The Theory of Reasoned Action and Self-Construal: Evidence from Three Cultures

Hee Sun Park and Timothy R. Levine

Self-construals have been advanced as individual level cultural dimensions, and are thought to explain and mediate the effects of culture on a variety of outcome measures. This study (total N = 439) investigated the effects of self-construals on the attitudinal and normative components of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) in Korea, Hawaii, and the mainland United States. Self-construals were investigated as both mediators and moderators of cultural effects. Across cultures, the data were consistent with the TRA, scores on independent self-construal were positively related to personal attitudes toward behavior, and scores on interdependent self-construal were positively related to normative beliefs and social attitudes toward behavior. Specific effects, however, varied from location to location suggesting a moderating role for self-construals. Mixed results were obtained for the link between culture and self-construals, and for the mediation model. Individuals in all three locations scored higher on independence than interdependence, and culture appeared to affect the extent to which individuals distinguished between types of self-construal. Taken together with previous findings, these findings suggest that it may be necessary to rethink the role of self-construals in intercultural research. Key words: Self-construal, Theory of Reasoned Action, Intercultural Communication

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) has demonstrated great heuristic value, and has long helped researchers to understand and predict certain behaviors. In the TRA, attitudinal and normative components affect behavioral intentions, which, in turn, guide actual behavior. The value of the attitudinal and the normative components, as well as their relative weight in predicting behavioral intentions, vary from person to person depending on a variety of social, cultural, and individual factors. Understanding these differences has important theoretical and practical implications for our understanding of the social influence process.

The TRA has been tested cross-culturally and the findings have generally been consistent with the theory (e.g., Godin et al., 1996; Lee & Green, 1991). Other studies have investigated how individual differences affect components of the theory. Even though variables extraneous to the TRA may influence the attitudinal and normative components directly or the relative weights of the two components (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), most of TRA studies have focused on the latter issue. Direct individual or cultural influences on the attitudinal and normative components, however, may be as informative as effects on the relative weights of the two components in predicting behavioral intention. Even when individual or cultural differences are not found to influence the relative importance of the two components in predicting behavioral intention, by examining the systematic differences in the magnitude of the two components, new insights may be obtained.

Since its introduction, the self-construal construct has been welcomed by cross-cultural communication scholars, and the effects of self-construals have been investi-
gated in several self-report type cross-cultural studies (e.g., Cross, 1995; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim et al., 1996; Kim, Shin, & Cai, 1998; Singelis & Sharkev, 1995). These scholars argue that interdependent and independent self-construals are individual level dimensions of collectivism and individualism (Kim et al., 1996; Singelis & Brown, 1995). Because self-construals are considered to be individual differences that reflect cultural differences, an investigation of how self-construals affect the components of the TRA may provide informative findings regarding the effects of culture on attitudes and behaviors. The current paper examines each component of the TRA in relation to self-construals and additionally tests the relationship between culture and self-construals.

The Theory of Reasoned Action

The TRA assumes that human beings usually behave in a sensible manner so that they might obtain favorable outcomes and meet the expectations of others (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). According to the theory, behavioral intention is an immediate predecessor of a behavior and it is determined by attitude toward behavior and subjective norm. Attitude toward behavior (the attitudinal component), in turn, is obtained by summing the products of behavioral beliefs and evaluation of outcomes. Behavioral beliefs refer to the probability that a behavior leads to certain outcomes. Evaluation of outcomes refers to the extent to which the consequences of the behavior are favorable or unfavorable. Subjective norm (the normative component) is composed of the summed products of normative beliefs and motivations to comply. Normative beliefs represent an individual’s perceptions of what significant others would think about his/her performing the behavior. Motivation to comply is a person’s tendency to behave in a manner consistent with their reference group’s beliefs.

