

# The Cultural Construction of Self and Well-Being: A Tale of Two Cities

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## Abstract

Local context, such as city of residence, matters for self and well-being. We theorize distinct cycles of mutual constitution between self and well-being and historically derived ideas, norms, practices, and products prevalent in two cities. We compare a cycle in Boston that emphasizes themes of “old and established” and reveals high social contingency between others’ expectations and self-assessment with one in San Francisco that emphasizes themes of “new and free” and reveals less contingency. Through historical analysis, four studies of norms and cultural products (newspaper headlines, venture capital, hospital websites), and three studies assessing self and well-being, we find a history in Boston emphasizing tradition, status, and community versus unlimited possibility, egalitarianism, and innovation in San Francisco; tighter social norms and products emphasizing community, status, and establishment in Boston versus individual, uniqueness, and creativity in San Francisco; and more social contingency in self and feeling good in Boston than San Francisco.

## Keywords

culture, well-being, self, mutual constitution, region

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Here in Boston, we have our angst, hoisted across each difficult day on our bone-weary shoulders, making us the martyrs we all strive to be . . . We complain about our baseball team, even as we pack Fenway every night. We complain about our politicians, even as we send one of them off in grand pursuit of the presidency. We complain about the fact that we always complain . . . Still, Boston will always have something that most other people and places don’t: common ground, in the best of ways. We’re a city shaped by a past that always leads to a better future . . . to gorgeous parks and tight-knit neighborhoods where the traditions are deep and the values carved into bedrock.

McGrory (2004)

I like the unassuming informality (when was the last time I had to wear a suit?), the tolerant, or if you prefer, the blasé anonymity . . . and even the superficiality. Most of my fellow Californians seem to be from somewhere else. In the grimy old brick towns of the East, I sometimes feel that people have grown up history-stained . . . In California, where the future promises continued sunniness, most of what I see is new.

Vollman (2008)

A move to another city can leave one feeling unsettled and out of place. Why is this? From the old, “history-stained” East coast to the “new” West coast, when it comes to self and well-being, place matters. As these quotes suggest, even beyond weather and terrain, there is a difference in the way worlds are arranged, and even beyond accents and lunch plate specials, there is a difference in the way folks act. We suggest here that place matters for self and well-being in part because local contexts have different ecologies and histories and vary in their often subtle and implicit cultural understandings of how to be (self) and how to be well (well-being). These understandings can be found *in the people*—in psychological tendencies (e.g., self-perceptions, evaluations of self and well-being, and emotional experiences)—and also *in the world*—in the pervasive historically derived

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**Table 1.** Factors Promoting Homogenization and Factors Promoting Localization

America—A homogeneous cultural context	Metropolitan areas are cultural contexts too
National language	Local dialect and vocabulary
National economic forces	Local industries and occupations
National health organizations and policies	Local health care practices
U.S. political system	City government (city council, mayor) and local political culture
National media	City-based newspapers and radio stations
Widespread access to Internet for national information and networking	Use of Internet technology to access local information and communicate and network with local social and business relations
National standards in school curricula	Local school districts
National holidays	Observation of certain national holidays
Assimilation to American culture	Incorporation of local cultural practices in daily life (e.g., dress, transportation, avocations)
Unprecedented mobility of the population	Movement to suburban and exurban locations within same metropolitan area
National pastimes	Local sports teams
National food preferences	Local tastes, availability, and dietary habits
American religious and ideological foundation (e.g., Protestant ethic and individualism)	Local manifestations of religious ideology and practice and local forms of individualism

Note: Some of the information in this table is adapted from Andersen, Lustig, and Andersen (1987) and Plaut, Markus, and Lachman (2002).

ideas, norms, practices, and products. These factors mutually influence one another in an ongoing cycle of cultural construction.

Our goal in this article is twofold: (a) to theorize a cycle of mutual constitution—what we call here a culture cycle—between individual self and well-being and the historically derived ideas, norms, practices, and products prevalent in these cities and (b) to contrast the components of culture cycles of two major U.S. metropolitan areas on opposite coasts, Boston and San Francisco. The aim of this in-depth, localized comparison is to produce a more comprehensive understanding of the constellation of factors that contribute to the cultural construction of self and well-being. Such a comparison requires attention to the major historical factors that originally set these cycles in motion, an analysis of the norms, practices, and products that propel these cycles, and an examination of how these differences are reflected in self and well-being.

The article therefore consists of three sections: (a) a brief historical analysis of both cities; (b) four studies that investigate whether their different historically derived ideas are reflected in current cultural norms, practices, and products; and (c) three studies that examine how these differences are reflected in self and well-being. As suggested in the opening quotes, the Boston culture cycle should reflect and promote greater attention to the “old and established,” whereas the San Francisco culture cycle should promote greater appreciation of the “new and free.”

## National Versus Local Culture

The United States is often cast as a monolithic individualistic culture—and indeed ideas and practices of independence

are pervasive. As shown in Table 1, factors such as a common ideological foundation, shared economic and political structures, and a national media promote a national culture of individualism, independence, personal control, and responsibility (e.g., Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Yet, strong local and regional cultures persist. Table 1 also lists factors that foster localization and geographic diversity. These factors reveal that everyday life is organized by local ideas and practices and suggest that fulfilling the task of becoming an independent individual—and therefore self and well-being—will necessarily take regionally specific forms (Rentfrow, Gosling, & Potter, 2008; Vandello & Cohen, 1999). For example, in New England—where older, established institutions and practices require attention to norms and social expectations—well-being is related to freedom from constraint (Plaut, Markus, & Lachman, 2002). In the former frontier Mountain West, voluntary settlement and higher residential mobility have provided fertile ground for the development of unbridled individualism and for a decreased sense of embeddedness in extended family, social, and institutional networks (Kitayama, Conway, Pietromonaco, Park, & Plaut, 2010; Oishi, 2010).

Although region serves as a particularly important cultural context for self and well-being, we suggest here that, consistent with other research (Heine, Buchtel, & Norenzayan, 2008; Levine, Martinez, Brase, & Sorenson, 1994), further localization will better illuminate components of the culture cycle. We therefore use cities as a basis for our investigation and focus on an in-depth comparison of two metropolitan areas (rather than a more superficial treatment of many areas).

Boston and San Francisco are alike in many ways. They share democratic political leanings; have high

concentrations of universities; rank as top cities for hi-tech industry; are waterfront, urban areas with high median incomes and home prices; and, perhaps most importantly, are strongholds of individualism (Bluestone & Stevenson, 2000; DeLuca, 1994; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). During the 2008 presidential election, both were characterized as blue cities in blue states that are home to large numbers of the “tax-hiking, government-expanding, latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, *New York Times* reading” liberal elite (Club for Growth, 2006). Yet, as a survey of popular media reveals, Boston is variously characterized as old, traditional, constraining, formal, hierarchical, status-conscious, and aware of its history (McGroarty, 2004), whereas San Francisco is characterized as new, innovative, informal, tradition-free, sensation-seeking, egalitarian, and tuned to the future (Florida, 2002). As we suggest here, these differences in city narratives have deep historical roots with important consequences for the cultural construction of self and well-being.

