Research Article

Going for the Gold

Models of Agency in Japanese and American Contexts

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ABSTRACT—*Two studies examined how Olympic performance is explained in American and Japanese contexts. Study 1, an analysis of media coverage of the 2000 and 2002 Olympics, shows that in both Japanese and American contexts, performance is construed mainly in terms of the actions of persons. However, Japanese and American accounts differ in their explanations of the nature and source of intentional agency, that is, in their* models of agency. *In Japanese contexts, agency is construed as* conjoint *and simultaneously implicates athletes' personal attributes (both positive and negative), background, and social and emotional experience. In American contexts, agency is construed as* disjoint, *separate from athletes' background or social and emotional experience; performance is explained primarily through positive personal characteristics and features of the competition. Study 2, in which participants chose information to be included in an athlete's description, confirms these findings. Differences in the construction of agency are reflected in and fostered by common cultural products (e.g., television accounts).*

> I think I just stayed focused. It was time to show the world what I could do. I am just glad I was able to do it. I knew I could beat Suzy O'Neil, deep down in my heart I believed it, and I know this whole week the doubts kept creeping in, they were with me on the blocks, but I just said, "No, this is my night."
>
> —Misty Hyman, gold medalist in the women's 200-m butterfly (Neal, 2000)

> Here is the best coach in the world, the best manager in the world, and all of the people who support me—all of these things were getting together and became a gold medal. So I think I didn't get it alone, not only by myself.
>
> —Naoko Takahashi, gold medalist in the women's marathon (Yamamoto, 2000)

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These are the reflections of two Olympic athletes in response to journalists asking, "How did you succeed?" Why are their accounts so different? Both had been instructed by the International Olympic Organization about how to talk to the press (A. Salmeen, personal communication, March 11, 2005). Each had just won a gold medal during the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney, Australia. Both had trained rigorously with their sights focused on a particular September day. Presumably both had given their all, tried as hard as they could, and, in the end, succeeded. The Olympic event differed, but these two phenomenal athletes had engaged in the same intentional activity—going for the gold. But these episodes illustrate how going for the gold may be divergently understood by athletes and the millions of fans tracking their movements.

In the studies reported here, we compared how the American and Japanese media represent and explain Olympic performance. We suggest that one important source of the variability in this coverage is the particular *models of agency* that are most available and pervasively distributed in these two cultural contexts. These models of agency provide implicit guidelines for "how to be," reflecting both descriptive and normative understandings of how and why people act (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 2004; Snibbe & Markus, 2005).

Sociocultural models are sets of assumptions that exist in individual minds and that are institutionalized in everyday social practices and public artifacts. As individuals engage the people and products of their cultural contexts, they will necessarily be influenced by these models. Cultural models have been analyzed in the domains of self, emotion, education, marriage, diversity, and intergroup relations, and have been studied by analyzing individual cognitive representations, as well as shared public representations (Deaux & Philogène, 2001; Holland & Quinn, 1987; Mesquita, 2002; Shore, 2000).

An analysis of media coverage of the Olympics provides a rare opportunity to make cultural comparisons of the process of meaning making about action in a constrained, yet naturally occurring situation. In explanations of sociocultural variation in behavior, the emphasis is often on the individual and internal

factors that explain these differences. Yet, as a sociocultural-models perspective highlights, the mental patterns that constitute the psychological do not reside only within the mind, but are also externalized and built into the practices and institutions of everyday life (Adams & Markus, 2004; Brescoll & La France, 2004; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Morris, Menon, & Ames, 2001). Media accounts are powerful cultural artifacts that perform the dual role of reflecting the common sociocultural models of agency and simultaneously fostering them.

SOCIOCULTURAL VARIATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF AGENCY

An extensive literature supports the conclusion that people engaging in East Asian cultural contexts are less likely than those in European American contexts to explain behavior in terms of traits or dispositions (e.g., Lee, Hallahan, & Herzog, 1996; Miller, 1984; Morris & Peng, 1994). Attributions in East Asian contexts are less dispositional because of a stronger shared belief in the role of the situation in determining behavior (e.g., Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). Recently, however, theorists (e.g., Malle, Knobe, O'Laughlin, Pearce, & Nelson, 2000; McClure, Hilton, Cowan, Ishida, & Wilson, 2001) have been looking more closely at naturally occurring explanations of behavior and contending that both categories in the traditional person/situation dichotomy require further analysis. Their findings suggest a variety of other factors that are not "dispositions" or "attributes," but that can be construed as "person factors." These include reasons, goals, histories, and enabling circumstances that should be taken into account when explaining intentional behavior. This analysis suggests the possibility of important cross-cultural variation in the degree to which people include these various person factors in social explanation (Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996; Nisbett, 2003; Norenzayan, Choi, & Nisbett, 1999).

