We disagree with Levine et al.’s (2003) conclusion that the 3 self construal scales currently in use have “severe” or “fatal” flaws. We argue that the results of Levine et al.’s meta-analysis and priming studies do not raise problems with the validity of self construal scales, in part, because their results are compatible with theorizing about self construals. We also contend that Levine et al.’s measurement studies do not necessarily lead to the conclusion that there are problems with the validity of the scales (e.g., there may be multiple dimensions that form independent and interdependent self construals in second-order factor analyses). We summarize other evidence for the construct validity of self construal scales which indicates that there are theoretically consistent findings across approximately 50 studies using the 3 scales. This would not be possible if there were major problems with the 2-dimensional model of self construals or the scales used to measure them. We conclude that the 2-dimensional model of self construals and the current scales are viable for use in future research.

Self construals have been the subject of research in communication for approximately a decade (e.g., Kim, Sharkey, & Kamakali, 1993; Morisaki, 1993; Sharkey & Singelis, 1993; Singelis & Brown, 1993, appear to be the first papers in communication using self construals). The research that has been conducted is based on Markus and Kitayama’s (1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1998) conceptualization of independent and interdependent self construals. The independent self construal involves defining the self as unique and separate from others, and the interdependent self construal involves defining the self as embedded in ingroups and interconnected with other members of the ingroups. Markus, Mullally, and Kitayama (1997) argue that these “selfways” are not just different ways of viewing the self, they involve different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) contend that independence “requires construing oneself as an individual whose behavior is organized and made
meaningful primarily by reference to one’s own internal repertoire of
thoughts, feelings, and action, rather than by reference to the thoughts,
feelings, and actions of others” (p. 226). When individuals’ behavior is
based on their independent self construals, their internal attributes (e.g.,
thoughts and feelings) “determine” or “cause” their behavior (Markus &
Kitayama, 1998). The “important tasks” for individuals emphasizing their
independent self construals are to be unique, to accomplish their own
goals, to express themselves, and to be direct (e.g., “say what you mean”;
Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Individuals’ self-esteem is based on expressing
themselves and validating their internal attributes when their behavior is
guided by their independent self construals.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) point out that interdependence “entails
seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one’s behavior is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor [or actress] perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others in the relationship” (p. 227). When individuals’ behavior is guided by their interdependent self construals their behavior is a response to others with whom they are interdependent (i.e., ingroup members; Markus & Kitayama, 1998). The “important tasks” for individuals emphasizing their interdependent self construals are to fit-in with their ingroups, act in an appropriate fashion, promote their ingroups’ goals, occupy their proper places, be indirect, and read ingroup members’ minds (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Individuals’ self-esteem is based on their “ability to adjust” to ingroup members, restrain themselves, and “maintain harmony” in their ingroups when their interdependent self construals guide their behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 230).

Everyone has both self construals, but individuals tend to use one self construal more than the other to guide their behavior, in part, as a function of their cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The self construal individuals activate, however, also depends on the situation (e.g., Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001). Self construals are individual-level factors that mediate the influence of cultural individualism-collectivism on communication (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim et al., 1996; Singelis & Brown, 1995). Triandis (1995) defines individualism as “a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives [and] are primarily motivated by their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others” (p. 2). Collectivism is defined as a “social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of one or more collectives (family, co-workers, tribe, nation) [and] are primarily motivated by the norms of, and duties imposed by, those collectives” (p. 2). Other factors that mediate the influence of cultural individualism-collectivism on communication have not been used widely in communication research (e.g., per-
sonality orientations, idiocentrism-allocentrism as in Triandis, Chan, Bhawuk, Iwao, & Sinha, 1985, or individual-level individualistic and collectivistic values, as in Schwartz, 1992). Gudykunst et al. (1996) found that self construals explain more variance in communication styles than cultural individualism-collectivism and individual-level individualistic and collectivistic values.

Three self construal scales have been used in the vast majority of the research conducted to date (Gudykunst et al., 1994, 1996; Leung & Kim, 1997, and earlier versions of the scales; Singelis, 1994). Levine et al.’s (2003) analyses of the three scales is the first extensive test of the validity of the scales. Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier (2002) examined self construals in their analysis of individual-level measures of individualism-collectivism and Matsumoto (1999) criticized Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) conceptualization of self construals based on results of studies included in Levine et al.’s meta-analysis. Levine et al. conclude that their findings suggest “severe, and perhaps fatal, flaws in self construal scales” (p. 244). We disagree with this conclusion. We argue that Levine et al. have isolated one potential threat to the validity of self construal scales; namely, there may be more than two dimensions of self construals. We believe that Levine et al.’s other findings are not problems with the validity of the scales. Rather, their findings would be expected, given theorizing about self construals. We begin by looking at Levine et al.’s meta-analysis of respondents’ self construal scores in individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