## Cultural Construction of Self and Well-being

In the current studies, we highlight a difference in the social contingency of self and well-being in Boston and San Francisco. Although focused on a within independent U.S. comparison, we draw on previous research, which highlights a difference between North American contexts where being a self involves expressing one’s personal attributes, preferences, and goals, and East Asian contexts where being a self involves fitting in with others and maintaining relationships by meeting obligations and expectations. Accordingly, well-being in individualist contexts correlates with self-esteem, positive affect, and happiness (Diener & Diener, 1995; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998), whereas in collectivist contexts, it is associated with maintaining harmonious (not strained) relations and on how significant others evaluate the self (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997). Similarly, emotions in individualist contexts are constructed as internal properties, whereas in collectivist contexts they are contingent on social situations and relationships (Kitayama, Mesquita, & Karasawa, 2006; Masuda et al., 2008). This does not mean that in collectivist contexts stronger social contingency necessarily leads to greater well-being. To the contrary, well-being can be associated with relief from strained contingencies such that greater social strain impedes well-being (Kitayama, Karasawa, Curhan, Ryff, & Markus, 2010).

A growing number of studies of cultural artifacts show that products such as books, ads, and websites mirror these divergent psychological tendencies (e.g., Lun, Mesquita, & Smith, 2011; Tsai, Louie, Chen, & Uchida, 2007). In one meta-analytic review, Morling and Lamoreaux (2008) found that not only were American-context individualism and Asian-context collectivism reflected in cultural products but effect sizes for cultural products were even greater than for

psychological data. These differences arise because people create products that reflect their understandings of how to be and how to be well. In turn, their exposure to and engagement with these products further reinforces these understandings.

## Overview of Hypotheses

We suggest here that in the “old and established” Boston area, the goals of being an independent self and being well are realized in a context that emphasizes tradition, establishment, community, an appreciation for precedent, and a comparatively tight contingency between what is expected by others and one’s own behavior. The longer history and greater institutionalization of the “right” way and of “the way things are done and should be done” produce a norm of following the norm. Consequently, selves and well-being are likely to attend to and be contingent on social expectations and standards. Importantly, well-being can be realized not just in promotion of these standards (e.g., feeling good through attainment of social status and support) but also in relief from the negative aspects of this relatively greater social contingency (e.g., feeling good through relief from strained family and work relationships). In a more socially contingent context, strained relations should be more salient and have greater power to hinder well-being.

In the “new and free” San Francisco area, in contrast, the goals of being an independent self and being well are realized in a context in which there is relatively less tradition, less establishment, fewer well-entrenched institutions and norms, an appreciation for the individual and uniqueness, and a comparatively loose contingency between what is expected by others and one’s own behavior. A short history and fewer institutions that inscribe the “right” way and “the way things are done, and should be done” produce a heightened appreciation for change and a norm of not following the norm. Consequently, selves and well-being are less likely to be attendant to and contingent on social expectations and standards. Well-being may therefore derive less from maintaining these standards and more from an assessment of one’s own internal experiences. In a less socially contingent context, strained relations should be less salient and less strongly related to how one feels. Given the theorized culture cycles, we expect to observe these hypothesized differences between the Boston and San Francisco areas in our comparative historical analysis, in norms, products, and practices, and in individual psychological tendencies.

## Historical Analysis

**Boston.** Founded in 1630 primarily by Puritans seeking religious freedom, Boston established a reputation for stern morals and Protestant principles of hard work and sacrifice. In the 1700s, Boston became a force of colonial resistance and the birthplace of the American Revolution. In the 1800s, the city experienced waves of European immigration, especially

Irish and Italian. It also gained a reputation for measuring people based on their knowledge, prompting Mark Twain (1899) to write, “In Boston they ask, ‘How much does he know?’ In New York, ‘How much is he worth?’ In Philadelphia, ‘Who were his parents?’” (p. 1). Boston housed America’s first public school, public school system, and college. It still values its tradition of education and boasts over 80 private colleges and universities, houses 360,000 students, and ranks among the top metropolitan areas in proportion of college-educated adults (McSweeney & Marshall, 2009; see Table 2 for demographics). Accordingly, Boston has the country’s highest concentration of educational and health services and a high concentration of other knowledge-based industries such as professional and business services, information, and finance. With a strong presence of hi-tech and biomedical industries, the area ranks second only to the San Francisco Bay area in venture capital investment (National Venture Capital Association, 2008).

Another of Boston’s key cultural features is the importance of ties to family and place. Approximately 16% of those residing in the Boston metro area are foreign-born—slightly higher than the national average but half the rate of San Francisco. Notably, almost 60% of Bostonians were born in Massachusetts. Boston’s cultural history also sheds light on the importance of family networks and social norms. The Boston Brahmins (e.g., the Lowells and Cabots)—the elite class of families that ruled Boston as Democratic aristocrats in the 19th century—and their legacy have long been the center of Boston social, cultural, political, and economic life (Farrell, 1993). Because Brahmin families controlled much of the economic and social structure, attention to family concerns and social expectations was crucial (Farrell, 1993). Perhaps on the basis of elite cultural heritage or on having some of the oldest traditions and institutions, Boston has often appeared self-important. However, from a Boston cultural standpoint, where your contingencies (e.g., your knowledge, hard labor, achievements, and affiliations) communicate a sense of who you are, this type of positioning is simply the expected and valued norm. These embedded ties extend even beyond family, history, and social norms and institutions. The city of Boston itself has also inspired allegiance in many residents, as demonstrated by the Red Sox Nation, a group of die-hard fans who derived distinctiveness, in an almost Calvinist sense, from their team’s 88-year “curse” (Stossel, 2005).

**San Francisco.** The history of San Francisco is much shorter than Boston’s (although both had a long history of Native American inhabitants who were heavily impacted by Europeans). Settled in the 1770s by Spanish explorers and missionaries, the area was ceded to the United States after the Mexican American war in 1848. In the late 1840s, San Francisco experienced massive population growth as the promise of riches drew thousands of fortune seekers. Therefore, in contrast with Boston, San Francisco developed as a “get rich quick” Gold Rush town, where individuals from

diverse ethnic and class backgrounds had to live and work alongside each other. San Francisco continues to attract immigrants (particularly from Asia and Latin America) and individuals from other parts of the country. Approximately 30% of San Francisco metropolitan area residents originated from other countries, and less than half of area residents (and only 38% of city residents) were born in California (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Like Boston, the San Francisco area contains a high concentration of colleges and universities, and more than 40% of the adult population has a bachelor’s degree. With its economic roots in 19th century entrepreneurial activity spawned by the Gold Rush, the boon of the railroad industry, and the development of the banking industry, San Francisco now houses the country’s most active hi-tech industry and venture capital investment (National Venture Capital Association, 2008). Furthermore, San Francisco’s economy developed in an informal atmosphere stressing freedom and creativity and continues to have fewer of the formal symbols marking status and hierarchy on the East Coast (Rodriguez, 1999).