The possibility of systematic variation in the construction of agency gains credence from recent studies examining the cultural contingency of attention and perception (Kitayama, Duffy, Kawamura, & Larsen, 2003; Masuda & Nisbett, 2001). These studies have found that in European American contexts, perceivers are likely to allocate attention relatively narrowly to a figural person or object and to attend less to the surroundings, whereas in East Asian contexts, perceivers are likely to disperse their attention more holistically to the field, including both the focal object and the surroundings.

In the current studies, we examined similarities and differences in how intentional behavior—going for the gold—is explained in two distinct cultural contexts. Building both on previous work that distinguished independent and interdependent modes of constructing the self (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and on research on cultural variation in attention, we (Markus & Kitayama, 2004) have suggested that different histories, religions, ontologies, and ideologies, as well as different institutional and interpersonal practices, give rise to different understandings of the nature and source of agency or of being-in-action. In American cultural contexts, perceivers are likely to focus their attention specifically on the target person's current attributes and understand agency as *disjoint*, that is, relatively separate from the agent's personal experience or history, his or her current subjective state, and the actions of other people. In other contexts, for example, in East Asian contexts, perceivers are likely to distribute their attention more holistically across the target person's life space and understand agency as *conjoint*, that is, interdependent with and responsive to the agent's past experience, his or her current subjective state, and the actions of other people. See Figure 1 for a schematic depiction of these models of agency.

In American contexts, agency is linked to particular attributes or characteristics and is seen as contained within the person and as entity-like (Choi et al., 1999; Dweck, 1998; Plaut & Markus, 2005). In Japanese contexts, agency is understood as developing over time and as contingent on context. Explaining performance in these contexts requires assuming an empathic stance, as well

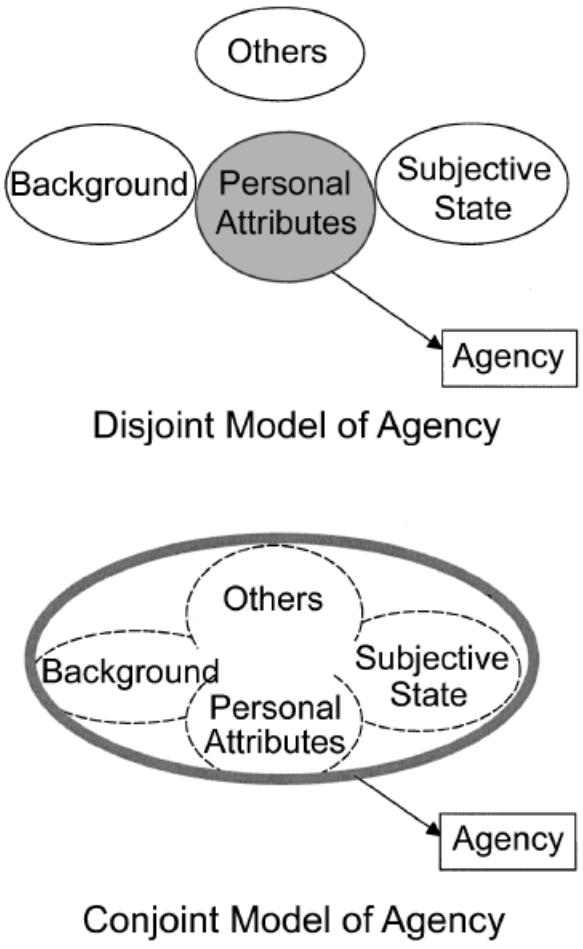

Fig. 1. Disjoint and conjoint models of agency.

as understanding the athlete's history and emotional or motivational state (Azuma, 1994; Cohen & Gunz, 2002). Moreover, in Japan, the presence of positive attributes (e.g., a powerful stride) necessarily implicates a history of failure and overcoming hardship (see Heine et al., 1999; Ji, Nisbett, & Su, 2001). As a result, a proper explanation of behavior entails simultaneously directing attention to both positive and negative aspects of behavior.