LEVINE ET AL.’S META-ANALYSIS

Levine et al.’s (2003) meta-analysis appears to be based on the assumption that the samples used in the studies analyzed should reflect the general tendencies of the cultures from which they are drawn with respect to cultural individualism-collectivism; that is, interdependent self construal scores should be higher in samples from collectivistic cultures than in samples from individualistic cultures, and independent self construal scores should be higher in samples from individualistic cultures than in samples from collectivistic cultures. Carpenter’s (2000) coding of descriptions of the self in the Human Relations Area Files supports this assumption. The results of Levine et al.’s meta-analysis, in contrast, do not support this assumption. Their findings, however, do not necessarily mean that self construal scales lack validity.

The theoretical arguments regarding the function of self construals in mediating the influence of cultural individualism-collectivism on communication suggest that self construals explain the individual-level vari-
ability in individualistic and collectivistic tendencies within cultures, not that self construals explain cultural-level individualism-collectivism (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim et al., 1996; Singelis & Brown, 1995). Gudykunst et al. (1996), for example, argue that the cultures in which individuals are raised influence the way individuals are socialized in terms of individualistic and collectivistic tendencies. Cultural individualism-collectivism has a direct effect on communication because it affects the norms and rules that guide behavior in individualistic and collectivistic cultures. The individualistic or collectivistic tendencies that individuals learn when being socialized into their cultures, in turn, influence the way they conceive of themselves (e.g., self construals), their personality orientations (e.g., idiocentrism-allocentrism), and the values they hold (e.g., individualistic or collectivistic values).

Gudykunst et al. (1996) also contend that members of individualistic cultures generally learn the dominant values of their cultures (e.g., independence, achievement) and acquire the preferred ways for how members of the cultures are expected to view themselves (e.g., as unique persons). Members of collectivistic cultures generally learn different dominant values (e.g., harmony, solidarity) and acquire different preferred ways to conceive of themselves (e.g., as interconnected with others). Members of individualistic and collectivistic cultures, however, do not just learn one set of values or just one way to conceive of themselves. Since individualism and collectivism exist in all cultures, members of individualistic cultures also learn collectivistic values and acquire views of themselves as interconnected with others, and members of collectivistic cultures also learn individualistic values and acquire views of themselves as unique persons. This suggests that members of individualistic cultures use (e.g., activate) their independent self construals more than members of collectivistic cultures and that members of collectivistic cultures use their interdependent self construals more than members of individualistic cultures.2

There are some members of individualistic cultures that learn mainly collectivistic ways of dealing with the world, and there are some members of collectivistic cultures that learn mainly individualistic ways of dealing with the world. It is this within-cultural variability that self construals (and other individual-level measures of individualism-collectivism) explain.3 Given this line of theoretical reasoning, clear patterns may not emerge in cross-cultural comparisons of independent and interdependent self construals depending on the samples. If the self construal scores do not fit the “expected” patterns, it does not necessarily mean that the scales are invalid. It probably means that the samples are not representative of cultural individualism-collectivism.

Triandis (1995) estimates that at least 30% of the members of a culture do not fit the predominant individualistic or collectivistic tendencies in
their culture. Other research (e.g., Hamaguchi, 1980; Ishii-Kuntz, 1989; Matsumoto, Kudoh, & Takeuchi, 1996) supports this conclusion, particularly with respect to Japan (used in several of the studies in Levine et al.’s, 2003, meta-analysis). These findings suggest that there are generational changes occurring in Japan where younger generations are becoming less collectivistic and more individualistic than older generations.4

Generational changes in individualistic and collectivistic tendencies also are taking place in other collectivistic cultures (e.g., the younger generations are becoming more individualistic and less collectivistic than older generations). These changes are so pronounced that Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Assai, & Luca (1988) suggest that college students may not be viable samples to test hypotheses regarding the effects of cultural individualism-collectivism in many collectivistic cultures. Given the generational changes that are occurring in collectivistic cultures, it is not surprising that many of the studies that use student samples to test self construals across cultures do not find the “expected” patterns, especially when these student samples are compared to multiethnic samples in the United States (e.g., Gudykunst et al.’s, 1994, U.S. sample). There also may be generational changes occurring in the United States that influenced Levine et al.’s (2003) meta-analysis. A recent Gallup Poll of U.S. college students, for example, revealed that 64% strongly agreed or agreed with the statement: “I think my generation will come to be known as the ‘us’ generation, meaning that we’ll be more oriented toward community well-being rather than ourselves” (Lowery, 2002, p. A7).

