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Pers Soc Psychol Rev 2011 15: 142 originally published online 17 August 2010
DOI: 10.1177/1088868310373752

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://psr.sagepub.com/content/15/2/142
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Abstract
Since the publication of Markus and Kitayama’s pivotal article on culture and the self, the concepts of independent, relational, and interdependent self-construal have become important constructs in cultural psychology and research on the self. The authors review the history of these constructs, their measurement and manipulation, and their roles in cognition, emotion, motivation, and social behavior. They make suggestions for future research and point to problems still to be sorted out. Researchers interested in these constructs have many opportunities to make important contributions to the literature in a variety of fields, including health psychology, education, counseling, and international relations.

Keywords
culture, ethnicity, self, identity, social cognition

When research on the self burst onto the social psychological scene more than three decades ago, it reflected the cultural assumptions and beliefs of the researchers’ backgrounds. These researchers were largely from European, Canadian, and European American backgrounds, and they assumed that the self was autonomous, independent of the influence of others, bounded, unique, integrated, and fundamentally prior to society and social relationships (Geertz, 1975). In the intervening decades, both the researchers studying the self and the assumptions about the self have become more culturally diverse. This diversity has resulted in the articulation and development of the concept of self-construal. First coined by Markus and Kitayama (1991), research on self-construal has come to have a prominent place among influential concepts in psychology, especially in regard to research on self-related concepts and processes, social cognition, close relationships, and cultural psychology.

This article reviews the existing research on self-construal and its role in cognition, emotion, motivation, and social behavior. Our overarching goal is to provide a guidebook for researchers—an integrated look at where research and theory on self-construal are after 20 years and where we believe they are going and need to go. To achieve this goal, we first address the What is it? question with a brief review of the history of this construct and its development since the original statement by Markus and Kitayama (1991). Second, we address How is it investigated? with a review of the most common measurement tools and manipulations. Third, we address the question, Why is self-construal important? by detailing the accumulated evidence regarding its role in psychological processes. Throughout, we also seek to point out gaps, problems, or inconsistencies in the research record to explore Where to from here? with the hopes that researchers will continue to further refine the methods used to investigate this topic and further explore the implications of self-construal for human behavior.

What Is Self-Construal?
Psychological researchers have long been interested in the existence and implications of multiple representations of the self. William James (1890), for example, distinguished the material, social, and spiritual selves. One of the most productive distinctions has been made between private and public selves (Baumeister, 1986; Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984). This distinction between inner, unobservable selves and the outer selves we portray to others provided a useful conceptual framework for understanding a range of representations of the self and their implications for cognition, affect, and behavior. Not surprisingly, however, this early work did not explicitly consider the ways in which culture shapes the development and expression of these different types of self. In one of the earliest efforts to do so, Triandis (1989) elaborated on the distinctions among the private, public, and collective selves (cf. Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984) and argued that cultural differences reliably lead to differential expression or sampling...
of these three selves. Around the same time, Markus and Kitayama (1991) similarly reviewed research that showed that members of European or American and Asian cultures constructed differing self-views. As they illustrated, Western cultures prioritize the individual over the group, and individuals seek independence, autonomy, and separateness from others. In East Asian cultures, the group is prioritized over the individual, and individuals seek to fit into the group and maintain harmony in the group. Although other researchers had broached the issue of the self as critical in understanding cultural differences, Triandis (1989) and Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) articles were the first to make this argument clearly and to make it accessible to a wide audience.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) coined the term self-construal in describing the ways that Americans and Japanese define and make meaning of the self. To construe means to “show or explain the meaning or intention of” (Random House Dictionary, 1980); thus, self-construal refers to how individuals define and make meaning of the self. Markus and Kitayama identified two such self-construals, independent and interdependent. Although they noted that these are only two of many possible self-construals, the term self-construal has become virtually synonymous with independence and interdependence; thus, self-construal is typically defined as how individuals see the self in relation to others.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that Europeans and Americans construe the self as fundamentally individual and separate from others, and they labeled this the independent self-construal (IndSC). For persons with high IndSC, the question, “Who am I?” is likely to be answered with reference to internal traits that are stable across situations (e.g., outgoing, shy, intelligent, ambitious) or that set one apart from others (e.g., especially creative, a straight-A student). Demonstrating one’s uniqueness is an important basis of self-esteem. Being “the same person” across situations and communicating assertively are considered signs of maturity. Interpersonal relationships are, of course, important to those with an IndSC, but significant others are typically important foremost for how they benefit the individual (e.g., for the support or esteem they provide to the independent individual). Furthermore, others are a source of social comparison for confirming one’s uniqueness (compared to my friends, I am more creative) and internal traits (I demonstrate my compassion in my relationships with my family).

In contrast, Markus and Kitayama (1991) pointed out that the Japanese tend to construe the self as fundamentally connected to others and defined by relationships with others, which they labeled the interdependent self-construal (InterSC). For persons with high InterSC, the question, “Who am I?” is likely to be answered with reference to important relationships (e.g., daughter, friend, coworker) or group memberships (fraternity member, Asian American). Demonstrating one’s ability to fit into the group is an important basis of self-esteem. Changing one’s behavior to respond to the demands of different situations and regulating emotional expression to maintain group harmony are considered signs of maturity. Interpersonal relationships are of utmost importance to those with an InterSC, with the individual concerned primarily with how he or she benefits the group. Others become a source of definition for the self (I am a responsible student and an impulsive friend), and social comparison is used to determine whether one is fulfilling obligations within those relationships.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) and others (e.g., Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1989) have argued that individuals possess both IndSC and InterSC but that cultural context typically promotes the development of one or the other self-construal more strongly. As noted above, the United States and Japan are generally considered prototypical cultures that promote development of IndSC and InterSC, respectively, with IndSC tending to be more well elaborated and salient in Western countries and InterSC tending to be more well elaborated and salient in non-Western countries, including parts of Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. Not surprisingly then, IndSC and InterSC are typically identified as corresponding to individualist and collectivist cultures. However, Markus and Kitayama never make this connection explicitly.

Nonetheless, the connection between IndSC and individualism and between InterSC and collectivism is clear—so clear, in fact, that it can be difficult to distinguish between self-construal and individualism–collectivism (IND-COL). Conceptually, IND-COL is a dimension used to describe cultures, whereas self-construal describes individuals. IND-COL, then, is not an individual differences variable, whereas self-construal is. This distinction is complicated by the fact that where a country falls on the IND-COL dimension is typically determined by the average responses of individuals on self-report surveys. Indeed, many self-report measures of IND-COL and self-construal share items. Despite these measurement problems, the conceptual distinction remains: IND-COL describes cultures; self-construal describes individuals. Sports analogies are helpful in understanding this distinction. We might refer to a football team as having a good defense, whereas we describe the individual members of the defense as quick, agile, and athletic. Without these individual traits of quickness, agility, and athleticism, the team could not have a strong defense, just as a culture can not be individualistic if the majority of its members are not independent. Similarly, the individual members of the football team vary in the degree to which they possess these traits, just as individuals within a culture vary in the degree to which they espouse an independent versus interdependent self-construal.

A strong defense in football requires more than just skilled players; it also requires strategies and game plans that go beyond the individual players’ abilities. Similarly, self-construal is only one of several components that distinguish individualistic and collectivist cultures. For example, Triandis (1995) identified three additional attributes that distinguish individualistic and collectivist cultures: (a) variation in structure of goals...
(in-group focused vs. individual focused), (b) behavior as a function of social norm versus individual attitudes, and (c) a focus on the needs of the in-group versus social exchanges. These attributes may in some ways be related to self-construal (e.g., variation in goals may derive from variation in self-construal), but in this article, we will define self-construal as one component of IND-COL. Unfortunately, the two terms are often confused or used interchangeably. Where relevant, we comment on this confusion and strive to articulate the source of the confusion and clarify the important differences.

**Tripartite Self-Construal: Relational–Interdependent and Collective–Interdependent Self-Construals**

The distinctions made by Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Triandis (1989) began to stimulate investigation into other varieties of self-construal. Triandis described private, public, and collective selves, but this tripartite distinction has unfortunately received relatively little empirical attention. Instead, researchers have focused more attention on self-construal based on close relationships as a third dimension of self-construal (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Y. Kashima et al., 1995). Y. Kashima and his colleagues (1995) were the first to demonstrate that independent, collective, and relational views of the self were empirically separable. In addition, they argued that whereas individualism and collectivism differentiated Western from East Asian cultural groups, across cultures men and women were best differentiated on the relatedness dimension.

In a separate line of research, Cross and Madson (1997; Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000) argued that gender differences in behavior among Western participants could also be explained by differences in self-construal. Integrating research by gender theorists (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Jordan & Surrey, 1986; Stewart & Lykes, 1985) with the newer work on culture and self, they suggested that women in Western societies were more likely than men to construct self-views that incorporated close relationships with other people. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to conceive of themselves as independent or separate from their close relationships (but for a different perspective on gender differences in self-construal, see Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Their article went on to detail how these differences in self-construals could explain many observed gender differences in cognition, motivation, emotion, and social behavior.

Although Cross and Madson (1997) used the term *interdependent self-construal* to refer to ways in which women in the West may define themselves in terms of close relationships, they acknowledged that the form of interdependence experienced by Western women could be quite different from the group-oriented interdependence of East Asians. As they wrote then, “[F]or U.S. adults, a self-construal based on relationships with others may be more likely to focus on individual relationships (e.g., with one’s spouse, close friends, siblings) than on group memberships or social roles” (p. 8). In later work, Cross and her colleagues (2000), referred to this as the **relational–interdependent self-construal** (often shortened to **relational self-construal** [RelSC]). They defined RelSC as the extent to which people define themselves in terms of close relationships and differentiated it from the group-centered collective–interdependent self-construal described by Markus and Kitayama (1991; often measured by the Singelis, 1994, Interdependent Self-Construal Scale).

RelSC, therefore, is a general individual difference construct and is distinct from other similar-sounding constructs that focus on specific close relationships. For example, the Inclusion of Other in the Self scale (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) taps commitment to a specific relationship rather than a general orientation to represent oneself in terms of close relationships (as does the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal Scale [RISC]).

Andersen’s (Andersen & Chen, 2002) theory of relational selves also focuses on specific relationships and on individuals’ distinctive and persistent ways of interacting in particular relationships. For instance, Leigh’s interactions with her peers may be marked by confidence and positive emotions, but the particular relational self (in Andersen’s terms) that has been created in her interactions with her overbearing older brother may be uniquely marked by resentment and anger. RelSC, instead, is conceived as a relatively global dimension that captures the extent to which people conceptualize themselves as defined by their close relationships.

Several researchers have sought to differentiate RelSC and collective–interdependent self-construal. For example, Gabriel and Gardner (1999; also see Baumeister & Sommer, 1997) investigated the hypothesis that American men and women differ in the extent to which they are characterized by these two forms of InterSC. Using a variety of methods, they found that American women were more likely than men to characterize themselves in relational terms but men were more likely than women to describe themselves in terms of larger, group collectives. Thus, InterSC may be considered to have two components: a relational component (RelSC) and a collective or group-oriented component (Coll-InterSC).

Unfortunately this distinction is rarely observed by researchers; many times, the term *interdependent self-construal* is used without regard to whether close relationships or group memberships are the focus of attention. This is understandable, given the history of the concept of InterSC. With a focus on East–West differences, Triandis (1995) and Markus and Kitayama (1991) defined collectivism and InterSC in terms of close relationships and important in-groups, including families and work groups (thus, they grouped together relational and group-oriented components of self-construal). More recently, Yuki, Maddux, Brewer, and Takemura (2005) showed that East Asian in-groups tend to be based on relational ties whereas Western groups are based on categorical distinctions between in-groups and out-groups. Thus, they suggest that InterSC among East Asians primarily focuses on close relationships (and so emphasizes the RelSC) whereas InterSC among European Americans primarily focuses on groups and collectives (and so emphasizes Coll-InterSC). Building on this work and taking the perspective of social identity theory,
Brewer and Chen (2007) argued that collectivism is best understood as membership in large shared social categories (e.g., ethnicity, nationality) rather than in groups of relationship connections, and they showed that most measures of collectivism or InterSC focus on interpersonal relationships. As this debate illustrates, there is significant confusion over the boundaries between RelSC and Coll-InterSC. We view InterSC as a superordinate category, with RelSC and Coll-InterSC as subcomponents within this larger category. In many cases researchers have used InterSC to refer to both relational and collective orientations; we have chosen to adopt the researchers' usage in these cases except where one or the other subcomponents is made explicit. Despite these distinctions, most research continues to focus on the more general consequences of InterSC and IndSC articulated by Markus and Kitayama (1991). In the next section, we briefly review their hypotheses.

**Hypothesized Consequences of Cultural Differences in Self-Construal**

Markus and Kitayama (1991) offered detailed discussions of the implications of self-construal for cognition, emotion, and motivation, reviewing cross-cultural literature that supported their hypotheses. Of course, such literature did not directly measure self-construal, so Markus and Kitayama relied on the assumption that Japanese people were more likely to have an InterSC, whereas those from Western cultures were more likely to have an IndSC (cf. Matsumoto, 1999). Markus and Kitayama demonstrated that a broad range of cultural differences in cognition, emotion, and motivation could be explained by invoking cultural differences in self-construal. We briefly review their hypotheses concerning the effects of self-construal on cognition, emotion, and motivation.

**Effects of self-construal on cognition.** Given that those with an InterSC define the self in relation to others and are motivated to fit in to the current social context, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that interdependent individuals are more likely to pay attention to others and to social context, resulting in three primary effects on cognition. First, individuals with an InterSC are likely to know more about, and thus to have more elaborate cognitive representations of, others than are those with an IndSC. Second, individuals with an InterSC are more likely to have cognitive representations of the self that incorporate a social context than are independent individuals. Finally, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that self-construal also affects cognitive processes that appear to be non-social, such as counterfactual thinking or reasoning about abstract concepts. They argued that interdependent individuals are more likely to consider their role in the relationship between themselves and the interviewer and thus to respond to apparently abstract questions differently than an independent individual who is much less, if at all, concerned with how his or her answer will be construed.

**Effects on emotion.** Arguing that most emotions implicate the self, Markus and Kitayama (1991) hypothesized that “emotional experience should vary systematically with the construal of the self” (p. 235). More specifically, emotional experience should vary in two ways. First, the same emotion may be elicited by different conditions for IndSC and InterSC. Second, people with IndSC versus InterSC will express and experience different emotions. Markus and Kitayama (1991) distinguished between so-called ego-focused emotions (e.g., anger, pride) and other-focused emotions (e.g., shame). They hypothesized that those with an IndSC are more likely to express and to experience ego-focused emotions, whereas those with an InterSC are more likely to express and to experience other-focused emotions. Relatedly, Markus and Kitayama hypothesized that people with differing self-construals would express and/or experience the same emotions with differing intensity. For example, not only are interdependent individuals expected to experience anger less often than independent individuals, but they are expected to experience anger less intensely when they do experience it.

**Effects on motivation.** Markus and Kitayama (1991) offered several hypotheses regarding the effects of self-construal on the types of goals individuals are motivated to pursue. The most intuitive of these is that individuals with an InterSC are more likely to be motivated by socially oriented goals. Importantly, it is not that these individuals have a higher need for affiliation, per se, but rather that they are more likely to be motivated to fulfill their roles within important relationships. Second, Markus and Kitayama argued that agency, or a sense of personal control and efficacy, is experienced differently, depending on one’s self-construal. Specifically, for those with independent selves, agency will be experienced as an effort to express one’s internal needs, rights, and capacities and to withstand undue social pressure, whereas among those with interdependent selves, agency will be experienced as an effort to be receptive to others, to adjust to their needs and demands, and to restrain one’s own inner needs or desires. (p. 240)

In other words, independent and interdependent individuals both experience a sense of being active agents in pursuit of their goals, but these specific goals differ depending on one’s self-construal (cf. Kağıtçibaşı, 2005).