Generally, research has been supportive of the TRA (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1973; Ryan & Bonfield, 1975; Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988). Some of the behaviors that have been successfully predicted include voting (Bowman & Fishbein, 1978), blood donation (Pomazal & Jaccard, 1976), cheating in college (DeVries & Ajzen, 1971), and consumer purchasing (Brinberg & Cummings, 1983). Gender, past behavior (Greene, Hale, & Rubin, 1997), self-related constructs (e.g., self-consciousness and self-monitoring, Miller & Grush, 1986), and culture (e.g., Lee & Green, 1991) are some of the factors that influence the relative weights of the two components in predicting behavioral intention.

Self-Construal

Two different construals of self, introduced by Markus and Kitayama (1991), merit consideration as factors affecting the attitudinal and normative components. Self-construals are aspects of self-concept. Instead of viewing self-concept as a unitary construct, people may be thought of as possessing a number of different selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Self-construals represent another branch in the study of self with an emphasis on how the self may differ in different cultural contexts. Socialization differences imposed by different cultures are thought to give rise to different self-concepts, and research on self-construals represents an effort to investigate culture and self.

Markus and Kitayama delineated independent and interdependent self-construals, and argued that these different images of self influence an individual’s cognition,
emotion, and motivation. Self-construal is conceptualized as "constellation of thoughts, feelings, and actions concerning one's relationship to others, and the self as distinct from others" (Singelis, 1994, p. 581). The different self-images affect what people "believe about the relationship between the self and others and, especially, the degree to which they see themselves as separate from others or as connected with others" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, p. 226, italics in original).

An independent self-construal is defined as a "bounded, unitary, stable" self that is separate from social context (Singelis, 1994, p. 581). People who emphasize their independent self view themselves as autonomous and invariant across contexts. The wholeness and uniqueness of the person's configuration of internal attributes is valued. Others, and the social situation in general, are important, but they are primarily used as standards of reflected appraisal, or as sources that can verify and affirm the internal attributes of the individual (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). The independent construal of self has been found to be negatively related to self-reported embarrassability, indicating less sensitivity to social context (Sharkey & Singelis, 1995), and positively related to outcome-oriented conversational constraints (Kim et al., 1996).

An interdependent self-construal is defined as a "flexible, variable" self that emphasizes one's connectedness with others (Singelis, 1994, p. 581). Individuals who emphasize their interdependent self view themselves as united with others and try to find ways to fit in with them. While these individuals also possess and express a set of internal attributes, these internal attributes are understood as situation specific. The interdependent self emphasizes relationships, one's proper place, and actions appropriate for social situations. Individuals who emphasize their interdependent self-construal are more likely to act primarily in accordance with the anticipated expectations of others and social norms rather than with their internal wishes or personal attributes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). The interdependent construal of self has been found to be positively related to self-reported embarrassability, indicating more sensitivity to social context (Sharkey & Singelis, 1995), and positively related to relational conversational constraints (Kim et al., 1996).

Self-Construals and The TRA

Factors such as individual or cultural differences influence a person's attitude toward behavior and subjective norm. For example, subjective norm was found to be a stronger determinant of the intention to buy sneakers for Koreans, while attitude toward behavior was a better predictor of the behavioral intention for Americans (Lee & Green, 1991). Since self-construals are used to explain cultural differences in cross-cultural research, the investigation of the TRA in relation to self-construals may provide better understanding of how the TRA works in various cultural settings. Further, self-construals may influence peoples' perceptions and behavioral intentions differently in different cultures.

Self-Construals and the Normative Component

Subjective norm is obtained by multiplying normative beliefs and motivation to comply. This motivation to comply with others refers to one's willingness to follow others' wishes. The independent self focuses on the uniqueness of one's thoughts, feelings, and actions without much reference to the thoughts, feelings, and action of others. These individuals may see others' influence attempts as a threat to their
individuality and yielding to others' expectations as a sign of weakness to social pressure. Those who construe themselves as independent may consider their own attitudes more important than others' opinions about their behaviors. Subsequently, they may not feel as compelled to comply with others. Therefore, it is predicted that:

\[ H_1: \text{The strength of an individual's independent self-construal is negatively related to the motivation to comply with significant others.} \]

Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that individuals who emphasize their interdependent self-construal do not see conformity as a liability. Instead, being responsive to particular others with whom one forms an important social unit is a highly valued end state. For those who stress an interdependent construal of self, meeting others' expectations, and keeping harmony with the others is intrinsically rewarding. Therefore, individuals who stress their interdependent self-construal should be more likely to comply with others' expectations.

\[ H_2: \text{The strength of an individual's interdependent self-construal is positively related to the motivation to comply with significant others.} \]

Park, Levine and Sharkey (in press) found that for recycling behavior in Hawaii, neither independent nor interdependent self-construal was significantly related to normative beliefs. These researchers speculated that a positive relationship between interdependent self-construal and subjective norm and a negative relation between independent self-construal and subjective norm were primarily a function of the relationship between motivation to comply and self-construals. Park et al.'s findings, while consistent with hypotheses one and two, may be limited to certain types of behavior such as recycling. It is possible that an individual's significant others may not greatly care about whether he or she recycled or not. On the other hand, an individual's important others may care more about his or her studying behavior, because studying has an influence on the individual's future, and people who care about the person may want them to study. Further, the social pressures to study may vary by culture. In Asian cultures, for example, people often place a strong emphasis on academic achievement. Therefore, the following research questions are advanced:

RQ1A: Are independent and interdependent self-construals related to normative beliefs?

RQ1B: Does culture moderate effects of self-construal on normative beliefs?

Self-Construals and the Attitudinal Component

Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) postulate that people evaluate the outcomes that a certain behavior brings about. When they defined behavioral beliefs and evaluation of outcomes for attitude toward behavior, they did not specify the type of outcomes that the behavior in question produces. There may be different types of outcomes. Some outcomes are more personal in nature while others are more social in nature. That is, it is possible that some behavioral outcomes directly affect the person who engages in the behavior, while other behavioral outcomes affect other people. Dividing attitude toward behavior into personal attitude toward behavior and social attitude toward behavior may be useful because these various types of behavioral outcomes may concern individuals differently. For example, for people who are in high self-monitoring and high self-consciousness, social attitudes rather than non-social attitudes were significantly correlated with studying behavior (Miller & Grush, 1986).
In the current study, the outcomes that studying behavior generates will be characterized as either social or personal. Personal behavioral outcomes (i.e., behavioral outcomes that affect self, rather than others) and the evaluation of these outcomes constitute the personal attitude toward behavior, while social behavioral outcomes (i.e., behavioral outcomes that affect others) and the evaluation of these outcomes comprise the social attitude toward behavior.

Since individuals who promote an independent self-construal value their own uniqueness, they may give more consideration to potential outcomes that benefit or cost them personally. Further, because such individuals tend see themselves as separate from others, outcomes that affect others should be seen as less salient. Therefore:

\[ H_3: \text{The strength of an individual's independent self-construal is positively correlated with their personal attitude toward behavior (} H_{3a} \text{) and negatively correlated with their social attitude toward behavior (} H_{3b} \text{).} \]

For the interdependent self, others are included within the boundaries of the self and relations with the others are crucial factors in defining the self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). One pays close attention to where one belongs with respect to others and assumes a receptive stance toward these others, continually adjusting and accommodating to these others (Azuma, 1984; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984). Since such acts of fitting in are important aspects of one's interdependent self-construal, one who adopts such a self-construal must be conscious of the implications of their behavior has for others. Therefore, the more interdependent one construes oneself, the higher one's score on social attitude toward behavior and the lower one's rating of personal attitude toward behavior.

\[ H_4: \text{The strength of an individual's interdependent self-construal is negatively related to one's personal attitude toward behavior (} H_{4a} \text{) and positively related to one's social attitude toward behavior (} H_{4b} \text{).} \]

**Culture and Self-Construals**

Markus and Kitayama's (1991) argued that individuals in individualistic cultures are more likely to construct an independent self-construal and those in collectivistic cultures tend to have a more interdependent construal of self. Based on these arguments, Communication scholars have developed self-construal scales and tested the relationship between the self-construals and culture (e.g., Gudykunst et al., 1996; Kim et al., 1996; Singelis, 1994; Singelis & Brown, 1995). The findings reported have been, at best, mixed.

