

# The “Me” I Claim to Be: Cultural Self-Construal Elicits Self-Presentational Goal Pursuit

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In 12 studies, respondents with an independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal showed an increased tendency and readiness to present themselves as skillful and capable and a decreased tendency and readiness to present themselves as socially sensitive and appropriate. This emerged in the form of differential scores on direct measures of self-presentation—self-deceptive enhancement and impression management (Study 1), differential social sensitivity in a gift-giving scenario (Study 2), differential performance on questions assessing general knowledge (Studies 5–6) and etiquette (Studies 7–8), and different choices between tests purportedly measuring one’s self-reliance versus social-appropriateness (Studies 9A and 9D). These relationships were observed when participants focused on their own self-presentational concerns but disappeared when participants focused on others’ outcomes (Study 3) or when they had a prior opportunity to satisfy their goals via self-affirmation (Studies 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9B, 9D). Finally, self-construal effects were eliminated or reversed when participants were led to doubt their ability to achieve their self-presentational goals (Study 9C).

*Keywords:* self-construal, independent prime, interdependent prime, self-presentational goals, self-affirmation

Imagine that you are hosting a formal dinner party for a group of acquaintances. Which of these is important to you: being seen as capable, skillful, and confident or being seen as socially sensitive and normatively appropriate? This may not seem like a meaningful choice because both of these types of qualities are typically central to our self-presentations. However, the social desirability of each of these types of qualities may differ depending on our current self-presentational goals. Self-presentational goals shape a variety of social judgments and decisions (e.g., Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). Indeed, many judgments and decisions are made in the service of self-presentation (Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker, 1980). People seek to appear more skillful, normatively appropriate, and generally more desirable through strategic self-presentations (e.g., Jones & Pittman, 1982; Schlenker, 1980).

However, people may highlight different qualities in their self-presentation, and the qualities deemed desirable will vary from one context to another (Schlenker, 1980). In this article, we argue that the cultural self-construal that is salient or dominant will determine the self-presentational goals that are triggered and effectively pursued.

Different self-construals are known to coexist in memory (Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). Only a subset of these are active in memory at any given time, depending, in part, on contextual cues that make them accessible (Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998) or on one’s cultural orientation. In particular, independent and interdependent self-construals have been linked to broad and profound differences in social judgments and processes (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; van Baaren, Maddux, Chartrand, de Bouter, & de Bouter, 2003). The independent self-construal is associated with concerns about establishing distinctiveness from others and being successfully self-reliant, whereas the interdependent self-construal is associated with concerns about maintaining connectedness and harmony with others, as well as saving face (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Although both independent and interdependent self-construals are present within each of us, they can be differentially activated as a function of context (e.g., Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; van Baaren et al., 2003). These self-construals have been linked to semantic associations and cognitive processes that influence a host of judgments and behavior. For instance, Gardner et al. (1999) found that salient self-construal significantly influences people’s values and their perception and evaluation of events. Whereas those with a salient, independent self-construal espouse values such as freedom, independence, choosing one’s own goals, and living an exciting life, those with a salient interdependent self-construal endorse values such as belongingness, friendship, family safety, and respect for elders.

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We argue that these different self-construals also activate and enhance the pursuit of distinct self-presentational goals. As a result, the nature of self-presentational efforts varies as a function of self-construal. Our prediction is that an independent self-construal elicits a presentation of oneself as uniquely competent and skillful. An interdependent self-construal elicits a presentation of oneself as normatively appropriate and socially sensitive. We further predict that these relationships will only be observed when respondents focus on their own self-presentational concerns and not when they focus on others' outcomes, when they are able to affirm their desirability through other means, or when they have reason to doubt their self-presentational performance.

### Self-Presentational Goals

Self-presentation pervades all aspects of human behavior. Self-presentations not only have important implications for how presenters are perceived, evaluated, and treated by others, but also for their own self-concepts and psychological well-being (Martin, Leary, & Rejeski, 2000). Hence, not surprisingly, research has demonstrated that self-presentations influence a host of outcomes, including romantic attraction, occupational and organizational success, and longevity of friendships (Vohs et al., 2005). Although the importance of understanding self-presentations has been repeatedly emphasized (e.g., James, 1890; Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Martin et al., 2000; Schlenker, 1980), relatively little attention has been devoted to different types of self-presentations as well as to the cultural factors that trigger distinct self-presentational goals. In particular, the link between self-construal and pursuit of specific self-presentational goals has been overlooked.

It should be emphasized that by self-presentation, we are referring both to interpersonal presentations aimed at external audiences and to one's efforts to establish a desirable self-concept. Both aspects of self-presentation are of interest and help to establish a self-concept in line with one's values and goals. People engage in self-presentation not only to manage others' opinions but also to influence their impressions of themselves (Greenwald & Breckler, 1985; Hogan, Jones, & Cheek, 1985; Snyder et al., 1985; Tetlock & Manstead, 1985; see also Leary & Kowalski, 1990), and indeed, it may not be possible to distinguish the role of these goals (Tetlock & Manstead, 1985).

Research has pointed to two distinct types of self-presentational goals. For instance, in the consumer domain, Sengupta, Dahl, and Gorn (2002) examined the conditions that can lead people actively to misrepresent information about their consumption decisions, including falsely presenting the price of their purchases. Their theorizing suggests that distinct motives such as impression management (IM) and self-bolstering could drive such misrepresentations. Wooten and Reed (2004) examined individual differences predicting people's self-presentational style, distinguishing between the tendency to protect oneself from perceived social disapproval, on the one hand, and the tendency to portray oneself in exaggerated or in self-enhancing terms, on the other. On similar lines, Millham and Kellogg (1980; also see Paulhus, 2002) showed that people who are prone to unrealistic self-enhancement exhibit diminished recall of their own unfavorable characteristics, whereas those who are prone to IM exhibit enhanced recall of the same characteristics.

This distinction in the goals that drive people to present themselves favorably maps on to two distinct forms of socially desirable responding: one in which people provide inflated assessments of their skills and abilities and another in which they downplay their shortcomings in order to appear normatively appropriate. These are referred to, respectively, as self-deceptive enhancement (SDE) and IM (e.g., Paulhus, 1991; Sackeim & Gur, 1979). Mick (1996) noted that distinguishing between these two categories enhances understanding of self-presentations regarding materialistic values (see also Sengupta et al., 2002; Wooten & Reed, 2004). These and other studies suggest that examining the distinct purposes served by self-presentation yields greater insights than does viewing self-presentation in unidimensional terms. It is important to note that these types of self-presentations fit well with the distinct motivations likely to be associated with independent and interdependent self-construals.

SDE refers to the tendency to describe oneself in an inflated yet honestly held manner (Paulhus, 1991). SDE is motivated by the desire to see oneself as competent and self-reliant (Lalwani, Shavitt, & Johnson, 2006). It is a predisposition to see oneself in a positive, overconfident light (Paulhus, 2002). SDE has been linked to such personality constructs as perceived control (Paulhus, 1991), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), self-controlling behavior (Paulhus, 1991), self-esteem (Paulhus, 1991; 2002), social dominance (Paulhus, 1991), and a general sense of capability (Holden & Fekken, 1989). SDE is linked to overclaiming of knowledge regarding various persons, events, and objects. For reasons that are described presently, we expect that when an independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal is salient, there will be a greater tendency and readiness to engage in SDE. On the other hand, IM refers to an attempt to tailor one's responses in order to appear more normatively appropriate (Paulhus, 1991; Leary & Kowalski, 1990) and is closely related to faking and dissimulation (Mick, 1996). It is an "attempt to control images that are projected in real or social interactions" (Schlenker, 1980, p. 6). Concerns about one's social relationships likely give rise to a tendency to present oneself in ways designed to harmoniously fit in and gain social approval. Thus, we expect that an interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal will be associated with a greater tendency and readiness to engage in IM.

### Self-Construal and Self-Presentational Goals

Although the notion that people have multiple selves is not new (James, 1890), recent research has established and delineated two distinct self-construals carrying broad implications for judgment and behavior. The independent self-construal involves a view of oneself that is autonomous, distinct from others, and self-reliant.

This view of the self derives from a belief in the wholeness and uniqueness of each person's configuration of internal attributes . . . It gives rise to processes like "self-actualization," "realizing oneself," expressing one's unique configuration of needs, rights, and capacities, or developing one's distinct potential (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226).