The two studies presented here assessed the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: In both American and Japanese contexts, the attributes of athletes are important in Olympics coverage. In American contexts, however, media attention concentrates on personal characteristics of the athletes, whereas in Japanese contexts, media attention is distributed, also focusing on the athletes' previous experience, their subjective state, and the contributions of socially important others. As a result, media coverage is characterized by attention to fewer themes in American than in Japanese contexts.

Hypothesis 2: In Japanese contexts, because of a more holistic understanding of agency that takes into account athletes' histories and the importance of failure for eventual success, both positive and negative features of actions are emphasized. In American contexts, the primary emphasis is on positive features of the athletes' action.

We tested these hypotheses in two studies: a content analysis of all the media coverage of the 2000 and 2002 Olympics and a study requiring American and Japanese respondents to select which type of information should be incorporated in an effective media representation of an Olympic athlete.

STUDY 1

Method

We collected the national coverage of the 2000 and 2002 Olympic athletes in Japan and the United States. Television and newspaper media coverage of 77 Japanese athletes (28.6% were medalists) and 265 American athletes (20.8% were medalists) competing in the 2000 Summer Olympics and 2002 Winter Olympics was coded and analyzed. In Japan, we recorded all the televised Olympic coverage provided by the NHK, Fuji, Nippon, Asahi, and TBS television channels, and gathered coverage from *Asahi* and *Yomiuri* newspapers and major news and sports magazines that covered the Olympics. For American athletes, we recorded the complete NBC, MSNBC, and CNBC television coverage of the Olympics and collected coverage from *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and other major news and sports magazines that covered the Olympics.

To develop an inductive code for the models of agency reflected in the media coverage of the Olympics, two American coders blind to the hypotheses watched selections from American television coverage of the 1996 Olympics and two highlight videotapes following the 2000 summer games, and two bilingual Japanese coders blind to the hypotheses watched both the American selections and a Japanese video of highlights from the 2000 summer games. Coders were given instructions based on the theoretical literature on attribution and agency, and asked to catalogue and categorize all descriptions or analyses of the athletes, whether by the athletes themselves, commentators, or interviewers. Discussion of the themes generated by all of the coders yielded 18 conceptually distinct themes that organized 124 more specific themes. Each of the 124 themes was judged by coders as positive (e.g., "I am so happy with this win"), negative (e.g., "he failed because of a weak ankle"), or neutral. For purposes of presentation, we group the 18 themes into seven major categories whose labels were derived from the data themselves: personal characteristics, athletic background, competitors and competition, other people (noncompetitors such as coaches and family), emotional states, motivational states, and reactions to performance (see Table 1 for a list of the themes and examples).

Each coder independently coded video segments and newspaper articles covering the 2000 and 2002 Olympics, judging whether each sentence mentioned none, one, or more of the 124 themes included in the coding scheme and which themes were mentioned in each case. Using a previously established procedure (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001), pairs of coders (American-American, Japanese-Japanese, and American-Japanese) agreed 80 to 90.4% of the time. The average Cohen's kappa across all of the themes was .84 (agreement for individual categories ranged from .64 to 1.00, $SD = .10$), indicating that reliability between coders was substantial (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Results

For data analysis, we treated each athlete as a unit of analysis. Each of the 342 athletes received a summary score representing the number of themes used by coders to reflect all the sentences in the media coverage of that athlete. Then, we determined how each of the 124 themes contributed to each athlete's summary score. For example, if an athlete had a summary score of 100, and 10 of these counts were in the personal-characteristics category, this athlete received a score of 10% in that category. Themes that accounted for less than 1% of the counts across all athletes (e.g., references to the features of the situation, such as lane assignment) were dropped from the analysis, leaving 101 themes. Table 1 shows how frequently each of the 18 major themes was coded for the media coverage in each cultural context. Prior to analysis, these percentages were submitted to an arcsine transformation.