Data consistent with the specified relationship between self-construal and culture were reported by Singelis and Brown (1995) and Singelis and Sharkey (1995). Singelis and Brown (1995) found that ethnicity was linked with self-construals as expected. Asian Americans were more interdependent (\( \beta = +.34 \)) and less independent (\( \beta = -.39 \) to -.41) than Caucasians. Similarly, Singelis and Sharkey (1995) also found that the average Caucasian American was lower on interdependence and higher on independence than the average Asian American (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, or Korean). Because the data in the two studies were collected in Hawaii, it is not clear whether the Asian Americans in Hawaii can be considered representative of the cultural collectivism of Asians in Asia.

Mixed results, however, were reported by Oetzel (1998) in a comparison of Caucasian American students to Japanese international students. The Caucasian
students scored higher on independence than the Japanese students, but the differences were not significant for interdependence. Further, both groups had higher average scores on independence than interdependence.

Studies actually using cross-cultural data have produced even more equivocal results. Cross (1995) reported that, as expected, East Asian participants scored higher on interdependent self-construal items than American participants. Contrary to her prediction, however, American and Asian students did not differ significantly in their ratings of independent self-construal, and scores on independent self-construal were higher than scores on interdependent self-construal among Asians from Taiwan, People's Republic of China, Korea, and Japan. In Kim et al.'s (1996) study, students from the mainland United States, Hawaii, Japan, and Korea showed the expected correspondence between their cultural background and his/her ratings of self-construals on the independence scale. For the interdependence scale, however, the ratings were not in the expected order and there were no significant differences among Koreans, Japanese, and Americans from the mainland United States. In the mediation model tested in that study, the supposedly indirect effect for individualism on outcome-oriented constraints was larger than the specified direct links. Brockner and Chen (1996) reported that there was no difference between cultures (the People's Republic of China and the United States) in ratings of self-construal; and if anything, participants from PRC scored slightly higher (but not significantly) on independent self-construal than did the U.S. participants. Finally, Gudykunst et al. (1996) also report that means for self-construals across cultures (Korea, Australia, Japan, and the United States) "do not reflect the general cultural tendencies usually associated with the four cultures" (p. 530, italics in original).

Despite these inconsistent findings between culture and self-construal, investigators have generally reported expected effects for self-construal on the dependent variables investigated. Cross (1995) reported that East Asian students who stress their independent construal of self utilized more direct coping strategies and these strategies were related to decreased levels of perceived stress. East Asian students who scored high on the interdependent self scale reported higher levels of stress. On the other hand, for Americans, one's self-construal did not have much of an effect on one's stress level. As expected, Kim et al. (1996) found that interdependent self-construal was related to other-oriented conversational constraints and independent self-construal was related to outcome-oriented conversational constraints. It has also been concluded that self-construal provides an explanation of differences between and within cultures for the impact of self-related variables including self-esteem (Brockner & Chen, 1996) and embarrassability (Singelis & Sharkey, 1995). Finally, Gudykunst et al.'s findings (1996) suggested independent self-construal was related to Low Context communication and interdependent self-construal was related to High Context communication across cultures. Gudykunst et al. conclude that "LC and HC communication styles are based on individuals' self-construals rather than on cultural I-C" (p. 537). However, even when the researchers find expected effects for self-construals on dependent variables, the effect sizes are, at times, very small. For example, the multiple correlations in Kim et al. (1998) were all $R^2 \leq 0.4$.

Researchers have reported data consistent the hypothesized findings on the effect that self-construal exerts on dependent variables. Therefore, it appears that self-construal can explain variation in communication styles, conversational constraints, coping strategies, perceived stress level in foreign countries, self-esteem, and embar-
rassability. Conceptually, the idea of self-construal as a mediator between culture and cognition, emotion, motivation, and behavior is intuitively appealing. The inconsistent findings on the relation between culture and self-construal, however, make it hard to interpret the findings as consistent with self-construal mediating the effect of culture on various dependent variables. Therefore, the following research question is advanced.