In contrast, the interdependent self-construal involves viewing "oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship and recognizing that one's behavior is determined, contingent on . . . the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others" (Markus & Kitayama,

1991, p. 227). An interdependent self-construal has also been linked to an enhanced tendency to conform to social norms (Kim & Markus, 1999) to conform to the decisions of others (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999) and to be fundamentally connected to others (van Baaren et al., 2003). Thus, people whose interdependent self-construal is activated are attentive to others and are focused on maintaining sociable relations with them.

The implications of these distinct self-construals have been demonstrated in a variety of domains, including social comparison effects (Stapel & Koomen, 2001), mimicry (van Baaren et al., 2003), judgments and values (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee 1999), and information processing (Hannover & Kuhnen, 2004). In addition to activating semantic constructs and cognitive processes (Hannover & Kuhnen, 2004; Trafimow et al., 1991; also see Aarts & Dijksterhuis, 2003), self-construals can activate goals as well (Holland et al., 2004; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). Goal activation refers to the energizing of goal pursuit (Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trotschel, 2001). Accordingly, we expect an activated independent or interdependent self-construal to enhance one's readiness to engage in goal-congruent self-presentational activities, as well as one's tendency to present oneself in line with those goals.

How might self-construal activate self-presentational goals and behaviors? A defining characteristic of the independent self-construal is the perception of oneself as autonomous. Indeed, being able to function independently is a key, culturally valued goal associated with this self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Stapel & Koomen, 2001; van Baaren et al., 2003). Accordingly, researchers have suggested that an inflated and unrealistically positive view of oneself can be adaptive to the functioning and goal attainment of the independent self (Taylor & Brown, 1988) and can often be associated with better mental health (Sackeim & Gur, 1979). We therefore contend that a key self-presentational goal linked to an independent self-construal is maintaining a self-reliant, confident, and skillful self-view. Thus, when the independent self-construal is salient, people will strive to present themselves in such terms.

We expect the interdependent self-construal to be associated with a different set of self-presentational goals. A defining characteristic of an interdependent self-construal is the view of oneself as interconnected with others and sharing a common fate with them (van Baaren et al., 2003). We therefore argue that a key self-presentational goal of the interdependent self-construal is maintaining an impression of oneself as normatively appropriate and sociable. Thus, when the interdependent self-construal is salient or dominant, people will strive to present themselves in such terms.

Some evidence consistent with these contentions has been obtained for individual differences in cultural orientation and in national culture. Individualistic cultures and cultural orientations are associated with a chronically active independent self-construal, whereas collectivistic cultures and cultural orientations are associated with a chronically active interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Accordingly, the tendency to portray oneself as competent and skillful has been shown to be associated with individualism (Lalwani et al., 2006) and with constructs that are linked to this orientation, including optimism, self-esteem, perceived control, and general sense of capability (e.g., Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). People from individualistic

cultures (e.g., North Americans) are also particularly likely to manifest self-enhancing biases (Heine et al., 1999; see also Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003, for a situation in which collectivists may self-enhance).

Similarly, there is evidence suggesting a link between interdependence and a focus on social appropriateness. People with a salient interdependent self-construal, with their goal of maintaining good relationships with others, are likely to focus on obtaining social approval via their self-presentations. Indeed, early on, researchers recognized that culture plays an important role in driving social approval goals. Crowne and Marlowe (1964, p. 27) suggested that participants' tendency to engage in IM was driven by their need to respond in culturally sanctioned and approved ways in order to obtain social approval, a defining characteristic of collectivists but not individualists. In line with this, Schwartz, Verkasalo, Antonovsky, and Sagiv (1997) reported significant correlations between scores on the Marlowe-Crowne IM scale and interdependence values of conformity and tradition. Johnson and van de Vijver (2002) indicate that IM is primarily related to the constructs of conformity, face management, and deference, all of which are trademarks of people with an interdependent self-construal (e.g., Heine et al., 1999). In line with this, collectivistic values have been linked with a tendency to present oneself in normatively appropriate ways (Lalwani et al., 2006).

Prior research has delineated a number of factors influencing self-presentational goal pursuit. For instance, research has shown that self-presentations depend on others' knowledge of the presenter (Baumeister & Jones, 1978), accuracy concerns of the presenter (Schlenker, Lifka, & Wowra, 2004), gender of the audience (Pontari & Schlenker, 2003; Leary, Nezek, Downs, Radford-Davenport, 1994), target familiarity (Leary et al., 1994), and dependence on the target (Jones et al., 1968). We seek to supplement this knowledge with a focus on how distinct cultural self-construals influence self-presentational goals and efforts. Our objective is to demonstrate that salient or dominant cultural self-construals trigger and enhance the pursuit of distinct self-presentational goals. Accordingly, different self-presentations will be seen as desirable in different contexts. We predict that people will show a greater tendency and readiness to portray themselves as self-competent and capable and will be more effective in doing so when their independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal is active. However, they will show a greater tendency and readiness to portray themselves as socially sensitive and normatively appropriate and will be more effective in doing so when their interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal is active.

To demonstrate that these effects are driven by the motivation to present oneself desirably, we further show that self-construal triggers self-presentational goal pursuit only under conditions when this goal is salient, is not already satisfied, and is expected to be successfully addressed by self-presentational efforts. For instance, if self-presentational goals are fulfilled prior to a self-presentation task (e.g., by self-affirmation; Steele & Liu, 1983), then the motivation to pursue these goals further may be reduced. As a result, in such situations, self-construal may not influence self-presentations. Further, because people's motivation to pursue their goals depends on their confidence that they can attain those goals (Feather, 1966; Johnson & Stapel, 2007), they may not pursue self-presentational goals and may even avoid pursuing them when they are led to doubt their ability to present themselves favorably.

In Study 1, we explored the relationship between self-construal and participants' tendency to engage in either SDE, the tendency to portray oneself as skillful and self-reliant, or IM, the tendency to present oneself as socially sensitive and normatively appropriate. In Study 2, we examined the latter link in the context of a gift-giving scenario, looking both at participants' self-presentations as well as outside observers' perceptions of the gift-giver. In Study 3, we investigated the effect of self-construal in situations in which respondents focus on their own self-presentational concerns versus others' outcomes. We expected self-construal to influence self-presentation only when participants' own self-presentational concerns are salient, not when others' outcomes are salient. In Study 4, we examined these relations in the context of self-affirmation. We predicted that when participants are not given an opportunity to self-affirm, self-construal will influence self-presentations as predicted in previous studies. However, when participants are given an opportunity to self-affirm, enabling self-presentational goals to be fulfilled, then self-construal effects should not emerge. In Studies 5–8, we examined the effect of self-construal on the effectiveness of self-presentations and the moderating influence of self-affirmation. Specifically, in Studies 5 and 6, we investigated how self-construal influences performance on a trivial pursuit test (an opportunity to showcase one's skill), whereas in Studies 7 and 8, we examined the effect of self-construal on performance on a test of etiquette and manners (an opportunity to showcase one's social sensitivity). Finally, in Studies 9A–9D, we examined how self-construal influences choices between opportunities to showcase one's skill and opportunities to showcase one's social sensitivity. We examined these relations in contexts in which participants were able to satisfy their goals via self-affirmation (Study 9B) and in contexts in which participants were led to doubt their ability to achieve their self-presentational goals (Study 9C).

### Pretests

A series of pretests were conducted to assess the effectiveness of several primes designed to activate the independent or interdependent self-construal. Three different procedures were tested: (a) a pronoun-based prime (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999), (b) the [dis]similarities with family and friends prime (Trafimow et al., 1991), (c) a reading a scenario based prime (Trafimow et al., 1991).

In the first pretest, 56 students at a large U.S. university read a paragraph describing a trip to the city. They were randomly assigned to the independent or interdependent salient self-construal condition. For the former group, the pronouns in the story were *I*, *me*, or *mine*, which served to focus attention on the independent self-construal. For the latter group, the pronouns were *we*, *us*, or *our*, which served to make salient the connectedness between the respondent and others. This task was based on a procedure developed by Brewer and Gardner (1996) and has been used in several experiments manipulating salient self-construal (e.g., Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; van Baaren et al., 2003; Stapel & Koomen 2001). Subsequently, all respondents completed the 10-statement test (TST; Trafimow et al., 1991) in which they were given 10 statements beginning with "I am" and followed by a blank space to complete. This measure has been extensively used to ascertain the salience of the independent versus interdependent self-construal

(e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Trafimow et al., 1991).