Comparison by Major Category

Figure 2 shows the frequency of the seven major categories in the American and Japanese coverage. There were significant differences for all categories except motivational states. Per-

TABLE 1

Coding Categories Used in Study 1 and Each Category's Percentage of the Total Coverage

Category and theme	Examples[a]	Percentage: United States	Percentage: Japan	t	p_{rep}	d
Personal characteristics						
General athletic strength or weakness	Gardner's strength keeps him in the running. (A) The big, powerful feet of Ian Thorpe. . . . (A) She wins because of her mental toughness. (J) His small body allows him to move very quickly. (J)	22.59	11.90	4.48	.99	0.58
Personality characteristics	A private person. . . . (A) A cheerful person when not in competition. . . . (J)	3.54	5.36	−2.39	.93	0.31
Physical health	In semis, Misty Hyman's shoulder did not give her any problems. (A) He is totally recovered from his injury and in good condition. (J)	0.63	2.99	−7.51	.99	0.97
Personal style or game plan	His steady, almost robotic stride is unorthodox, but apparently effective. (A) In her races, she always swims very quickly in the first half to give herself a lead and control the race. (J)	5.39	3.47	1.67	.82	0.22
Competition						
Competitors	It was definitely an honor to race Petria and Suzie. They are great butterflyers and have been for so long. (A) Someone had to knock him off of his pedestal, and I'm just glad it was me. (A)	11.43	6.19	3.19	.98	1.68
Competitive experience	He played varsity baseball all through high school baseball. (A)	4.83	1.50	4.50	.99	0.58
Athletic background or experience						
Previous athletic success or failure	Two-time U.S. champion. . . . (A) Failed to qualify for the 400 m in '96. (J)	9.12	12.36	−2.22	.91	0.29
Difficulties, stress, hardships during Olympic preparation	"We had a lot of trials and tribulations to get here," she said, recounting the painful rehabilitation that followed her injury. (A) His mother passed away before the Olympics. (J)	3.17	6.48	−3.88	.99	0.50
Length of time in sport	She started judo in elementary school and has hoped to go to the Olympics since. (J)	0.33	1.19	−4.53	.99	0.59
Other people (not competitors)						
Advice or encouragement from family, friends, coach, teammates, nation, community, fans	Armstrong urged her to dive for her friend and teammate Hilary Grivich, who was killed in a car accident in 1998. (A) His coach said, "Just do your best." (J)	5.99	6.95	−0.89	.59	0.11
Meeting or exceeding the expectations of others, pleasing others	I want to shock the world from lane 1. Winning is possible. (A) It was my dad's dream that I win gold. (J)	0.63	3.28	−7.40	.99	0.95
Emotional states	It's the happiest feeling in my judo life. I feel like I met a first lover. I am full of delight because I achieved my goal. (J)	1.61	4.95	−6.32	.99	0.82
Motivational states						
Motivation related to Olympics	So many times I've heard the "Star-Spangled Banner" and dreamed of standing on the podium at the Olympic Games and hearing it played for me. (A)	0.73	1.78	−3.68	.99	0.48
Positive attitude toward athletics or competitions	I don't know what it is about this sport, but I find it addictive. I love it. (A)	0.71	1.04	−1.33	.74	0.17
Motivation to win or do one's best in the competition	I definitely want to win in this game: I should get gold at best, and at least. (J)	2.39	2.16	0.37	.59	0.05

continued

Table 1. (Continued)

Category and theme	Examples[a]	Percentage: United States	Percentage: Japan	t	p_{rep}	d
Reaction to Olympic performance						
Positive performance evaluation	This is the best game I have ever had. (J)	1.32	3.17	−2.20	.91	0.29
Negative performance evaluation	Her second Olympics is a regrettable one. She was almost at the top, but she didn't have a perfect performance. (J)	0.60	2.59	−6.04	.99	0.78
Future plans	In the next 6 months, I plan on focusing myself back on the training and all the rigors of practice every day. (J) They're going to have to run their butts off if they're gonna beat us in 2004. (A)	0.32	2.81	−6.24	.99	0.81

[a]Examples taken from American media coverage are identified by "A," and examples taken from Japanese media coverage are identified by "J."

sonal characteristics was the most frequently used category in both the American and the Japanese contexts, a result consistent with our first hypothesis. However, this theme occurred significantly more often in American coverage than in Japanese coverage, and was significantly more frequent than any other category in American coverage.[1] As shown in Table 1, in the American coverage, most mentions within the personal-characteristics category targeted the athletic strengths of the Olympian and the athlete's personal style of performance. Although the Japanese coverage was significantly less likely than the American coverage to focus on personal characteristics of the athletes, this was still the most frequently used category. Within this category, Japanese coverage emphasized athletic strengths, but also included more general or background types of personal characteristics, such as the athlete's nonathletic personality attributes or overall health during the games, and did so significantly more than the American coverage.