Third, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that motives such as self-enhancement take on different meanings when the self that is being enhanced is independent versus interdependent. For example, given an InterSC, self-esteem is based on one’s ability to fit in, whereas for those with an IndSC, self-esteem is based on one’s ability to be unique. Thus, to enhance the IndSC, one is motivated to demonstrate uniqueness, resulting in self-serving biases, which are much less common among...
those with an InterSC. These differences in the self and bases for self-esteem also mean that different motives will be experienced as more or less positive or desirable, depending on self-construal. For example, the so-called need for abasement may be desirable for those with an InterSC but considered almost pathological for those with an IndSC.

Finally, given that a sign of maturity for those with an InterSC is the ability to refrain from expressing private attitudes and feelings to maintain social harmony, counterattitudinal behavior is not likely to create dissonance-related distress among those with an InterSC. In other words, those with an InterSC are much less likely to be motivated to reduce cognitive dissonance than are those with an IndSC.

In the remainder of this article, we examine the ways that researchers have responded to and elaborated on the original Markus and Kitayama (1991) theses. Because of space limitations, we focus on research that employs either measures or manipulations of self-construal. Unfortunately, therefore, a thorough description of research that uses culture as a proxy for self-construal must be saved for another time. We begin first with a review of the most frequently used means of measuring and manipulating self-construal, followed by a review of the research examining the role of self-construal in cognition, emotion, motivation, and social behavior.

How Is Self-Construal Studied? Approaches to Measuring and Manipulating Self-Construal

Measuring Independent and Interdependent Self-Construal

Likert-type scales. The majority of research on self-construal has relied on self-report measures with Likert-type scales. Measures of IND-COL, sociotropy–autonomy, allocentrism, and other related constructs are sometimes used as proxy measures of self-construal. However, several measures have been designed specifically to measure IndSC and InterSC as individual-differences variables as defined by Markus and Kitayama (1991). The first and most common of these is the Self-Construal Scale (SCS; Singelis, 1994). The SCS provides separate scores for IndSC and InterSC, consistent with theoretical predictions that the two self-construals are orthogonal dimensions rather than opposite ends of a single continuum (Singelis, 1994). An initial 45-item pool included original items and modified items drawn from existing measures of related constructs. Exploratory principal components analysis, followed by confirmatory factor analyses, in multiethnic Hawaiian samples resulted in two 12-item scales. Scores on the items demonstrated the expected between-group differences, with Asian Americans being more interdependent and less independent than European Americans. Furthermore, InterSC scores predicted participants’ tendency to make situational attributions for behaviors described in short vignettes, supporting the predictive validity of the SCS. However, the interitem reliabilities of the two scales tend to be adequate at best. Singelis (1994) reported Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities of .73 and .74 for the IndSC scale and .69 and .70 for the InterSC scale. Most published research using these scales report comparable reliabilities, although they have been found to be even lower (e.g., α = .58 and .53 on the InterSC and InterSC scales, respectively, among undergraduates in Hong Kong; Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai, 1999).

Additional items have been added to the SCS, resulting in various versions being used in the literature, including IndSC scales with 13 (Singelis et al., 1999), 14 (Trafimow & Finlay, 1996), 15 (Hardin, Leong, & Osipow, 2001), and 16 items (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997) and InterSC scales with 14 (e.g., Yamada & Singelis, 1999) and 15 items (e.g., Hardin et al., 2001; Kwan et al., 1997). The 12- and 15-item versions appear to be most common. In addition, some authors have created a unidimensional self-construal score by reverse scoring the InterSC items (e.g., Aaker, 2000; Pöhlmann & Hannover, 2006); however, such unidimensional scores are clearly contrary to the intended use of the SCS and theoretical understanding of the nature of self-construal (Singelis, 1994). Although most items have good face validity, several have been questioned (e.g., “I value being in good health above everything”; Hardin, Leong, & Bhagwat, 2004; Levine et al., 2003). The SCS has been used in hundreds of studies and translated into numerous languages, including Chinese (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001), Japanese (Ozawa, Crosby, & Crosby, 1996), Greek (Nezlek, Kafetsios, & Smith, 2008), Thai (Polyorat & Alden, 2005), Arabic, and Hebrew (Kurman, 2001).

A second self-report measure of self-construal is that developed by Gudykunst et al. (1996). As with the SCS (Singelis, 1994) a large item pool was drawn from existing measures (including the SCS) and supplemented with original items. Data from four countries (United States, Japan, Korea, and Australia) were submitted to a principal components analysis, after standardizing item responses within culture. On one of the two factors, 29 items had acceptably high loadings, resulting in a 14-item IndSC scale and a 15-item InterSC scale. A total of 3 (6) items on the IndSC (InterSC) scale also appear on the Singelis scales. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities were adequate to good, ranging from .80 (United States) to .85 (Korea) on the IndSC scale and from .73 (Korea) to .83 (Australia) on the InterSC scale. Although the four cultural groups did not differ as might be expected in mean scores on the IndSC and InterSC scales, self-construal did predict high and low context communication as expected.

Hackman, Ellis, Johnson, and Staley (1999) further tested and refined the Gudykunst et al. (1996) scales. Using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a large sample of undergraduates drawn from three countries (the United States, New Zealand, and Kyrgyzstan), Hackman et al. were unable to fit the hypothesized two-factor model to adequately fit the
data, despite numerous data-driven modifications to the model. However, when the IndSC and InterSC items were factor analyzed separately, two well-fitting one-factor solutions were derived after dropping several items from each scale and allowing pairs of error variances among some items to covary. These analyses resulted in an 11-item IndSC scale and a 12-item InterSC scale. Cronbach’s alpha reliabilities were adequate to good, ranging from .89 (United States) to .77 (Kyrgyzstan) on the IndSC scale and from .86 (New Zealand) to .78 (Kyrgyzstan) on the InterSC scale. Moreover, the 11-item IndSC scale demonstrated measurement invariance (i.e., invariant factor loadings) across all three cultures; two items on the InterSC scale were not invariant in the Kyrgyzstan sample. Collapsing across the three samples, both scales demonstrated measurement invariance between genders.

A third Likert-type measure of self-construal was developed by Leung and Kim in 1997 and described in an unpublished manuscript (cited in Levine et al., 2003); not surprisingly, therefore, it has been used less in the literature than the other two measures. It consists of two 15-item scales, with the majority of items (11 independent and 9 interdependent) appearing on at least one of the other two scales (see Levine et al., 2003, for a list of items appearing on all three measures). Other less frequently used measures have been developed by Oyserman (1993), Kağitçibaşi (2007), and E. S. Kashima and Hardie (2000).

**Twenty Statements Test as a measure of self-construal.** The Twenty Statements Test (TST; Kuhn & McPartland, 1954) has also been used as a self-report measure of self-construal (e.g., Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005; Somech, 2000). On the TST, participants are asked to complete 20 sentence stems that begin, “I am . . .” Responses to these statements may then be coded by the researcher as either independent (e.g., “I am intelligent”; “I am shy”), relational (e.g., “I am Bob’s girlfriend”; “I am a mother”), or interdependent (e.g., “I am on the soccer team”; “I am African American”). The number of independent, relational, and interdependent statements generated may then be used as self-construal scores. Unfortunately, authors rarely provide detailed descriptions of their coding schemes, and researchers may define RelSC and InterSC quite differently. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to compare the findings from different researchers using the TST. Furthermore, the TST does not assess the importance of self-views to the individual. Members of East Asian societies often belong to fewer groups compared to members of Western societies, but these groups are arguably more important, stable, and self-defining for East Asians (Triandis, 1989).

**Self-report measures of self-construal: Two or more factors?** Given that Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) self-construal theory posits two dimensions of self-construal, IndSC and InterSC, all three Likert-type measures described above were explicitly designed to measure only these two factors. Neither Singelis (1994) nor Gudykunst et al. (1996) considered more than two factors during development of their self-construal scales. However, there is considerable evidence that this simple two-factor structure does not provide a good fit to the data from any of the scales (Hardin, 2006; Hardin et al., 2004; Levine et al., 2003). In fact, the results of a CFA led Singelis (1994) to note that for the SCS, “Though clearly superior to the one-factor model, the two-factor model seems only adequate” (p. 586). The two-factor model was found to be a poor fit to responses on (a) the Leung and Kim (1997) scale in samples of college students from the United States (mainland and Hawaii), Japan, and South Korea (Levine et al., 2003), (b) the Gudykunst et al. (1996) scale among college students in Hawaii (Levine et al., 2003), and (c) Singelis’s (1994) SCS among college students in South Korea, Japan (Levine et al., 2003), and the mainland United States (Hardin, 2006; Hardin et al., 2004; Levine et al., 2003).

More recent research suggests that despite being designed to measure self-construal in terms of independence and interdependence, these measures actually have a multidimensional structure. Content analyses of the TST (Somech, 2000) and factor analyses of the Leung and Kim (1997) scale (Levine et al., 2003) and the Singelis (1994) scale (Guo, Schwartz, & McCabe, 2008; Hardin, 2006; Hardin et al., 2004; Sato & McCabe, 1998) all show that multidimensional structures fit the data better than a simple two-factor structure. For example, Hardin et al. (2004) identified a higher order factor structure underlying items on the SCS, with four independence factors (Autonomy/Assertiveness, Individualism, Behavioral Consistency, and Primacy of Self) and two interdependent factors (Esteem for Group and Relational Interdependence). Note that the two interdependence factors identified in the SCS items map closely onto the RelSC–Coll-InterSC distinction discussed above. Importantly, this higher order multifactor structure replicated to samples of Asian American (Hardin et al., 2004), European American (Hardin, 2006; Hardin et al., 2004), African American, and Latino/a (Hardin, 2006) students.

Measuring such specific aspects of IndSC and InterSC does seem to be useful. For example, Somech (2000) found that although kibbutz members were generally more interdependent and less independent than urban residents in Israel, the kibbutzim endorsed some aspects of IndSC more than the urban residents, who endorsed some aspects of InterSC more than the kibbutzim. Cultural differences in in-group favoritism were better explained by the degree to which participants emphasized personal or in-group interests than by broader measures of self-construal or IND-COL (Y.-R. Chen, Brockner, & Katz, 1998). Hardin (2006) also found that more than 50% more variance in social anxiety could be accounted for by aspects of independence and interdependence than by the broader dimensions.

Based on this evidence that existing measures of self-construal have a multidimensional structure and that these specific aspects of independence and interdependence are useful predictors of between-group differences and other psychological phenomena, there is a clear need for a psychometrically
sound measure of multidimensional self-construal. Hardin, Cross, and Hoang (2009) have begun development of such a measure.

**Implicit measures of self-construal.** Recently, Kitayama and his colleagues have used several different measures of basic psychological tendencies as implicit measures of self-construal. Kitayama, Mesquita, and Karasawa (2006) were apparently the first to suggest that measures of psychological processes thought to reliably be related to IndSC and InterSC might be used as implicit measures of self-construal. They suggested that measures of the tendency to experience socially engaging emotions (e.g., guilt, relatedness) versus socially disengaging emotions (e.g., anger, pride) might be useful as implicit measures of self-construal (see the section below on self-construal and affect for more on the distinction between socially engaging and disengaging emotions). Later, Kitayama, Park, Sevincer, Karasawa, and Uskul (2009) used such a measure as one of five implicit measures of self-construal. The others were the tendency to make situational versus dispositional attributions, use of holistic versus focused attention, relational versus individual correlates of happiness, and symbolic self-inflation. As expected, participants from the United States scored significantly more independently (i.e., reported more socially disengaging emotions, made more situational attributions, used more focused attention, demonstrated stronger personal correlates of happiness, and demonstrated a larger inflated self) than participants from Japan; moreover, participants from two Western European countries (the United Kingdom and Germany) did not differ from each other and scored between the U.S. and Japanese participants on all five measures. Despite this consistent pattern of results, the five implicit measures were uncorrelated with each other across all four groups, a point to which we return at the end of the article. In addition, scores on an explicit measure of self-construal, Singelis’s (1994) SCS, were also uncorrelated with all five implicit measures, across all four groups. This lack of convergence between the explicit SCS measure and the implicit measures is consistent with other research that shows that implicit and explicit measures of self-construal are not correlated with measures of independence (e.g., the Singelis IndSC Scale, \( r = .08 \)). The RISC scale generally is unrelated to well-being measures such as Satisfaction with Life (\( r = .07 \); Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) and the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale (\( r = .01 \)). Examination of the incremental utility of the RISC scale showed that it predicted a significant proportion of variance in scores on broad measures of attitudes toward relationships and group memberships, controlling for other related measures (Cross et al., 2000). Thus, the RISC scale taps self-definition in a unique fashion that is not tapped by other measures of relatedness, expressivity, or communalism.

Although Cross and Madson (1997) argued that women in the United States are more likely to construct a RelSC than are men, RelSC is characterized by the degree to which one includes others in the self or defines the self in terms of close relationships, not the degree to which individuals endorse gender-stereotyped attributes. In fact, Cross and her colleagues (2000) were wary of making cross-cultural claims about gender differences in their measure of the RelSC because they recognized that cultures may vary widely in their construction of gender-related norms. Unfortunately, others have at times assumed that culturally based stereotypes of men and women are equivalent to IndSC and RelSC, respectively (e.g., Guimond, Chatard, Martinot, Crisp, & Redersdorff, 2006). For example, Guimond et al. (2006) define IndSC with items that were found to be central to the stereotype of men in France: lazy, coarse, boastful, and selfish. Although these authors argue that this set of attributes is consistent with the masculine gender role of dominance and power, their argument is based on the mistaken assumption that IndSC is defined by the male gender role and that RelSC is defined by the female gender role. This confounding of cultural gender stereotyping and self-construal impedes progress; cultural stereotypes may vary widely, but definitions of IndSC, InterSC, and RelSC are anchored in a theoretical focus on the relation of self to others. This theoretical focus on self-other relations that defines self-construal is independent of a particular culture’s understanding of gender.
Measuring Collective–Interdependent Self-Construal

Although the RelSC is defined in terms of significant dyadic relationships, the Coll-InterSC is defined in terms of significant group memberships. Brewer and Chen (2007) demonstrated that although most existing measures of collectivism and of interdependence assess both types of interdependence, relationally oriented items are more than twice as common. Brewer and Chen argued that cross-cultural researchers need to clearly delineate between these two types of interdependence, as they have very different implications and predict different outcomes. For example, although past research has noted that men tend to score lower than women on measures of interdependence (see Cross & Madson, 1997), Gabriel and Gardner (1999) demonstrated that distinguishing between RelSC and Coll-InterSC yields more nuanced findings: Men score lower than women in terms of RelSC but higher than women in terms of collective–InterSC.

The measure used in Gabriel and Gardner (1999) study, the Collective Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (CISC), was, until recently, the only measure specifically designed to assess collective or group InterSC. Gabriel and Gardner created the CISC by modifying the RISC (Cross et al., 2000) to replace references to relationship partners with references to group memberships (e.g., “When I think of myself, I often think of groups I belong to as well” instead of “When I think of myself, I often think of my close friends of family as well”). In a sample of college students, the CISC showed excellent interitem reliability (α = .90), was uncorrelated with scores on the RISC (r = .07), and was correlated with a measure of masculinity (r = .25).