Two independent judges coded the TST responses as idiocentric or allocentric. Idiocentric thoughts refer to a personal quality, attitude, belief, or behavior that is not related to other people (e.g., "I am artistic"). Allocentric responses refer to a quality of interdependence, friendship, or sensitivity to the viewpoints of others (e.g., "I am a good listener"). See Trafimow et al. (1991), for details and validation of this coding scheme. General linear model (GLM) analyses were used to test predictions, and all directional predictions in our studies were analyzed with one-tailed tests.

For the manipulation to be effective, there should be evidence of an interaction, such that respondents in the independent condition have a higher number of idiocentric thoughts and fewer allocentric thoughts than do those in the interdependent condition (Trafimow et al., 1991). A repeated measures GLM supported this prediction,  $F(1, 54) = 2.75, p = .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.45$  (idiocentric thoughts:  $N_{\text{independent}} = 6.39, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 5.89$ ; allocentric thoughts:  $N_{\text{independent}} = 1.36, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 2.14$ ), suggesting that the priming procedure was successful in activating the desired self-construal.

Following a priming procedure developed by Trafimow et al. (1991), respondents in the second pretest ( $N = 45$ ) were asked to think for 2 min about how they were different from (independent condition) or similar to (interdependent condition) their family and friends and to write these thoughts down. Subsequently, they were asked to complete the TST. Again, a repeated measures GLM revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 43) = 2.68, p = .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.50$ , such that respondents in the independent self-construal condition had a higher number of idiocentric thoughts than did those in the interdependent self-construal condition ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 6.46, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 5.57$ ), whereas those in the latter condition had a higher number of allocentric thoughts ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 1.17, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 1.52$ ).

Respondents in the next pretest ( $N = 39$ ) read a story about an ancient warrior, Tiglath, who was put in command of the troops for a difficult mission by his King, Sostoras. Tiglath needed to select a person to lead his army. In the independent self-construal condition, he selects a talented general, whereas in the interdependent self-construal condition, he selects a trusted family member. Subsequently, respondents were asked how much they admired Sostoras. Because this pretest was conducted along with several other studies, the TST could not be administered. Instead, to check this manipulation, we examined scores on Triandis and Gelfand's (1998) measure of cultural orientation. Consistent with expectations, respondents in the independent self-construal condition scored higher on individualism than did those in the interdependent self-construal condition ( $M_{\text{independent}} = 5.21, M_{\text{interdependent}} = 4.56$ ),  $t(37) = 2.10, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.69$ , suggesting that the manipulation was successful.

### Study 1: Manifesting an SDE or IM Style of Responding

If an activated independent or interdependent self-construal triggers distinct motives, then one would expect it to be associated with corresponding styles of self-presentation. The first study was designed to test this hypothesis by measuring self-presentations directly via individual difference measures of socially desirable responding. We examined whether participants whose independent

(vs. interdependent) self-construal is salient would score higher on a measure of SDE, a form of socially desirable responding that presents an inflated view of one's capability and self-reliance. We also examined whether participants whose interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal is salient would score higher on a measure of IM, a form of socially desirable responding that presents oneself as normatively appropriate and socially sensitive.

### Method

**Participants and design.** One hundred and twelve students in introductory courses at a large university participated in exchange for class credit. One of two different primes was used to make a given self-construal salient—either the pronoun-based prime (Brewer & Gardner, 1996), or the (dis)similarity to family and friends task (Trafimow et al., 1991), both described in the pretests. After one of these priming procedures, respondents participated in what was ostensibly a separate study carried out by different researchers.

**Measures of self-presentation.** Subsequently, participants were asked to complete the Paulhus Deception Scales (formerly, the Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding or BIDR; Paulhus, 1991) designed to measure SDE and IM. The SDE and IM scales comprised 20 items each (SDE examples: “My first impressions of people usually turn out to be right” and “I am very confident of my judgments”; IM examples: “I always declare everything when asked by police or customs officials,” and “I have never dropped litter on the street”). All items were 7-point Likert-type scales anchored with 1 = *strongly disagree* and with 7 = *strongly agree*. Participants then responded to several demographic questions before being debriefed and dismissed.

### Results and Discussion

Because the pattern of results did not differ by type of self-construal prime, we collapsed the data across prime types. As predicted, a GLM with SDE and IM as a repeated measures factor and salient-self-construal (independent or interdependent) as a between-subjects factor revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 110) = 11.37, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.64$ . Participants with a salient independent self-construal had a greater tendency to engage in SDE than did those in the interdependent self-construal condition ( $M_{\text{independent}} = 4.22, M_{\text{interdependent}} = 3.98$ ),  $t(110) = 2.07, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.39$ , whereas those in the interdependent self-construal condition had a greater tendency to engage in IM than did those in the independent self-construal condition ( $M_{\text{independent}} = 3.39, M_{\text{interdependent}} = 3.70$ ),  $t(110) = 2.05, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.39$  (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

The results of this study suggest that salient self-construal leads people to engage in self-presentations geared to the goals of the activated self-construal. When an independent (versus interdependent) self-construal is salient, people are more likely to describe themselves in ways that appear intelligent, self-reliant, and discerning, scoring higher in SDE. In contrast, when an interdependent (versus independent) self-construal is salient, people are more likely to describe themselves in ways that appear socially appropriate, scoring higher in IM.

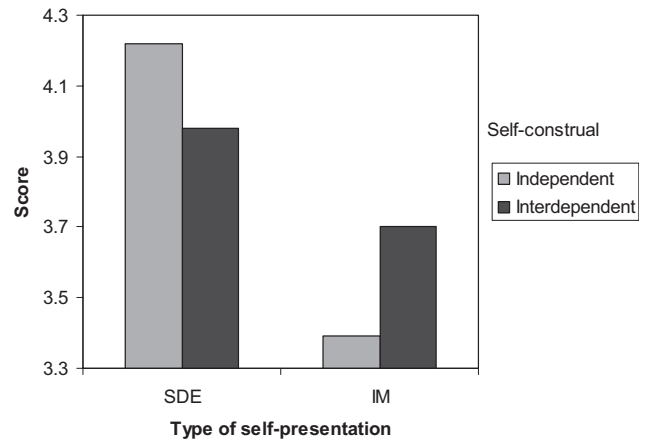


Figure 1. The effects of self-construal on type of self-presentation (Study 1). IM = impression management; SDE = self-deceptive enhancement.

### Study 2: Being Perceived as Socially Appropriate

Study 1 used measures that directly tap one's self-descriptions. It indicated that an active self-construal influences one's tendency to engage in distinct self-presentations. If this is true, then self-construal may also facilitate effective self-presentations. The next study examined whether people with a salient interdependent self-construal present themselves as being more sensitive to another person in a gift-giving scenario and whether, in turn, they are actually perceived by observers to be more socially sensitive.

### Method

Thirty-four undergraduate students at a large university participated in exchange for class credit. To heighten the salience of the independent self or the interdependent self, respondents read the “Sostoras and the Warrior” story (Trafimow et al., 1991) described earlier. Thereafter, they were asked to imagine that they worked for a small company and that one of their coworkers, Chris, a friend whom they have known for some time, is leaving the company (cf. Stapel & Johnson, 2007). They were asked, “What parting gift would you give Chris and why?” and were given an open-ended space to write the gift they would give and the reason for their choice. They were also asked the amount of time they were willing to spend and the distance they were willing to travel in order to search for an appropriate gift, using a 7-point Likert type scales anchored by *not much* (1) and *very much* (7). In addition, they wrote down how much money they were willing to spend.

### Results and Discussion

We expected that a salient interdependent self-construal would lead participants to perform more sensitively in a social scenario, emphasizing the recipient's perspective when describing criteria

<sup>1</sup> We also examined whether the effect of self-construal on self-presentational goals depended on the gender of the participant. Across the studies, there was no consistent evidence for the role of gender. Hence, this aspect was not considered further.

for gift selection. We also expected such participants to report a willingness to invest more time and effort searching for the right gift. Indeed, those in the interdependent prime condition ( $M = 4.33$ ) indicated that they were willing to spend more time searching for the gift than did those in the independent prime condition ( $M = 3.38$ ),  $t(32) = 2.00$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.70$ . The same participants ( $M = 3.89$ ) reported being willing to travel further in search of the appropriate gift than did those in the independent prime condition ( $M = 3.13$ ),  $t(32) = 1.72$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.61$ .