The second most frequently used category in the American coverage was competition, and characterizations that fit this category were invoked significantly more often in the American coverage than in the Japanese. Moreover, in the American coverage, the athlete's competitor was significantly more likely to be mentioned for losers ($M = 12.47$) than for winners ($M = 7.66$), $t(263) = 2.30$, $p_{rep} = .92$, $d = 0.34$, suggesting that failure is more likely than success to be attributed to the strength of the competition.

In the Japanese coverage, the second most frequently used category was athletic background, which refers to information about an athlete's previous success or failures, past difficulties, and length of time in the sport. The third most frequently used category in the Japanese coverage was other people (i.e., coach, teammates, family, etc.). Within this category, the Japanese coverage was more likely than the American to mention meeting or exceeding the expectations of others. Contrary to our predictions, the American coverage was just as likely as the Japanese to include mentions of advice or encouragement from others. Further analysis revealed, however, that our hypothesis was confirmed for the Summer Olympics, although in the Winter Olympics, which followed September 11 and took place in the United States, the Americans were as likely as the Japanese to reference nation, community, and friends.[2]

Comparison by Number of Categories

The Japanese coverage used four of the seven major categories significantly more often than the American coverage (see Fig. 2), a result consistent with our first hypothesis. Although American coverage tended to focus attention on personal characteristics and competition, Japanese coverage tended to pay attention to many different aspects of athletes, including their current features (e.g., personality, relationships, emotional states, motivational states), past experience (e.g., background), and future plans (e.g., reaction to their performance). To examine this hypothesis in another way, we calculated the average number of the 18 major themes used to explain the performance of an athlete. The American media coverage used an average of 6.54 categories to explain an athlete's performance, whereas the Japanese coverage used an average of 13.09 categories, $t(341) = 13.82$, $p_{rep} = .99$, $d = 1.79$, indicating that the Japanese coverage included a broader array of factors in explaining action.

[1]In the United States, there was a significant main effect of category, $F(6, 1584) = 178.89$, $p_{rep} = .99$, $\eta_p^2 = .403$. Bonferroni multiple-comparison tests showed that the mean difference between personal characteristics and each of the other categories was significant at the .001 level in the United States. In Japan, although there was a significant main effect of category, $F(6, 456) = 58.15$, $p_{rep} = .99$, $\eta_p^2 = .433$, Bonferroni multiple-comparison tests showed that personal characteristics and athletic background were used equally.

[2]A 2 (culture) × 2 (Summer or Winter Olympics) ANOVA yielded a significant interaction, $F(1, 338) = 7.10$, $p_{rep} = .96$, $\eta_p^2 = .021$. Japanese coverage used the category "advice or encouragement from others" more in the summer 2000 games ($M = 7.43$) than the American coverage did ($M = 4.62$). In the winter 2002 games, however, the American coverage was more likely than the Japanese coverage to invoke this category (Ms = 9.22 and 6.11, respectively).

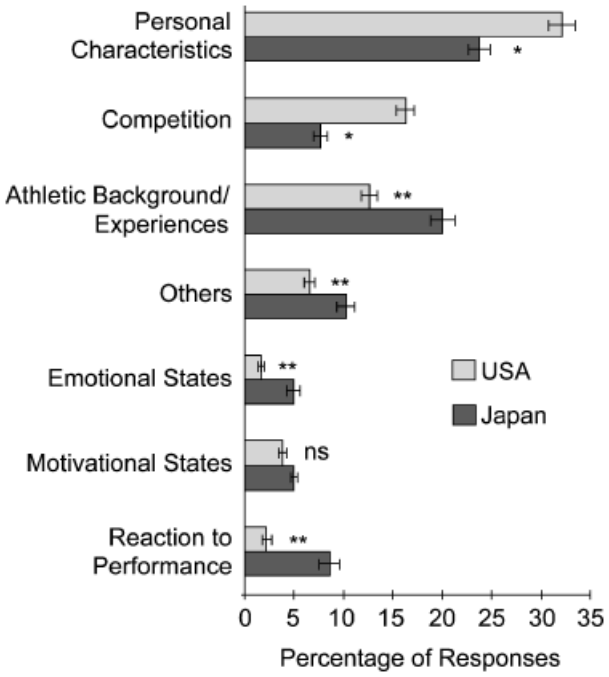

Fig. 2. Frequency with which each of the major categories appeared in American and Japanese media coverage of the 2000 and 2002 Olympic games. Error bars show standard errors. Asterisks indicate significant differences between the American and Japanese coverage, $^{*}p < .01$, $^{**}p < .005$.