This cultural tendency to reject tradition, norms, and hierarchy also appears in the city’s history of counterculture, from the beatniks of the 1950s, to the hippies of the 1960s, to the gay rights movements of the 1970s, to current social and political protest. Unlike Boston’s reform history, San Francisco’s has not been tied to an entrenched social elite or to religious or moral doctrine (DeLuca, 1994). In fact, the city has long had a reputation for tolerating, and even embracing, rejection of social norms (Rodriguez, 1999). The hippie movement, for example, sought to release moral strictures and institutional constraints to bring people into a natural state of peacefulness and self-discovery (DeLuca, 1994). Perhaps as a legacy of its history as the furthest outpost of the Wild West—a place where one could start a new life (e.g., “Go West young man”), an outlaw town with few rules, and a place to escape the establishment of the East—San Francisco is still known as the place to go to discover and be yourself.

### **Norms, Practices, and Products**

This historical analysis suggests that centuries of diverging constellations of ideas and practices regarding self and well-being have precipitated two distinct culture cycles—an “old and established” one in Boston and a “new and free” one in San Francisco. Accordingly, in Boston where residential stability is high; where a longer history has produced many well-established institutions, policies, and practices; and where tradition, status, and experience are emphasized, self and well-being will assume a relatively tighter, socially contingent form. In contrast, in San Francisco, where residential stability is low, histories are shorter, tradition is thinner, and where uniqueness, antiestablishment attitudes, and the pursuit of change and the “new” are emphasized, self and well-being will assume a relatively looser, less socially contingent

**Table 2.** Demographic Characteristics of Boston and San Francisco Metropolitan Areas

	Boston	San Francisco	U.S.
<b>Population</b>			
Total households	1,735,175	1,594,554	114,567,419
Females (%)	51.6	50.7	50.9
Median age	38.2	38.0	36.9
Average household size	2.5	2.62	2.63
<b>Economy</b>			
Unemployment (%)	6.9	7.7	7.9
Per capita income (US\$)	36,604	39,862	27,334
Employment by industry <sup>a</sup> (%)			
Professional and business services	14.3	16.5	10.4
Educational, health, and social services	26.0	20.8	22.1
Retail trade	10.4	10.2	11.5
<b>Social</b>			
Race (%)			
White	79.7	55.3	74.0
Black or African American	7.2	8.4	12.5
American Indian and Alaska Native	0.2	0.5	0.8
Asian	6.3	23.1	4.7
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	0.0	0.7	0.2
Other race	4.3	7.8	5.5
Latino (any race)	8.5	20.9	15.7
Bachelor's degree or higher (%)	42.1	43.5	28.2
Owner-occupied homes median value (US\$)	382,400	655,000	188,400
Use public transportation to work (%)	11.9	14.6	4.9
Geographic mobility			
Foreign born (%)	16.3	29.8	12.9
Born in state of residence (%)	58.5	48.5	58.8

Source: American Community Survey, 2010.

<sup>a</sup>Top three for both states.

form. To the extent that these “old and established” and “new and free” culture cycles characterize Boston and San Francisco, we should find them reflected in residents’ perceptions of the norms and cultural products that permeate these contexts.

**Study 1: Tightness and Looseness of Norms.** To test whether residents’ perceptions of norms reflect “old and established” versus “new and free,” we drew on the concept of norm tightness or looseness (Berry, 1967; Gelfand et al., 2011). This construct—related to, but conceptually and empirically distinct from, individualism/collectivism (Triandis, 1989)—refers to the strength of social norms and the degree of sanctioning within societies. Reflecting more social contingency, key correlates of tightness include order, conformity, and felt accountability, whereas, reflecting less social contingency, key correlates of looseness include openness to change and low felt accountability (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006). We expected greater perceptions of tightness in Boston than San Francisco.

**Method.** Participants included 125 residents of the Boston ( $n = 62$ ) and San Francisco ( $n = 63$ ) areas, with an age range of 18 years to older than 65 and a modal response of 22 to 34.

They were recruited through craigslist and paid US\$10 for their participation as part of a larger web-based survey. To examine differences in tightness and looseness, at the beginning of the survey, we asked participants to rate themselves (on a scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) on items examining the degree to which the areas they lived in provided clear norms and sanctions for behaviors deviating from the norm (e.g., “In this area, there are very clear expectations for how people should act in most situations”; Gelfand et al., 2011).

**Results and discussion.** Consistent with our expectations, results of the survey indicated significant differences in responses to the Tight-Loose scale. People from Boston ( $M = 3.98$ ,  $SD = .87$ ) were significantly more likely to perceive clear norms in their area than people from San Francisco ( $M = 3.48$ ,  $SD = .91$ ),  $t(123) = 3.12$ ,  $p = .002$ . Having established support for our hypothesis that Boston and San Francisco residents characterize their respective areas differently with respect to norm tightness and looseness, next we examined differences in self and well-being as reflected in and perpetuated by cultural practices and products.

**Studies 2 to 4: Content Analyses of Practices and Products.** Recent work in cultural psychology has drawn attention to the link between cultural products and the psychological tendencies that shape and are shaped by them (D. Cohen, 2007; Morling & Lamoreaux, 2008). These cultural products are a critical component of the culture cycle; as people engage with the many cultural products that comprise a given local context, they implicitly acquire frameworks for behavior in that context.

One vivid example comes from a comparison of viewbooks of two prominent universities in Boston and San Francisco. “The wind of freedom blows” marks the opening of Stanford University’s Viewbook (2009). “Free from the boundaries of tradition,” the university “attracts forward-looking, forward-thinking people—people whose entrepreneurial attitudes refuse limits and resist assumptions” and gives students “the freedom to be themselves: innovative, creative, unconstrained by any predetermined look or affect” (p. 22). In contrast, Harvard University’s Viewbook (2008–2009) begins with a description of “a tradition of excellence,” where “since its founding in 1636,” Harvard has brought together “promising students and faculty in a community designed to stimulate” (p. 4). Harvard reminds us that it is the nation’s oldest college and “what many consider America’s finest university” (p. 5), and that students “benefit directly from the university’s eminence as a national and international crossroads” (p. 16).

Despite sharing a goal of recruiting top students, these viewbooks reflect and promote the historically derived narratives of their local contexts and also contribute to distinct ways of how to be and how to be well. In studies 2 to 4, we conducted content analyses of three sets of cultural products for themes consistent with the hypothesized “old and established” or the “new and free” culture cycle. We chose a diverse set of products that require people to actively engage with them and that are widely distributed across different demographics. These included (a) newspaper headlines from leading daily papers, (b) venture capital websites accessed by entrepreneurs and investors, and (c) hospital websites used by an increasingly broad spectrum of people as they select physicians, monitor test results, and order prescriptions online. In each study, we expected to find greater emphasis on “old and established” in Boston than in San Francisco and greater emphasis on “new and free” in San Francisco than in Boston.