Participants' rationale for the parting gift they identified was coded into relationship-focused or recipient-focused aspects (e.g., "Chris can use it whenever he wants with whoever he wants"), self-focused criteria (e.g., "cheap and easy"), or neither. A GLM,  $F(1, 15) = 3.90$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.02$  revealed that a greater proportion of participants in the interdependent prime condition (69%) mentioned relationship- or recipient-focused reasons than did those in the independent prime condition (31%). Conversely, all participants (100%) in the independent prime condition mentioned self-focused reasons, whereas no one in the interdependent prime condition did.

It should be noted that we did not have expectations about the specific gift participants said they would give Chris and, thus, did not code those open-ended responses. We also did not expect specific differences in the price participants would be willing to pay, and in fact, no such differences emerged ( $M_{\text{independent}} = \$35.00$ ,  $M_{\text{interdependent}} = \$33.17$ ),  $t(25) = 0.44$ ,  $p > .66$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.17$ . Indeed, the same gift could have been identified for either self-focused or other-focused reasons.

Next, in a separate session, participants' reasons<sup>2</sup> for choosing the gift were given to 34 observers (none of who participated in the earlier session), who were asked to indicate on a scale from 1 to 9 their perceptions of the following: (a) the friendliness of the gift-giver and (b) "how much does the writer seem to care about Chris and his friendship?" No prime was administered to these observers. Observers perceived the gift-givers in the interdependent self-construal condition to be both more friendly ( $M_{\text{independent}} = 5.06$ ,  $M_{\text{interdependent}} = 5.34$ ),  $t(33) = 1.99$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.69$ , and more caring ( $M_{\text{independent}} = 5.11$ ,  $M_{\text{interdependent}} = 5.45$ ),  $t(33) = 2.15$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.75$  than those in the independent self-construal condition. These findings suggest that the activated interdependent self-construal facilitated effective presentation of oneself as socially sensitive.

We have argued that an interdependent prime is associated with a heightened focus on presenting oneself in a socially appropriate manner, especially in the context of a socially meaningful behavior. As expected, when an interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal was salient, participants were more likely to report that they would choose a gift based on socially sensitive reasons. They also claimed to be willing to travel further and spend more time searching for the right gift, suggesting that an interdependent self-construal is associated with greater striving to appear socially sensitive. It is important to note that based on their stated reasons for choosing the gift, independent observers perceived these gift-givers to be more friendly and caring, suggesting that people with an interdependent self-construal are more effective in portraying a socially sensitive and appropriate self.

Studies 1–2 showed that when people are asked about their social sensitivity or their skill and capability, they answer in a way

that enhances their desirability in terms of the activated self-construal. The next several studies examined moderators that help to establish the role of self-presentational motives in these self-construal effects.

### Study 3—Focusing on Oneself Versus Others

If indeed the relations we have observed between self-construal and self-descriptions is driven by the motivation to appear desirable, then one would expect that the relationship should disappear when attention is drawn away from one's own self-presentational goals. In other words, if the relations we observed reflect an attempt to portray oneself in a positive light, the effects would be observed when respondents focus on their self-presentational goals, but not when their focus is directed elsewhere. Study 3 was designed to test this hypothesis. Further, in order to ascertain the generality of the results of the previous studies, we examined individual differences in chronic self-construal instead of situationally activated self-construals.

### Method

*Participants, design, and procedure.* One hundred and seventeen students at a large university participated in exchange for class credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions meant to heighten the salience of either their own self-presentational concerns or others' outcomes. Participants considered 20 self-presentation relevant behaviors (e.g., buying a convertible sports car, gaining weight). In the self-focused condition they were asked to imagine themselves performing each behavior listed and to rate "how well you think it would reflect on you" along a scale from 1 = *would reflect very well on me* to 9 = *would not reflect well on me at all*. In the other-focused condition, participants were asked to rate each behavior for how common an experience it is, using a scale from 1 = *very rare experience for most people* to 9 = *very common experience for most people*. In a pretest, 92 respondents rated how much they were thinking about their own versus others' social image. The self-focused (vs. other-focused) condition elicited more thoughts about the respondents' own self-presentations ( $M_{\text{self-focused}} = 5.55$ ,  $M_{\text{other-focused}} = 4.37$ ),  $t(90) = 2.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.57$ , greater desire to present themselves in the best possible light ( $M_{\text{self-focused}} = 7.11$ ,  $M_{\text{other-focused}} = 6.13$ ),  $t(90) = 2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.47$ , and greater concern for how they will be viewed ( $M_{\text{self-focused}} = 5.35$ ,  $M_{\text{other-focused}} = 4.30$ ),  $t(90) = 3.03$ ,  $p < .005$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.64$ ).

*Self-construal measure.* Triandis and Gelfand's (1998) 16-item, 7-point Likert type scale was used to measure participants' chronic self-construal—*independent* or *interdependent*. Examples of the 8 items measuring independent self-construal ( $\alpha = .79$ ) included "I'd rather depend on myself than others" and "It is important that I do my job better than others." Examples of the 8 items measuring interdependent self-construal ( $\alpha = .83$ ) included "If a coworker gets a prize, I would feel proud," and "Parents and children must stay together as much as possible." Participants also completed the Paulhus Deceptions Scales to measure SDE and IM, and demographic measures.

<sup>2</sup> Each judge was asked to rate the responses of 8 to 10 participants.

## Results and Discussion

In the self-focused condition, participants' scores on the independent self-construal significantly correlated with SDE ( $r = .36, p < .005$ ), and their scores on the interdependent self-construal significantly correlated with IM ( $r = .23, p < .05$ ), replicating the results of Study 1 with a chronic measure of self-construal. In the other-focused condition, the association between participants' independent self-construal scores and SDE was significantly weaker ( $r = .01, p > .95$ ) than in the self-focused condition,  $\chi^2(1, N = 60) = 3.65, p < .05$ . Although the association between participants' interdependent self-construal scores and IM was weaker in the other-focused condition ( $r = .16, p > .10$ ) than in the self-focused condition, this difference was not statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 57) = 0.14, p = .70$ .

These findings indicate that when their own self-presentational concerns were highlighted, participants with an independent self-construal were more likely to engage in SDE, whereas those with an interdependent self-construal were more likely to engage in IM, consistent with previous studies. However, when participants' attention was drawn away from their own self-presentations, these tendencies weakened, although not significantly so for interdependent self-construal participants. These results are consistent with the notion that the impact of self-construal observed in the prior studies is driven by the motivation to appear desirable.

An alternative explanation of these findings should also be considered.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, the self-presentation focused condition may have increased the salience of the self, leading respondents to be more consistent in their self-ratings across scales. The next study was conducted to address this possibility. Specifically, instead of directing their focus to themselves or to others, some participants were given the opportunity to self-affirm, whereas others were not. We predicted that when respondents are given the opportunity to self-affirm before the self-presentation scales, their motivation to appear desirable should be fulfilled (Johnson & Stapel, 2007; Steele & Liu, 1983; also see Stapel & Johnson, 2007) and self-construal should no longer influence self-presentations. However, when respondents are not given the opportunity to self-affirm, self-construal should influence self-presentational goals as in the previous studies. It is important to note that these predictions are contrary to the self-salience account, which predicts that directing the focus to oneself (self-affirmation present condition) will strengthen the relationship between self-construal and self-presentations.

### Study 4: The Moderating Role of Self-Affirmation

#### Method

Sixty-seven undergraduate students participated in exchange for class credit. The design and procedure were similar to the previous study, except that we used a self-affirmation manipulation instead of directing participants' attention to themselves versus others. Respondents in the self-affirmation present condition ( $N = 35$ ) were told,

We are interested in learning some ways in which you have met or exceeded any specific standards that your family and friends have set for you. These could be standards in any aspect of your life. Please think of four such ways, and write them in the blank space below.

Respondents in the self-affirmation absent condition ( $N = 32$ ) were asked to write four characteristics or features of a tree (see Johnson & Stapel, 2007, for a similar manipulation; see also Sherman, Nelson & Steele, 2000). All participants completed the Paulhus Deception Scales, Oyserman's (1993; Study 3) 6-item measure of chronic independent self-construal (e.g., "The best decisions are the ones I make on my own") and Clark, Powell, Ouellette, and Milberg's (1987) 14-item measure of chronic interdependent self-construal (e.g., "When making a decision, I take other people's needs and feelings into account").