RQ: Does self-construal mediate the effects of culture on normative and attitudinal components of the TRA?

Method

Cultures Selected

Korea, Hawaii, and the mainland U.S. were selected for comparison. Korea has been described as one of the most collectivistic cultures (Bond, 1988; Hofstede, 1980). Hawaii has a multicultural environment, with heavy Asian and Polynesian influences on a predominantly Western cultural backdrop (Kim et al., 1996). Culture of the mainland U.S. has been considered to be individualistic.

Participants

One hundred forty eight students (99 males, 48 females, and 1 unclassifiable) from Chung-Ang University located in Seoul, Korea, 141 undergraduate students (62 males, 78 females, and 1 unclassifiable) enrolled in Speech Communication classes in the University of Hawaii, and 150 undergraduate students (67 males, 80 males, and 3 unclassifiable) enrolled in Communication classes in Michigan State University participated in the current study. Mean age was 22.13 ranging from 16 to 45 (Korea, $M = 22.61$; Hawaii, $M = 22.48$; mainland U.S., $M = 21.32$).

All of the participants from Korea were Koreans culturally as well as ethnically. Out of the participants from Hawaii, 37 people were Japanese (26.2%), 26 Hawaiian or part Hawaiian (18.4%), 24 Caucasian (17%), 16 Chinese (11.3%), 9 Korean (6.4%), 4 Pacific Islander (2.8%), 2 Filipino (1.4%), 1 African American (.7%), 19 other (13.5%), and 3 unclassifiable (2.1%). Cultural makeup of the participants from Hawaii was also diverse: 46 Japanese (33.3%), 23 Chinese (16.3%), 20 Caucasian (14.2%), 15 Korean (10.6%), 8 Filipino (5.7%), 7 Hawaiian or part Hawaiian (5.0%), 6 mixed (4.3%), 9 other (6.4%), and 4 unclassifiable (2.8%). Among the participants from the mainland U.S. there were 125 Caucasian (83.3%), 13 African American (8.7%), 2 Filipino (1.3%), 1 Japanese (.7%), 1 Korean (.7%), 5 other (3.3%), and 3 unclassifiable (2.0%). Culturally, 117 participants (78.0%) indicated that they belong to mainland U.S. culture, 15 African American (10.0%), 4 Filipino (2.7%), 2 Hispanic (1.3%), 2 Korean (1.3%), 8 other (5.3%), and 1 unclassifiable (.7%).

Procedures

In Korea, participation was voluntary, and solicited by two teaching assistants. In Hawaii and Michigan, the research was completed during regularly scheduled class time, and all participants received extra credits in exchange for their participation. The respondents were told that the study was investigating people's attitude toward studying for an exam. The questionnaires were distributed to students a few weeks prior to their final exams.

The questionnaire was translated from English to Korean and back translated
from Korean to English by two bilinguals. The Korean version of the questionnaire was checked for fluency and semantics by a native Korean graduate student in Korea. The Korean version of the questionnaire was distributed to Korean students and the English version of the questionnaire was distributed to the participants from Hawaii and Michigan.

Measuring Components of TRA

The topic of the current study was the participants' intentions to study for their upcoming final exams. The behavior of studying was chosen because all participants in the current study were college students, studying is an activity that occurs in each of the three locations, and studying is a volitional behavior. In Korea, Hawaii, and the mainland U.S., final exams are considered to take a significant portion of grades. As suggested by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), instead of measuring intention to study in general, a specific behavior, studying more than usual for the upcoming exam, was selected to measure behavioral intention.

Scales were constructed to measure each component in the TRA. Attitude toward behavior calculated by summing up the products of behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluations, and subjective norm calculated by summing up the products of normative beliefs motivations to comply with important others. All items used the 7-point format and the response options recommended by Ajzen and Fishbein (1980).

