Pakistanis experienced far less positive self-esteem discrepancies than did Canadians, who desired more self-esteem than they possessed (i.e., wanted to like themselves more). Furthermore, Pakistanis were less inclined to believe in self-esteem's positive, agentic consequences than were Canadians, and this difference in their naïve theories helped to account for Pakistanis' less positive self-esteem discrepancies. Pakistanis perceived self-esteem as causing good communal outcomes more than did Canadians, providing an interesting caveat to our initial conclusion and demonstrating the value of distinguishing between beliefs about agentic versus communal benefits of high self-esteem. In sum, our findings reveal that one's cultural background is crucial to understanding not just *how much* people will desire to pursue more positive self-esteem but also *how and why* positive self-esteem may be of interest in these cultures.

4.1 | Theoretical implications

Cross-cultural work often examines how people in different cultures conceptualize, idealize, and pursue positive states such as happiness and self-esteem (Grossmann & Kross, 2010; Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Hornsey et al., 2018; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). However, such work has largely focused on differences in East Asian (e.g., China, Japan) versus North American countries (e.g., United States, Canada), conflating “Eastern” cultures with specific regions of Asia whose moral traditions are deeply rooted in Confucianism (i.e., a specific set of face cultures). This focus has led researchers to overlook honour-based (Uskul et al., 2010) and/or argumentative-interdependent collectivist cultures (Kitayama et al., 2022), which may differ from face cultures in important respects. This limited focus has led to several gaps in the literature in terms of better understanding large countries including Pakistan. The current work contributes to this shortcoming by adding to recent research examining differences in understudied cultures such as Pakistan, Egypt, and Turkey (Azevedo et al., 2022; Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2021; Vignoles et al., 2016).

We proposed that Pakistanis may show less positive self-esteem discrepancies (than do Canadians) because Pakistan is a joint product of honour-based principles and South Asian argumentative-interdependent

influences. Interestingly, both influences might be seen in our data. Pakistanis had higher (Study 1) or the same actual self-esteem (Study 2) as Canadians, resembling an honour culture in this respect (San Martin et al., 2018), but they had substantially lower ideal and ought self-esteem than Canadians in both studies, resembling the self-effacing qualities of South Asian (Nanakdewa et al., 2022) or holistic cultures (Hornsey et al., 2018) in this respect. We think this is consistent with the idea of Pakistan being a hybrid culture that has been greatly influenced by its history, religion, and geographical neighbours.

Combining these findings, Pakistanis reported less positive self-esteem discrepancies compared to Canadians. This finding provides important insight into cross-cultural work involving self-views, which do not account for actual self-esteem differences when examining self-esteem idealization (Hornsey et al., 2018). Moreover, our work suggests an important barrier condition to DeMarree and Rios (2014, Study 2), who captured significant desired/actual self-esteem discrepancies across a diverse range of cultures, suggesting that some cultures (e.g., Pakistan) are likely to show no (Study 1) or minimal (Study 2) positive biases in their desired/actual self-esteem discrepancies. Our data consistently supported the idea that beliefs about self-esteem helped account for this effect: Pakistanis showed less positive self-esteem discrepancies insofar as they were more doubtful that self-esteem had positive, agentic consequences for their lives (self-esteem importance; Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020).

As predicted, however, Pakistanis (versus Canadians) believed more in self-esteem's communal benefits. This parallels past studies (Brown & Cai, 2010; Gebauer et al., 2013) which focused on how much members of collectivist or individualistic cultures value communal or agentic attributes. We extend these findings by showing that people in collectivistic (individualistic) cultures may also view self-esteem as having more *consequences* for communal (agentic) ends. The present work thus joins past efforts to identify cultural diversity in naïve belief systems concerning how the world works (Ji et al., 2001; Nisbett et al., 2001; Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2009). These past efforts generally focused on people's metaphysical beliefs about the world's mutability and the presence/absence of contradictions. Our work shows intriguing differences across cultures in how people conceptualize causal relationships between psychological forces and their environments (also see Brown, 2008).