If college students are used as respondents, minimally the strength of their cultural identities should be assessed. Gudykunst and Nishida (1999), for example, found that Japanese and U.S. college students who strongly identify with their cultures hold values consistent with the individualistic or collectivistic tendencies in their cultures more than those who weakly identify with their cultures. The value differences expected between Japanese and U.S. participants emerge for students who strongly identify with their cultures but not for those who weakly identify with their cultures. We therefore believe that the “expected” patterns for self construals in individualistic and collectivistic cultures would occur only for college students who strongly identify with their cultures.

Gudykunst (2002) argues that one of the primary uses of individual-level measures of individualism-collectivism (e.g., self construals) is to test whether samples are representative of the cultural syndromes being studied. It is possible, however, that these tests are influenced by cultural response styles. Asians, for example, often do not use the end-points on rating scales (e.g., Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995). To ensure this is not the case, analyses of mean scores should be conducted with both raw scores and scores standardized within cultures.
If samples are not representative of cultural individualism-collectivism, then researchers should use self construals (or other measures of individual-level individualism-collectivism) as covariates in the cultural-level analyses (Gudykunst, 2002). Once individual variability is removed, fair tests of cultural syndromes can be made. To illustrate, Gudykunst et al.'s (1996) samples from Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States did not fit the expected pattern for cultural individualism-collectivism based on the average self construals of their samples (or individual-level individualistic and collectivistic values). They, therefore, included self construals as covariates in their analysis of the effect of cultural individualism-collectivism on communication styles. Self construals explained 62% of the variance in communication styles and cultural individualism-collectivism explained 22% after the effect for self construals was removed. Cultural individualism-collectivism explained less variance when the variance explained by self construals was removed first than when self construals were not included at all. Because the individual-level variability in individualism-collectivism within cultures was removed in this study (due to self construals being treated as covariates), the results for cultural individualism-collectivism should be a reasonable estimate of its effect. Including covariates would not have been necessary, however, if the samples were consistent with the cultural syndromes based on individual-level measures (e.g., self construals).

LEVINE ET AL.’S PRIMING STUDIES

Kanagawa et al. (2001) point out that

the content of the working self-concept is determined by the social situation at a given time and by the person’s current goals, affect, and motivational state. Once activated, the working self-concept orients and directs an individual’s behavior so as to facilitate adaptation to a given social context. (p. 91)

Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee (1999) found that independent and interdependent “primes” influence the values respondents endorse and the judgments they make. Several other studies have produced compatible results (e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Kühnen & Hannover, 2000; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; Trafimow, Silverman, Fan, & Law, 1997; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Oetzel (1999) discovered that cooperative-competitive task structure and ingroup-outgroup status influence the situation-specific self construals that respondents activate.
These studies indicate that priming influences the self construals individuals activate in specific situations.

Prior research has focused whether situational primes influence which self construal individuals activate. Levine et al.’s (2003) priming studies, in contrast, examined whether situational primes influence respondents’ scores on self construal scales (i.e., the strength of the two self construals). Individuals’ self construals are formed when they are socialized into their cultures, ethnic groups, families, and so forth, and are relatively stable (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). We therefore would not expect situational primes to influence respondents’ scores on self construal scales. Similarly, Fiske (2002) argues that “priming does not change institutions, practices, or systems of communication and coordination. Priming does not affect socially constituted entities, relations, and practices in relation to which a person lives” (p. 80).

Even though priming would not be expected to influence individuals’ self construal scores, it is still necessary to consider situational influences on self construals because priming influences which self construal is activated. Several studies have addressed the measurement of situation-, relationship-, or ingroup-specific individual-level individualism-collectivism. Hui (1988), for example, developed an individualism-collectivism scale that assesses individuals’ feelings and behaviors related to “solidarity and concern for others” (p. 17) directed toward spouses, parents, kin, neighbors, friends, or coworkers. Rhee, Uleman, and Lee (1996) found that individuals can be independent with respect to one ingroup and interdependent with respect to other ingroups. Uleman, Rhee, Bardoliwalla, Semin, & Toyama, (2000) observed that individuals’ individualistic and collectivistic tendencies (i.e., closeness to ingroups) vary depending on whether they are thinking of immediate family members, relatives, or friends. Gudykunst and Nishida (2002) reported that family-specific self construals can predict family communication styles but general self construals cannot. These studies clearly suggest that the issue of ingroup-specific measurement of self construals must be taken into consideration in future research.5

LEVINE ET AL.’S MEASUREMENT STUDIES

Singelis’s (1994) and Leung and Kim’s (1997) self construal scales were developed using multiethnic samples in Hawaii. Singelis’s scales were developed first and Kim et al.’s (1993; Kim & Sharkey, 1995; Leung & Kim, 1997) scales include items from Singelis’s scales.6 Gudykunst et al.’s scales (1994, 29 items, see Appendix; Levine et al., 2003, indicate they used 30 items in their Measurement Study 3 using these scales; Lapinski &
Levine, 2000) were developed using samples from Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the United States (a multiethnic sample from California). All three scales assume that the two self construals are orthogonal (i.e., are not correlated).