**Study 2: News Media.** In our first content analysis, we coded the front pages of two prominent online newspapers of Boston and San Francisco. Content analysis of newspaper articles has been used in previous research to study psychological phenomena across and within cultures (Gardikiotis, Martin, & Hewstone, 2004; Hallahan, Lee, & Herzog, 1997; Morris & Peng, 1994).

**Method.** We recorded articles daily ( $n = 365$ ) from the *Boston Globe* ( $n = 196$ ) and the *San Francisco Chronicle*

( $n = 169$ ) for 46 days at the same time each day. These two regional papers both rank in the top 10 newspaper sites for 2008, are comparable in circulation (approximately 5 million and 4 million average unique monthly visitors, respectively; Seward, 2008), and have the highest readership in their respective cities. In addition, both newspapers have fairly diverse readership with respect to gender, age, employment, and household income. We limited the analysis to headlines because headlines succinctly embody the most important elements of news stories (see Gardikiotis et al., 2004).

To index an emphasis on “old and established,” we coded headlines for reference to a variety of established social entities such as domestic community organizations (e.g., related to school, religion, or health), international community (e.g., news about other nations), and business community (e.g., companies). To index an emphasis on “new and free,” we coded headlines for reference to individuals and to instances of new, unique, or creative (e.g., new scientific or medical findings, unique expressions of creativity and learning).

**Results.** Consistent with our hypothesis of greater emphasis on “old and established” in Boston, we expected the *Boston Globe* to have more mentions of domestic, international, and business communities than the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Consistent with our hypothesis of greater emphasis on “new and free” in San Francisco, we expected the *San Francisco Chronicle* to have more mentions of the individual and of new, unique, and creative than the *Boston Globe*. Kappas ranged from .93 to .97 ( $M = .95$ ). Table 3 summarizes codes and results.

We found that *Boston Globe* indeed had significantly more mentions of communities, both domestic and international, than *San Francisco Chronicle*. It also had more mentions of companies, but this difference was not significant. *San Francisco Chronicle*, on the other hand, had more mentions of an individual than *Boston Globe*, as well as more mentions of new, unique, and creative. Note, however, that both regional patterns unfolded against a backdrop of individualism, as the category with the highest percentages for both newspapers was individual reference. Overall, consistent with predictions, Boston news focused more on established social entities, such as domestic and international communities, with headlines such as “Church Struggles to Keep Its Voice” and “With Tensions on Rise, Pakistan Moves Troops.” San Francisco news focused more on the individual and pushing boundaries of discovery, with headlines such as “Wheelchair Athlete Sets High Goals” and “Technology Gets Fossil to Reveal Its Secrets.”

**Study 3: Venture Capital Websites.** Corporate websites serve as an important medium for organizational communication (Aikat, 2000) and have been analyzed for cultural variation (Singh, Zhao, & Hu, 2003). Venture capital firms constitute an important part of the economy in the Boston and San Francisco Bay areas, which serve as the country’s top two locations for venture capital investment. Venture capital firms

**Table 3.** Codes and Results for Content Analyses of Newspapers, Venture Capital, and Hospital Websites (Studies 2-4)

Categories	Examples	Boston Globe	San Francisco Chronicle	$\chi^2(1)$	p
<b>Coding of newspapers (Study 2)</b>					
Old and established					
(A) Community reference—domestic organization (schools, churches, health)	Charter schools grade highest	13.8	5.4	7.19	.007
(B) Community reference—international	Citizens energy giveaway imperiled as Venezuela halts its oil donations	10.2	2.4	8.99	.003
(C) Companies/businesses	Apple pulls out of Macworld	14.8	11.9	0.65	.420
New and free					
(D) Individual reference	How “visionary” raised and lost a fortune	23.5	36.9	7.83	.005
(E) New/unique/creative (discovery, creativity, learning)	A place to awaken S.F. kids’ inner Einsteins	4.1	13.7	10.72	.001
<b>Coding of venture capital firm websites (Study 3)</b>					
Old and established					
(F) Social entity reference (teams, companies)	Smart companies start here	51.7	24.1	6.62	.010
(G) Hierarchical control (select, seek out, manage, build, active role)	[Our firm’s] mission is to create, finance, and manage ... companies.	51.7	10.3	18.08	.000
(H) Status/precedent/experience (expertise, experience, proven team)	We have earned a reputation for being experienced, thoughtful, trusted partners.	55.2	13.8	16.57	.000
(I) History (puts firm in historical context)	Since our inception in 1988, we have invested in over 200 seed, early and growth stage companies.	41.4	32.8	.63	.429
New and free					
(J) Individual reference (entrepreneurs)	The entrepreneurs behind the entrepreneurs	27.6	72.4	15.90	.000
(K) Egalitarian (partner with, work with/for, common vision, collaborate, together)	We are privileged to work with entrepreneurs.	27.6	72.4	15.90	.000
(L) New/unique/creative (includes codes L1 through L4)		27.6	67.2	12.22	.000
(L1) Change (change, disrupt, transform, future)	Want to change the world?	13.8	31.0	3.04	.081
(L2) Unique (unique, original, big idea, dream)	We partner with entrepreneurs around the world who have unique ... ideas.	3.4	20.7	4.52	.033
(L3) Pioneering (pioneer, being first, ahead of curve, leader, breakthrough)	One of the first VC firms to fund start-ups in China	17.2	44.8	6.42	.011
(L4) Innovate (innovation, creativity)	Committed to fostering innovation	17.2	32.8	2.33	.127
<b>Coding of Hospitals and Medical Center Websites (Study 4)</b>					
Old and established					
(M) Establishment reference	You may also take comfort in knowing that the clinical services of the hospital are of the highest quality	37.9	10.3	6.03	.014
(N) Number of employees (doctors, nurses, volunteers)	With more than 280 primary care doctors and specialists on the active medical staff	51.7	24.1	4.687	.030
(O) Expertise/experience	We provide special expertise in a full range of compassionate care	27.6	13.8	1.68	.195
New and free					
(P) Individual empowerment (develop potential)	We empower people to take a greater role in their own health and wellness.	0	27.6	9.28	.002
(Q) Alternative medicine (whole person)	Health care that is compassionate and attentive to the whole person: body, mind, and spirit	10.3	34.5	4.86	.028
(R) New/unique/creative	We strive for innovation by encouraging creative ideas and seeking progressive technologies.	6.9	24.1	3.288	.070

Note:VC = venture capital.

fund and help build companies in return for equity. These long-term investments involve great risk and therefore favor innovative business ideas with high potential for success. In many ways, U.S. venture capital investment fosters and requires American-style independence. However, an initial analysis of venture capital firm websites suggests differences in the ways they reflect and promote styles of being. For example, emphasizing “old and established,” Boston firm *Polaris Venture Partners* states,

We have built an exceptional team . . . with a broad range of investment and operating experience, the highest business standards, and a commitment to success . . . Helping build first-rate management teams is a key commitment we make to the companies we back.