Behavioral Intention. Behavioral intention was measured with a single item “I intend to study more than usual for my upcoming final exam.” Participants responded to this item on a scale bounded by extremely likely and extremely unlikely, with extremely likely scored as 7.

Attitudinal Component. Specific behavioral beliefs were derived by the authors. The behavioral beliefs were divided into social outcomes and personal outcomes. Social outcomes of behavior referred to consequences of behavior that involved others. Social outcomes of behavior included getting recognition from others, cutting down on time with friends, making others proud of me, getting good grades that reflect positively on my important people, and getting a good job that reflects positively on my important people. Personal outcomes of behavior referred to outcomes of the behavior that had primarily impacted the self. Personal outcomes of behavior included learning more, getting stress, cutting down on my time on myself, getting good grades that are good for me, and getting a job that is good for me. Social outcomes of behavior and evaluation of the outcomes were used to calculate social attitude toward behavior and personal outcomes of behavior and evaluation of the outcomes were used to obtain personal attitude toward behavior. Social attitude toward behavior and personal attitude toward behavior were summed as a global measure of attitude toward behavior.

Behavioral beliefs were assessed by asking participants to rate the likelihood that their studying would truly lead to each outcome (scored 0, extremely unlikely to 6, extremely likely). Outcome evaluations were assessed by asking the participants to rate each consequence on a scale ranging from extremely good to extremely bad (scored +3 to −3). Behavioral beliefs for each outcome and the corresponding outcome evaluation were multiplied, and the products were summed across outcomes as attitude toward behavior.
Normative Component. Nine reference groups or individuals were used for determining normative beliefs and motivation to comply. These were derived from previous research (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) and by the author. The groups or individuals included parents, siblings, close friends, romantic partner, co-workers, roommates, classmates, relatives, and teachers. Normative beliefs were assessed by having the participants rate whether or not each reference group or individual thought that the participant should study for his/her upcoming exam. The motivation to comply items asked the extent to which participant wanted to do what each reference group or individual thought they should do. Normative beliefs were scored from 0 to 6, and motivations to comply were scored from 0 to 6. The normative belief for each reference group or individual and the corresponding motivation to comply rating were multiplied, and the products were summed across reference groups as subjective norm. Since only 71 participants from Korea responded to questions regarding co-workers and 63 participants from Korea and 93 from Hawaii responded to questions regarding roommates, these two reference groups were omitted from the calculation of subjective norm. This procedure was used because missing values dramatically lowered valid cases for subjective norm (e.g., valid N = 52 for Korea, 77 for Hawaii, and 141 for the mainland U.S.).

Self-Construal

The revised version of Self-Construal Scale (Kim & Leung, 1997) is a Likert-type scale using a seven-point response format and “strongly agree” and “strongly disagree” as the anchors. Fifteen items measure independent self-construal and 14 items measure interdependent self-construal. The ratings of the items for each scale were averaged as measures of their respective constructs.

Overall scale reliability was .89 for independent self-construal (M = 5.56) and .89 for interdependent self-construal (M = 4.42). Independent self-construal scale had .90 reliability in Korea, .86 in Hawaii, and .88 in the mainland U.S. and interdependent self-construal had .84 reliability in Korea, .82 in Hawaii, and .80 in the mainland U.S. Figure 1 shows each culture’s mean scores for independent and interdependent self-construals.