More recently, Harb and Smith (2008) created the Six-Fold Self-Construal Scale that integrates Brewer’s work on the personal, relational, and group selves (Brewer & Chen, 2007; Brewer & Gardner, 1996) with Singelis’s work on vertical and horizontal IND-COL (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). The scale assesses the horizontal and vertical collective self-construal as well as the horizontal and vertical RelSC, the personal self-construal, and a humanity-bound self-construal. Each of the six dimensions comprises five items (e.g., “I feel I have a strong relationship with _______”) that are rated on a 7-point Likert-type scale. The horizontal collective dimension referred to “students at my university,” whereas the vertical collective dimension refers to “my social grouping.” In samples of college students from the United Kingdom, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan, reliabilities on all six dimensions were adequate to good, ranging from .68 on the personal self dimension (Jordan) to .92 on the vertical collective dimension (the United Kingdom). Most reliabilities were in the mid-.80s. As might be expected, the Arab samples tended to score higher than the U.K. sample on the collective self-construals, whereas the U.K. sample tended to score higher than the other samples on the RelSCs. In light of Brewer and Chen’s (2007) call for researchers to distinguish between the relational and collective (or group) interdependence, new measures such as this are likely to be of increasing utility.

Between- and Within-Group Differences in Self-Construal

These measures have facilitated the explosion in research on self-construal by allowing researchers explicitly to measure IndSC and InterSC and to test their relations to a range of other cognitive, affective, and behavioral variables (which we review more thoroughly below). The development of these measures has also allowed researchers to explore between- and within-group differences in self-construal. To the surprise of many, however, the results from such research tend to be inconsistent, often showing that individuals from different countries do not demonstrate the expected differences in self-construal. After reviewing the literature, Matsumoto (1999) concluded that North Americans do not have higher IndSCs than East Asians, who do not have higher InterSCs than North Americans. A later meta-analysis (Levine et al., 2003) also found that East Asians do not have a higher InterSC than North Americans, nor do East Asians have a higher InterSC than IndSC. Both reviews find examples not only of an absence of difference (e.g., North Americans and Japanese having equally high IndSCs; Krull et al., 1999; Sato & Cameron, 1999) but of theoretically incongruent differences, such as North Americans having a higher InterSC than Japanese (Kleinknecht, Dinnel, Kleinknecht, Hiruma, & Hirada, 1997; Sato & Cameron, 1999; for a review, see Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). More recent research continues to find such anomalies using these measures (Kitayama et al., 2009). Matsumoto concludes that the theory of self-construal itself is fundamentally flawed: Culture does not reliably predict self-construal in the ways predicted by theory.

Other authors have been less quick to attribute the mixed results in the literature to flawed theory without first considering other possibilities. One of these is that scores on self-construal measures are affected by situational priming, such that uncontrolled aspects of the research environment inadvertently activate one or the other self-construal (Levine et al., 2003). Across three studies using the Leung and Kim (1997) scales, however, there was no evidence that situational priming affected either InterSC or IndSC scores among North Americans.

Levine et al. (2003) interpreted these results as supporting another explanation for the mixed results in the literature: that measures of self-construal are fundamentally flawed. These authors argued that because the InterSC is defined as a situationally determined, and therefore variable, sense of self, interdependence scale scores should be sensitive to priming. In failing to find such priming effects, they concluded that the InterSC scale lacks construct validity. Other authors, however, have argued that although we would expect a high InterSC individual’s sense of self and concomitant cognitions, emotions, or behaviors to vary based on the situation, we would not expect
his or her fundamental level of InterSC to be variable (Gudykunst & Lee, 2003; M.-S. Kim & Raja, 2003). Thus, these authors contend, the failure of priming to induce changes in self-construal scale scores is actually evidence for the construct validity of these scales.

Other contextual factors may, in fact, explain the failure to find predicted between-group differences, however. Heine, Lehman, Peng, and Greenholtz (2002) demonstrated that so-called reference group effects inherent in the Likert-type scales used by common self-report measures of self-construal can account for much of the data. Just as a 5’9” man would rate himself somewhat tall if he lived in a culture where the average male height was 5’8” but short if in a culture where the average height was 6’, a moderately interdependent individual might rate himself or herself quite differently in terms of interdependence depending on his or her reference group. If North Americans use other (presumably highly independent, on average) North Americans as their reference group, they will have a lower IndSC score than if they use Japanese as their referent group, who are presumably perceived to be less independent.

Heine et al. (2002) argued that because measures of self-construal do not specify a reference group, participants are likely to use their own cultural group as their referent. Indeed, across two studies with bicultural Canadian and Japanese participants, such reference group effects were found in scores on Singelis’s (1994) SCS. When participants were given no explicit instructions regarding reference groups (i.e., the standard self-construal scale instructions were used), expected between-group differences were weak or absent. When participants were explicitly asked to use their own group as a reference, differences opposite to that predicted by theory were found: Canadians had significantly higher InterSC scores than the Japanese. However, when participants were explicitly asked to use the other group as their reference, expected between-group differences were found: Bicultural Canadians comparing themselves to “most Japanese” perceived themselves as significantly more independent and less interdependent than bicultural Japanese who were comparing themselves to “most North Americans,” which is exactly what self-construal theory would predict.

Furthermore, because individuals within the same country are likely to share a common cultural standard of reference, reference-group effects should be attenuated or absent when self-construal scale scores are compared for different ethnic groups within the same country (e.g., Asian Americans compared to European Americans), allowing expected between-group differences more readily to emerge (Heine et al., 2002). Indeed, Levine et al. (2003) noted that most studies that use multiethnic samples within the same country yielded results consistent with the predictions of self-construal theory. Finally, we would expect such reference-group effects to affect explicit, self-report measures of self-construal, but not more implicit measures. Indeed, Kitayama et al. (2009) found that North Americans, Western Europeans, and Japanese differed in the expected directions on all five of their implicit measures of self-construal, despite demonstrating unexpected patterns on the explicit measure (Singelis’s, 1994, SCS).

One other methodological issue also accounts for the conflicting data on between- and within-group differences in self-construal: problems with the content of existing self-report measures (Noguchi, 2007). Hardin et al. (2004) noted that the items on Singelis’s (1994) SCS do not capture several important aspects of IndSC (e.g., the importance of one’s private thoughts and feelings or the role of others in social comparison) or InterSC (e.g., a preference for communicating indirectly). Noguchi argued more specifically that (a) existing measures fail to adequately assess the extent to which individuals rely on and are sensitive to external versus internal information and (b) this is precisely the domain in which cultural differences should be most likely to emerge. Thus, researchers have failed to find expected cross-cultural differences in self-construal because they have failed to measure specific aspects of self-construal most likely to differ cross-culturally. To test this hypothesis, Noguchi constructed a new measure with items specifically designed to tap into the extent to which one considers others’ viewpoints (i.e., the extent to which one relies on external versus internal information).

Across several studies, Noguchi found that Japanese students did score higher on this other-focused factor whereas American students scored higher on a self-focused factor. Interestingly, Americans consistently scored higher on a helping-others factor, providing further evidence for the importance of both the specific content of items on self-construal scales and measuring self-construal multidimensionally.

Manipulations of Self-Construal

The development of priming manipulations took research on self-construal into a new era. This development allows researchers to move from reliance on culture as a proxy for self-construal or on explicit self-report measures to experimental manipulations of these constructs. As a result, researchers can more confidently examine causal hypotheses and within-culture consequences of activation of the three different components of self-construal (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). The premise in this work is that all persons, no matter their cultural background, construct independent, relational, and collective–interdependent self-construals. Cultural practices and affordances, however, result in variability in the elaboration and accessibility of independent, relational, or interdependent self-knowledge. Priming techniques can make the self-knowledge associated with one or another of these self-construals temporarily accessible; thus, priming can be used to experimentally examine the effects of IndSC, RelSC, and InterSC on behavior. In this section, we describe the primary ways that self-construal has been manipulated and some of the issues surrounding these manipulations.

The first studies to manipulate IndSC and InterSC were conducted by Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991). They
examined the effects of two different manipulations with U.S. college students. In the first technique, participants are asked to think about what makes them different from their family and friends (IndSC prime) or what makes them similar to their family and friends (InterSC prime; we refer to this as the similar/different prime technique). In the second technique, participants read a story about a ruler selecting a general to send to war based on either individualistic concerns (how it would increase the ruler’s status, prestige) or collective concerns (because he was a member of the ruler’s family). They examined the effects of these manipulations on open-ended responses to the “Who am I?” test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954). The proportions of two kinds of statements were analyzed: private or idiocentric self-views (deriving from the IndSC) and collective self-views (deriving from the InterSC). A third category, which they termed allocentric responses, referred to aspects of “interdependence, friendship, responsiveness to others, and sensitivity to the viewpoints of others” (p. 650). Because these relational responses were not relevant to their hypotheses, they were eliminated from the analyses. As expected, participants exposed to the IndSC primes described themselves using more individual, private terms than did those exposed to the InterSC primes, whereas those exposed to the InterSC primes reported more collective and group-oriented responses than did those exposed to the IndSC primes (also see Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998, Study 3). Examination of a small group of Asian Americans in their sample revealed a very similar pattern of responses to the primes.

Unfortunately, these studies did not include a neutral or no-prime control condition, which would help disentangle the direction of the effects in these studies. Given that one would expect European American participants to describe themselves using primarily personal, individual descriptors, it is unclear from these results whether the proportions of the two types of self-statements were increased or decreased by the manipulations relative to a control condition.

A few years later, Brewer and Gardner (1996) and Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee (1999) introduced a third approach to manipulating self-construal. In this technique, participants read a story about going on a trip to the city and circle either singular pronouns (I, me, mine; IndSC prime) or plural pronouns (we, our, us; InterSC prime). Control conditions included a similar task in which third-person pronouns (they, them) or impersonal pronouns (it) were circled. The first series of studies by Brewer and Gardner (1996) focused on aspects of the interdependent (we) self and compared the effects of the we circling task to the control tasks. They hypothesized that when the InterSC (we-us) is primed, others are included in the self, resulting in an increased perception of similarity to others. Using a reaction time task, Brewer and Gardner found that we primed participants made judgments of similarity more quickly than those in the they prime condition. A subsequent study revealed that InterSC-primed participants endorsed collectivist values and obligations to help more than did IndSC-primed participants (Gardner et al., 1999).

These differences were mediated by differences in TST responses; participants primed with InterSC tended to describe themselves in terms of their relationships and group memberships more than did the IndSC-primed participants; TST responses in turn predicted responses to the values and helping measures.

Until recently, it was unclear whether these common InterSC priming techniques made ReISC or group-oriented, Coll-InterSC accessible (or perhaps a combination of the two; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Brewer and Gardner (1996) attempted to tease apart these two dimensions in studies that contrasted a large group collective to the small group implied in the trip to the city task, but they were only partly successful. In their meta-analysis of IND-COL priming manipulations, Oyserman and Lee (2008) categorize the original Brewer and Gardner (1996) pronoun circling task as a relational collectivism manipulation, but they categorize the Sumerian ruler story manipulation as a mixture of relational and group-level collectivism. Unfortunately, they provide little explanation for the basis of these decisions, and little empirical evidence is available to guide such decisions. In short, there has been much ambiguity remaining about which domain of the InterSC is primed by these commonly used primes—the ReISC or the Coll-InterSC.

Recently, however, Stapel and van der Zee (2006) modified the Brewer and Gardner (1996) manipulation to make these distinctions more clear. For ReISC, they modified the paragraph about the trip to the city to start with sentences that clearly focus on a dyad (“I am with you. We are together, the two of us.”). For the Coll-InterSC, they began the paragraph with sentences that focus on being part of a group (“We are a group of people.”). Manipulation checks documented that the IndSC, ReISC, and Coll-InterSC manipulations had the intended effects on the degree to which participants valued being an independent, unique person, being in close relationships, or being part of a group. Using this new method, researchers will be better able to develop and test theories that distinguish the role and function of ReISC and Coll-InterSC in behavior.

Several other priming tasks have also been used successfully in other studies. For example, Utz (2004) asked participants to write about a typical day in the life of a student from a first-person singular perspective or from a third-person singular perspective. She found this manipulation interacted with chronic social value orientation to predict cooperative behavior. Stapel and Koomen (2001) primed IndSC and InterSC by having participants write a story about themselves, describing either “Who I am” using the words I, me, myself, and mine in each sentence or “Who we are” using the words we, our, ourselves, and ours (see Wang and Ross, 2005, for a similar task). Others have used a scrambled sentence task with words such as I, me, mine, unique, different, and independence to prime IndSC and we, our, us, cooperative, share, and similar to prime InterSC (Briley & Wyer, 2001; Kühnen & Hannover, 2000; Utz, 2004).

Several cautions are in order for the researcher interested in priming self-construal. First, the degree to which manipulations prime the self-construal versus other dimensions of...
culture or of individualism and collectivism (IND-COL) is often unclear. For example, some studies use bilingual participants and manipulate the language used in the study (Kemmelmeier & Cheng, 2004; Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002; Trafimow, Silverman, Fan, & Law, 1997) or manipulate cultural icons (Y.-Y. Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). These approaches likely activate the associated self-construal (e.g., InterSC when Chinese language or icons are used) but also likely activate many other dimensions of IND-COL that are unrelated to self-construal. For example, Oyserman and Lee (2008) conclude that languages vary in the degree to which they are focused on abstract versus concrete ways of thinking, which could in turn influence a variety of cognitive tasks. In addition, some manipulations (e.g., language or cultural icons) likely activate other aspects of a specific culture that are unrelated to self-construal. Because of these concerns, studies that manipulate the language used by participants as a proxy for variation in self-construal have been excluded from our review of the literature. More importantly, researchers should be cognizant of the many ways that people from different cultures differ from each other and should not presume that priming different self-construals in members of one cultural group is equivalent to using members of different cultural groups. It is a gross understatement to say that observing the behavior of an American student who has been exposed to one of the InterSC tasks described above is not the same as observing a Japanese or Chinese student. If, however, self-construal is the mechanism hypothesized to explain cultural differences in behavior, this approach would shed light on this causal process in ways that measures do not.

Which of the manipulations described above is most effective in producing differences in self-construal? A meta-analysis of the consequences of priming manipulations by Oyserman and Lee (2008) helps answer this question. They examined the effects of priming tasks on self-concept-related outcomes (e.g., the TST and responses to the Singelis SCS measure). Their results show that the strongest effects were found using the similar/different task (d = .44, n = 4), followed by the Sumerian warrior task (d = .37, n = 6). Other manipulations (e.g., the pronoun circling task) had smaller effects (d < .29) on self-concept-related outcome measures (also see Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009, for a comparison of the effects of different manipulations on responses to the TST). Oyserman and Lee’s meta-analysis also revealed that the different priming approaches differentially affected other types of behavior. For example, the similar/different task had the strongest effects on relationality tasks (e.g., liking for another participant), and the pronoun circling task had the strongest effects on cognitive tasks (e.g., performance on the Embedded Figures task). This suggests that the different priming techniques may activate somewhat different cognitive processes and that researchers should choose their approaches carefully in light of the outcomes in question.