In contrast, reflecting “new and free,” San Francisco area firm *Accel* states, “We partner with entrepreneurs around the world who have unique, breakthrough ideas and the courage to be first.” We sought to systematically evaluate these differences.

**Method.** To obtain a sample of venture capital firms, we used *Entrepreneur Magazine*’s list of Top 100 Venture Capital Firms based on number of deals made in 2007 and containing firms focused on early and/or late stage financing. We retained 87 firms clearly headquartered in either the Boston or San Francisco area (list available from first author). Two trained coders coded each website’s homepage for references to our themes (see Table 3). The “old and established” theme included codes referencing portfolio companies as social entities (e.g., teams and companies) rather than individuals, firms’ hierarchical control over portfolio companies, firm’s status and expertise, and contextualizing firms in terms of history. The “new and free” theme included codes referencing portfolio companies as individual entrepreneurs rather than social entities, firms’ egalitarian approach to working with their portfolio companies, change and transformation, uniqueness and big ideas, being a pioneer, and innovation. (As the purpose of most venture capital investment is to foster successful innovation, we expected no difference across cities on reference to innovation.)

**Results.** Results of the venture capital firm website coding revealed striking between-city differences. As seen in Table 3, Boston firms conformed to the “old and established” theme more than San Francisco firms. Boston firms were more likely to refer to groups, to their own status and experience, and to exerting top-down control over their investments. Although they were also more likely to provide historical context, this difference was not significant. In contrast, San Francisco firms conformed to the “new and free” theme more than Boston firms. They referred more often to individual entities, to an egalitarian working relationship with their portfolio companies, and to new/unique/creative themes such as changing and transforming industries, having big,

unique ideas, and being a pioneer. As expected, the cities did not differ significantly on innovation, although this theme was stronger in San Francisco.

**Study 4: Hospital Websites.** In our final content analysis, we examined cultural products of a different domain—the website content of all hospitals and medical centers in the Boston and San Francisco areas.

**Method.** We coded descriptions of the hospital, its facilities, services, history, and mission statement that could be found in either the front pages, “about us” pages, or mission statement pages of all hospitals and medical centers listed in by a national search engine as being located in Boston ( $n = 29$ ) and San Francisco ( $n = 29$ ). Two trained coders coded each website for hypothesis-driven themes associated with social expectations and establishments versus the individual and the new (see Table 3). The codes used to assess “old and established” included establishment reference (i.e., appreciation of skills, resources, and care provided by the hospital), status markers (i.e., size of organization as illustrated by number of employees listed), and mentions of expertise and experience (e.g., “health care decisions are made by experts in our community”). The codes used to assess “new and free” included mentions of individual empowerment (e.g., “We empower people to take a greater role in their own health and wellness”), alternative medicine (e.g., “health care that is . . . attentive to the whole person’s body, mind, and spirit”), and new/unique/creative (i.e., creative ideas and approaches to health care). In sum, the “old and established” codes focused on the hospital as a sizable, skilled establishment containing experts who know what is in the best interest of the patient, whereas the “new and free” codes focused on more nontraditional, innovative conceptualizations of health care that bring the individual into the process and tailor therapies to individual needs.

**Results.** Kappa’s ranged from .66 to 1 ( $M = .86$ ,  $SD = .11$ ). Table 3 summarizes the results. As expected, Boston websites were significantly more likely than San Francisco websites to include direct mentions of how patients would appreciate their establishment, in terms of quality skills, care, and facilities. They also were significantly more likely to highlight the hospital’s status as a social entity by listing the number of employees, doctors, nurses, and volunteers. Boston hospital websites also emphasized their expertise and experience more than San Francisco websites, though this difference was not significant. San Francisco websites contained more mentions of developing one’s individual role in one’s health care (individual empowerment) and striving to improve whole-person wellness (alternative medicine). San Francisco websites also had more mentions of being new/unique/creative in approaching health than Boston websites, though this difference was only marginally significant.

**Studies 2 to 4: Discussion.** Consistent with the historical analysis and the norm tightness study, we found across three

different types of cultural products—newspapers, venture capital websites, and hospital and medical center websites—converging evidence that themes of “old and established” are relatively more prominent in Boston, whereas themes of “new and free” are relatively more prominent in San Francisco. Specifically, cultural products in Boston, reflecting the relatively tight contingencies between individuals and social norms or expectations, are particularly likely to reference community and social entities, the establishment, expertise, experience, and status. In contrast, cultural products in San Francisco, reflecting a looser contingency between the individual and social norms and expectations, are more likely to reference the individual, individual empowerment, and newness, uniqueness, and creativity.

### *Psychological Tendencies*

To the extent that “old and established” and “new and free” culture cycles characterize Boston and San Francisco, we should find them not only in cultural products but also in residents’ psychological tendencies. In Boston, where themes of “old and established” are prominent and strong social norms are salient, individuals should experience greater social contingency in their psychological tendencies; that is (a) there should be a stronger link between what is expected by others and individuals’ assessment of their self and well-being and (b) feeling good should be tied to relief from this contingency. In San Francisco, where themes of “new and free” are prominent and social norms are less salient, individuals should experience relatively less social contingency in their psychological tendencies; that is (a) there should be a weaker link between what is expected by others and individuals’ assessment of their self and well-being and (b) feeling good should be relatively less based on social contingency. We test these ideas in Studies 5 to 7.

**Study 5: Self-Satisfaction Contingency in Midlife.** Given our hypothesis that the different culture cycles in Boston and San Francisco promote variation in social contingency, we used a nationally representative Midlife in the United States Survey (MIDUS) to examine how contingent individuals’ assessment of self is on social status and norms.

**Method.** Participants ( $N = 3,485$ ) were contacted by random procedure and completed a mail survey (response rate = 61%). For our analyses, we selected European American participants residing in the counties associated with Boston ( $n = 40$ ) and San Francisco ( $n = 39$ ) metro areas.

We constructed a measure of social contingency within the MIDUS that examined the association of one’s overall self-evaluation and one’s evaluation of five specific domains of one’s life (i.e., finances, education, family, community, and work), assuming that greater associations reflect greater contingency. We selected a single item gauging self-satisfaction (“Overall how satisfied are you with yourself?”). We then tested the partial correlation of this item with ratings of

**Table 4.** Partial Correlations of Self-Satisfaction With Life Domain Variables (Controlling for Age and Household Income) for Boston and San Francisco in Study 5

Variable	Boston		San Francisco		Fischer’s Z
	r	n	r	n	
Educational attainment	.27*	36	-.17	35	1.79*
Finances	.61****	36	.00	33	2.88***
Family support	.42***	36	.19	33	1.01
Contribution to others	.55*****	35	-.15	34	3.11***
Work	.34**	33	.34**	33	0.00
Average			.44	.04	

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

various life domains, controlling for age and household income. Therefore, the correlation between self-satisfaction and each of the other variables served as a measure of social contingency.

