

Emotional and Self-Evaluative Balance in Success and Failure Situations: The Role of Self-Beliefs

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Abstract

Using a 2 (self-beliefs: non-dialectical vs. dialectical) X 2 (test-performance: failure vs. success) experimental design, the present study examined how individuals' self-beliefs affect their responses to success or failure ($N = 140$). Results indicated that dialectical self-beliefs were associated with greater balance in feelings of self-worth both in success and failure conditions. On the other hand, there was no significant relationship between dialectical self-beliefs and balanced self-appraisals of intelligence.

Keywords. Dialectical thinking, dialectical self-beliefs, emotional balance, balanced self-appraisals

Introduction

Cultural differences in conceptions of the self have been well-documented in literature. This line of research has mainly focused on East and West differences and suggested that East Asians are more likely than individuals from Western cultures to hold *dialectical self-beliefs* (DSB), which involve a dynamic, and contextual view of the self, as well as acceptance of psychological contradiction (e.g., see Chen, Spencer-Rodgers, & Peng, 2018; Spencer-Rodgers, Williams, & Peng, 2010). In addition, having a dialectical view of the self has been linked to moderation and balance of emotional experiences and self-evaluations among East Asians (e.g., see Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010).

Although more prevalent in East Asian countries, DSB appear to be present in all cultures to some extent, including Western cultures such as United States and England (Zell, Su, & Albarracín, 2018); however, we do not know whether DSB serve similar functions (e.g., greater balance between positive and negative emotions and self-appraisals) for individuals in Western cultures. Therefore, using a sample of college students from the United States (US), we examined how DSB affect participants' feelings of self-worth (FOSW) and self-appraisals of intelligence (INT) following failure or success on a cognitive ability test. We predicted that DSB (vs. non-dialectical self-beliefs [NDSB]) would be associated with greater balance in feelings of self-worth (FOSWbal), as well as more balanced appraisals of one's intelligence (INTbal). In addition, we expected that these relationships would not be significantly different across failure and success situations.

Method

Participants

Participants included 140 undergraduate students (mean age = 19.64, $SD = 1.45$). The majority of the participants were women (77.9%) and identified their race/ethnicity as White/Caucasian (58.6%).

Design, Materials, and Procedures

A 2 (NDSB vs. DSB) X 2 (failure vs. success) experimental design was used. Participants were tested individually or in groups of 2 to 7. After completing an informed consent form and a demographic questionnaire, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. The number of participants in each experimental condition are presented in Table 1.

Test performance manipulation. Depending on the condition they were assigned to (i.e., success or failure), participants completed either an easy or a difficult version of a 20-item timed test. After completing the test, participants were given their scores and evaluated their performance by rating the following two items on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*): "I am satisfied with my score on this test" and "I consider my performance on this test to be a failure" (reverse scored).

Self-beliefs manipulation. We adapted the self-beliefs manipulation texts and procedures used by Rabinovich and Morton (2016) in order to stimulate different aspects of DSB and NDSB. As a manipulation check, participants rated six items (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) that were adapted from the implicit theories (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997) and dialectical self-beliefs scales (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2015).

Feelings of self-worth and perceived intelligence. After completing the self-beliefs task, participants rated two positive-valence (proud, pleased with myself) and two negative-valence (ashamed, humiliated) FOSW items (Brown & Dutton, 1995) to indicate the degree to which they were feeling these emotions at present (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). Then, they rated (1 = *very slightly or not at all*, 5 = *extremely*) three positive-valence (intelligent, smart, bright) and three negative-valence (unwise, slow-witted, simple-minded) items that measured perceived intelligence (Brown & Dutton, 1995). FOSWbal and INTbal scores were created by subtracting the absolute difference between positive and negative components of FOSW and INT from 5 (e.g., $5 - |FOSW\ positive - FOSW\ negative|$).

Results

Manipulation Checks

Participants in the success condition answered more test questions correctly ($t[138] = -36.57, p < .001$) and were more satisfied with their test scores ($t[137] = -15.10, p < .001$) than participants in the failure condition. In addition, participants in the DSB condition reported more DSB than participants in the NDSB condition ($t[138] = -4.23, p < .001$).

Effects of Self-Beliefs and Test Performance on FOSWbal

A 2 (NDSB vs. DSB) X 2 (failure vs. success) between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed on FOSWbal. Results indicated that self-beliefs were significantly related to FOSWbal ($F[1, 136] = 8.47, p = .004$, partial $\eta^2 = .059$). As expected, participants in the DSB condition reported greater FOSWbal ($M = 3.60, SD = 1.03$) than participants in the NDSB condition ($M = 3.07, SD = 1.06$). On the other hand, neither test performance ($F[1, 136] = .69, p = .409$) nor the interaction between self-beliefs and test performance ($F[1, 136] = .05, p = .833$) were significantly related to FOSWbal.