Priming is sometimes a delicate task, and Kühnen and Hannover (2000) caution against the use of very transparent or obvious priming manipulations. When participants are exposed to a very explicit priming task (Moskowitz & Roman, 1992) or when they are reminded of a previous task meant to prime a construct (Strack, Schwarz, Bless, Kubler, & Wanke, 1993), their judgments contrast with the direction of the expected prime (termed a correction contrast). To examine this effect in the self-construal domain, Kühnen and Hannover created a scrambled sentence task in which the four-word sentences focused on either IndSC (“I like being unique”) or InterSC (“I support my team”). Each scrambled sentence also included one additional word that was related to the type of prime—either a word reflecting independence (assertive) or a word reflecting interdependence (help). The authors varied the salience of the IndSC or InterSC prime by having participants write down either the unscrambled sentence (the “overt” prime) or the unnecessary word (the “subtle” prime). When participants were exposed to the subtle primes, the IndSC prime led to less perceived similarity to a target person than the InterSC prime, as would be expected. But the opposite occurred when they were primed with the overt IndSC prime: Participants viewed themselves as more similar to the target person than when primed with the InterSC prime. The effects in the explicit prime condition may be a consequence of the correction effect suggested by others (Strack et al., 1993), or it may be because of a rebalancing of the need for uniqueness and relatedness, as suggested by Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory. Whatever the explanation, this research provides a note of caution to researchers that very strong, explicit manipulations of self-construal may have unintended consequences.

Finally, researchers should ask themselves, “How might chronic individual differences interact with priming manipulations to affect outcomes?” Relatively little research has focused on the interaction of individual differences and priming manipulations within cultural groups (but see Utz, 2004). Gardner and her colleagues (1999) found that priming the culturally nondominant dimension of self-construal (e.g., InterSC for European Americans and IndSC for East Asians) resulted in greater differences relative to a no-prime condition than priming the culturally dominant self-construal. The work by Gardner et al. (1999) also points to our final point about priming manipulations: Relatively few studies have used these priming techniques with non-Western samples. The Oyserman and Lee (2008) meta-analysis of IND-COL priming studies compared the effects of these oft-used priming techniques for participants from Europe or European American backgrounds and Asian backgrounds. Very few studies have used Asian samples (or samples from Africa or Latin America, for that matter), but Oyserman and Lee’s results indicate that the effects of the Sumerian Warrior and the similar/different priming tasks are similar for East Asians and European Americans for most tasks (see their Table 6). More studies are needed to assess the effectiveness of the pronoun circling task for Asian samples (see, e.g., Oyserman, Sorenson, Reber, & Chen, 2009). As Kitayama, Duffy, and Uchida (2007) suggest, if the self of East Asians is understood to be...
also a useful tool for investigating within-culture processes.

**Summary and future directions for measures and manipulations**

The methods of measuring or manipulating IndSC, RelSC, and Coll-InterSC are continuing to evolve. New measurement approaches are focusing on clarifying specific facets of each of these self-views (Hardin et al., 2009) and on developing implicit measures of IndSC and InterSC (Kitayama et al., 2009). Implicit measures of RelSC are still lacking, however. One starting place for the development of an implicit measure of RelSC is the individual versus relational version of the IAT used by Cross, Morris, and Gore (2002, Study 1). Undoubtedly, however, creating an implicit measure valid for multiple cultures is a daunting task.

Several new manipulations of self-construal have been reported in the past decade, but researchers frequently fail to include control conditions. Researchers seeking to use these manipulations should attempt to specifically define the dimension of self-construal of interest and think carefully about the implied focus of the priming manipulation (e.g., relational or collective–interdependent self-construal). The newly developed manipulations that differentiate these two dimensions will enhance researchers’ ability to untangle their effects on behavior. Finally, the great majority of these approaches have been developed in the West by Western researchers with Western assumptions about the person. Although cultural psychology has begun to shine a light on these assumptions and biases, many of these methods may nonetheless reflect cultural assumptions about the person, about ways of thinking and knowing, and about relationships. Focused attempts to consider these constructs from non-Western perspectives and to devise methods to assess or manipulate them that are free from Western biases are the next steps in exploring how variation in self-construal influences behavior. In the next section, we review research that has examined the role of self-construal in cognition, emotion, motivation, and social interaction.

**How Do Self-Construals Shape Behavior?**

For more than three decades, researchers have demonstrated the central importance of the self in information processing, affect regulation, motivation, and social behavior (for reviews, see Baumeister, 1998; Leary & Tangney, 2003; Markus & Wurf, 1987). Most of this work, however, was based on Western samples and assumed an IndSC. If the self is defined interdependently, many of these self-related processes may vary. Although Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Triandis (1989) focused on the role of differing views of the self in explaining cultural differences in behavior, researchers soon found that variation in self-construal was also a useful tool for investigating within-culture processes (particularly in Western societies). Figure 1 depicts the ways that IndSC, Coll-InterSC, and RelSC are thought to influence cognition, affect, motivation, and, through them, social behavior. Although we strive to distinguish Coll-InterSC and RelSC in the figure, many research findings cannot be easily categorized into one or the other of these components of InterSC. In those cases, the figure includes consequences of InterSC with Coll-InterSC. In this section, we review research in each of these domains in which self-construal is measured or manipulated using the most common approaches described above.

**Self-Construal Influences on Cognition**

Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that individuals with high InterSC should be especially likely to pay attention to others and the social context of interaction, resulting in very elaborate cognitive representations of others and self-representations that include social contexts. Since their formulation, researchers have focused on two primary ways that variation in self-construal affects cognition: differences in attention to the context or relationships and different information processing styles. In the following sections, we review the existing research on each of these processes, describing their influences on self-views, social cognition, and nonsocial cognition.

**Context sensitivity versus insensitivity and self-descriptions.** Much of the early research that followed the initial publication of Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) and Triandis’s (1989) articles focused on examining the hypothesis that persons with high InterSC were more likely to describe themselves in terms of their social contexts, including close relationships, group memberships, and social identities. As Markus and Kitayama hypothesized, people from collectivist cultures report more social, collective, or group-oriented self-descriptions than do people from individualistic cultures (Bond & Cheung, 1983; Cousins, 1989; Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995; Shwed & Bourne, 1984). In addition, manipulations of IndSC and InterSC generally result in the corresponding differences in self-descriptions on the TST (Oyserman & Lee, 2008).

Perhaps more importantly, IndSC and InterSC are hypothesized to influence the variability of self-descriptions across situations. If people with high InterSC are sensitive to situational or relational context, then they should tend to describe themselves differently in different situations. Evidence to support this hypothesis is mixed. Cross-cultural studies that use country as a proxy for self-construal do find that East Asian participants’ self-descriptions depend on situational context more than did those of American participants (Cousins, 1989; Kanagawa et al., 2001; Rhee et al., 1995; Suh, 2002).

The existing evidence, however, does not clearly support the association between self-concept variability across situations and measures of self-construal. The clearest support comes from a study in which self-construal was manipulated using
Figure 1. Components of self-construal and their influence on cognition, affect, motivation, and social behavior

Note: Research findings that cannot easily be categorized as relational–interdependent or collective–interdependent were included with collective–interdependent self-construal.
the similar/different manipulation. Participants described themselves as more context dependent in the InterSC priming condition than did participants in the IndSC priming condition (Kühnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001). Studies that measure self-construal are less clear, however. For example, a multicountry study revealed that self-concept consistency was positively related to IndSC but not to InterSC (Church et al., 2008). Another multicountry study discovered that ReISC predicted contextualized self-description differently for Japanese and Korean participants and was not associated with contextualized self-description for participants with European backgrounds (Y. Kashima et al., 2004). In three studies reported by Cross, Gore, and Morris (2003), ReISC (measured by the Cross et al., 2000, RISC scale) generally was not associated with self-concept variability across important relationships (rs ranged from .04 to .14; also see Locke & Christensen, 2007).

Although recent studies have continued to explore cultural differences in self-concept stability within and across relationship contexts (see English & Chen, 2007), there is little evidence of self-construal as a mediator of these cultural differences. In part, this may be because of the methods used to assess variation in the self-concept across situations. Most often, these methods request the participants to describe themselves in different situations (e.g., at home, at school, or with friends) or in different relationships (e.g., with family, with specific friends). Participants from Western cultural backgrounds may feel a press to describe themselves consistently across contexts. The Kühnen et al. (2001) study described above, which manipulated self-construal, assessed context-sensitive self-concept with three items from the SCS (e.g., “I act the same no matter who I am with”). Studies that use experience sampling methods, in which participants describe themselves using handheld computers when alerted, may more accurately tap the degree to which self-construal predicts the extent to which people think about themselves differently in different situations.

**Context-sensitive social cognition.** A variety of social-cognitive tasks have also been linked to variation in self-construal. In studies in which self-construals were primed, Haberstroh, Oyserman, Schwarz, Kühnen, and Ji (2002) showed that InterSC-primed Western participants were more likely than IndSC-primed participants to take a target person’s prior knowledge into account and avoid providing redundant information. Similarly, InterSC-primed participants who prepared to engage in a debate with an opponent listed more of the opponent’s possible arguments in the debate and indicated a greater willingness to listen to the opponent’s position compared to IndSC-primed participants (Gardner & Le, 2000, reported in Gardner & Seeley, 2001). People whose InterSC is chronically activated (or primed in an experiment) tend to give more weight to others’ views or subjective norms about their goals and behaviors than do people with high IndSC, whose personal attitudes are more likely to direct behavior (Torelli, 2006; Trafimow & Finlay, 1996; Ybarra & Trafimow, 1998).

Given that InterSC is associated with context-sensitive cognition, how might it affect memory? In one study, both European American and Asian or Asian American participants were primed with IndSC or InterSC and asked to recall their earliest memories (Wang & Ross, 2005). The IndSC-primed participants tended to describe more individual-focused memories, whereas the InterSC-primed participants tended to describe more group-focused memories and memories that focused on social interaction.

If people with high InterSC are especially likely to attend to the context when thinking about themselves and others, then they should also tend to consider situational factors when making attributions for others’ behavior. In fact, cultural variation in situational versus dispositional attributions was the focus of some of the earliest research by cultural social psychologists (e.g., Miller, 1984; Morris & Peng, 1994). In general, these studies revealed that East Asian participants are more likely to attribute others’ behavior to situations than are European Americans. Singelis (1994), in her original publication describing the SCS, reported that measures on the InterSC subscale were positively associated with situational attributions, controlling for participants’ cultural background. Surprisingly, however, other researchers have seldom attempted to link attribution processes to differences in self-construal. One exception is the work by Oishi, Wyer, and Colcombe (2000), who found that subliminal priming with interdependence-related concepts led to lower levels of dispositional attributions for another person’s negative behaviors compared to priming with independence-related concepts (but see Krull et al., 1999).

Finally, if persons with a high InterSC pay attention to and remember information about social contexts, then they should have a rich and easily accessible store of interpersonal knowledge (as suggested by Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For example, Markus and Kitayama suggest that the asymmetric results of self-to-other versus other-to-self comparisons (as originally shown in Holyoak & Gordon, 1983) are because of IndSC, in which unique aspects of the self are privileged over other information. They provided evidence that this asymmetry was absent among Japanese participants, presumably because of the greater knowledge of others accessible in the InterSC. Kühnen and Haberstroh (2004) tested this hypothesis in a study in which self-construal was manipulated using the pronoun search task (Gardner et al., 1999). They found the typical asymmetry among German participants in the IndSC-prime condition but no asymmetry in the InterSC-prime condition.

**Relational self-construal and relationship sensitivity.** In research that focused specifically on ReISC, Cross and her colleagues (2002) argued that if the ReISC is a central framework for defining the self, then it should influence information processing without conscious control. In a series of studies using North American participants, they examined the role of ReISC in a variety of implicit cognitive processes that centered on relationship-oriented material. For example, they found that...
participants who scored high on the RISC scale remembered more relationship-related information about a target person (Study 3) and organized information about others in terms of their relationships (Study 4). In addition, persons with high RelSC were more likely to respond positively to relationship-oriented terms in an IAT task (Greenwald, McGee, & Schwartz, 1998) and were more likely to have dense associative networks for relationship-oriented terms, compared to lows on their RISC scale (Study 2). In short, persons with chronically high RelSC are “tuned” to pay attention to and organize their worlds in terms of relationships.

When others are connected to the self and viewed as self-defining, a person will tend to consider the other person’s interests and take the other’s perspective in social interaction and decision making. Cross and her colleagues (2000) found that students with high RelSC were more likely to consider the needs and wishes of friends and family members when making decisions about how to spend their summer than were low RelSC students. Likewise, Gore and Cross (2006) found that North Americans with high RelSC tended to include other people in their rationale for pursuing important goals. Among new college roommates, those with high RelSC were better able to predict their roommate’s responses to a set of questions about values and beliefs than were low relationalists, indicating better memory for the roommate’s revelations about themselves (Cross & Morris, 2003). Thus, RelSC is associated with attention to, consideration of, and memory for relational contexts, especially important or close relationships.

Context-sensitive nonsocial cognition. Researchers have paid substantial attention to the roles of self-construal and context-sensitivity for nonsocial events. Kühnen et al. (2001) found when IndSC was primed, German and American participants were quicker to find geometric figures that had been drawn within more complex geometric designs (the Embedded Figures Test; Witkin & Berly 1969). In contrast, InterSC-primed participants performed better than IndSC-primed participants on a task that was especially sensitive to context-dependent thinking (also see Konrath, Bushman, & Grove, 2009). Others have demonstrated similar effects among Western participants using a modified Stroop task and a cognitive switching task (Hanover, Pohlman, & Springer, 2005). Likewise, InterSC-primed North American participants were more sensitive to contextual information presented in a causal reasoning induction task than were IndSC-primed participants (K. Kim, Grimm, & Markman, 2007; also see Haberstroh et al., 2002).

Much of the early work linking self-construal to context-dependent thinking was limited to Western European or North American participants. More recently, Oyserman and her colleagues showed that priming the InterSC promotes better memory for the location of objects in an array among both European American participants (Kühnen & Oyserman, 2002) and East Asian participants (Oyserman et al., 2009). Furthermore, when the demands of a task matched the self-construal prime (i.e., a task that requires one to ignore the context performed by an IndSC-primed participant), performance on the task was enhanced among both Western and East Asian participants (Oyserman et al., 2009).

Finally, considerable research has demonstrated significant cultural differences in attention to the context versus attention to the focal objects in a display (Masuda & Nisbett, 2001; Morris & Peng, 1994; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001). Can these differences be accounted for by differences in self-construal? This question was addressed in an innovative study that examined neural responses to target objects or to novel contextual stimuli among European American and Asian American participants (Lewis, Goto, & Kong, 2008). The Event Related Potentials (ERP) data revealed the expected cultural differences in attention to the focal object or the context; this, in turn, was mediated by scores on the Singelis (1994) InterSC scale. In another study, priming IndSC and InterSC in Chinese participants resulted in neural activity that reflected cultural differences in cognition. Z. Lin, Lin, and Han (2008) found that priming IndSC resulted in increased focus on local targets in a compound letter task (i.e., the small letters that make up larger letters), whereas an InterSC prime resulted in increased focus on the global target (i.e., the larger letter), as evidenced by neural activity in the extrastriate cortex (which is related to visual perceptual processing; also see Z. Lin & Han, 2009). These and other recent studies of neural activity (e.g., Hedden, Ketay, Aron, Markus, & Gabrieli, 2008) provide provocative evidence that self-construal underlies important cultural differences in cognition.

Connecting and assimilating versus differentiating and contrasting. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argued that people with a high IndSC will strive to differentiate themselves from others, whereas people with a high InterSC will seek to connect to others. Since then, considerable research has focused on this effect for the self and social judgments; research on nonsocial judgments is just beginning to emerge.

Connecting versus differentiating in self- and social judgments. Social comparison processes have been thoroughly explored in social psychology research, but it entered a new era with the finding that self-construal moderated social comparisons processes. As Stapel and Koomen (2001) demonstrated, when the IndSC is activated, contrast or differentiation from the comparison target occurs. When the InterSC is activated, people tend to assimilate or view themselves as similar to the comparison target (also see Kemmelmeier & Oyserman, 2001; Kühnen & Haberstroh, 2004; Kühnen & Hanover, 2000; Stapel & van der Zee, 2006).