Levine et al.’s (2003) five measurement studies examine the dimensional structure of the three self construal scales in 10 samples (i.e., six tests of Leung & Kim’s, 1997, scales, three of Singelis’s, 1994, scales, and one test of Gudykunst et al.’s, 1994, scales). Only one of these tests examines scales with a sample from the same location from which they were developed (the test of Leung & Kim’s scales in Hawaii). None of Levine et al.’s analyses provide a good fit of the scales to the data. All analyses were conducted with the correlation between the two latent variables unconstrained (i.e., assuming correlated factors; T. R. Levine, personal communication, June 19, 2002), even though all scales are based on the assumption that the two self construals are orthogonal. Singelis’s analysis, however, suggests that this should not have a major influence on Levine et al.’s findings.

The main difference among the three scales is that Gudykunst et al.’s (1994) scales are derived etic measures (Berry, 1969), but Singelis’s (1994) and Leung and Kim’s (1997) scales are not. Gudykunst et al. began with 94 items developed in individualistic and collectivistic cultures, including items drawn from Kim et al. (1993) and Singelis and Brown (1993). Using pancultural procedures (Leung & Bond, 1989), responses were standardized within individuals and within cultures before being factor analyzed. The resulting derived etic measures of independent and interdependent self construals contain 29 items that are common across the four cultures (i.e., 15 independent items, 14 interdependent items). This procedure is not the same as testing samples from different cultures separately (e.g., Hackman, Ellis, Johnson, & Staley, 1999; Levine et al.’s Measurement Studies 2 and 5). Derived etic measures are useful for making cross-cultural comparisons. They are not, however, the best measures to use within specific cultures because they do not contain culture-specific items. The dimensional structure of derived etic scales should be tested with pancultural data. It, therefore, is not surprising that Gudykunst et al.’s scales did not provide a good fit to Levine et al.’s (2003) data in Measurement Study 3.

There is one potential methodological explanation for the results of Levine et al.’s (2003) measurement studies and other studies using confirmatory factor analysis to test the dimensional structure of self construal scales (e.g., Hackman et al., 1999). The number of respondents in Levine et al.’s measurement studies range from 121 to 323, with only one sample over 230. These sample sizes may not be sufficiently large samples for stable coefficients. Estimates of sample sizes required for stable coeffi-
cients in structural equation modeling range from a minimum of 200 respondents (e.g., Bearden, Sharma, & Teel, 1982) to 50 (e.g., Bagozzi, 1981) or 100 (e.g., McPhee & Babrow, 1987) respondents over the number of degrees of freedom ($df$).

Six of Levine et al.’s (2003) measurement studies met the minimum of 200 respondents criterion, but none of the studies approach the sample size needed to meet the 50 to 100 respondents plus the number of degrees of freedom criteria (e.g., 301 to 351 for Singelis’s, 1994, scales with 251 $df$; 425 to 475 for Gudykunst et al.’s, 1994, or Leung & Kim’s, 1997, scales with 375 $df$; we assume uncorrelated factors in stating $df$). It also appears that none of the other studies using confirmatory factor analysis had sufficiently large sample sizes to meet the 50 to 100 plus the number of degrees of freedom criteria (e.g., Hackman et al., 1999). It, therefore, is possible that the confirmatory factor analysis studies have unstable coefficients, which lead to the models not fitting the data. The sample size necessary for exploratory factor analysis tends to be smaller (e.g., 5 times the number of items; Stevens, 1996).9

We believe that there also is a plausible theoretical explanation for the results of Levine et al.’s (2003) measurement studies. In their general discussion, Levine et al. raise an important question: “Who constitutes those ambiguous ‘others’ and who comprises the constantly referenced ‘my group’ in self-construal items?” (p. 244). Clearly, these items need to be anchored to specific ingroups, relationships, or situations. There are similar problems with some of the independent items (e.g., respondents may think they should be unique in one situation but not in another). We therefore believe that one reason why the measurement models may not consistently fit the data in confirmatory factor analyses is that general self construals are used rather than ingroup-specific self construals. If the items are anchored in specific ingroups, responses may be more consistent than when they are not anchored. If cross-cultural studies are conducted, it is critical that comparable ingroups be used (e.g., the family) and that ingroup comparability is demonstrated.