## Results and Discussion

In the self-affirmation absent condition, participants' independent self-construal scores correlated with SDE ( $r = .52, p < .005$ ), and their interdependent self-construal scores correlated with IM ( $r = .37, p < .05$ ), replicating our previous findings. In the self-affirmation present condition, however, the association between participants' interdependent self-construal scores and IM was significantly weaker ( $r = -.06, p > .72$ ) than in the self-focused condition ( $\chi^2 = 3.06, p < .05$ ). Although the association between participants' independent self-construal scores and SDE was somewhat weaker in the other focused condition ( $r = .27, p = .11$ ) than in the self-focused condition, this difference was not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 1.36, p = .12$ ).

These findings are generally in line with our theoretical framework and suggest that self-construal influences self-presentational goals. Thus, the self-construal effects emerge when those goals have not already been satisfied via self-affirmation. It is important to note these findings rule out the alternative account regarding self-salience. In the current study, the self would be more salient in the self-affirmation present condition, yet in this condition, the effect of self-construal on self-presentational goals was weaker, as predicted by our motivational account.

Studies 1–4 suggest that an active self-construal influences one's tendency to engage in distinct self-presentations. In particular, Study 2 hinted at the possibility that self-presentational performance is enhanced by an activated self-construal. In the next four studies, we address this possibility systematically by assessing participants' performance on distinct self-presentational tasks.

### Study 5: Presenting Oneself as Being Competent

As the previous studies suggested, an independent self-construal activates self-presentational goals of appearing skillful, intelligent, and self-reliant. We therefore expect that when the independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal is salient, one would more effectively present oneself in such terms. Prior research suggests that activating such constructs directly affects performance on cognitive tasks (cf. Mabe & West, 1982). For instance, Bargh et al. (2001, Experiment 1) found that priming participants with such words as *succeed*, *attain*, and *master*, which relate to goals associated with an independent self-construal, led to better performance on word puzzles than did priming participants with neutral words (e.g., *ranch*, *carpet*, and *window*). Dijksterhuis and van Knippenberg (1998; also see Dijksterhuis et al. 1998) found sim-

<sup>3</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

ilar effects when priming constructs associated with intelligence (e.g., the word *professor*). Moreover, our Studies 1, 3, and 4 showed that an independent self-construal activates self-enhancing cognitions, which often have beneficial effects on mental functioning and performance (e.g., Taylor & Brown, 1988; Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, & Gruenewald., 2000). Therefore, performance may be facilitated on a task that displays one's intelligence or capability (a knowledge test) when the independent self-construal is salient. To establish the role of self-presentational motives in these effects, we further predicted that when respondents are given the opportunity to self-affirm before the focal task, their motivation to appear desirable should be fulfilled (Johnson & Stapel, 2007; Steele & Liu, 1983) and self-construal should no longer influence task performance.

### Method

One hundred and thirty-four students enrolled in introductory courses at a large U.S. university participated in exchange for class credit. The study used a 2 (self-construal: independent, interdependent)  $\times$  2 (self-affirmation: present, absent) between-subjects factorial design. The pronoun-based prime (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) described earlier was used to activate salient self-construal. After the self-construal had been activated, some respondents were given the opportunity to self-affirm, with the same manipulation as in Study 4. Respondents in the self-affirmation absent condition were not given these instructions. Next, under the guise of a different study, all participants were asked to participate in a very difficult test of general knowledge comprising 20 questions randomly drawn from the game "Trivial Pursuit," from a variety of domains, including art, geography, politics, and current events (e.g., "What is the capital of Bangladesh? (a) Hanoi, (b) Dhaka, (c) Yangon, (d) Bangkok"; "What game begins with a 'corking'? (a) chess, (b) Chinese checkers, (c) roulette, (d) darts"; see Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998; Dijksterhuis et al., 1998; Stapel & Johnson, 2007, for similar tests).

### Results and Discussion

A GLM with number of correct responses (out of 20) as a dependent variable and self-affirmation and self-construal as between-subjects factors revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 128) = 5.10, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.40$ . In the self-affirmation absent condition, participants in the independent prime condition, with 11.42 correct responses, scored significantly higher on the knowledge test than did those in the interdependent prime condition, with an average of 9.12 correct responses,  $t(34) = 2.59, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.55$ . This supports the key hypothesis that the goals of being intelligent and capable, associated with an independent self-construal, facilitated effective self-presentation in these terms. As expected, in the self-affirmation present condition, salient self-construal did not affect the number of correct responses on the knowledge test ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 10.45, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 10.21$ ),  $t(94) = 0.14, p > .89$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.03$ , suggesting as predicted that once the goals of appearing desirable triggered by an active self-construal were fulfilled via self-affirmation, self-construal did not impact self-presentational efforts.

This study suggested that salient self-construal can enhance effectiveness at meeting one's activated self-presentational goals.

Specifically, an activated independent self-construal heightens goals of appearing intelligent and capable. Accordingly, we predicted and found that participants with a salient independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal performed better on a general knowledge test (for instance, correctly responding that the capital of Bangladesh is Dhaka or that the game that starts with a corking is darts). It is important to note that this effect was not observed when participants had the opportunity to self-affirm, whereby their goals of appearing desirable were fulfilled before they took the knowledge test. The next study was conducted to ascertain the generalizability of these findings with a different measure of self-construal.

### Study 6: Presenting Oneself as Being Competent, Revisited

#### Method

One hundred and two undergraduate students enrolled in business courses at a large university participated in exchange for class credit. The manipulation of the self-affirmation present and absent conditions was the same as in Study 4. Participants also completed Oyserman's (1993) scale to measure chronic independent self-construal, as described in Study 4, and responded to the "Trivial Pursuit" questions described in Study 5.

#### Results and Discussion

A GLM with self-affirmation entered as a between-subjects factor and self-construal entered as a continuous measure to predict scores on the trivial pursuit test revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 98) = 3.28, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.36$ . Among participants who did not self-affirm before taking the test, the independent self-construal was significantly associated with scores on the trivia test ( $r = .29, p < .05$ ). However, as expected, this relationship was insignificant ( $r = -.06, p > .64$ ) for participants who were given the opportunity to self-affirm prior to taking the test.

These findings extend those of the previous study by demonstrating their generalizability. Irrespective of the way self-construal is operationalized, self-affirmation significantly moderates the link between self-construal and self-presentational goals. An independent self-construal triggers goals of wanting to be seen as self-reliant, competent, and unique. However, when these goals are fulfilled via self-affirmation, participants' motivation to pursue them further is decreased, as no effect on the focal self-presentational task is observed.

### Study 7: Presenting Oneself as Being Socially Sensitive

In this study, we examined whether a salient interdependent self-construal enhances performance on tasks that enable the respondent to meet the self-presentational goals associated with that self-construal. Because people with an interdependent self-construal seek to present themselves as socially sensitive and normatively appropriate, by the same logic as in the previous study, they should score higher on questions assessing etiquette and manners in social situations. As in the previous study, we further expected that this effect would not be observed when respondents were given an opportunity to self-affirm, which would

fulfill their goals of appearing desirable before they performed the etiquette test.

### Method

Sixty-six undergraduate students at a large university participated in exchange for class credit. The design was a 2 (self-construal: independent, interdependent)  $\times$  2 (self-affirmation: present, absent) between-subjects factorial design. The “Sostoras and the Warrior” prime (Trafimow et al., 1991) described earlier was used to activate self-construals. The self-affirmation manipulation was the same as in the previous study. Thereafter, under the guise of a different study, all participants were asked 20 multiple choice questions developed from a number of books on etiquette, including *Emily Post’s Etiquette*, and *Miss Manners’ Guide to Excruciatingly Correct Behavior*. Examples included “At a restaurant, you have reason to leave the table. You should place your napkin (a) to the left of your dinner plate, (b) refolded and repositioned where it was before you were seated, (c) on the seat of your chair, (d) anywhere there is a clear space on the table,” and “When shaking hands, (a) a man should wait for the woman to extend her hand, (b) a woman should wait for the man to extend his hand, (c) persons of either gender can extend their hand, (d) persons of the opposite gender should not shake hands.”