Behavioral evidence for assimilation versus contrast effects of self-construal on behavior was demonstrated in a study of the effects of priming a negatively stereotyped group on test performance (Bry, Follenfant, & Meyer, 2008). When exposed to the stereotype of dumb blondes, French students performed
worse on a general knowledge test if the InterSC was salient than if it was not (and worse than participants in a control condition), suggesting that the InterSC-primed participants had connected themselves with the dumb blonde stereotype. A contrast effect among IndSC-primed participants was demonstrated in Study 2: Participants exposed to the dumb blonde stereotype performed better than participants in the control condition when the IndSC was made salient (for related research, see Blanton & Stapel, 2008; Keller & Molix, 2008; Sui & Han, 2007).

Cross and her colleagues (2002) hypothesized that persons with high RelSC will also strive for connections with relationship partners and so will tend to see similarities between themselves and close others. North American participants rated the descriptiveness of multiple traits, values, and abilities for themselves and a same-sex friend. An indirect measure of similarity was calculated by computing intraclass correlations for each person’s pair of ratings in each domain (traits, values, and abilities). In regression analyses that controlled for self-esteem, RISC scale scores significantly predicted each type of similarity. In short, both RelSC and InterSC promote ways of thinking that enhance connections, similarity or assimilation in social comparison. IndSC promotes differentiation, contrast, and cognitive separation from others.

**Connecting versus differentiating in nonsocial cognition.** The tendency to engage in differentiation versus assimilation may also apply to other domains of cognition. To date, however, few people have investigated this hypothesis in nonsocial domains. One study extended this line of reasoning to the generation of novel ideas. When IndSC was primed, people tended to generate more unusual examples of categories (e.g., clothing or furniture) compared to control conditions or InterSC-priming conditions (Wiekens & Stapel, 2008). In another study, Oyserman and her colleagues (2009) argued that the completion of multiple-choice tests, such as GRE tests that require students to select the correct antonym for a word or to complete analogies, requires a differentiation mind-set (i.e., the ability to separate the correct answer from the rest). They found that InterSC-primed participants performed worse on these tasks than IndSC-primed or control participants. These studies suggest that many of the academic tasks valued in Western cultural contexts, such as creativity, finding novel solutions to a problem, and completion of multiple-choice-type tasks, are related to IndSC and that exploration of other learning- and education-related topics may profit from consideration of the role of self-construal.

**Summary and recommendations for future research.** As Markus and Kitayama (1991) predicted, variation in self-construal is related to a variety of cognitive processes. In particular, researchers have focused on the role of self-construal in context-dependent or – independent cognition and on cognitive tendencies to differentiate or to connect information. Most of the research on cognitive processes has understandably focused on self and social judgments, but work exploring the effects of self-construal on nonsocial cognitive processes is expanding and suggests promising avenues for new research. For example, spatial judgments (Krishna, Zhou, & Zhang, 2008) and aesthetic preferences (Zhang, Feick, & Price, 2006) are influenced by self-construal priming. As suggested above, researchers interested in learning styles, creativity, and other dimensions of education may find consideration of self-construals useful in their work.

Some processes linked to the self-construal by Markus and Kitayama (1991), however, have not received much attention by self-construal researchers. For example, they suggest that differences in self-construal may be the source of observed cultural differences in counterfactual thinking and categorization. To our knowledge, researchers have not (successfully) investigated these hypotheses with measures or manipulations of self-construal (but see interesting cross-cultural findings for categorization by Ji, Zhang, & Nisbett, 2004). Furthermore, although scant research exists on the relations between self-construal and attribution, these studies suggest that manipulations of self-construal may provide important insights into attribution-related processes.

New evidence linking self-construal to variation in neural activity is exciting and provocative. Although examination of neural activity cannot replace studies of cognitive behavior, they provide support for the contention that culture’s effects on the individual are more than skin deep.

**Self-Construal Influences Affect.**

Despite strong interest in cultural differences in emotion, little research has actually measured self-construal to investigate directly how independence and interdependence relate to various affective consequences. The few studies that have directly measured self-construal tend to find that, in a variety of samples, IndSC is associated with greater subjective happiness (Elliott & Coker, 2008) as well as decreased depression (e.g., B. T. Lam, 2005; Okazaki, 1997; Sato & McCann, 1998), unhappiness (Y. Kim, Kasser, & Lee, 2003), general anxiety (e.g., Hardin, Varghese, Tran, & Carlson, 2006; Y. Kim, Kasser, & Lee, 2003; Xie, Leong, & Feng, 2008), and social anxiety (Hardin et al., 2006; J. J. Hong & Woody, 2007; Okazaki, 1997; Xie et al., 2008), whereas InterSC is often associated with increased levels of these negative affects (Hardin et al., 2006; Okazaki, 1997; Sato & McCann, 1998).

Such results, of course, beg the question of why self-construal is related to affect in these ways. Kitayama, Karasawa, and Mesquita (2004) laid out a dual process model of emotion in which cultural pressures to be either independent or interdependent result in distal and proximal cultural affordances that encourage the development of culturally consistent affective experience and expression. More specifically, they argue that IndSC is related to a tendency to experience and express socially disengaging emotions such as anger or pride, whereas
InterSC is related to a tendency to experience socially engaging emotions, such as guilt or relatedness. Although not specifically mentioned by Kitayama et al., social anxiety would be another socially engaging emotion because it refers to feelings of nervousness that occur in the context of social relationships. It is not surprising that individuals high in InterSC, for whom interpersonal relationships are central to definitions of the self, would express more concern about appropriate behavior in social contexts. Interestingly, IndSC is often found to be a better predictor of social anxiety than InterSC; this appears to be particularly true for European Americans as opposed to East Asians (Xie et al., 2008).

But what of the relation of self-construal to other types of negative affect, such as unhappiness and depression? Kitayama, Karasawa, and Mesquita (2004) explicitly identify these emotions as neither engaging nor disengaging, and thus we might expect them to be unrelated to self-construal. It is likely that the observed relations are largely artifactual, explained by the high correlations between social anxiety and other types of negative affect. Okazaki (1997) demonstrated that once social anxiety is controlled, neither IndSC nor InterSC is related to depression. Furthermore, ethnic group differences in depression disappeared when social anxiety was controlled. Thus, the common finding that Asian Americans self-report higher levels of depression than European Americans (e.g., Aldwin & Greenberger, 1987; Kuo, 1984) is likely, at least in part, because of the fact that Asian Americans self-report higher levels of social anxiety than European Americans, which in turn is at least in part because of the greater interdependence and lower independence common among Asian Americans (Okazaki, 1997).

Such failure to control for social anxiety may account for other findings that, on the surface, appear to contradict predictions of self-construal theory. For example, given that interdependence is culturally consistent with collectivist values, we might expect InterSC to be associated with positive outcomes in collectivist cultures. To be sure, some evidence does support this hypothesis: InterSC was associated with greater life satisfaction among college students in Hong Kong but was unrelated to life satisfaction among college students in the United States (Kwan et al., 1997). Surprisingly, then, greater relative InterSC predicted greater unhappiness and less happiness in South Koreans but was unrelated to unhappiness among students in the United States (Y. Kim, Kasset, & Lee, 2003). If the measures of happiness and unhappiness used in this study are highly correlated with social anxiety, the apparently inconsistent finding that InterSC predicts unhappiness in South Korea may simply be an artifact of InterSC predicting social anxiety. These results, however, must be interpreted with caution. First, InterSC scores were subtracted from IndSC scores to create a unidimensional self-construal score that reflected an individual’s relative level of interdependence. As discussed previously, such unidimensional scores are inconsistent with both theory and intended use of most self-construal scales. In addition, although the correlation between self-construal and unhappiness was statistically significant among the South Korean sample (r = –.15) but not in the U.S. sample (r = –.10), the relative magnitude of the correlations was not compared statistically to determine if the relation is actually stronger for the South Koreans than for the Americans.

In addition to these relations being at least partly artifactual, it is likely that other variables mediate these relations. For example, InterSC is also associated with maladaptive perfectionism, probably because of the emphasis on being a good group member; however, after controlling for maladaptive perfectionism, InterSC no longer predicted depressive symptoms (Yoon & Lau, 2008). Thus, it is not that being interdependent is inherently depressing but rather that being interdependent is associated with other variables, some of which may in turn be associated with negative affect. Just as independence may manifest in some individuals as an unhealthy disconnection from others, interdependence may manifest in some individuals as an unhealthy overdependence on others that leads to maladaptive perfectionism, among other things. Perhaps more likely, existing measures of self-construal may be incapable of adequately distinguishing independence from social isolation and interdependence from dependence.

Given the importance of interpersonal relationships to those with an InterSC and the importance of internal, private self-evaluations to those with an IndSC, several researchers have argued—and demonstrated—that life satisfaction is predicted by different variables, depending on self-construal. Large multinational studies have found that life satisfaction is predicted by emotions (an internal, private experience) in individualistic cultures but by adherence to social norms in collectivist cultures (Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). However, because neither of these studies directly measured self-construal, the hypothesis that self-construal accounted for this difference remained speculative until a recent study provided direct support (Suh, Diener, & Updegraff, 2008). Suh et al. showed that for individuals who were relatively higher in independence than interdependence, life satisfaction was predicted only by emotions (i.e., the balance of positive and negative affect) and not by the extent to which the individuals felt significant others would evaluate the participants’ lives positively. For those with relatively stronger InterSC, however, both these social appraisals and emotion predicted life satisfaction.

Such findings are consistent with those of Kwan et al. (1997), who found that in both Hong Kong and the United States relationship harmony fully mediates the relation between interdependence and life satisfaction, whereas global self-esteem fully mediates the relation between independence and life satisfaction. In a multiethnic U.S. sample, self-esteem also mediated the relation between independence and life satisfaction (measured in terms of positive and negative affect), although relationship harmony did not mediate the relation between interdependence and life satisfaction (Reid, 2004).
Similarly, B. T. Lam (2005) found that self-esteem fully mediates the relation between independence and depression in a sample of Vietnamese American adolescents: Those with greater independence tended to have more positive self-appraisals, which resulted in fewer depressive symptoms. Contrary to past research (e.g., Kwan et al., 1997; Okazaki, 1997; Sato & McCann, 1998), however, interdependence was also associated with greater global self-esteem and less depression and self-esteem also fully mediated the relation between interdependence and depression. This is likely because of the more bicultural nature of Lam’s adolescent sample. Unlike the other samples, which used college students (Kwan et al., 1997; Okazaki, 1997; Sato & McCann, 1998), Lam’s participants were adolescents in junior high and high school who were still living at home with their parents. Given that a majority of Lam’s participants (87%) reported Vietnamese was the primary language spoken at home, it appears these participants largely were living with ethnically enculturated families; thus, Lam argued that higher levels of interdependence reflected an important cultural consistency with the participants’ home environments, which in turn was associated with greater self-esteem and less depression.

Indeed, B. T. Lam (2005) found that different factors predicted self-esteem for adolescents high in IndSC versus high in InterSC. Based on arguments similar to those of Kwan et al. (1997), Lam argued that family cohesion should be more important to the self-esteem of high InterSC adolescents. Given that these adolescents’ peer groups are more likely to reflect dominant cultural values, peer support should be more important to the self-esteem of high IndSC adolescents. As predicted, family cohesion fully mediated the relation between interdependence and global self-esteem, whereas peer support partially mediated the relation between independence and self-esteem.

Together, these studies (Kwan et al., 1997; B. T. Lam, 2005; Suh et al., 2008) demonstrate that IndSC and, in some samples, InterSC predict life satisfaction at least in part through their relation with self-appraisals such as global self-esteem and affect. Furthermore, interdependence predicts life satisfaction through its relation with interpersonal constructs such as relationship harmony, family cohesion, and social appraisals. By simply measuring self-construal, however, none of these studies demonstrates that self-construal causes these differences in the bases of life satisfaction; however, Suh et al. (2008) conducted a second study that does. They primed either an IndSC or an InterSC and obtained the same results: Life satisfaction was predicted by both social appraisal and emotion for those primed with InterSC, but life satisfaction was predicted only by emotion for those primed with IndSC. Moreover, the same pattern emerged whether self-construal was manipulated in the United States or in Korea, providing strong evidence that self-construal causes differences in the bases of life satisfaction.

Although most of the studies cited above examined independence and interdependence as orthogonal constructs, none of the research considered interactions between IndSC and InterSC. One study that has done so examined the roles of self-construal and family cohesion in predicting mental distress among Asian American high school students (Liu & Goto, 2007). The authors found that increasing interdependence was associated more strongly with increasing distress among those adolescents low in independence; although increasing interdependence was also associated with increasing distress for those high in independence, the relationship was weaker. Importantly, family cohesion mediated this effect, with adolescents high in both independence and interdependence reporting more family cohesion than adolescents high in interdependence but low in independence. For these latter adolescents low in independence, increasing interdependence was actually associated with decreasing family cohesion. Although acculturation of adolescents and their parents was not measured, these findings were attributed to higher independence representing a more bicultural identity on the part of adolescents, which buffered the negative effects of acculturative conflict between parents and adolescents. These results highlight the need for researchers not only to consider IndSC and InterSC as orthogonal constructs but also to consider interactions between them.

**Relational self-construal and affect.** RelSC and well-being are associated under some conditions. One of these is the type of well-being considered. Although RelSC is not associated with general psychological well-being (defined in terms of life satisfaction, depressive symptoms, perceived stress, positive and negative affect) among predominantly European American college students (Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003, Studies 1 and 3), RelSC is associated with greater relational well-being (defined in terms of positive relations with others and aspects of collective self-esteem; Cross et al., 2003, Study 2). Sample also affects whether relations between well-being and RelSC are found. Berkel and Constantine (2005) argued that a need for affiliation may be stronger and more beneficial to women of color in predominantly White environments; therefore, they hypothesized that RelSC would predict life satisfaction among these women of color. Indeed, in their sample of African American and Asian American women recruited from a predominantly White university, greater RelSC predicted greater life satisfaction, even after controlling for relationship harmony and family conflict.

Some researchers are also examining whether different factors predict well-being for those with a more RelSC. Unfortunately, much of this research relies on gender as a proxy for RelSC rather than measuring it directly. However, this research does tend to support the hypothesis that positive interpersonal relationships are more predictive of life satisfaction for those with a more relational InterSC. For example, women show greater decrements in daily life satisfaction than men when they feel misunderstood in interpersonal interactions (Lun, Kesebir, & Oishi, 2008), and women’s life satisfaction (measured in terms of positive and negative affect) was predicted by relationship harmony, whereas men’s life satisfaction was not (Reid, 2004).
Summary and recommendations for future research. As evidenced by the relative brevity of the preceding section, surprisingly little research has been conducted that has actually measured self-construal in investigating the relations between self-construal and affect. The little research that has been done has tended to focus on whether one type of self-construal is more strongly associated with particular types of affect than another type of self-construal and whether different variables mediate the relation between one type of self-construal and affect as compared to another type of self-construal. Markus and Kitayama's (1991) specific predictions about self-construal and affect (i.e., that the same emotion is elicited by different conditions depending on self-construal, that different emotions are experienced by independent and interdependent people and to different degrees) have received support. For example, the same construct of life satisfaction is elicited by different conditions depending on self-construal: by internal experiences, such as emotion or positive self-esteem, for those with a more IndSC, and by relationship variables, such as relationship harmony or social appraisal, for those with a more InterSC (Kwan et al., 1997; B. T. Lam, 2005; Suh et al., 2008).