Effects of Self-Beliefs and Test Performance on INTbal

The results of a 2 (NDSB vs. DSB) X 2 (failure vs. success) between-groups ANOVA indicated that neither the main effects of self-beliefs ($F[1, 136] = .69, p = .409$) and test performance ($F[1, 136] = .21, p = .651$), nor the self-beliefs X test performance interaction ($F[1, 136] = .19, p = .666$) were significantly related to INTbal.

Table 1. Number of Participants in Experimental Conditions

	Failure	Success	Total
Non-dialectical self-beliefs	32	37	69
Dialectical self-beliefs	36	35	71
Total	68	72	140

Conclusion

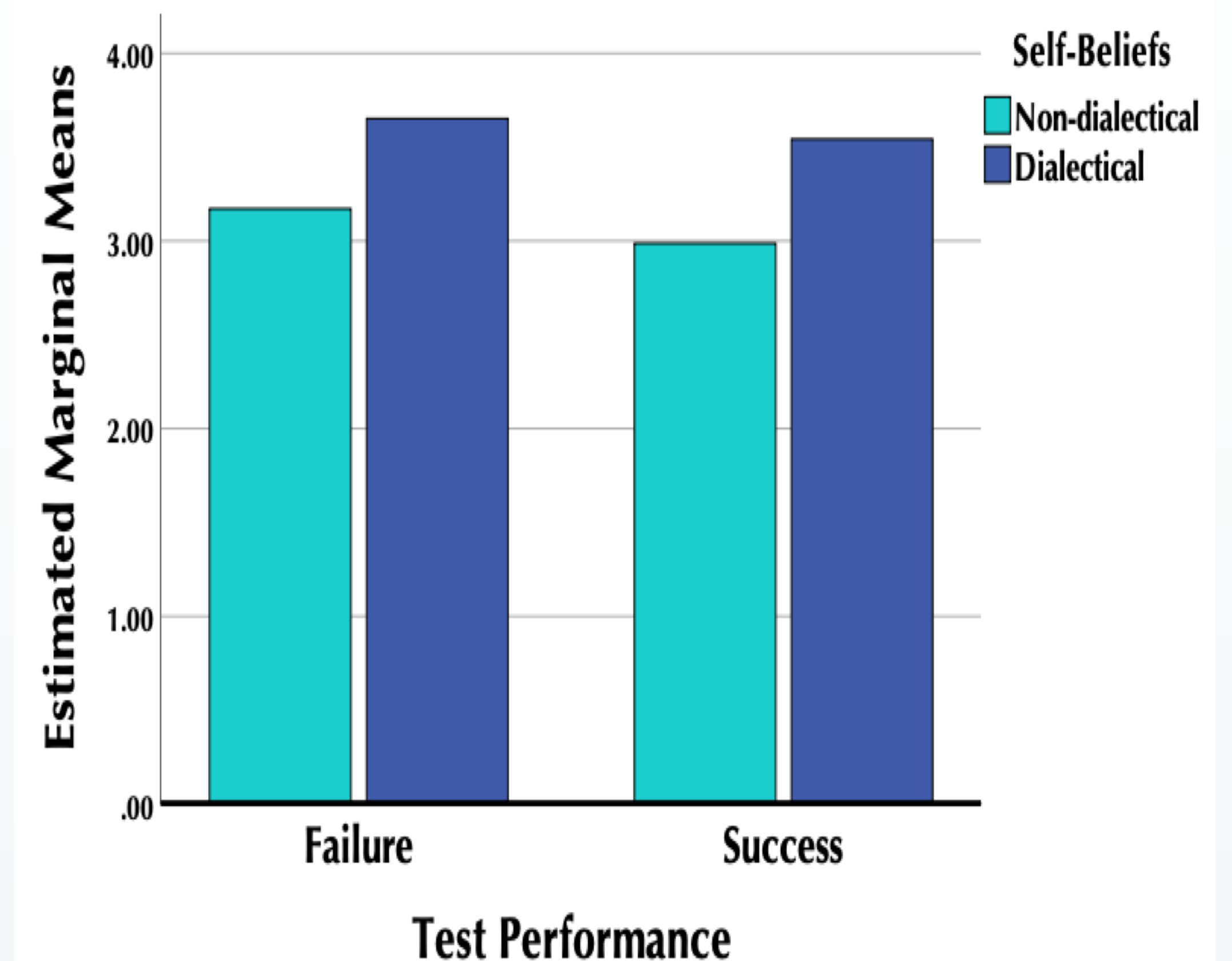


Figure 1. Estimated Marginal Means of FOSW Balance

As hypothesized, participants in the DSB condition reported greater FOSWbal than participants in the NDSB condition. Further, the effects of self-beliefs on FOSWbal did not vary as a function of test performance. On the other hand, contrary our expectations, self-beliefs did not have a significant effect on INTbal.

Our findings provide a preliminary understanding of how thinking dialectically about the self affects individuals' responses to success and failure; however, considering the limited research in this area as well as the limitations of our study (e.g., the majority of the participants were women), more research is needed to determine the generalizability of our findings and to develop a more in-depth understanding of the prevalence and mental health consequences of DSB in Western cultures.

Contact Information

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