### Results and Discussion

A GLM with number of correct responses (out of 20) on the etiquette test as a dependent variable and self-affirmation and salient self-construal as independent variables revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 62) = 4.04, p < .05$ , Cohen’s  $d = 0.51$ . In the self-affirmation absent condition, participants with a salient interdependent self-construal scored significantly higher on the etiquette questions than did those with a salient independent self-construal ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 9.75, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 11.13$ ),  $t(30) = -1.88, p < .05$ , Cohen’s  $d = 0.68$ , suggesting that these participants’ concerns about presenting themselves in a socially appropriate manner resulted in better performance on questions showing their social appropriateness. However, when participants

were given the opportunity to fulfill their goals via self-affirmation, there was no performance difference between participants with a salient, independent self-construal versus an interdependent self-construal ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 11.18, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 10.47$ ),  $t(32) = 0.97, p > .34$ , Cohen’s  $d = 0.34$ , (see Figure 2), suggesting as predicted that once the goals of appearing desirable triggered by an active self-construal were fulfilled via self-affirmation, self-construal did not increase self-presentational efforts.

We have argued that an interdependent self-construal heightens the goal of appearing socially appropriate. In line with this prediction, we found that when an interdependent (vs. independent) prime was salient, participants were more likely to perform better on a set of questions about etiquette and appropriate social behavior (for instance, correctly responding that one should leave one’s napkin on the seat of one’s chair when leaving the table or that when shaking hands, persons of either gender can extend their hand). As predicted, this relationship was not observed when participants had the opportunity to self-affirm, whereby their self-presentational goals could be fulfilled before they participated in the test.

### Study 8: Presenting Oneself as Being Socially Sensitive, Revisited

This study extended the previous ones in two ways. First, to enhance generalizability, it replicated the findings of the previous study with a different priming manipulation. Second, it included a neutral prime condition along with the independent and interdependent prime conditions. Following previous research (e.g., Gardner et al., 1999), we expected the default self-construal of our participants, who were all from the U.S., to be independent. Hence, we expected the neutral self-construal to mirror the results in the independent self-construal condition and differ from the results in the interdependent self-construal condition.

### Method

Seventy-four undergraduate students at a large university participated in exchange for class credit. The pronoun circling prime

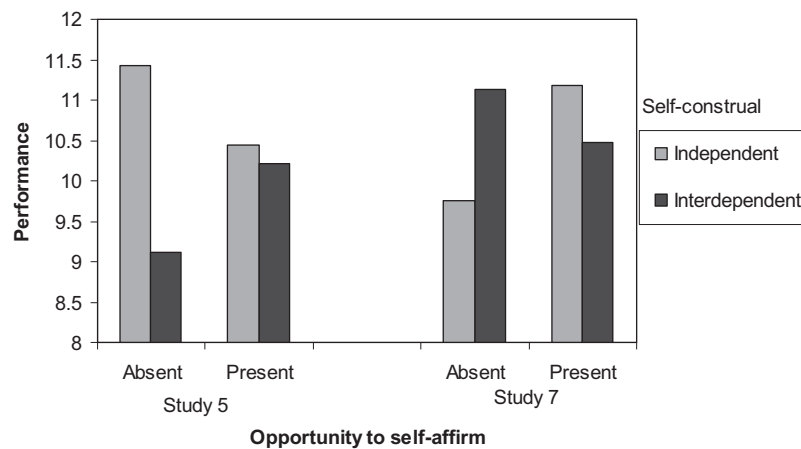


Figure 2. The effects of self-construal on performance on general knowledge trivia questions (Study 5) and etiquette questions (Study 7).

(Brewer and Gardner 1996) described earlier was used to activate the independent and interdependent self-construals. In the neutral prime condition, participants were given the same paragraph describing a trip to the city as in the other priming conditions, except that the visitors were described in the third person (i.e., *they* instead of *I* or *we*). Self-affirmation was induced among some participants with the same procedure as in the previous study. Following Johnson & Stapel (2007), participants in the self-affirmation absent condition were asked to list four characteristics of a tree. Participants then took the same etiquette test as in Study 7.

### Results and Discussion

A GLM indicated that salient self-construal (independent or interdependent) significantly interacted with self-affirmation (present or absent) to predict the number of correct responses on the etiquette test,  $F(1, 70) = 3.90, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.47$ . When respondents were not given the opportunity to self-affirm, those with a salient interdependent self-construal scored significantly higher on the etiquette questions than did those with a salient independent self-construal ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 10.05, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 11.39, t(36) = -2.05, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.68$ ). In contrast, in the self-affirmation present condition, salient self-construal did not influence scores on the etiquette test ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 10.89, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 10.00, t(34) = 0.95, p > .34$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.33$ , as expected).

For comparison, we also ran a neutral prime group with both self-affirmation conditions. Results indicated that without the opportunity to self-affirm, performance in the neutral prime condition was statistically equivalent to that in the independent prime condition ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 10.05, N_{\text{neutral}} = 9.93, t(33) = 0.18, p > .85$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.06$ , but significantly lower than in the interdependent prime condition ( $N_{\text{neutral}} = 9.93, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 11.39, t(31) = 2.08, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.75$ ). In contrast, when given the opportunity to self-affirm, as expected, there were no differences between the neutral prime group's performance and that of either primed group ( $N_{\text{independent}} = 10.89, N_{\text{neutral}} = 10.27, N_{\text{interdependent}} = 10.00; ps > .34$ , Cohen's  $ds = 0.10-0.32$ ).

These findings replicate those of the previous study with a different priming manipulation. When participants were not given the opportunity to self-affirm, they pursued self-presentational goals in line with the activated self-construal: Those in the interdependent prime condition, who were more motivated to present themselves in a socially appropriate manner, scored higher on a test of etiquette and manners than did those in the independent prime condition. This was not observed for participants who were given the opportunity to self-affirm, which enabled them to fulfill their self-presentational goals. Further, because our participants were from the United States, their default self-construal was expected to be independent (Gardner et al., 1999). Accordingly, we found that the self-presentational goals of participants in the neutral prime condition mirrored those of participants in the independent prime condition, but were significantly different from those of participants in the interdependent prime condition.

### Studies 9A–9D: Choosing a Self-Presentation Opportunity

The next studies were designed to extend the previous findings by examining choices between distinct self-presentational oppor-

tunities. According to our account, a salient independent or interdependent self-construal elicits a readiness to take advantage of opportunities to present oneself in a goal-congruent manner. Thus, these studies examined whether a salient self-construal would lead people to choose opportunities to present themselves as skillful versus socially sensitive. To assess this, people were asked to choose between taking a test of self-competence (reflecting self-presentation goals of the independent self) and taking a test of social appropriateness (reflecting self-presentation goals of the interdependent self).

Because people with an independent self-construal desire to be seen as competent and skillful, they should be more likely to pursue the opportunity to showcase that skill. Hence, we predicted that these participants, compared with those with an interdependent self-construal, will be more likely to choose to take a test of self-competence over a test of social appropriateness (Study 9A; see Vohs & Heatherton, 2001, for a similar dependent variable). We further predicted that if respondents first engage in self-affirmation, their motives to appear desirable should be fulfilled. As a result, self-construal should no longer affect test choice (Study 9B), supporting the role of self-presentational goals in the observed effects.

We also explored another condition in which self-presentational goals should moderate the observed effects. Research suggests that goal pursuit depends on perceptions of the attainability of goals. In the context of social comparison effects, for instance, Johnson and Stapel's (2007) findings suggest that when people have reason to doubt their ability to attain their self goals, their motivation to pursue these goals is reduced. In line with this, we argue that when people are led to doubt their ability to perform well on the upcoming tests, they may set aside their self-presentational goals and perhaps even avoid taking a goal-congruent test to avoid presenting themselves poorly on a goal-relevant dimension. Under such circumstances, when given a choice of tests to take, participants with an interdependent (independent) self-construal may be more likely to choose the test of self-reliance (social appropriateness; Study 9C).

## Study 9A

### Method

Thirty-nine undergraduate students enrolled in introductory courses were given either the independent or interdependent version of the "Sostoras and the Warrior" story. They then participated in a purportedly unrelated study conducted by researchers from a different department on campus and were instructed,

The personality department at [school name] recently developed two tests using sophisticated techniques utilizing the latest developments in cognitive psychology and human engineering. These tests enable a "test of self-reliance" and a "test of social appropriateness." As the title suggests, the test of self-reliance indicates, with a 95% accuracy, how much a person relies on one's own capabilities, judgment, or resources, as compared to the average person of the same age, gender, and educational qualifications. Similarly, the test of social appropriateness determines, with a 95% accuracy, how suitably a person behaves in front of others in public and important others, as compared to the average person of the same age, gender, and educational qualifications. You can participate in either one but not both tests.

Respondents indicated which test they wanted to take (no actual test was administered), completed individual difference and demographic measures, and were debriefed and dismissed.