Apart from the research reviewed here, however, most of the research relevant to these predictions has relied on either proxies of self-construal (e.g., culture of origin; Cole, Bruschi, & Tamang, 2002; Kitayama et al., 2006) or measures of IND-COL (e.g., Fischer, Manstead, & Rodriguez Mosquera, 1999). Although generally consistent with predictions, such research fails to explicitly link observed differences to self-construal. In addition, more research like that of Suh et al. (2008) that actually manipulates self-construal is needed. Demonstrating, for example, that priming an IndSC leads participants to experience a socially disengaging emotion (e.g., anger) whereas priming an InterSC leads participants to experience a socially engaging emotion (e.g., shame) in response to the same stimulus would provide compelling evidence that self-construal causes differences in emotional experience.

In addition, work such as that by Liu and Goto (2007) raises important questions about how IndSC and InterSC interact in predicting affective experiences. Are such interactions found only among bicultural participants, such as Liu and Goto’s Asian American high school students, for whom being high in both independence and interdependence reflects an important adaptation to living in two cultures, or are similar interactions found among monocultural individuals? We know that individuals high in independence and relatively low in interdependence experience life satisfaction as a result of internal experiences such as affect or self-esteem; is the same true for individuals high in both independence and interdependence? Moreover, who is more likely to chronically experience high IndSC and InterSC, and under what conditions might others demonstrate both types of self-construal?

Finally, recent work on specific aspects of IndSC and InterSC raises new questions. For example, Hardin (2006) found that although InterSC was uncorrelated with social anxiety among Asian Americans, a specific aspect of InterSC, relational interdependence (as captured by Singelis’s, 1994, SCS), was associated with social anxiety. Moreover, some aspects of IndSC (autonomy/assertiveness and behavioral consistency), but not others (individualism and primacy of self), were associated with social anxiety. For European Americans, only autonomy/assertiveness predicted social anxiety. Thus, Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) prediction that the same emotion is elicited by different conditions depending on self-construal may be more nuanced. Does social appraisal predict life satisfaction equally well for those high in the relational interdependence component of InterSC as for those high in the esteem for group component? Or do different types of social appraisal predict life satisfaction, with positive appraisals from significant others being more relevant for those high in the relational interdependence component whereas positive appraisals from one’s group are more relevant for those high in the collective interdependence or esteem for group components? Turning to another of Markus and Kitayama’s predictions, that high IndSC and high InterSC individuals experience different emotions, are certain emotions more tied to some aspects of self-construal than others? As noted above, research that examines the consequences of experimentally manipulating these aspects of self-construal would provide the most compelling evidence for the role of dimensions of self-construal in affective experience.

Self-Construal Influences Motivation and Self-Regulation

According to Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) conceptualization, people with high InterSC are expected to have a greater number of social motives compared to those with high IndSC. Indeed, these social motives are an integral part of the definition of InterSC. The independent self is motivated to be autonomous and agentic. In contrast, being a part of social groups and maintaining harmonious relationships with important others are of great importance to the interdependent self. Recently, Wiekens and Stapel (2008) provided relevant evidence. Using Brewer and Gardner’s (1996) method, they primed either the IndSC or the InterSC of their participants. Participants whose IndSC was primed reported higher levels of motivation to be independent, different, and alone compared to participants whose InterSC was primed. Those who received the InterSC prime reported higher levels of motivation to be accepted, to conform, and to be together than those who received the IndSC prime (also see Verplanken, Trafimow, Khusid, Holland, & Steentjes, 2009). Other studies have shown that measures of IndSC are positively related to the importance of individual goals and to status and achievement motivations and are negatively related to affiliation motivation (Brutus & Greguras, 2008; van Horen, Pölhlmann, Koeppe, & Hannover, 2008). In contrast, InterSC is positively related to the importance of social goals (van Horen et al., 2008). Likewise, when facing a serious illness, people with high interdependent self-views...
establishing a particular self-representation (see Leary, 2007). These self-motives can be described as directed at construal concerns self-related motives. Motives that are directly related to the self (i.e., self-motives) are expected to be experienced very differently by people with differing self-construals. These self-motives can be described as directed at establishing a particular self-representation (see Leary, 2007).

Second, agency for IndSC and InterSC results from different motivational sources. For IndSC, personal goals, desires, and abilities become the fuel for action, whereas for InterSC coordination of the goals, desires, and needs of relational others with those of the self are the primary sources of motivation (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 2004). In Markus and Kitayama’s (2004) conceptualization, what differs is not the content of the needs, goals, and motivations but the processes that put these into action. For instance, two students who have the goal of achieving in school might have different motivational processes underlying this goal. One of these students, who has high IndSC, might see school success as a way of actualizing himself or herself, and the other student, who has high InterSC, might be motivated to be successful to better realize his or her obligations to her family and to the society. Here, self-actualization can be considered a personal reason for goal pursuit, whereas fulfilling the wishes of one’s family can be considered a relational reason. It is important to note, however, that personal and relational aspects of a goal are different than its autonomous and controlled aspects (Deci & Ryan, 2000). That is, a person may be intrinsically motivated to pursue a relational goal if the goal is autonomous (“I am pursuing this because it is important to someone who is important to me”) rather than controlled (“I am pursuing this goal because other people expect me to”). Likewise, someone may be unmotivated to pursue a personal goal if the goal is controlled (“I am pursuing this because the situation demands it”) rather than autonomous (“I am pursuing this because I really believe it is an important goal to have”).

In two longitudinal studies conducted with North American participants, Gore and Cross (2006) examined the relation between self-construal and relational versus personal reasons for pursuing goals. Their results showed that people with higher ReI-SC had more relational-autonomous reasons for their goals compared to those with lower ReI-SC (as assessed by the RISC scale; Cross et al., 2000). They found that both personal-autonomous and relational-autonomous reasons for goals affected perceived progress and effort toward achieving the goal. A cross-cultural replication of this study obtained similar results among American and Japanese samples (Gore, Cross, & Kanagawa, 2009). These studies demonstrate the link between RelSC and forms of interdependent agency, as proposed by Markus and Kitayama (2004).

A third and very important implication of different self-construal concerns self-related motives. Motives that are directly related to the self (i.e., self-motives) are expected to be experienced very differently by people with differing self-construals. These self-motives can be described as directed at establishing a particular self-representation (see Leary, 2007). Markus and Kitayama (1991) speculated on the implications of different self-systems for self-enhancement and self-consistency self-motives. Although considerable research has examined differences in consistency motives for Westerners and East Asians (with a focus on cognitive dissonance processes; see Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004), to our knowledge no studies have used measures or manipulations of self-construal. Below, we focus on self-enhancement because it has been the focus of significant cross-cultural and self-construal research and has prompted a lively debate.

**Self-enhancement.** Self-enhancement, which is motivated by the need to see oneself with positive regard and to protect the self from negative information, has long been considered to be one of the basic tendencies of the self. Biases related to self-enhancement are viewed as conducive to having a healthy and well-adjusted self (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

According to Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999), however, self-enhancement motivation is mostly a result of the IndSC. From the point of view of IndSC, behavior is directed by the internal characteristics of the unique individual. Thus, enhancing positive internal attributes and seeing oneself with positive regard are beneficial. The InterSC, on the other hand, is not as separated from the surrounding group as the IndSC. Maintaining personal relationships, pursuing group harmony, and being willing to sacrifice one’s own needs are expected. Given the InterSC, self-enhancement may elicit jealousy or envy from others and so could be detrimental for basic social needs such as maintaining harmonious relationships. Thus, persons with a high InterSC would not be highly motivated to see themselves in a positive light. Much research on self-enhancement has relied on group comparisons using IND-COL of the given culture as a proxy measure for the prevalent self-construal of the cultural group under investigation. This line of research has provided valuable evidence for this perspective with a wide range self-enhancing behaviors (e.g., Chang & Asakawa, 2003; Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001; Heine & Lehman, 1995; Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997).

Others, however, have claimed that self-enhancement is a universal motive, and they have argued the self-enhancement will occur in different domains depending on the salient dimension of self-construal. For example, Sedikides, Gaertner, and Toguchi (2003, Study 2) conducted a study where they employed the better-than-average method to observe group differences. Participants rated themselves relative to a hypothetical group member on two sets of behaviors and traits that were differentially meaningful for IndSC and InterSC. The two groups did not differ from each other on overall self-enhancement, but participants high on IndSC (as measured by Singelis’s, 1994, scale) self-enhanced on the independence-related measure, whereas participants high on InterSC self-enhanced on the interdependence-related measure. The measure of self-enhancement used...
in the Sedikides et al. studies and in similar research by Kurman (2001), the better-than-average method, has been criticized on multiple grounds (Heine & Hamamura, 2007). In this approach, participants are asked to compare themselves to an average person on specific characteristics, traits, and abilities on which most people consider themselves better than most others. In a given population, if most people consider themselves better than most others, this would be a statistical impossibility, and so it is considered a bias (Alicke, 1985). Any given individual, on the other hand, can be objectively better than most other people. Correlating self-construal scores of individual participants with their standing on the better-than-average measure is therefore not appropriate for assessing self-enhancement bias at the individual level.

A second problem with this measure concerns the process of making comparisons with an average other. It has been argued that when people are asked to compare themselves to an average other, they engage in absolute rather than relative evaluations of themselves (Klar & Giladi, 1999). In fact, when people are evaluating any randomly selected target, they tend to evaluate it as better than average. Because most people have a favorable absolute evaluation of themselves, it appears that most people have a bias in comparative measures (for further criticism of this method, see Klar & Giladi, 1997).

Other studies have approached the role of self-construal in self-enhancement from different theoretical perspectives. For example, Gardner, Gabriel, and Hochschchild (2002) examined this issue from the perspective of Tesser’s (1980) self-evaluation maintenance (SEM) model. SEM predicts that people reflect on the success of close others when the success is in a self-irrelevant domain, and this in turn boosts self-esteem. When the success of the close other is in a self-relevant domain, this results in comparison and thus a reduction in self-esteem. These effects are reversed when the social other is not a close person. Gardner et al. (2002) manipulated the self-construal of their participants to see if the above predictions hold true when InterSC is activated. Consistent with the predictions of SEM theory, participants in the IndSC prime condition evaluated their friend as more successful than a stranger in a self-irrelevant domain and as less successful in a self-relevant domain. Participants in the InterSC prime condition evaluated their friend as more successful than a stranger in both the self-relevant and self-irrelevant domains. This shows that for people with an InterSC, comparing oneself to a close other is not a source of threat but instead is an opportunity to bask in the reflected glory of the relational other (also see Cheng & Lam, 2007). Similarly, people exposed to upward and downward social comparisons respond differently depending on their primed self-construal. When InterSC is primed (compared to IndSC), people experience less positive affect after exposure to a downward comparison target and less negative affect after exposure to an upward comparison target (White, Lehman, & Cohen, 2006). In short, priming the InterSC seems to create a sense of having a bond with the target, resulting in stronger empathic responses rather than contrasting (i.e., self-enhancing) affective responses.

Self-regulation. Self-regulation can be defined broadly as the exercise of control over oneself to attain desired end states (Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004). It is an essential element in any goal-directed behavior, and as such it is extremely relevant for the dynamic relations between motivation and self-construal. Most self-construal research in this area has centered on the topic of regulatory focus. Yet there has been some research attention to differences of the direction of control and self-regulatory strength across the two primary self-construals. In this section, we briefly summarize this line of research.

According to Higgins (1996, 1997) there are two basic self-regulatory foci: a promotion focus, which is characterized by a motivation to approach desired end states, and a prevention focus, which is characterized by a motivation to avoid undesired end states. Regulatory focus has important consequences for behavior. For instance, prevention focus is shown to increase speed of braking in an accident-prone simulated traffic condition, which points to risk avoidance (Werth & Forster, 2007). Although these regulatory foci can be situationality induced by various priming techniques (e.g., Shah, Higgins, & Friedman, 1998), individuals differ in their chronic levels of prevention and promotion focus. Chronic self-regulatory foci have roots in early socialization practices, where parental emphasis on positive outcomes by rewarding desired behavior fosters promotion focus and parental emphasis on negative outcomes by punishing undesired behavior fosters prevention focus in the child (Higgins & Silberman, 1998).

Parental practices are one antecedent of chronic regulatory focus. Another antecedent could be self-construal. Maintaining relational harmony, fitting into one’s proper roles in the society, and living up to the standards of significant others are essential for people with high InterSC. This requires self-monitoring and sensitivity to self-relevant information that could signal success or failure in the fulfillment of obligations. Hence, InterSC may support a prevention self-regulatory focus. People with high IndSC, on the other hand, are socialized to be self-actualized individuals who pursue personal aspirations. Unlike people with InterSC, who act with a concern for not harming significant relationships, those with IndSC are motivated to be positively distinct persons with achievements. Hence, IndSC may support a promotion focus.

Lee, Aaker, and Gardner (2000) tested these assumptions using a sample of participants with chronic IndSC versus InterSC (as measured by the Singelis SCS) as well as a sample of participants whose self-construal was experimentally primed. They utilized specific scenarios that provided the same information, except for a difference in framing. Half of the scenarios were presented in terms of gains (gain-framed information), and the other half were presented in terms of losses (loss-framed information). Results showed that participants with high InterSC...
evaluated loss-framed information as more important than the gain-framed information, and participants with high IndSC evaluated gain-framed information as more important than the loss-framed information (also see Aaker & Lee, 2001). More recently, Hamilton and Biehal (2005) provided additional support for these effects of self-construal on financial risk taking. Participants were primed with either IndSC or InterSC and asked to allocate a hypothetical budget across several funds that varied in their gain and risk levels. They found that the IndSC-primed participants allocated the budget so as to maximize gain and took greater risks, whereas the InterSC-primed participants allocated the budget so as to minimize losses and risk. Moreover, the relation between self-construal prime and risk taking was completely mediated by a measure of promotion and prevention orientation.

Zhang and Mittal (2007) tested a similar hypothesis about regulatory focus using a different experimental paradigm. They reasoned that people with a promotion focus would find enriched options more attractive but that people with a prevention focus would prefer impoverished options. Enriched options have high attribute scatter with extreme values. Impoverished options have values clustered toward the average. Suppose that you are a home buyer and the four important criteria are the size of the rooms and the deck and the condition of the kitchen and bathrooms. Suppose further that you have two options from which to choose. The first house, which represents the enriched option, has huge rooms and a fabulous kitchen with state-of-the-art appliances. But the deck is very small and the bathrooms are not in good shape. The second house, which represents the impoverished option, is average on all four criteria: average-sized rooms and deck and kitchen and bathrooms in acceptable condition.

In a series of cross-cultural studies with Chinese and American samples, Zhang and Mittal (2007) found that participants with high InterSC (as measured by Trafimow et al.’s, 1991, scale) evaluated impoverished options as more attractive than enriched options. Participants with high IndSC, however, evaluated enriched options as more attractive than impoverished options. Moreover, self-construal completely mediated the relation between culture and option evaluations. In addition, they employed a questionnaire measure of regulatory focus in a separate study and successfully showed that the relation of self-construal (as measured by Singelis’s, 1994, scale) with option evaluations was mediated by regulatory focus. This lends strong support to the argument that different self-systems afford different regulatory foci.

Regulatory focus is only one aspect of the motivational components of self-regulation. Another important aspect is the direction of control. Challenged by a stressful situation, people can cope with it in two different ways. They can either direct their control efforts to the environment to change it to fit their personal needs (primary control) or direct control toward themselves through altering feelings and cognitions to adjust to the objective environment (secondary control; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984).