If self and well-being are relatively more grounded in education and financial status in “old and established” Boston than in “new and free” San Francisco, then self-satisfaction should be more contingent on these domains, and we should find stronger correlations of self-satisfaction with domains such as educational attainment and financial success (“How would you rate your financial situation these days?”) for Boston than San Francisco. Likewise, if self and well-being are more socially contingent in Boston than in San Francisco, we should also find stronger correlations of self-satisfaction with domains such as family (composite of four items gauging support from family), community contributions (composite including “How would you rate your contribution to the welfare and well-being of others these days?” and “How much effort do you put into your contribution . . . .”), and work (“How would you rate your work situation these days?”).

**Results and discussion.** Overall, Boston displayed more contingency (i.e., stronger associations) than San Francisco,  $t(8) = 3.27$ ,  $p = .01$ . As shown in Table 4, Boston’s average association was robust (average  $r = .44$ ), whereas San Francisco’s was near zero (average  $r = .04$ ). The pattern of stronger associations of self-satisfaction with education, finance, community, and family in the Boston sample are one indication that an awareness of status and established social norms contour the experience of the self in Boston. The lack of association between these factors and self-satisfaction in San Francisco suggests a self relatively less bound by a concern with status and established social norms.

The fact that self-satisfaction was equally dependent on work in Boston and San Francisco reveals that the connection between self and work remains strong regardless of whether the region is “old and established” or “new and free.” This link is likely animated by a common, cross-regional

cultural grounding in the Protestant ethic (Plaut et al., 2002). This raises the interesting possibility that self-satisfaction across regions is also similarly tied to feelings of mastery. The presence in the MIDUS of a personal control measure, which included indices of mastery and constraint, allowed us to test this possibility. Indeed, the correlation of self-satisfaction with mastery (e.g., "I can do just about anything I really set my mind to"; Lachman & Weaver, 1998) was robust across the two regions,  $r_{BOS}(36) = .53, p < .001$ ;  $r_{SF}(35) = .37, p < .05$ ;  $Z = .83, ns$ . However, given the hypothesized heightened awareness of norms and the significance of meeting social expectations and standards in Boston, we would expect Boston to be more sensitive to social constraint and therefore that self-satisfaction should be more contingent on the absence of perceived constraint (e.g., "Other people determine most of what I can and cannot do"; Lachman & Weaver, 1998) in Boston than in San Francisco. In fact, this relationship held in Boston,  $r(36) = .62, p < .001$ , but not in San Francisco,  $r(35) = .18, ns, Z = 2.19, p < .05$ , in which there is less normative pressure and less attunement to such constraints. (We further probe this relationship between well-being and absence of constraint in Studies 6 and 7.) In sum, these patterns suggest a tighter, more socially contingent style of self and well-being in Boston and a looser, less socially contingent one in San Francisco.

**Study 6: Self-Worth Contingency in College Students.** In our next study, our goal was to extend our analysis of variation in social contingency using a different population (college students) and a different set of measures. We used an established self-worth contingency scale, as well as survey items designed to measure attitudes about fitting in and regulation by establishment, and negative affect. Consistent with our hypotheses and Study 5, we predicted higher self-worth contingency and greater endorsement of items reflecting a concern with fitting in and regulation by establishment in Boston than in San Francisco. In addition, on the basis of previous research showing more expression of negativity or neuroticism in the Northeast than in Western states (Plaut et al., 2002; Rentfrow et al., 2008), and on literature linking tightness to experience of negative reactions (see Gelfand et al., 2006), we expected (a) more negative affect and (b) a stronger relationship between negative affect and self-worth contingency in Boston than in San Francisco.

**Method.** Fifty-eight students from New England attending a Boston area college and 73 students from the Pacific region attending a San Francisco Bay area college completed a survey for partial course credit. The survey included the Contingencies of Self-Worth Scale (Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003), which, using 35 items (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*), directly assesses the extent to which self-worth is contingent upon specific domains, including appearance, academic competence, competition, virtue, God's love, others' approval, and family support. The survey also contained seven items reflecting attitudes toward

fitting in with others (e.g., "It is better to fit in with people around you") and regulation by establishment (e.g., "There are more things the government should be doing"; see Vandello & Cohen, 1999). The survey also included the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), including positive words (e.g., interested, excited, strong) and negative words (e.g., irritable, distressed, upset) rated on a scale of 1 = *very slightly or not at all* to 5 = *extremely*.

**Results and discussion.** As predicted and replicating the previous results with participants drawn from a probability sample of adults, Boston area students ( $M = 4.71$ ) exhibited more contingent self-worth than San Francisco area students ( $M = 4.49$ ),  $t(123) = 2.90, p < .01$ . Notably, Boston students were higher in all contingency domains ( $ts$  ranged from 2.1 to 3.85,  $ps < .05$ ) except God's love and virtue, on which there were no significant differences between the two groups ( $ts < 1, ns$ ). Boston ( $M = .60$ ) also scored higher on the index of attitudes toward fitting in with others and regulation by establishment than San Francisco students ( $M = .48$ ),  $t(121) = 2.66, p < .01$ . As predicted, the Boston students ( $M = 2.16$ ) were more likely to express negative affect than San Francisco students ( $M = 1.89$ ),  $t(121) = 2.137, p < .05$ . There was no difference in positive affect,  $t(121) = 1.43, ns$ .

To test whether the relationship between self-worth contingency and affect varies by region, we then conducted a test of moderation. We found a significant interaction effect of region and contingency on negative affect,  $\beta = .26, p < .05$ , such that being more contingent was associated with more negative affect in Boston ( $\beta = .33, p = .058$ ) but not in San Francisco ( $\beta = .15, ns$ ). In sum, these findings suggest not only stronger self-worth contingency in Boston but also that this contingency is associated with negative affect, perhaps because of the greater pressure and constraint of meeting norms and others' expectations (Gelfand et al., 2006). In other words, although Boston residents display more contingency between well-being and status markers such as education and positive social relations such as family support (Study 5), contingency alone may not pave the path to greater well-being. In this tighter context, contingency can also be experienced as stressful. Notably, Boston residents also show a tighter link between lack of perceived constraint and well-being (Study 5) and lower contingent self-worth and well-being (Study 6), such that less social contingency (when experienced as less constraint) may be experienced as less stressful. Therefore, in Study 7, we test whether well-being in such contexts benefits from relief from strained contingencies.

**Study 7: Emotional Contingency in Commuter Train Riders.** In Study 7, we further tested the hypothesis of greater social contingency—a stronger link between what is expected by others and individuals' assessment of their self and well-being—and its implications using a measure that taps perceptions of constraints of daily life. We hypothesized that in

“old and established” Boston, there would be more attention to the negative aspects of social contingency (e.g., social constraints) such that feeling good would be associated with relief from the negative aspects of this relatively greater social contingency. This prediction linking constraint and well-being draws on research showing that in cultural contexts with tight contingencies, there is pressure to pay attention to and meet the norms and expectations of others and so relief from such constraint feels good. Lebra (1984) theorized that in Japan, the normatively desirable state is a stable one in which there are no difficulties with relations with others. Empirically, Kwan et al. (1997) found that in Hong Kong, a lack of relational harmony undermines life satisfaction. Similarly, Kitayama, Karasawa, et al. (2010) showed that in Japan, constraint is related to relational strain and that absence of relational strain powerfully predicts well-being and health. In contrast, we predict that in cultural contexts where the focus is on the unfettered individual, well-being is associated with individual positive affect and happiness. Consistent with this prediction, Suh, Diener, and Updegraff (2008) found that inner emotional experience predicts life satisfaction in more individualistic cultures. Therefore, in “new and free” San Francisco, rather than being associated with relief from constraint, feeling good should be tied to the assessment of one’s own positive experiences and not to the absence of negative contingencies.