An alternative explanation is that the items used to measure self construals form more than two factors. Given that all three scales were constrained to two factors when they were developed, this is a clear possibility. It may be that there are multiple factors and that these factors combine into independent and interdependent self construals in a second-order factor analysis. Takata, Omoto, and Seike (1996), for example, found that the independent self construal is divided into “individuality” and “dogmatism,” and the interdependent self construal is divided into “evaluative apprehension” and “depending on others.” Takata et al.’s results for the independent self construal are compatible with Gelfand, Triandis, and Chan (1996) who observed that authoritarianism is the
polar opposite of individualism and that collectivism is an orthogonal dimension. Sato and McCann (1998) also isolated four factors in their analysis of Singelis’s (1994) scales: autonomy, achievement, attachment, and sensitivity. These four factors could easily form two factors in a second-order factor analysis.

If there are more than two dimensions of self construals as Levine et al.’s (2003) measurement studies might suggest, it does not mean that we should discard the self construal construct, especially if they form two dimensions in second-order factor analyses. If there are two dimensions in second-order factor analyses, it is only necessary to describe the first order factors that form independent and interdependent self construals. If two dimensions are not formed in second-order factor analyses, however, it suggests that we should refine our conceptualization and measurement of self construals.10

EVIDENCE FOR THE CONSTRUCT VALIDITY OF THE SCALES

Levine et al.’s (2003) measurement studies do not provide definitive evidence that the two dimensional self construal scales lack validity. It is possible that the data from their measurement studies would yield multiple factors that combine into two self construals in second-order factor analyses. Testing the dimensional structure of self construals, as in Levine et al.’s measurement studies, also is only one way to assess construct validity. Carmines and Zeller (1979) argue that “construct validation must be conceived of within a theoretical context. . . . Construct validity is concerned with the extent to which a particular measure relates to other measures consistent with theoretically derived hypotheses concerning the concepts . . . that are being measured” (p. 23). In other words, the construct validity of self construal scales should be assessed by examining their associations with other measures that should be theoretically related to self construals. There is extensive evidence for the construct validity of all three scales. Space does not allow a summary of the studies that have been conducted. We therefore only outline the evidence here (see Gudykunst, n.d., for a brief summary of the studies that have been conducted).

There are numerous studies using Singelis’s (1994) scales that are consistent with Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) conceptualization of self construals, for example, high-context communication (Singelis & Brown, 1995), embarrassability (Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai, 1999; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995), self-esteem-relational harmony (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997), relatedness (Gorski & Young, 2002; Sato & McCann, 1998), defining the self based on group memberships (Sato & Cameron, 1999), differ-
entiation-similarity (Aaker & Schmitt, 2001), and strength of ethnic identity (Barry, 2002). There also is convergence between Singelis’s scales and other measures of individual-level individualism-collectivism (Singelis et al., 1995).

Similarly, there are numerous studies using Leung and Kim’s (1997) scales that are consistent with Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) conceptualization of self construals, for example, conversational constraints (Kim, Sharkey, & Singelis, 1994, Kim et al. 1996; Kim & Sharkey, 1995), conflict styles (Kim & Kitani, 1998), communication apprehension-argumentativeness (Kim, Aune, Hunter, Kim, & Kim, 2001), conversational indirectness (Hara & Kim, 2001), personal versus social attitudes (Park & Levine, 1999), self- versus other-promotion (Ellis & Wittenbaum, 2000), and sojourner adjustment (Yamaguchi & Wiseman, 2001).

There also are numerous studies using Gudykunst et al.’s (1996) scales that are consistent with Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) conceptualization of self construals, for example, low- and high-context communication (Gudykunst, 2001; Gudykunst & Nishida, 2002; Gudykunst et al., 1996), conflict styles (Oetzel, 1998c; Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, & Chew, 2001), leadership styles (Hackman et al., 1999), communal relationships (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), relational harmony (Chau, Cheung, Cheung, Li, & Wong, 1996), face and facework (Oetzel et al., 1999, 2001), self-esteem (Chau et al., 1996; Morisaki, 1997), emotional expression (Morisaki, 1997), strength of ethnic-cultural identity (Gudykunst, 2001), and sojourner adjustment (Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002). There is evidence for the convergence of Gudykunst et al.’s scales with other individual-level measures of individualism-collectivism as well (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1994, 1996; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