People who construe themselves in relation to others are hypothesized to prefer secondary control over primary control (Morling, Kitayama, & Miyamoto, 2002; Weisz et al., 1984). Therefore, one would expect people with high InterSC to engage in secondary control when faced with stressors. Indeed, A. G. Lam and Zane (2004) showed in a cross-cultural study that this assumption was correct. At the group level, Asian participants scored higher than Americans on a self-report measure of secondary control and American participants in turn, scored higher than Asians on primary control. At the individual level, IndSC was positively related to primary control, whereas InterSC was related to secondary control. Moreover, culture’s influence on direction of control was mediated by self-construals.

These results point to the willingness of persons with high InterSC to adjust themselves to fit into a situation or harmonize with others. As a result, people with chronically high InterSC may develop strong self-control strategies over time. This idea of increasing one’s ability to exert self-control is consistent with recent research on self-regulation. According to Baumeister and his colleagues, self-regulatory strength is comparable to the strength of a muscle: Like the use of a muscle, use of one’s store of self-regulatory resources will eventual lead to temporary exhaustion, termed “ego-depletion” (Baumeister & Vohs, 2003; Schmeichel & Baumeister, 2004). Although it may be exhausted, the strength of this “muscle” can also be improved by chronic use. For this reason, one would expect people with high InterSC, who are accustomed to adjusting to situations, to experience less ego-depletion after a self-regulatory task, compared to others.

Seeley and Gardner (2003) tested this hypothesis in a study in which participants engaged in a self-regulation task (suppressing any thoughts of a “white bear” for 5 min) followed by another task that also required considerable self-control (squeezing a handgrip exerciser). In line with the hypothesis, participants with high InterSC persisted on the second task longer than participants with high IndSC, indicating lower levels of regulatory depletion among the former group. Similarly, regulatory depletion was more pronounced for Americans compared to Asians. This study provides initial behavioral evidence that self-construal is related to differences in self-regulation, but much more research is needed to uncover the particular types of situations and specific self-regulation tasks that may be influenced by variation in self-construal.

**Summary and recommendations for future research.** Most of Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) predictions concerning the relations between motivation and self-construal have found empirical support. First, self-construal research showed that social motives are an integral part of the definition for InterSC. Evidence for the importance of social motives for people with InterSC comes both from studies that manipulated self-construals (e.g., Wiekens & Stapel, 2008) and from studies that measured participants’ existing self-construals (e.g., Brutus & Greguras, 2008; van Horen et al., 2008).
Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) second proposal—that agency differs for IndSC and InterSC—also has received empirical support. Specifically, for people with high IndSC, personal concerns such as self-actualization are important in goal pursuit. For people with high InterSC, however, relational concerns are important sources of motivation. For people with high RelSC, relational reasons are very influential in goal pursuits in the long run, and they serve as intrinsic sources of motivation (Gore & Cross, 2006; Gore et al., 2009). These initial findings point to the importance of considering prevailing theories of motivation and agency from the perspective of variation in self-construal. For example, although self-determination theory posits that relatedness is one of three primary motives for all people (the others being competence and autonomy), it has received far less attention than the other two. This may in part be because of the assumptions of the self as independent and separate from others that pervade the environment of Western researchers and the populations they study. Other forms of social motivation, such as motivations that focus on one’s reputation in the community (as are represented in the concepts of face or honor), also may be linked to variation in self-construal.

Among all of the proposals of Markus and Kitayama (1991), the one that has prompted the liveliest debate was that self-motives such as self-enhancement would take on different meanings given different self-systems. In their view, self-enhancement motivation is mostly a result of the IndSC, which promotes evaluating oneself positively. For the InterSC, however, the need to be a good group member requires self-improvement and a self-critical attitude. Although considerable cross-cultural research has lent support for these predictions (e.g., Heine et al., 2000; Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001; Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, et al., 2001; Kitayama et al., 1997), some researchers have argued that people with high InterSC also engage in self-enhancement, but only in ways meaningfully related to their self-construal (e.g., Kurman, 2001; Sedikides et al., 2003). Others, in contrast, have proposed that self-enhancement motivation is not related to self-construal at all. In a series of studies by Thomsen, Sidanius, and Fiske’s (2007), self-enhancement was not related to self-construal but to the endorsement of interpersonal leveling beliefs. In sum, although there is controversy, the existing evidence mostly supports the proposal of Markus and Kitayama (1991) that self-enhancement takes on different meanings for different self-systems.

Self-regulation has been another topic that has attracted considerable research attention. In general, self-construal studies concerning regulatory focus, direction of control, and self-regulatory strength are generally in line with the predictions derived from Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) theorizing. InterSC supports promotion focus, whereas IndSC supports prevention focus (Lee et al., 2000; Zhang & Mittal, 2007). Concerning direction of control, IndSC is positively related to primary control and InterSC is related to secondary control (A. G. Lam & Zane, 2004). And finally, research on self-regulatory strength points out that people with high InterSC experience less regulatory depletion compared to people with high IndSC in some situations (Seeley & Gardner, 2003). This research on the role of self-construal in self-regulation is preliminary but promising, and it may be beneficial in numerous domains.

To date, although considerable attention has been paid to cognitive approaches to the issue of consistency (as described above), no one has examined the role of self-construal in dissonance processes. Cross-cultural research has made great strides in showing how dissonance processes vary for people from East Asian versus Western backgrounds (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005; Kitayama, Snibbe, et al., 2004). To be brief, Western participants tend to seek consistency within themselves, whereas East Asians tend to seek consistency with others’ views and expectations. Unfortunately, most research in this area uses culture as a proxy for self-construal and has not used explicit measures or manipulations of self-construal (but see Pöhlmann, Carranza, Hannover, & Iyengar, 2007, for a closely related study). Considering the importance of self-consistency as a self-motive and the range of cross-cultural findings on this topic, examination of the hypothesized role of (measured or manipulated) self-construal in this process will be an informative next step.

Because of its influence on motivation and self-regulation, the possible applications of self-construal theory are almost countless. Researchers in applied disciplines have begun to examine its importance in a variety of domains. Links have been made to the fields of leisure studies (Walker, Deng, & Dieser, 2005), eating disorders (Green, Scott, DeVilder, Zeiger, & Darr, 2006), health (Lun et al., 2008; Uskul & Hynie, 2007), counseling (Yeh & Arora, 2003), consumer behavior (Zhang & Shrum, 2009), and business management (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O’Brien, 2006; see next section). We suspect that further applications in education, vocational psychology, and marital and family therapy—to name just a few—are not far behind.

Self-Construal Shapes Interpersonal Behavior

How does variation in self-construal shape interaction with other people? Although Markus and Kitayama (1991) did not address social behavior specifically, there are many obvious applications of their thesis to social interaction. People with high InterSC should seek to maintain connectedness and harmony in relationships, whereas those with high IndSC should seek to maintain individuality and separateness from others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Pursuit of these goals may be relatively automatic or nonconscious when the associated self-construal is chronically or temporarily activated. For example, people who have chronically high InterSC (or who are exposed to an InterSC prime) tend to sit closer to another person in a lab situation than do those with a primed IndSC or chronically high IndSC (Holland, Roeder, van Baaren,
Brandt, & Hannover, 2004). Similarly, priming the InterSC results in a greater likelihood of imitating the behavior of another person, compared to priming the IndSC or a control condition (van Baaren, Maddux, Chartrand, de Bouter, & van Knippenberg, 2003). Why might imitation be important in the development or maintenance of social relationships? Imitation may create a sense of interpersonal similarity or synchrony, which then greases the wheels of interpersonal interaction. In general, people who are mimicked by an interaction partner tend to like that partner, to have greater rapport with the partner, and to engage in more prosocial behavior (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; van Baaren, Holland, Steenaert, & van Knippenberg, 2003; see Chartrand, Maddox, & Lakin, 2005, for a review). The association between self-construal and mimicry is bidirectional: People who are imitated by others also come to describe themselves more interdependently than do people who are not mimicked (as measured by responses to the TST; Ashton-James, van Baaren, Chartrand, Decety, & Karremans, 2007). Furthermore, when participants were unobtrusively imitated by another person, they were more likely to describe themselves as interdependent with others (relative to non-mimicked participants), which in turn predicted their willingness to help a third party (Ashton-James et al., 2007). Self-construal also influences self-presentation; IndSC priming increases self-enhancing forms of self-presentation, whereas InterSC priming increases self-presentations of social appropriateness (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009).

People with chronically high InterSC also behave in a more other-oriented fashion, compared to those with a high IndSC. For example, when exposed to scenarios that pitted the individual’s self-interest against the interest of an important ingroup, InterSC-primed European American and Asian American participants were more likely than IndSC-primed participants to choose the group’s welfare over their own (Gardner, Gabriel, & Dean, 2004). Similarly, when given power to distribute tasks to themselves and to another participant, highly relational participants distributed the tasks less selfishly than did lows on this dimension (S. Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001).

**Self-construal and close relationships.** These studies of proximity, mimicry, and other-oriented behavior utilized laboratory procedures in which participants interacted with strangers. Thus, they provide compelling confirmation that the InterSC promotes positive relational behavior even when there is no prior relationship between the partners. When there is an ongoing relationship or the possibility of continuing interaction, however, individuals with high RelSC should be especially likely to engage in a variety of behaviors that promote closeness and harmony in the relationship. Cross and her colleagues (Cross et al., 2003; Cross & Morris, 2003; Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006) have investigated how North Americans with varying levels of RelSC (as measured by the RISC scale, Cross et al., 2000) interact with strangers who were assigned to be their roommates. The roommate situation provides an excellent opportunity to examine relationship processes among previously unacquainted persons who have not self-selected to live together.

Cross and her colleagues hypothesized that persons with high RelSC will seek to make the most of the situation and will strive to develop a close relationship with the partner. If a close friendship is not possible with the new roommate, the very relational person will nonetheless seek to have a harmonious, relatively conflict-free relationship. One way to promote a relationship with a new partner is to share openly one’s own interests, goals, values, and beliefs and to attend closely to and respond sensitively to the self-disclosures of one’s partner. Gore et al. (2006, Study 2) found that participants’ degree of chronically activated RelSC had both direct and indirect effects on their own and their roommates’ closeness and commitment to the relationship. Both high RelSC individuals and their roommates reported enhanced relationship quality after 1 month. This effect was mediated by perceptions of one’s own and one’s partner’s emotional disclosure and perceptions that one’s partner responded sensitively to one’s own disclosures. In short, because high RelSC participants disclosed openly and responded sensitively to their roommates, they created a supportive environment for the development of a close relationship (for other studies of self-construal and self-disclosure, see Cross et al., 2000, Study 3; Morry, 2005; Terzino & Cross, 2009).

When a person pays close attention to his or her relationship partner’s self-revelations, that person should be able to predict the partner’s responses to a variety of situations. Cross and Morris (2003) found that participants with high RelSC were better able to predict their roommate’s responses to a values measure. This association was strongest in relationships that were relatively distant and weaker in relationship in which the two roommates were very close. Cross and Morris (2003) suggested that in very close relationships, the relationship itself motivates the participants to attend to each others’ cares and concerns and thereby enhances agreement on this task. In more distant relationships, the person with high RelSC may pay close attention to the partner as a strategy for avoiding conflict or in hopes that a deeper relationship is still possible. In their second study, Cross and Morris found evidence for the latter goal: Participants with high RelSC had overly optimistic views of their roommate’s feelings of closeness in the relationship. Such optimism can foster continued efforts to work at the relationship in hopes of greater intimacy eventually. Indeed, other studies suggest that persons with high RelSC or InterSC report closer relationships and more social support than lows (Cross et al., 2000), and they are more likely to include others in the self (Cross et al., 2000; Vorauer & Cameron, 2002). Furthermore, persons with high RelSC are less likely than others to view conflict with friends and close others as a zero-sum game, in which one person wins and the other loses. Gore and Cross (in press) asked participants to imagine themselves in a variety of situations in which they were resolving a conflict with a friend, roommate, or another close other. The results
revealed zero-sum thinking among those with low RelSC but not among those with high RelSC. For the low RelSC participants, decisions that benefitted the partner were perceived as costly to the self. For the participants with high RelSC, there was typically no relation between evaluations of the outcome of a decision for oneself and for the relationship partner. In a third study, where participants were asked to recall a conflict situation, high RelSC participants indicated regret over making a self-serving decision. In other words, persons with high RelSC do not perceive a trade-off between acting in their own interests and acting in the interests of close others. Instead, consistent with the notion that the other is part of the self, they perceive decisions that benefit the relationship as ultimately benefitting the self as well.

Friendships and roommates are important parts of people’s lives, but romantic relationships receive much more attention from researchers. To date, however, researchers have paid little attention to the role of variation in self-construal in romantic relationships. Given the strong association of gender with RelSC (Cross et al., 2000), one might expect that self-construal plays a significant role in many aspects of relationship development and maintenance. Sinclair and Fehr (2005) examined the association between self-construal and responses to dissatisfaction in romantic relationships. When measured (Study 1) or primed (Study 2), IndSC was positively associated with the preference to use the active, constructive strategy of voice when one is dissatisfied with the relationship. Measured (Study 1) and primed (Study 2) InterSC was positively associated with the passive, constructive strategy of loyalty, in which the person waits for things to improve (also see Yum, 2004). These findings are consistent with other research that suggests that IndSC is associated with a promotion focus and InterSC is associated with a prevention focus (Lee et al., 2000) and with other studies showing that individuals with high InterSC avoid dominating forms of conflict resolution (see below).

In what other ways might self-construal influence relationship development and maintenance? Persons with high RelSC may be more likely than others to make situational (rather than dispositional) attributions for a partner’s bad behavior, which are associated with relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). High RelSC persons tend to perceive themselves as more similar to their partner than low relationalists, which can also help maintain relationships (Byrne & Blaylock, 1963; Cross et al., 2002). When a relationship is threatened, highly relational participants may be more likely to engage in prorelationship behavior rather than withdraw (Lydon, Menzies-Toman, Burton, & Bell, 2008). If InterSC is associated with perceiving the self as malleable (as cross-cultural research suggests; Heine, Kitayama, Lehman, et al., 2001), then highly interdependent persons may tend to adjust to their relationship partners to maintain harmony in the relationship (Morling et al., 2002). In short, a focus on variation in self-construal may help researchers better understand a wide variety of relationship processes. Perhaps Sinclair and Fehr (2005) said it best when they closed their article with this statement: “[I]t may even be the case that self-construal is the fundamental, distal factor that drives many of the other self-related processes that have been examined in the close relationships literature” (p. 303).

Self-construal and communication processes. When people’s self-construals focus them on interdependence versus independence, their characteristic ways of communicating will reflect these orientations. As Singelis and Brown (1995) describe, the focus on harmonious relationships and the definition of the self in terms of close relationships and in-groups among those with high RelSC or Coll-InterSC should result in a preference for indirect communication, sensitivity to the context in social interaction, attention to others’ thoughts and feelings, and non-confrontational conflict resolution styles. In short, the goal of communication, given RelSC or Coll-InterSC, is the maintenance of harmonious relationships with close others and in-group members. In contrast, for individuals with high IndSC, the goal of communication is to express the person’s unique goals, wishes, thoughts, feelings, and abilities. As a result, IndSC should be associated with direct communication styles, little attention to contextual aspects of social interaction, attention to one’s own thoughts and feelings during social interaction, and willingness to engage in confrontational dispute resolution styles.