Comparison of Emphasis of Positive and Negative Aspects of Action

To examine our second hypothesis, we analyzed the extent to which the description of each athlete mentioned clearly positive aspects (strengths, past successes, positive personality attributes, positive emotional states, and positive performance evaluations) and clearly negative aspects (weaknesses, past failures, negative personality attributes, negative emotional states, and negative performance evaluations). Aspects that could not be categorized as clearly positive or negative were not included in this analysis. Of the overall coverage, the percentages of the positive and negative features in all categories combined in each culture are presented in the top panel of Figure 3. The data were analyzed with a 2 (culture: Japanese or American) × 2 (valence: positive or negative) analysis of variance (ANOVA). The ANOVA yielded a main effect for culture, $F(1, 340) = 4.38$, $p_{rep} = .90$, $\eta_p^2 = .013$. The main effect of valence, $F(1, 340) = 67.62$, $p_{rep} = .99$, $\eta_p^2 = .166$, reflected the fact that positive features were more likely than negative features to be mentioned in both cultures.

We also found a significant Culture × Valence interaction, $F(1, 341) = 5.83$, $p_{rep} = .94$, $\eta_p^2 = .017$. American coverage tended to focus more on positive aspects ($M = 33.6\%$) than negative aspects ($M = 16.6\%$), and Japanese coverage tended to focus more equally on positive ($M = 32.4\%$) and negative ($M = 23.1\%$) aspects, a result consistent with previous research revealing the self-enhancing attributional style common in

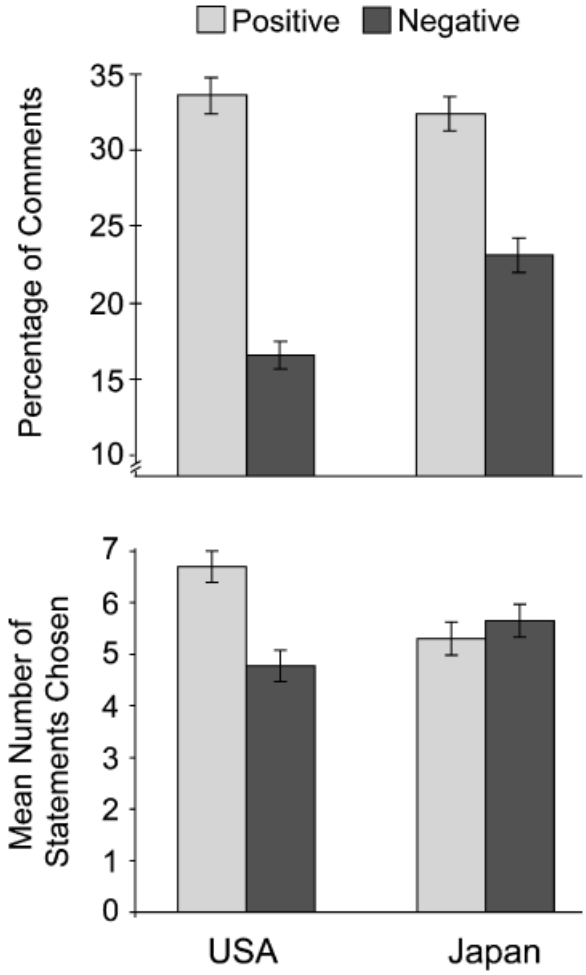

Fig. 3. Frequency of statements referring to positive and negative features in the two studies. The top graph shows the percentage of comments that referred to positive and negative features in the U.S. and Japanese media coverage of the 2000 and 2002 Olympics. The bottom graph shows the number of statements referring to positive and negative features that American and Japanese participants chose as being most relevant to media coverage of a given athlete. Error bars show standard errors.

American contexts (see Heine et al., 1999). A multiple *t*-test analysis showed that the difference between the percentages of positive and negative aspects was significant in both cultural samples, $t(340) > .30$, p_{rep}s $> .98$, $d > 0.59$, but negative descriptions were more likely to be mentioned by Japanese coverage than by American coverage, $t(340) = 2.88$, $p_{rep} = .95$, $d = 0.46$. A difference between Japanese and American coverage was not obtained for positive descriptions, $t(340) = 0.53$, $p_{rep} = .43$, $d = 0.07$.