Levine et al. (2003) argue that two studies with nonsignificant findings challenge the validity of Leung and Kim’s (1997) self construal scales (Levine et al., 1999; Park, 2001). Levine et al. (1999) reported that the independent self construal is associated positively with self-reported honesty in other-benefit situations, but not in a self-benefit situation. They did not, however, find the associations between self construals and coders’ ratings of deception that they predicted. These findings may be due to conceptual problems with Kim, Kam, Singelis, and Aune’s (1999) cultural model of deceptive communication motivation on which Levine et al.’s study was based (e.g., ingroup-outgroup distinctions are not made). Alternatively, the results may be due to the conditions studied not requiring deceptive messages. We would, for example, only expect the interdependent self construal to influence the generation of deceptive messages in situations where the person benefitting in the other-benefit condition is an ingroup member.

Park (2001) found that the independent self construal is correlated posi-
tively with individuals placing emphasis on maintaining their own opinions. The interdependent self construal was correlated positively with individuals placing importance on considering the majority opinion when forming their opinions. After assessing initial opinions, Park provided participants with fake majority opinions. She expected that individuals who emphasized their independent self construals would diverge from the majority opinions and those who emphasized their interdependent self construals would converge toward the majority opinions. The results did not support the predictions. As with Levine et al.’s (1999) findings, Park’s results may be due to not assessing whether the participants viewed the majority as members of their ingroups. We would expect, for example, that individuals emphasizing interdependent self construals would only converge toward the opinions of the majority in important ingroups.

Approximately 50 studies have been conducted that clearly indicate that the three self construal scales have clear patterns of associations with other variables that are theoretically consistent with Markus and Kitayama’s (1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1998; Markus, Kitayama, Mullally, Masuda, & Fryberg, 1997; Markus, Mullally, et al., 1997) conceptualization of self construals. There also is a convergence in the findings across the three scales (e.g., the same variables are associated with the same self construals across the different scales). Studies of self construals have been conducted by a wide variety of researchers, many of whom do not have any connection with the scale developers. The evidence consistently supports the construct validity of the three self construal scales. This would not be possible if there are “severe” or “fatal” (or even major) flaws with the conceptualization of self construals or the scales designed to measure them.

Levine et al. (2003) dismiss the evidence for the construct validity of the three scales. They argue that the correlations may be spurious, that the correlations are between self-reports of self construals and other self-report measures (this is not true of all studies, e.g., Ellis & Wittenbaum, 2000; Oetzel, 1998a, 1998b), and that correlations “do not provide as strong of evidence as many social scientists think they do” (p. 246). Levine et al. also point out that scores on self construal scales may correlate with other measures because items related to those measures are included in the self construal scales. They contend that multitrait-multimethod validation procedures (e.g., Campbell & Fiske, 1959) need to be used to demonstrate the validity of self construal scales. Finally, Levine et al. suggest that self-report items may not be appropriate for measuring the interdependent self construal.

We agree with Levine et al. (2003) that multitrait-multimethod procedures would be ideal ways to establish validity, and future attempts to establish the validity of measures of self construals should use these procedures (e.g., as Triandis, Chan, Bhawuk, Iwao, & Sinha, 1995, have done
for their measures of idiocentrism-allocentrism). We disagree, however, that the evidence for construct validity presented here can be dismissed. Cronbach (1971) argues that “one validates, not a test, but an interpretation of data” (p. 447). The findings of approximately 50 studies are consistent with Markus and Kitayama’s (1991, 1994a, 1994b, 1998) conceptualization of self construals. This minimizes the possibility that the associations between self construals and other variables are spurious.

The vast majority of the findings are based on self-report measures but there is no evidence that the correlations are due to the use of the same method of measurement, and similar findings emerge based on coders’ ratings of behavior (e.g., Ellis & Wittenbaum, 2000; Oetzel, 1998a, 1998b). There also is no evidence that the correlations are due to the self construal scales containing items related to the concepts with which they are correlated. The only finding that comes close to providing evidence is the lack of association between the independent self construal and high-context communication in Singelis and Brown’s (1995) study (e.g., Singelis’, 1994, independent self construal scale contains a couple of items that might tap low-context communication).