Researchers have made several inroads into investigating these theoretical consequences of self-construal for communication processes. For example, InterSC is positively related to concern for a conversation partners’ feelings and possible negative evaluation of the self (Gudykunst et al., 1996; M.-S. Kim, Sharkey, & Singelis, 1994; Mandel, 2003), a desire to avoid arguments (M. Kim, Aune, Hunter, Kim, & Kim, 2001), and the use of cooperative strategies in group discussions (Oetzel, 1998). IndSC is positively related to a concern for clarity or directness in communication (Gudykunst et al., 1996; M.-S. Kim et al., 1994); open and expressive communication (Gudykunst et al., 1996); and the use of assertive or dominating strategies in group discussions (Oetzel, 1998; also see Bresnanhan, Ohashi, Liu, Nebashi, & Liao, 1999). In addition, IndSC is associated with approval of others’ positive self-presentations, but InterSC is associated with approval of others’ negative self-presentations and approval of others when they attribute their own success to the help of others (Ellis & Wittenbaum, 2000; J. Kim, Kim, Kam, & Shin, 2003).

Differing self-construals should also engender different reactions to conflict, especially conflict with meaningful others (e.g., friends, relatives, or coworkers). One conceptualization of conflict strategies draws on conceptions of face and facework (Ting-Toomey, 1988). Facework is the strategies one uses to protect, challenge, or defend one’s own or another’s “claimed sense of positive image in the context of social interaction” (or face; Oetzel et al., 2001, p. 235). In a study that included participants from China, Germany, Japan, and the United
States, Oetzel and his colleagues (2001) asked participants to recall a conflict and to rate their experience in that conflict with respect to several facework strategies. IndSC (as measured by the Gudykunst et al., 1996, measure) was strongly associated with facework strategies that defended one’s own face. InterSC was strongly associated with strategies that reflected concern for the other’s face and mutual face concerns, such as problem solving, apologizing, and giving in to the other person. InterSC was negatively related to dominating strategies in the interaction (also see Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001).

Unfortunately, most of these studies of self-construal and communication employ cross-sectional designs and use only self-report data. New strides in understanding how variation in self-construal relates to communication processes may be made by using experimental paradigms that manipulate self-construal and employ behavioral measures of direct or indirect communication strategies. A good example of an experimental approach is found in a recent study by Seeley Howard, Gardner, and Thompson (2007). Three studies showed that the behavior of InterSC-primed participants who had high power in a negotiation depended on the situational context. When negotiating with a lower power individual, high-power and InterSC-primed participants were more generous and more likely to reach a settlement with their lower power opponent than were IndSC-primed participants (Study 1). In a second study, power and self-construal were again manipulated but participants engaged in either a negotiation with one other person or a team negotiation, in which teams of three participants negotiated with each other. Interestingly, when negotiating with a group, high power InterSC-primed participants were less generous than the high-power IndSC-primed participants. Negotiating individually or as a group did not affect the final settlement amounts decided by high-power IndSC-primed participants. These studies suggest that persons with high InterSC have a sense of responsibility or attachment to other persons in the negotiation but that the attachment depends on the context. When negotiating individually with a lower status target, the high-power and high-InterSC negotiator will behave benevolently. But when negotiating as part of a team, their loyalties and attachments lie with the other team members. Their commitment is to pursue the interests of the team, resulting in less generous settlements with the opposing party.

This work highlights the potential importance of self-construal to organizational psychology and leadership (van Knippenberg, van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004). A few researchers have begun to consider the role of self-construal in topics of organizational justice. For example, Brockner, De Cremer, van den Bos, and Chen (2005) argued that because procedural fairness communicates that individuals are respected and valued in the organization, it therefore reflects the importance of relational values. Consequently, people who tend to define themselves in terms of their relationships may be especially sensitive to procedural fairness in organizations. Across three studies, Brockner and his colleagues found that perceptions of procedural fairness (e.g., the degree to which one has a voice in decisions or the fairness of interpersonal treatment) were more strongly related to a variety of outcomes (e.g., cooperation, positive affect, and desire to interact with the other party) for people who had high InterSC than for lows on this dimension (also see Brockner, Chen, Mannix, Leung, & Skarlicki, 2000; Gollwitzer & Bücklein, 2007; Holmavall & Bobocel, 2008). Research focused on equity in social exchange revealed that responses to inequitable treatment depended on the participants’ RelSC and their relationship with the other person: Persons with high RelSC were less likely than lows to respond negatively when a close other had treated them unfairly (Y. Chen, Chen, & Portnoy, 2009, Study 2) but were more likely to respond negatively when a person who was not close treated them badly (Holmavall & Sidhu, 2007). Others have found that the degree to which the three dimensions of self-construal (IndSC, RelSC, and InterSC) moderate the association between procedural justice and work-related outcomes differs depending on the specific forms of procedural justice under investigation (Johnson, Selenta, & Lord, 2006).

Summary and recommendations for future research. Surprisingly little research has focused on the effects of differing self-construals for social behavior, close relationships, and other phenomena related to interactions with others or with groups. Consistent with expectations, InterSC is associated with a variety of processes that serve to enhance or maintain relationships, including mimicry, prosocial behavior, and indirect, non-confrontational communication strategies. Cross and her colleagues have examined the role of RelSC in a variety of relationship-related processes, but many more processes may be fruitfully explored from the perspective of variation in self-construal. For example, many gender differences in behavior and relationship processes have been observed, and these differences may be in part a function of gender differences in self-construal (Cross & Madson, 1997; Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). When the mechanisms that explain gender differences in behavior are identified (e.g., differences in self-construal), researchers are better able to stipulate the conditions under which those behaviors are most likely to be expressed, ways that the behaviors may be modified, and other factors that may maintain or bolster the behaviors. Consider the finding that many couples differ in their expectation of closeness or intimacy in the marriage, with women desiring more closeness and communication of love and affection than men (see Eldridge & Christensen, 2002, for a review). If these differences derive from different self-construals, then both researchers and therapists have a theoretically rich starting point for further investigation into the cognitive, affective, and motivational foundations of differences in communication, conflict, and marital satisfaction.

Cross-cultural studies have observed cultural differences in a variety of social phenomena, such as conformity (H. Kim
& Markus, 1999), trust (Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994), and
social loafing (Earley, 1993). To date, these studies have not
been followed up by additional work aimed at identifying the
mechanisms responsible for these differences. For example,
one would expect that participants with high InterSC would
be more likely to conform to the behavior of in-group members
than would those with high IndSC.

There are also promising avenues for further research into
the consequences of different self-construals for social behav-
ior in other settings, such as the workplace. Many aspects of
organizational behavior, such as citizenship behaviors, job
withdrawal, and leadership styles, may be linked to differences
in self-construals (e.g., Gahan & Abeysekera, 2009; Gelfand
et al., 2006). Ultimately, whether a person considers himself
or herself to be independent of others or fundamentally inter-
dependent with others in a situation can importantly affect
other social behaviors, such as conformity, compliance, aggres-
sion, altruism, cooperation, and persuasion.

Where to From Here?

Self-construal was initially proposed as a means of understand-
ing cultural differences in behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1991;
Triandis, 1989). Today, however, researchers also recognize
the potential role of within-culture variation in self-construal
for explaining many psychological phenomena (e.g., Cross &
Madson, 1997). We suspect that these dual goals—understanding
cultural differences and within-culture processes—will continue
to motivate considerable research in the near term. To further
these goals, we next turn to theoretical, conceptual, and meth-
odological issues that sometimes thwart this work.

As we mentioned in the section on Between- and Within-
Group Differences in Self-Construal, there are times when
measures of self-construal fail to demonstrate the expected
cultural patterns of differences (Oyserman et al., 2002). There
are also many times measures of self-construal fail to mediate
cultural differences in specific behaviors (Kitayama et al.,
2009). We are confident that a great many studies have been
relegated to the file drawer because manipulations of self-
construal fail to produce the expected effects on behavior. In
an innovative study, Kitayama and his colleagues presented
an argument for why explicit measures of self-construal may
fail to predict cultural differences in behaviors that have been
linked theoretically to the self. They observed the expected
differences in American, Western European, and Japanese
participants’ performance on several tasks (e.g., dispositional
attribute, focused vs. holistic attention, and preference for
disengaging or socially engaging emotions), but there was no
systematic association between performance on these tasks
and Singelis’s (1994) measure of IndSC and InterSC. Moreover,
there was little to no association of the tasks with each other.
In other words, people who described themselves as high in
IndSC were no more likely than those low on this dimension
to engage in dispositional attribution, to focus on the target
rather than the context in an attention task, or to prefer disen-
gaging to socially engaging emotions. Moreover, individuals
who tended to engage in one of these IndSC-related tasks were
not necessarily likely to engage in other IndSC-related tasks.

Kitayama and his colleagues (2009), along with Y. Kashima
(2009), offer helpful insight into these sorts of apparent anom-
alias in cross-cultural data. First, Kitayama et al. remind us
of Simpson’s paradox: the observation that constructs that are
related at the societal level (e.g., InterSC and context-sensitive
thinking) may not necessarily be related at the individual level
(also see Oyserman & Uskul, 2008; van de Vijver, van Hemert,
& Poortinga, 2008). They also contend that cultural mandates
to be independent or interdependent may be enacted through
any of several different cultural tasks. For example, two
Americans, who both strive to be independent, may go about
that by focusing on different dimensions of independence. Ed
demonstrates his independence by focusing on his uniqueness
and differentiating himself from others, whereas Valerie de-
monstrates her independence by aggressively pursuing her
personal goals. Moreover, each cultural task is associated with
specific psychological tendencies (e.g., using focused vs. holis-
tic attention or making dispositional vs. situational attribu-
tions). Just as different individuals use different cultural tasks
to fulfill their culture’s mandate, different cultural tasks are
associated with different sets of psychological tendencies. Thus,
within an individual, there may be relatively little association
among different culture-related processes.

Second, Kitayama et al. (2009) observe that these cultural
mandates begin to influence children from birth and the vari-
ous psychological tendencies and cultural tasks used to comply
with the cultural mandate become habitual, automatic, or rote.
Explicit views of the self, as tapped by measures of self-
construal, develop in adolescence, and they may not be linked
conceptually to these automatic, habitual, or overlearned tasks.
Thus, Americans and East Asians may perform very differently
on a variety of culture-linked tasks (as they did in Kitayama
et al.’s, 2009, study), but performance on these tasks may not
require the activation of the associated self-construal. Kashima
(2009) also notes that culturally based processes are typically
learned and become automatized in specific situations and
activities; some behaviors are strongly driven by the norms
of particular contexts rather than by personal beliefs or self-views
(Zou et al., 2009). Thus, attempts to elicit cultural tasks and
behaviors (i.e., through priming) may not be effective if the
attempt does not tap the appropriate context or if the behavior
is strongly driven by situational factors.

Third, explicit measures of self-construal appear to assess
Kitayama et al.’s cultural tasks (e.g., being unique or self-effacing)
rather than the accompanying psychological tendencies (e.g.,
preferring engaged or disengaged emotions). Indeed, many of
the specific dimensions of self-construal identified by Hardin
et al. (2004) as underlying items on Singelis’s (1994) SCS (e.g.,
primacy of self) map directly onto Kitayama et al.’s cultural tasks.
Given that Kitayama et al. (2009) argue explicitly that different
cultural tasks are associated with different psychological tendencies, we would expect weak correlations, at best, between broad measures of cultural tasks (e.g., explicit measures such as the Singelis SCS scales) and the specific measures of psychological tendencies. Instead, specific psychological tendencies (e.g., cultural differences in dispositional attribution) may be better explained by domain-specific measures (e.g., beliefs in attitude-behavior consistency; see Y. Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka, & Kashima, 1992). Likewise, Kashima (2009) argues that the commonly used priming tasks induce specific ways of thinking or feeling that are associated with particular behaviors but not with others. The reason that the pronoun circling priming task promotes attention to the target rather than the context (as in the Kühnen et al., 2001, studies), he contends, is that thinking about oneself as an individual prompts analytical processing of information among English speakers. Thinking about oneself as “we,” in contrast, may hinder analytical thinking. Cultural differences in processes that are unrelated to analytical thinking, however, may not be influenced by “I” versus “we” primes (see Oyserman & Lee’s, 2008, review for the effects of different types of primes on cognitive and other outcomes). In short, when researchers seek to demonstrate that a particular cultural difference in behavior is associated with self-construals, they would be wise to focus on the specific dimension of IndSC, RelSC, or InterSC that accounts for the behavior and to consider the specific contexts in which the behavior develops.

These issues raise the question of whether self-construal is best understood as the cause of a variety of behaviors or is better viewed as a way to interpret cultural differences in behavior. Kashima (2009) offers a compelling argument for self-construal as an interpretive tool rather than a causal construct (and he acknowledges as well that an interpretive tool can be a causal mechanism). In our view, this is similar to saying that extraversion does not cause talkativeness so much as it is a way to interpret or describe that behavior. Yet just as measures of extraversion have been productively used to predict a wide variety of behaviors, so also many of the studies reviewed here suggest that measures of self-construal are useful tools in the exploration of within-culture patterns of behavior. Likewise, priming techniques help researchers begin to approximate the ways that self-construal influences thinking and feeling. As better measures of self-construal are developed and as priming techniques become more specific, some of these apparent anomalies may be resolved.

Researchers may best avoid dead ends and detours along their routes if they are careful about how they describe their work and recall how they got where they are now. Authors have at times referred to the pronoun circling task or other common priming tasks as “cultural priming.” This term is most appropriately applied to the cultural icons task devised by Y.-Y. Hong and her colleagues (2000) and perhaps to studies that use language as a prime with bicultural participants. For other primes, however, particular perceptions of the self (as an individual or as a member of a group, or as similar to or different from others) or ways of thinking (or mind-sets; Oyserman et al., 2009) are primed, not cultures. The danger in calling these latter procedures cultural priming is that it equates culture with self-construal or mind-set and ignores the fact that these are just two of the many ways culture shapes individual behavior. Moreover, the distinction made by Kitayama et al. (2009) among very basic cognitive and affective processes (their psychological tendencies), complex behavioral goals (their cultural tasks), and the cultural mandates of individualistic and collectivist societies reminds us that the global concept of culture cannot be adequately represented by a very specific way of thinking. In our view, equating culture with self-construal or mind-set (or equating self-construal with a specific psychological tendency) can lead outsiders to view social or personality psychologists engaged in cultural psychology as naive, uninformed, and overly narrow in our interests.

In addition, cross-cultural researchers should remember that our understanding of self-construal has developed out of comparisons between Europeans or Americans and East Asians. Consequently, they may not apply as well to Africans or Latin Americans. Research in these understudied regions will help us identify the culture-based assumptions that are largely implicit in this work. For example, we wonder whether InterSC and holistic thinking are associated as strongly in Africa as in East Asia. Latin Americans are typically more expressive and emotive than East Asians; thus, the associations between InterSC and emotional expression may be very different in Latin American cultures than in East Asian societies. Similarly, InterSC is positively associated with the self-criticism and social isolation dimensions of the self-compassion scale in Taiwan (which has a Confucian heritage) but negatively associated with these dimensions in Thailand (which has a strong Buddhist heritage; Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, & Hsieh, 2008). Just as English is spoken and written differently in the United States and the United Kingdom, so also people in Africa, Latin America, or Middle Eastern societies may express IndSC, RelSC, and Coll-InterSC with somewhat different “dialects.”

Self-construals represent how people view themselves with respect to other people—as separate, independent, and autonomous; as related to individual friends, family, and coworkers; or as part of larger social groups. This conceptualization has generated considerable research and fruitful theories. Unfortunately, not all that research could be reviewed here, but we have attempted to provide an overview of those efforts and a snapshot of the current status of these constructs. We hope this serves as a useful tour book for researchers exploring this new and promising terrain of the self.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Kari Terzino, Tsui-Feng Wu, and Meng Zhang, who offered helpful comments on this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interests with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.
Financial Disclosure/Funding
The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the authorship, and/or publication of this article: This article was completed while the first and third authors were supported by National Science Foundation Grant BCS0646360.

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