Our data also contribute to a growing literature concerning self-esteem importance (Vaughan-Johnston et al., 2020; Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021a, 2021b) by revealing expected cross-cultural differences in this construct and in showing that self-esteem importance scales are measurement-invariant when assessing samples from at least one non-Western culture. Furthermore, we added an important point of

conceptual and empirical clarity by distinguishing between beliefs about agentic and communal outcomes that people associate with high self-esteem. This distinction proved critical in our cross-cultural comparison, as Pakistanis believed less in the agentic benefits of self-esteem and more in communal benefits of self-esteem than did Canadians. This finding provides an interesting wrinkle compared to relevant past research. Cross-cultural research on self-esteem importance may need to avoid biasing results by skewing items towards agentic over communal wording. For instance, Brown (2008) found that Japanese people believed that self-esteem was less consequential than Americans did, and Vaughan-Johnston and Jacobson (2021a) found that self-esteem importance was lower among Canadians of East Asian versus European descent. However, both research teams' items focus primarily on agentic outcomes (e.g., making people successful) and fail to include communal outcomes (e.g., self-esteem helping people to treat others well). Our work reveals that cultural differences in beliefs about the consequentiality of self-esteem may attenuate or even reverse depending on the particular consequences that researchers measure.

4.2 | Limitations and future inquiries

We recruited only university students, which limits the generalizability of our results. For example, although our cultural groups did not differ on subjective SES, and SES was unrelated to our variables, since being a university student bestows certain SES benefits compared to being a non-student. One might wonder whether studying less advantaged Pakistanis or Canadians would yield different results. However, Crocker and Major (1989) argued that being in a low-status group does not necessarily entail low self-esteem, as low-status individuals may attribute negative self-relevant information to prejudice, shift standards to people within their own group, and use other self-esteem maintenance strategies. Thus, even extremely disadvantaged individuals may have only very slightly lower self-esteem, and meta-analytic results suggest only a small association ($r=0.08$; Twenge & Campbell, 2002). Finally, our Pakistani samples contained a higher proportion of women (versus our Canadian samples; see Table 1). However, this difference worked *against* some of our findings because women see more agentic benefits to self-esteem than do men (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2021a), yet the higher ratio of women in the Pakistani sample endorsed agentic self-esteem benefits less.

Interestingly, we obtained substantial cultural differences despite having Pakistanis complete the research in English. Past work suggested that having Chinese-born participants speak in Chinese versus English reveals larger cultural differences compared with North

Americans (Ross et al., 2002). For instance, Chinese people instructed to speak Chinese showed more collectivism and lower self-esteem than Chinese instructed to speak English. Assuming that Pakistanis are similarly responsive to language shifts, our effect sizes might have been reduced by having Pakistanis engage the materials using English rather than Urdu (Ji et al., 2004; but note that larger effect sizes would enhance rather than diminish the strength of our claims). Urdu is Pakistan's national language, but because our Pakistani participants spoke fluent English, using only English materials had practical advantages, such as avoiding the risk of measurement non-invariance emerging from translation-based differences. Finally, because our Pakistani participants use English in all their academic work, we were concerned that presenting materials in Urdu would be comparatively irregular and may have had unintended effects on the interpretation of materials and, consequently, the results. Regardless, future work could examine whether Pakistanis' evaluations differ as a function of language type.

One limitation of our mediation analyses is that in cross-sectional mediation, only theoretical considerations can ultimately determine the "correct" ordering of variables. In simple mediation, at least six equivalent models of the proposed predictor, proposed mediator, and proposed DV can be formed, and Thoemmes (2015) has shown that the correct model often is not identified in simulations. Statistical tests cannot rule out competing mediation models given cross-sectional data (Lemmer & Gollwitzer, 2017), but some models may be conceptually unlikely. We argue against four of these models – participants' Pakistani/Canadian culture surely precedes their belief in self-esteem's consequences or self-esteem discrepancies (so our predictor is appropriately positioned first). We cannot, however, rule out the possibility that self-esteem importance beliefs follow from self-esteem discrepancies (i.e., our mediator and DV could be reversed), and although we were able to rule out religiosity and subjective SES as alternative third variables, we cannot be certain that some other construct related to culture or one of our other variables accounts for our results. Thus, the data are consistent with our theoretical view but are best considered as preliminary pending conceptual replication involving the experimental manipulation of self-esteem importance beliefs in each culture (Spencer et al., 2005).