### Results and Discussion

A GLM<sup>4</sup> with choice of test entered as a dependent variable, and salient self-construal as a between-subjects factor revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 37) = 3.09, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.58$ . As expected, in the independent self-construal condition, a larger proportion of respondents chose to participate in the test of self-reliance (67%) than the test of social appropriateness (33%). In contrast, in the interdependent self-construal condition more respondents chose the test of social appropriateness (61%) than the test of self-reliance (39%). These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that self-construal influences one's self-presentational goals, such that an independent self-construal leads to greater readiness to engage in tasks that enable respondents to portray themselves as skillful and competent, whereas an interdependent self-construal increases one's readiness to engage in tasks that enable respondents to portray themselves as socially sensitive. The magnitude of this effect, as a function of subtle changes in the context surrounding the task selection, is also noteworthy. For instance, when a prior story had made salient their independent self-construal, more than twice as many participants chose to take a test designed to reflect their self-reliance, as opposed to their social appropriateness, a finding that reversed in the interdependent condition.

## Study 9B

### Method

Forty-seven undergraduate students from a large university participated in the study. The design and procedure of this study was very similar to that of Study 9A, with the exception that after the priming task, all respondents were given the opportunity to self-affirm with the same manipulation as in Studies 4–8. As in those studies, we reasoned that allowing participants to self-affirm would satisfy their self-presentational goals (Johnson & Stapel, 2007; Steele & Liu, 1983). Hence, participants should be less motivated to pursue these goals further, eliminating the effect of self-construal on choice of test that was observed in Study 9a.

### Results and Discussion

A GLM with choice of test entered as a dependent variable and salient self-construal as a between-subjects factor revealed no interaction,  $F(1, 45) = 0.01, p > .92$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.03$ . In the independent self-construal condition, 44% respondents chose the test of self-reliance, and 56% chose the test of social appropriateness. Similarly, in the interdependent self-construal condition, 45% chose the test of self-reliance, and 55% chose the test of social appropriateness. These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that the effect of self-construal on self-presentational goals is eliminated when respondents are able to achieve those goals by other means. In this case, enabling participants to self-affirm provided them with the opportunity to satisfy self-presentational goals before choosing a test.

## Study 9C

### Method

One hundred and one undergraduate students from a large university participated in the study. A  $2 \times 2$  between-subjects design was used. The first factor manipulated participants' self-construal (independent or interdependent) with the "Sostoras and the Warrior" story described earlier. The second factor manipulated the difficulty of a prior task, which was intended to affect whether respondents had reason to doubt their ability to perform well on the upcoming test they chose. This was done by giving respondents either difficult or easy multiple-choice math questions and informing them of their performance. In the high-difficulty condition, participants were given 10 difficult math questions taken from a GRE practice test (e.g., "There are 13 marbles in a bag. One is red, 4 are blue, and 8 are yellow. If a blue marble is drawn from the bag, what is the probability that a red or yellow marble will be drawn next?") along with five possible responses each, one of which was correct. In the low-difficulty condition, participants were given 10 easy elementary math questions (e.g.,  $109 \times 22 = ?$ ) along with two possible options, one of which was correct. After they completed the math exercise, participants in the high-difficulty condition were told that they got 1 out of 10 questions right, whereas those in the low-difficulty condition were told that they got 9 out of 10 questions right (cf. Stapel & Johnson, 2007). A manipulation check confirmed that participants in the high-difficulty condition found the math questions to be significantly more difficult than those in the low-difficulty condition ( $M_{\text{high-difficulty}} = 6.92, M_{\text{low-difficulty}} = 3.18$ ),  $t(93) = 9.10, p < .001$ , Cohen's  $d = 1.89$ .

We predicted that participants' motivation to pursue their self-presentational goals will depend on the difficulty of the prior task (see Feather, 1966). When the difficulty is low, participants should be motivated to pursue their primed self-presentational goals because they believe they can achieve them. In contrast, when the difficulty is high, people may doubt their ability to present themselves well on the test they choose to take (Johnson & Stapel, 2007). As a result, their motivation to pursue their activated self-presentational goal may be diminished, and they may even avoid choosing a goal-congruent test to avoid performing poorly on it.

### Results and Discussion

A GLM with choice of test entered as a dependent variable and salient self-construal and level of prior task difficulty entered as between-subjects factors revealed a significant interaction,  $F(1, 97) = 6.58, p < .02$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.52$ . In the low-difficulty condition, self-construal significantly influenced choice of test,  $F(1, 49) = 3.39, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.52$ . As predicted, more respondents in the independent self-construal condition chose to participate in the test of self-reliance (63%) versus the test of social appropriateness (37%). The reverse was true for respondents in the interdependent self-construal condition (38% chose the self-

<sup>4</sup> It is appropriate and sometimes highly recommended to analyze categorical outcome measures with GLMs (Wickens, 1998).

reliance test, 62% chose the social appropriateness test). These findings replicate those of Study 9A.

In the high-difficulty condition, in which respondents had reason to doubt their upcoming test performance after doing poorly on a difficult prior task, self-construal significantly influenced choice of test,  $F(1, 48) = 3.20, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.51$ , albeit in a different direction. In the independent self-construal condition, 46% chose the test of self-reliance, and 54% chose the test of social-appropriateness. In contrast, in the interdependent self-construal condition, 71% chose to take the test of self-reliance, and 29% chose the test of social-appropriateness. These findings are in line with our prediction that when people have reason to doubt their ability to pursue their goal-congruent self-presentations, their motivation to pursue them will be diminished. Thus, in this case, participants with an interdependent self-construal, who normally would seek to present themselves as socially appropriate, instead chose to take the test of self-reliance when they were given reason to doubt their ability to perform well on these tests. The next study was conducted to ascertain how self-affirmation influences the relationship between self-construal and self-presentational goals with a different operationalization of self-construal.

### Study 9D

#### Method

Fifty-two undergraduate students from a large university participated in the study. The procedure was the same as in Study 9A, except for two changes. First, instead of situationally activated self-construals, we used individual differences in self-construals. Maslach et al.'s (1985) 12-item scale ( $\alpha = .89$ ) was used to measure the independent self-construal, whereas Clark et al.'s (1987) scale ( $\alpha = .75$ ) was used to measure the interdependent self-construal (see Study 4 for sample items). Example items from Maslach et al.'s scale include, "What is the likelihood you will volunteer to head a committee for a group of people you do not know very well?" and "What is the likelihood you will perform on a stage before a large audience?" All items had 7-point scales with 1 = *not at all willing to do this* and with 7 = *very much willing to do this*.

Second, half the respondents were given the opportunity to self-affirm, as in Studies 4–8 and 9B, whereas the other half were not given this opportunity. The latter group was asked to list four characteristics of a tree (no self-affirmation condition; see Johnson & Stapel 2007). As in the previous studies, we predicted that participants not given the opportunity to self-affirm would pursue their distinct self-presentational goals because these goals had not yet been fulfilled.

#### Results and Discussion

In the self-affirmation absent condition, a GLM with both independent and interdependent self-construals entered as independent variables to predict choice of test revealed that both effects were significant; independent  $F(1, 23) = 5.70, p < .02$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.99$ ; interdependent  $F(1, 23) = 3.42, p < .05$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.77$ . Because the independent variables were continuous and the dependent variable was discrete, point-biserial correlations were conducted to ascertain the nature and direction of these relation-

ships. These analyses revealed that participants with an interdependent self-construal were more likely to pick the test of social appropriateness ( $r = .41, p < .05$ ), whereas those with an independent self-construal were more likely to pick the test of self-reliance ( $r = -.49, p < .05$ ).

In the self-affirmation present condition, however, a GLM revealed that neither the independent nor the interdependent self-construal influenced the choice of test (independent:  $F(1, 23) = 0.01, p > .91$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.04$ ; interdependent:  $F(1, 23) = 0.97, p > .33$ , Cohen's  $d = 0.41$ ). This was further confirmed by the point-biserial correlations between the independent self-construal and choice of test ( $r = -.01, p > .94$ ) and between the interdependent self-construal and choice of test ( $r = -.20, p > .32$ ).