Discussion

This extensive analysis of media coverage reveals that agency is understood differently in American and Japanese contexts. American accounts of Olympic performance focus attention primarily on the positive personal characteristics of athletes and on the competition, a pattern that suggests reliance on an

TABLE 2
Categories Used in Study 2 and the Mean Number of Selected Statements Reflecting Each Category

Category	Examples	Number of statements: U.S. participants	Number of statements: Japanese participants	t	p_{rep}	d
Personal	She has been described as "a remarkable, interesting, and energetic person, absolutely dedicated to being the best."	8.53	7.52	2.38	.93	0.43
Unique	She stood out from the crowd from the start, sticking close to her signature strategies. She showed us all what a world-class champion looks like.	5.88	3.58	6.24	.99	1.14
Background	Won the 2002 5,000-m World Championships in California.	6.58	6.37	0.63	.48	0.11
Coach/team	Her coach has been her most comprehensive advisor, helping her develop strategy and competency.	3.95	4.88	−2.39	.93	0.43
Other people	You should always appreciate your fans and respect their commitment to you.	2.98	2.88	0.29	.30	0.05
Competitors	I hope my fans are respectful of my competitors too, especially at the Olympics.	1.93	2.15	−0.87	.58	0.16
Motivation	After all the help she received from her team, she knew she couldn't let them down.	4.38	6.00	−3.69	.99	0.67
Emotion	She takes long walks around the city after dinner in order to calm any anxiety she feels about the race.	1.60	2.13	−2.34	.92	0.42
Doubt	She won despite her worries that the unfamiliar conditions of extreme heat and humidity might hurt her performance.	3.10	3.88	−2.42	.93	0.44

implicit model of agency as contained, entity-like, or disjoint. In contrast, Japanese accounts draw attention to a broader array of factors, both positive and negative, including personal characteristics, the athlete's previous experiences and background, and the athlete's subjective state, a pattern that suggests reliance on an implicit model of agency as developing over time (i.e., as incremental) and as conjoint.

STUDY 2

In Study 2, to gain control over the information presented, we created materials that were relevant to both Japanese and American contexts and that differentially emphasized the themes identified in Study 1. We tested our two hypotheses about how performance is understood in the two contexts by asking participants what types of information they would regard as most relevant to communication about a given Olympic athlete.

Method

Participants
Sixty students (34 females and 26 males) from Stanford University and 60 (20 females and 40 males) from Kyoto University participated in the study.

Materials
We created a list of descriptions about a fictional long-distance female runner using statements that were modeled after actual statements made about athletes in the media coverage examined in Study 1. The fictional Olympian was named Stacy Clark for American participants and Rie Kawahara for Japanese participants. As was often the case with actual media statements, each of the 40 multisentence descriptions reflected at least two of the major categories (see Table 2 for excerpts). These categories included five of the major categories used in Study 1 and four new categories. In coding the Olympics coverage, we found that many of the references to personal characteristics targeted the ways in which an athlete stands out from the crowd, either in athletic abilities or in everyday lifestyle, so we added the category "unique." Another theme we added was "doubt," having found that athletes commonly made statements such as "Sometimes I worry about losing." We also split the others category into references about "coach and teammates" and "others" (family, friends, and fans). The reaction-to-performance category used in Study 1 was deleted because the fictional athletes were described as preparing for the Olympics. The descriptions included both positively and negatively valenced statements for each category.

Procedure
The participants' task was to read the 40 statements and to select the 15 most relevant items to present in media coverage of the athlete, then to select from those 15 items 5 that were indispensable to such coverage. Participants were also asked to answer the following questions using 7-point scales: "How good a role model is this athlete for other athletes?" "How much do you think the general public will like the athlete after reading about

her?" and "How well do you think this athlete represents American [Japanese] athletes?"

Results

The American and Japanese respondents did not differ in their mean ratings of whether the athlete was a good role model (*M*s = 5.63 and 5.54, respectively), whether the general public would like her (*M*s = 5.73 and 5.53, respectively), and whether she was representative of American or Japanese athletes (*M*s = 4.85 and 4.75, respectively). Thus, the athlete was comparably credible in the two contexts.

Each respondent received a point for each category that was present in each of the 15 statements he or she endorsed. For example, by endorsing the statement containing the first excerpt in Table 2, a participant would receive a score of 1 in the following categories: personal characteristics, unique, and motivation. The category scores for an item that was included among the 5 statements believed to be indispensable were doubled. Each respondent then received a summary score (total points) for each of the nine categories.