**Method.** To make these comparisons with a sample of working adults, we surveyed 403 adults from diverse socio-economic and racial backgrounds on commuter trains in the Boston and San Francisco areas. We analyzed data from 304 adults who reported currently residing in the area (Boston: 104, 38% male, 77% White,  $M_{age} = 30.2$ ,  $SD = 13.8$ ; San Francisco: 200, 45% male, 49% White,  $M_{age} = 32.6$ ,  $SD = 14.4$ ). Research assistants approached participants seated on the Commuter Rail of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA; Boston area) or on the Caltrain (San Francisco Bay Area), the country’s fifth and seventh busiest commuter rail systems, respectively. Data collection was staggered throughout the day and week in May and June. Participants returned surveys in a sealed envelope and were compensated with a US\$3 gift certificate.

To assess people’s perceptions of constraints and positive events in daily life, we used the hassles and uplifts questionnaire (DeLongis, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1988). We shortened the questionnaire from 53 to 36 items for efficient administration on the train. Instructions read as follows:

Hassles are irritants—things that annoy or bother you; they can make you upset or angry. Uplifts are events that make you feel good; they can make you joyful, glad, or satisfied . . . This questionnaire lists things that can be hassles and uplifts in day-to-day life . . . Please think about how much of a hassle and how much of an uplift each item was for you in the last few days.

Participants rated each item (e.g., family-related obligations, fellow workers, neighborhood) on a scale of 0 = *none or not applicable* to 3 = *a great deal*. Participants also completed the PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) and demographics.

**Results and discussion.** As in Study 6, Boston ( $M = 2.04$ ) displayed more negative affect than San Francisco ( $M = 1.90$ ), but the difference did not reach conventional levels of significance,  $F(1, 218) = 2.24$ ,  $p = .13$ . There was no variation by city in positive affect,  $F(1, 218) = .31$ ,  $ns$ , controlling for race, income, education, age, and gender. These results suggest that although the Boston sample may have a tendency toward expressing more negative affect than the San Francisco sample, the two samples are comparable on positive emotion.

Next, we tested the hypothesis that Boston would show more awareness of constraints (operationalized here as reports of greater hassles) than San Francisco (we made no prediction about mean differences in uplifts). We first conducted principal components analyses with varimax rotation separately on the hassles and uplifts ratings to reduce the data to a smaller number of groupings. We then examined differences in reports of average daily hassles and uplifts, controlling for demographic covariates. Boston participants reported significantly more hassles overall ( $M = 1.10$ ) than San Francisco ( $M = .91$ ),  $F(1, 219) = 4.73$ ,  $p < .05$ , and marginally more uplifts ( $M = 1.46$ ) than San Francisco ( $M = 1.33$ ),  $F(1, 221) = 3.30$ ,  $p < .10$ . Notably, Boston participants ( $M = .94$ ) reported significantly more hassles related to family than San Francisco participants ( $M = .63$ ),  $F(1, 218) = 12.02$ ,  $p = .001$ .

To investigate the association of hassles and uplifts with positive affect, we then conducted a moderated regression analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) with hassles, city, and the interaction term. We repeated this analysis for uplifts and for each hassles and uplifts grouping and conducted simple slope analyses for each, controlling for demographic variables in all analyses. To the extent that fewer hassles represent relief from constraint, fewer hassles should be related to positive affect in Boston relative to San Francisco. As predicted, city moderated the relationship between hassles and positive affect,  $\beta = -.29$ ,  $p < .10$ , with a significant slope for Boston,  $\beta = -.42$ ,  $p < .001$ , and a significant but less steep slope for San Francisco,  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p < .05$ . A closer examination of types of hassles revealed a moderating effect of city on the relationship between family hassles and positive affect,  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .05$ , with a significant slope for Boston,  $\beta = -.41$ ,  $p < .001$ , and no relationship for San Francisco,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $ns$ . Likewise, city moderated the relationship of work relations hassles and positive affect,  $\beta = -.20$ ,  $p < .10$ , with a significant slope for Boston,  $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .05$ , but not San Francisco,  $\beta = -.03$ ,  $ns$ .

To the extent that more uplifts represent an assessment of one’s own positive experiences, we should see a relationship between uplifts and positive affect in San Francisco relative to Boston. Consistent with our prediction, city moderated the

association of uplifts and positive affect,  $\beta = -.44, p < .05$ , such that there was a significant slope for San Francisco,  $\beta = .24, p = .005$ , but not Boston,  $\beta = -.06, ns$ . A closer examination of types of uplifts revealed moderation of city on work-related uplifts and positive affect,  $\beta = -.38, p = .01$ , with a significant slope for San Francisco,  $\beta = .30, p = .001$ , but not Boston,  $\beta = -.06, ns$ . Likewise, city moderated the association of environment-related uplifts and positive affect,  $\beta = -.33, p < .05$ , with a significant slope for San Francisco,  $\beta = .21, p = .01$ , but not Boston,  $\beta = -.07, ns$ . In other words, consistent with Studies 5 and 6, in Boston, well-being depends on construing daily events as free from constraints, especially from social sources, whereas in San Francisco, well-being depends on construing daily events as those that make you feel good.

## General Discussion

In seven studies, we have sketched a tale of two cities, Boston and San Francisco. Similar in many respects, they differ in how to be (self) and how to be well (well-being). To explain why and how a local context such as city of residence matters for self and well-being, we theorized distinct cycles of mutual constitution between self and well-being and historically derived ideas, norms, practices, and products. The Boston culture cycle reflected and promoted relatively greater attention to the “old and established,” and revealed a high degree of social contingency. In contrast, the San Francisco culture cycle reflected and promoted relatively greater attention to the “new and free” and less social contingency.