We also have not seen any evidence to suggest that the interdependent self construal cannot be measured with self-report items. Many scholars in collectivists cultures have used self-report measures to assess collectivism at the individual level (e.g., Hamaguchi’s, 1980, measure of contextualism; Verma’s, 1992, measure of allocentrism; Yamaguchi’s, 1994, measure of individual-level collectivism). We believe, however, that measuring interdependent self construals using self-report items is best accomplished by anchoring the items to specific ingroups, as Gudykunst et al. (1994, 1996) suggested. It is also possible that the use of scenarios instead of attitudinal items might yield better measures. Peng, Nisbett, & Wong (1997), for example, found that rankings and ratings of values across cultures do not yield measures with good criterion validity. Attitude measures have better criterion validity than rankings or ratings, but scenarios have the highest criterion validity (e.g., see Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998, for scenarios to measure individual-level horizontal and vertical individualism-collectivism; also see Schwartz et al., 2001, for a “portrait” procedure that might be useful).

Finally, Levine et al. (2003) claim that correlations do not provide strong evidence for the construct validity of self construal scales. Correlations, nevertheless, are used widely in the physical and social sciences. Gebhardt et al. (2000), for example, used a correlation to establish the relationship between black holes and galaxy velocity. Musser (2000) claims that the findings of this correlational study approach the status of a new “law of nature.” The APA Taskforce on Statistical Inference suggests that researchers should choose the “minimally sufficient analysis” (Wilkinson & APA
Taskforce on Statistical Inference, 1999). In testing many of the hypotheses regarding self construals, correlations are the “minimally sufficient analysis.” Not all research on self construals, however, uses correlations. Many studies use regression analysis or structural equation modeling. The findings are consistent across the statistical procedures used and, therefore, the results of the studies cannot be attributed to the use of correlations.

One concern we have about the results of some studies of self construals that Levine et al. (2003) do not mention arises when one self construal correlates positively with a specific variable and the other self construal correlates negatively with the same variable (e.g., Ellis & Wittenbaum, 2000; Hara & Kim, 2001; Kim et al., 2000, 2001; Sato & McCann, 1998; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995). Hara and Kim (2001), for example, found that the interdependent self construal correlates positively and the independent self construal correlates negatively with the tendency to speak indirectly. If the two scales are orthogonal, this should not happen. Rather, the two scales should consistently correlate with different variables if they are truly orthogonal.

CONCLUSION

We contend that the results of Levine et al.’s (2003) meta-analysis of cross-cultural studies using self construal scales do not warrant concluding that the scales lack validity. Rather, their findings probably reflect that the samples used in the studies analyzed are not representative of cultural individualism-collectivism. We also argue that the priming studies Levine et al. conducted should not be expected to influence the respondents’ scores on self construal scales. Priming only influences the self construals individuals activate, not their scores on the scales.

Levine et al.’s (2003) measurement studies raise an important concern about the dimensionality of self construals. These studies, however, do not rule out that there are multiple factors that combine into two dimensions (i.e., independent and interdependent self construals) in second-order factor analyses. This may be likely given that other evidence for construct validity clearly indicates the two dimensions of self construals yield theoretically consistent patterns of associations with the other variables that have been studied. This suggests that there cannot be “severe” or “fatal” flaws with the conceptualization or measurement of self construals. In combination with the consistently acceptable reliabilities that are obtained across cultures, the evidence for construct validity indicates that the two-dimensional model of self construals and the three self construal scales are viable for use in future research.
APPENDIX

Gudykunst (1994) et al.’s Self Construal Scales

I should be judged on my own merit. (ind)
Being able to take care of myself is a primary concern for me. (ind)
My personal identity is important to me. (ind)*
I consult others before making important decisions. (inter)
I consult with co-workers on work-related matters. (inter)
I prefer to be self-reliant rather than depend on others. (ind)*
I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group. (inter)*
I stick with my group even through difficulties. (inter)*
I respect decisions made by my group. (inter)*
I will stay in a group if it needs me, even if I am not happy with it. (inter)
I maintain harmony in the groups of which I am a member. (inter)*
I respect the majority’s wishes in groups of which I am a member. (inter)*
I remain in the groups of which I am a member if they need me, even though I am dissatisfied with them. (inter)
I am a unique person separate from others. (ind)
If there is a conflict between my values and values of groups of which I am a member, I follow my values. (ind)
I try to abide by customs and conventions at work. (inter)
I try not to depend on others. (ind)
I take responsibility for my own actions. (ind)*
I give special consideration to others’ personal situations so I can be efficient at work. (inter)
It is better to consult others and get their opinions before doing anything. (inter)
It is important to consult close friends and get their ideas before making a decision. (inter)*
It is important for me to act as an independent person. (ind)*
I should decide my future on my own. (ind)*
What happens to me is my own doing. (ind)
My relationships with others are more important to me than my accomplishments. (inter)
I enjoy being unique and different from others. (ind)*
I am comfortable being singled out for praise and rewards. (ind)
I help acquaintances, even if it is inconvenient. (ind)**
I don’t support a group decision when it is wrong. (ind)

NOTE: ind = independent self construal; inter = interdependent self construal. The items are worded to measure general self construals. We believe that the wording of the items should be modified if behavior in a specific ingroup is studied. Not all items can be modified for ingroup-specific self construals.