Six of the nine categories showed differences between Japanese and Americans (see Table 2). The Americans chose statements emphasizing two categories—personal attributes and uniqueness—significantly more than the Japanese. The Japanese, however, chose statements emphasizing four categories—athlete's coach and team, motivation, emotion, and doubt—significantly more than the Americans. These findings are consistent with Hypothesis 1.

The results are also consistent with Hypothesis 2 in that the American participants chose statements that focused more on positive aspects ($M = 6.70$) than negative aspects ($M = 4.77$), whereas the Japanese participants chose statements that more equally emphasized positive aspects ($M = 5.30$) and negative aspects ($M = 5.65$); the culture-by-valence interaction was significant, $F(1, 118) = 13.38$, $p_{rep} = .99$, $\eta_p^2 = .102$ (see Fig. 3, bottom panel). Analyses also showed a main effect for valence, $F(1, 118) = 6.43$, $p_{rep} = .94$, $\eta_p^2 = .052$. A multiple *t*-test analysis showed that compared across cultural contexts, negative statements were more likely to be chosen by Japanese participants than by American participants, $t(118) = -1.99$, $p_{rep} = .88$, $d = 0.36$, whereas positive statements were more likely to be chosen by American participants than by Japanese participants, $t(118) = 3.17$, $p_{rep} = .99$, $d = 0.59$. However, the difference between the number of positive and negative statements chosen was significant in the American sample only, $t(118) = 4.37$, $p_{rep} = .99$, $d = 0.52$, versus $t(118) = -0.079$, $p_{rep} = .58$, $d = 0.11$.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Two studies—one in which we analyzed the content of thousands of comments from actual media coverage and another in which we manipulated the content of comments—reveal different explanatory patterns in American and Japanese contexts. Explaining performance entails the use of widely shared assumptions (e.g., Olympic performance demands distinctive skill and resilience), but also the use of culture-specific understandings about performance. Misty Hyman and Naoko Takahashi were alike in that they acted intentionally and succeeded in securing gold medals, yet they differed in how they understood the nature and source of their agency, as did the commentators and reporters who conveyed their actions to the world. The American Olympic coverage allocated attention primarily to personal attributes, whereas the Japanese coverage was more dispersed, allocating as much attention to the athletes' background experiences as to their attributes, and giving significantly more coverage to the athletes' emotional states and reactions to their performance. These predicted differences support the hypothesis that different sociocultural models of agency are invoked in the two contexts.

Explanations of agency in American contexts reflect a disjoint model in which agency stems primarily from the expression of an individual's unique and positive attributes and is relatively independent of the individual's background or subjective state, or the enabling actions of others. Agency is constructed in a relatively focused and bounded way and as entity-like—one has the right stuff or not. Explanations of agency in Japanese contexts reflect a conjoint model in which agency derives simultaneously from multiple sources and implicates more factors, including personal attributes, past experiences of success or failure, current emotions, and the enabling expectations or actions of other individuals. Japanese explanations of agency require knowledge of past experience, suggesting a view of agency as developing over time (see Dweck's, 1998, distinction between entity and incremental theories of intelligence). As Naoko Takahashi said, many things come together and "become a gold medal."

The mental patterns that constitute the psychological do not reside only within the mind, but are also externalized and built into the practices and institutions of everyday life (Brescoll & La France, 2004; Kitayama et al., 1997; Snibbe & Markus, 2005). Media accounts are powerful cultural products that perform the dual roles of reflecting the common sociocultural models of agency and simultaneously fostering them. Thus, they function as cultural mediators of these observed differences and explanatory tendencies. The behavior of athletes and the behavior of fans are likely to be shaped by these accounts, and media reports of athletes' actions further reinforce the explanatory tendencies of athletes and fans. An emphasis on cultural models and their expression both in media and in individual responses reveals the dynamic mutual constitution of psychological processes and sociocultural contexts.

The question of divergence in the meaning of actions is related to key psychological theorizing about the construction of social reality (Bruner, 1990; Hardin & Higgins, 1996; Sapir, 1986;

Shweder, 1991). Performance does not just happen for the Olympian or for the fans. Rather, it is fashioned and "identified" (Vallacher & Wegner, 1989) with the aid of a variety of implicit, socioculturally grounded models (Kitayama & Duffy, 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 2004). Yet what is seen appears as observed reality. Sociocultural variation in the categorization of action has broad implications for both scientific and lay analyses of behavior. Beyond construing the "same" world differently, perceivers experience and create somewhat different worlds.

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