As summarized in Figure 1a, the pattern of findings for Boston suggests a history emphasizing tradition, status, and community. Analyses of norms and diverse cultural products (news headlines, venture capital, and hospital websites) informed by these historically derived ideas reveal tighter social norms and an emphasis on community and social entities, status, expertise, and experience, and establishment and hierarchical control. These norms, practices, and products are associated with a particular pattern of psychological tendencies. People living in Boston reveal a sense of self-satisfaction that is contingent on education, finances, work, family, and community; more contingent self-worth; more attention to fitting in with others; and support of regulation by establishment. However, such contingency can have costs, especially when experienced as constraint; in this tight context, well-being may rise with the relative absence of negative contingencies and fall with the presence of these contingencies. As summarized in Figure 1b, the pattern of findings for San Francisco suggests a history emphasizing unlimited possibility, egalitarianism, and innovation. Analyses of norms and products reveal looser social norms and an emphasis on the individual, change, uniqueness, and creativity. People living in San Francisco reveal a sense of self-evaluation and self-worth that is relatively noncontingent on family, finances, or

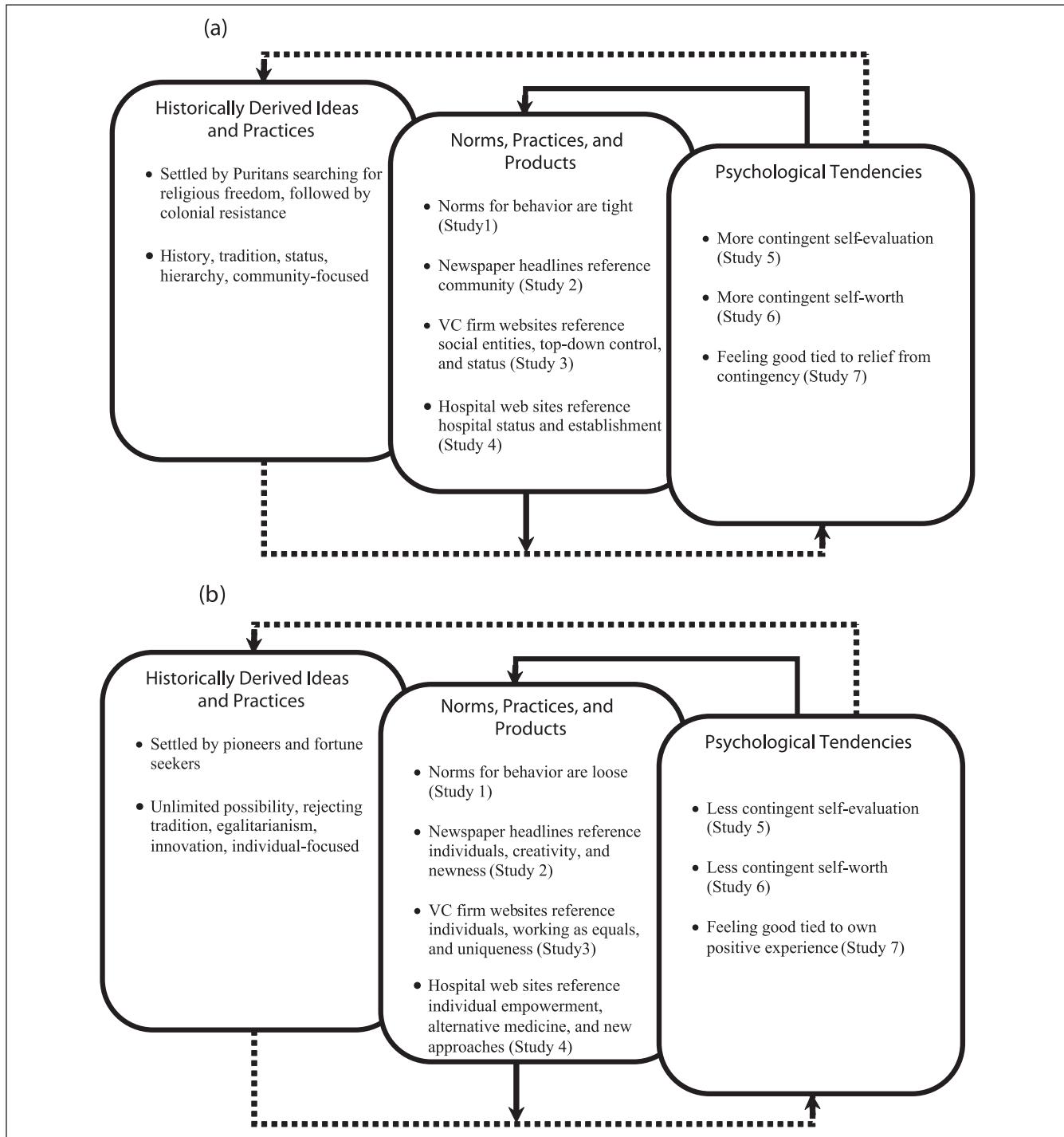
community (but is related to work), and well-being understood in terms of the presence of events that produce good feelings.

These findings have a number of implications. Practically, they explain why a person who moves can feel out of place and suggest that practices developed in one context (e.g., health care or business practices) may not always travel well. Theoretically, the findings extend research revealing the cultural construction of well-being, suggesting that one important dimension of difference in the United States is in the degree of social contingency that characterizes self and well-being. This distinction is related to Berlin’s (1969) notions of positive and negative liberty and to Higgins’ (1998) distinction between prevention and promotion focus. “Old and established” has elements of negative liberty or “freedom from” constraints and “prevention” or relief from difficulties. “New and free” has elements of positive liberty or “freedom to” go one’s own way and to focus on “promotion” of one’s preferences and goals. The distinction noted here resonates with findings tying independence to promotion focus and interdependence to prevention focus (Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). Differences in social contingency are also relevant to recent distinctions between relational and collective selves (Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011; Kashima, Hardie, Wakimoto & Kashima, 2011).

The distinction between the “old and established” East coast and the “new and free” West coast resembles differences between East Asian and North American contexts; moreover, it reveals that city difference can be productively conceptualized as a form of culture (A. B. Cohen, 2009). Future research is needed to explore nested cultures and the intersectionality of cultural dimensions. For example, culture cycles of cities in the United States unfold against a backdrop of individualism (see Table 1); in addition, these city culture cycles in turn form a backdrop for even more localized contexts such as communities or neighborhoods distinguished by racial or social class composition.

In addition to pursuing these research directions, additional studies analyzing these and other cities could fruitfully use behavioral measures (e.g., measures of choice, conformity, risk-taking, financial and health decision making, consumer behavior) that reflect and fuel culture cycles. It will also be important to expand the range of cultural products examined and to analyze practices in schools, workplaces, places of worship, and other institutions. Finally, having identified the components, the next important step in a culture cycle analysis would be to document the ways in which the components influence each other (e.g., how historically derived ideas and practices translate into psychological tendencies and vice versa). Cultural products (e.g., the websites analyzed here) could be used to prime psychological tendencies or psychological tendencies could be primed to foster the creation of cultural practices and products.

This research underscores that when it comes to self and well-being, local context matters. Each culture cycle has its



**Figure 1.** The cultural construction of self and well-being in (a) Boston and (b) San Francisco  
Note: VC = venture capital.

own logic and adjusting to it is necessary for being an effective self and for being well. Unless these logics are made explicit (and even if they are), adjustments may not be easy. Understanding these culture cycles, however, has the potential to explain differences in self and well-being that have gone

unexplained, been dismissed as stereotyping, or been misattributed to other internal psychological or physiological sources. What these studies make clear is that, in tandem with individual differences in personality, the cultural cycles of one's particular contexts are a key source of self and well-being.

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