*These 12 items all loaded .50 or greater in Gudykunst et al.’s (1994, 1996) study. They can be used to construct short versions of the scales. As would be expected, reliability tends to be a little lower than the full scales, but the short versions are consistently reliable.

**This item lacks face validity and we suggest that it be dropped.
NOTES

1. Following the original use by Markus and Kitayama, we do not hyphenate self construal.

2. We believe that “use” or “activate” is a better way to state this claim, rather than saying that one self construal “predominates” in individualistic or collectivistic cultures.

3. Gudykunst et al. (1996) do not claim that self construals explain cross-cultural variability in communication styles as Levine et al. (2003) suggest they do.

4. Matsumoto, Kudoh, and Takeuchi (1996), for example, found that 70.8% of a student sample in Japan are individualists and only 29.2% are collectivists (they used Matsumoto et al.’s, 1997, measure which provides one score for individual-level individualism-collectivism). Their Japanese adult sample (average age 39) revealed the opposite tendency: 67.9% are collectivists and 32.1% are individualists. Hamaguchi (1980) reported that 74.7% of respondents in Japanese organizations are “contextualists” (i.e., collectivists). Similar conclusions emerge from other studies (e.g., Ishii-Kuntz, 1989; see also research reviewed by Takano & Osaka, 1997, 1999). Matsumoto (2002) concludes that Japan is moving toward an “individualistic collectivism.” We believe it is too early to conclude that the Japanese culture has changed. Only time will tell whether the younger generations will change the Japanese culture or whether the Japanese culture will change the younger generations when they are socialized into the corporations for which they work.

5. Gudykunst et al. (1994) presented situation-specific versions of their scales.


7. Gudykunst et al.’s independent scale includes items from Singelis, Triandis, Hui (e.g., Hui, 1988; Triandis et al., 1985) and items they wrote. Their interdependent scale incorporate items from Hamaguchi (1980), Verma (1992), and Yamaguchi (1990, 1994).

8. One independent item—“I help acquaintances, even if it is inconvenient”—lacks face validity and should be dropped.

9. Gudykunst et al. did not have sufficiently large samples within cultures to do culture-specific factor analyses, 94 items × 5 = 470 respondents needed.

10. One possibility is that there are three self construals: individual, collective, and relational (e.g., Kashima & Hardie, 2000; Kashima et al., 1995). In this model, the relational self construal is based on individuals’ relationships with specific people with whom the individuals feel close. Similarly, Cross, Bacon, & Morris (2000) argue that there are two types of interdependent self construals: collectivism based interdependence (e.g., the self is defined by group memberships) and relational interdependence (e.g., the self is defined by close relationships with others).

Another viable way to modify our conceptualization of self construals is to adopt Triandis’ (1995) distinction between horizontal (e.g., it is not acceptable for individuals to stand out from others) and vertical (e.g., it is acceptable and desirable for individuals to stand out from others) individualism and collectivism. This distinction would yield horizontal and vertical independent self construals, as well as horizontal and vertical interdependent self construals. Triandis and Gelfand (1998) argue that there is convergent validity between Gudykunst et al.’s self construal scales and Singelis et al.’s (1995) individual-level measures of horizontal and vertical individualism-collectivism.

Still another conceptualization can be adapted from Kagitçibasi’s (1996, 1997) distinction between two aspects of individual autonomy: (a) “interpersonal separateness-relatedness” or the “degree of distancing of the self from others,” and (b) “agent-like versus pawn-like (dependent) functioning” or autonomy-heteronomy (agency-dependency; 1996, p. 180). Kagitçibasi links these aspects of individual autonomy to normative and relational cultural individualism-collectivism: “Normative individualism is parallel to autonomy, and normative collectivism to heteronomy; relational individualism is akin to separateness and relational collectivism to relatedness” (1996, p. 181). Her emphasis on autonomy-agency is com-
compatible with Kashima et al.’s (1995) and Wang, Bristol, Mowen, & Chakraborty (2000) research revealing cultural differences on this dimension. Kashima et al., however, link the relational dimension to gender differences rather than cultural differences.

Any one of the alternative views outlined here could be used as a starting point for reconceptualizing self construals. A clear theory of self construals that specifies how they are linked to communication within cultures and across cultures is needed before the measurement of self construals can be refined.

REFERENCES