A final limitation is that we did not measure modesty in the present research. A modesty interpretation might suggest, for instance, that Pakistanis expressed minimal self-esteem discrepancies only because blatant self-satisfaction is not valued in Pakistan. Indeed, we speculated that differences in religiosity between Pakistani and Canadians might prompt more a self-critical mindset, encouraging modesty (Saleem & Mahmood, 2011; Stewart et al., 1999). Such religiosity-induced modesty might reduce self-esteem

striving while simultaneously improving self-esteem levels more broadly as a benefit of greater religiosity (Khaledian et al., 2017; Suhail & Chaudhry, 2004). Thus, Pakistanis might appear to ironically pursue positive self-esteem precisely by adopting a modest self-view (Cai et al., 2011).

5 | CONCLUSION

The results presented here justify Dufner et al.'s (2019) call for researchers to examine self-esteem dynamics in neglected cultures. We found a rich variety of differences in terms of self-esteem discrepancies and beliefs about self-esteem's consequences between Pakistani and Canadian participants. However, our findings do not represent the final word about how distinct cultures cultivate unique perspectives on self-esteem. How do parenting beliefs within each culture promote or discourage these evaluative discrepancies and beliefs about self-esteem's importance? How might descriptive norms ("most people want to like themselves") or injunctive norms ("you should want to like yourself") differ across cultures, shaping the emergence of differences such as ours? Research addressing these critical questions would facilitate deeper appreciation of cultural diversity regarding the self.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Thomas I. Vaughan-Johnston: Conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; project administration; validation; visualization; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Faizan Imtiaz:** Conceptualization; investigation; methodology; resources; writing – review and editing. **Li-Jun Ji:** Conceptualization; project administration; supervision; writing – review and editing. **Rubina Hanif:** Funding acquisition; investigation; project administration; resources; writing – review and editing. **Devin I. Fowlie:** Formal analysis; investigation; methodology; writing – original draft; writing – review and editing. **Jill A. Jacobson:** Conceptualization; formal analysis; supervision; visualization; writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

None of the authors have conflicts of interest to declare.

OPEN RESEARCH BADGES



This article has earned Open Data and Open Materials badges. Data and materials are available at <https://osf.io/5j2f4/>.

PRE-REGISTRATION STATEMENT

None of the studies were pre-registered.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data and syntax for both studies are available at <https://osf.io/5j2f4/>.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The studies conformed to standard ethics practices of the American Psychological Association, and were granted ethics approval by the General Research Ethics Board at Queen's University.

RESEARCH MATERIALS AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

We provide open materials for each study at <https://osf.io/5j2f4/>.

DISCLAIMER

This manuscript has not been submitted to any other journal. Data from Study 1 were presented at the IACCP 2018 conference. Data for each sample were collected in conformity with the ethical standards of the field and are available on the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/5j2f4/>. Open materials for each study are available in the Supplementary Materials (SOM-1). All collected materials/measures and data have been disclosed in the main and/or supplementary sections.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ All of these descriptions are intended as *ideal types*; that is, we understand that to some extent people in all three cultures likely value self-esteem, face, and honour. For the purposes of clearly contrasting the types, however, we emphasize the differences.
- ² We anticipated that this difference would manifest similarly for ideal/actual as well as ought/actual self-esteem discrepancies, because in practice people seldom show different patterns concerning their ideal "versus" their ought self-esteem (DeMarree & Rios, 2014).
- ³ The two universities—Queen's University in Canada and Quaid-i-Azam University in Pakistan—are similar in many important respects, each being prestigious within their respective countries, each teaching exclusively in English, and each having psychology departments (not common in all Pakistani universities). The Pakistani and Canadian universities are ranked similarly (Nos. 461 and 412, respectively), according to a 2022 best global universities ranking system by *U.S. News & World Report*.
- ⁴ We conducted measurement invariance tests for our measures using multigroup factor analysis alignment (developed by Asparouhov & Muthén, 2014). All measures showed acceptable invariance for valid group comparisons. We plan to publish these findings as a separate paper.

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Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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