### General Discussion

We proposed that an active independent versus interdependent self-construal triggers distinct self-presentational goals. Specifically, because an independent self-construal is associated with concerns about being skillful and capable of self-reliance, people with an active independent (versus interdependent) self-construal should show a greater inclination to engage directly in self-presentations congruent with these goals (e.g., SDE) and should exhibit enhanced readiness to participate in tasks that showcase these skills. They should be more likely to exaggerate their skills and abilities (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Stapel & Koomen, 2001) and to perform better on tasks that showcase them. In contrast, because an interdependent self-construal is associated with the motivation to maintain harmonious social relationships and to avoid social disapproval (Kim & Markus, 1999; Lalwani, in press), we predicted that people with an active interdependent (versus independent) self-construal will be more likely to present themselves as socially sensitive and normatively appropriate and to exhibit an enhanced readiness to participate in tasks that showcase their social appropriateness. They will also be more effective at portraying themselves in a socially sensitive manner.

Twelve studies provided converging evidence for these predictions, with three different methods of situationally activating self-construals as well as various measures of chronic self-construals. In addition, the studies had multiple measures of self-presentational goal pursuit, including both direct self-reports and relatively tacit measures such as task selection and performance. Study 1 revealed that an activated self-construal directly influences the nature of one's self-descriptions. Specifically, respondents with an independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal scored higher on measures of SDE, whereas those with an interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal scored higher on measures of IM.

Study 2 showed that respondents with a salient interdependent (versus independent) self-construal indicated they would buy a gift for a coworker based on socially sensitive reasons, and also claimed they would spend more time and would travel further in searching for the appropriate gift. They were also perceived to be more friendly and caring by observers, suggesting that they were successful in presenting themselves as interpersonally sensitive. Studies 3 and 4 provided evidence that the effects observed in the first three studies reflect attempts at self-presentation. Specifically, the associations between self-construal and desirable self-descriptions emerged when people were focused on their own self-presentational concerns (Study 3) or when they did not have

an opportunity to fulfill these goals via self-affirmation (Study 4). However, when their attention was directed toward others' outcomes, or when they had an opportunity to self-affirm, the effects of self-construal were generally weaker. These findings are consistent with the notion that the impact of self-construals on self-descriptions reflected the motivation to present oneself desirably.

In Studies 5 to 8, salient self-construal led to more effective goal-congruent self-presentation. Studies 5 and 6 revealed that respondents with an independent (versus interdependent) self-construal scored higher on a "Trivial Pursuit" task, whereas Studies 7 and 8 showed that respondents with a salient interdependent (versus independent) self-construal scored better on a task measuring social sensitivity. It is important to note that these effects were not observed when participants were given the opportunity to self-affirm, allowing them to fulfill their self-presentational goals before participating in the tasks. This consistent pattern further supports the notion that the impact of self-construal reflects self-presentational efforts.

Studies 9A–9D indicated that an active self-construal enhances the readiness to engage in goal-congruent self-presentations. Specifically, Study 9A suggested that a salient independent (versus interdependent) self-construal led to a greater willingness to take a test purportedly measuring self-reliance versus a test purportedly measuring social-appropriateness. That is, participants preferred tasks that would enable them to showcase their desirability on goal-relevant attributes. Studies 9B and 9D, however, showed that these tendencies disappeared when respondents had been given the opportunity to pursue and fulfill their self-presentational goals via self-affirmation.

Study 9C examined another moderator of the relationship between self-construal and self-presentational goals. Given recent research by Johnson and Stapel (2007), we predicted that participants' motivation to pursue self-presentational goals would depend on their confidence in attaining those goals. Indeed, when a difficult prior task gave participants reason to doubt that they would do well on their chosen test (Feather, 1966), they no longer chose the goal-relevant test. In this condition, an interdependent (independent) self-construal prompted participants to choose the test of self-reliance (social appropriateness).

In sum, throughout the studies, we found evidence of distinct self-presentational goal pursuit as a function of the self-construal that was active. Moreover, across studies, these effects were modulated by features of the situation that either amplified, satisfied, or mitigated one's self-presentational goals. For example, the effects of self-construal on self-presentations emerged when attention was drawn toward one's self-presentation goals, when one was not given alternative opportunities to fulfill those goals, and when one was not given reason to doubt one's ability to fulfill them on the focal tasks.

Our experimental sessions often included materials from multiple projects and studies. Accordingly, we had some data available on several potentially relevant individual difference measures (e.g., promotion–prevention focus scale and demographic variables such as age and gender). We explored whether these measures moderated the effects observed. Across studies, there was no consistent evidence that these individual differences moderated the role of self-construal in activating self-presentational tendencies. This speaks to the broad generality of these effects. Regardless of

one's background and goals, specific self-construals appear to activate distinct self-presentational tendencies.

Our data attest to the dynamic and malleable nature of self-presentations. The desirability of a given self-presentation and, thus, the nature of one's self-presentational efforts, varies by context. It is noteworthy that simple and relatively mundane activities like reading a paragraph containing first-person (*I, me, mine*) versus second-person pronouns (*we, us, our*) was sufficient to alter one's self-presentational efforts. Similar effects emerged across multiple priming manipulations. It is important to note that debriefing questions indicated that our respondents were not aware of the influence of these manipulations on their self-presentational goals (also see Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1998; Dijksterhuis et al., 1998; Stapel & Koomen, 2001). It is also interesting to note that some of these findings were obtained on standard measures of individual differences in socially desirable responding (SDR; Paulhus, 1991). Although socially desirable responding is generally considered a fixed response style (Johnson & van de Vijver, 2002; Paulhus, 2002), our results suggest that it can also vary by situation. That is, people respond so as to appear desirable in that context.

Our data also shed some light on a recent debate in the cross-cultural literature centered on whether collectivists self-enhance, as do individualists. One view is that self-enhancement is a culture-specific phenomenon and is restricted to those with an independent self-construal (e.g., Heine et al., 1999). Accordingly, research suggests that people with an independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal are more likely to exhibit unrealistic optimism (Heine & Lehman, 1995), to evaluate themselves and their close others more favorably (Heine & Lehman, 1997), and to be more willing to conclude that they performed better than their average classmate (Heine, Takata, and Lehman, 2000). Another view is that self-enhancement is a universal human motive and that both people with an independent and interdependent self-construal self-enhance, albeit on different dimensions. In support, research indicates that people with an independent self-construal self-enhance on independent attributes, whereas those with an interdependent self-construal self-enhance on interdependent attributes, which are also, respectively, regarded as personally important (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005). Although the present datasets do not shed light on cross-national patterns, we can speculate from the literature as a whole (e.g., Lalwani, Shrum, and Chiu, 2009; Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) to consider the implications of our findings for cross-cultural self-enhancement. Our data suggest that both types of people seek to present a desirable self-image, although the image they want to present is different. Whereas those with an active independent self-construal seek to present an image of themselves as skillful and capable, those with an active interdependent self-construal seek to present themselves as interpersonally sensitive.

Researchers have typically used the IM and SDE scales we used in Studies 1, 3, and 4 to measure individual differences in propensity to engage in socially desirable responding. In contrast, our data suggest that the IM and SDE scales used in these studies have broader usefulness. In addition to individual differences, they are also sensitive to contextual shifts in self-presentational goals, which makes them more useful tools for understanding social desirability and self-presentation.

In the future, researchers should examine other domains in which self-construal may influence self-presentational goals and one's readiness to pursue these goals. For instance, would an interdependent self-construal increase one's interest in consuming goods and services that offer effective IM strategies (e.g., reading magazine articles on hiding one's own shortcomings or those that discuss etiquette and manners)?

Recent evidence (e.g., Vohs et al., 2005) suggested that self-presentations often require self-regulation in the sense that dispositional tendencies need to be overridden in the service of making a desired impression. An additional avenue for future research is to examine the resource-depleting effects of self-presentations geared to the independent versus interdependent self and to examine how they impact self-regulation later. For instance, when the independent self-construal is salient, having to present oneself as socially appropriate (rather than as skillful and capable) may be particularly depleting and exact a greater downstream cost in self-regulatory effectiveness.

### Conclusions

This research sheds light on how cultural self-construal influences self-presentational goals, with a variety of operationalizations of both self-construal and self-presentations. The results suggest that whereas people with an independent self-construal seek to be viewed as skillful and competent, those with an interdependent self-construal seek to be viewed as normatively appropriate and socially sensitive. It is important to note that these effects are obtained only when people focus on their own self-presentational concerns, not when they think about others' outcomes, when they have an alternate channel to satisfy their goals via self-affirmation, or when they doubt their ability to achieve their self-presentational goals. These findings provide insights on the distinct motives that guide people's self-presentational goal pursuit. As such, they have important implications for the study of the self in social contexts.

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