Overall, independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal were significantly negatively correlated, r(420) = -.12, p < .02. For the participants from Korea, however, independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal were positively correlated, r(141) = .28, p = .001. There was no significant correlation between the two types of self-construals for the participants from Hawaii, r(131) = -.07, p = .40, another nonsignificant correlation for the participants from the mainland U.S. r(144) = -.15, p = .07.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the data were screened for normality and linearity. The distribution of each measure approximated normality, and scatterplots did not reveal substantial nonlinearity for the variables involved in the correlation and regression analyses. Although normally distributed, scores on both self-construal scales tended fall above the midpoint. For independence, 97.0% of the subjects scored 4.0 or above. Sixty-six percent of the respondents scored above the midpoint on interdependence.
**Hypotheses Testing**

**H 1 & H 2: Self-Construals and Motivation to Comply.** The strength of independent self-construal was expected to be negatively related to the degree of motivation to comply with significant others. The data were not consistent with the hypothesis 1. Pearson product moment correlation coefficient analysis showed that there was no statistically significant relationship between the strength of independent self-construal and the degree of motivation to comply, $r(380) = -0.06, p = .24$. The power to detect a correlation of $r > .20$ was .98.

The scores on interdependent self-construal were expected to be positively related to the degree of motivation to comply with significant others. Consistent with this hypothesis, there was a significantly positive correlation between the strength of interdependent self-construal and motivation to comply, $r(376) = .58, p < .001$.

Additionally, correlation analyses were conducted to see how interdependent and independent self-construals were related to motivation to comply within each culture. As Table 1 shows, in Korea, both independent and interdependent self-construals were significantly and positively related to motivation to comply with important others, even though there was a difference in the magnitude of the correlations. On the other hand, in Hawaii and the mainland United States, only interdependent self-construal was significantly correlated with motivation to comply. It is possible that the positive correlation between Koreans' independent self-construal and motivation to comply stems from the positive correlation between the two types of self-construals. Therefore, to control the effect of interdependent self-construal on
TABLE 1
CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SELF-CONSTRUALS AND NORMATIVE COMPONENTS

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Note. 
***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05. Ranges of degrees of freedom are reported in parentheses.

the relationship of independent self-construal to motivation to comply, a semipartial correlation was calculated. As expected, independent self-construal did not account for a significant variance in motivation to comply when controlling for interdependent self-construal.

R 1: Self-Construals and Normative Beliefs. It was asked how normative beliefs were related to self-construals, and if relationship between normative beliefs and self-construals varied between cultures. As shown in Table 1, the across cultures correlation analysis showed that the strength of independent self-construal was not related to normative beliefs, while the strength of interdependent self-construal was positively related to them. Separate analyses for each culture revealed different patterns for different cultures. In Korea, both independent and interdependent self-construals were positively related to normative beliefs. In Hawaii, it was only interdependent self-construal that was positively related to normative beliefs. In the mainland U.S., however, neither independent nor interdependent self-construal was significantly related to normative beliefs.

H 3 & H 4: Self-Construals and Attitude. Hypotheses 3 posited that independent self-construal would be positively related to personal attitude toward behavior, but negatively related to social attitude toward behavior. As shown in Table 2, when zero-order correlation analysis was used, the strength of independent self-construal was positively related to personal attitude toward behavior, while the strength of independent self-construal was not significantly related to social attitude toward behavior. Since personal attitude toward behavior and social attitude toward behavior were positively related, r(426) = .61, p < .001 [r(142) = .68, p < .001 in Korea; r(135) = .60, p < .001, in Hawaii; r(145) = .60, p < .001, in the mainland U.S.], semipartial correlations were calculated, partialling out either personal or social attitudes toward behavior. The analysis revealed that the strength of independent
TABLE 7
Correlations Among Self-Construals and Social and Personal Attitudes Toward Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Peratt Zero-order</th>
<th>Peratt Semipartial</th>
<th>Socatt Zero-order</th>
<th>Socatt Semipartial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall (421)</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.30***</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.10***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent SC</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent SC</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea (140)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent SC</td>
<td>.35***</td>
<td>.44**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent SC</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii (133)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent SC</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent SC</td>
<td>.25**</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mainland U.S. (142)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent SC</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>.44***</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent SC</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td></td>
<td>.29***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  
***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05. Degrees of freedom are reported in parentheses.

SC: Self-Construal.
Peratt: Personal Attitude Toward Behavior.
Socatt: Social Attitude Toward Behavior.

self-construal had a positive relationship with personal attitude toward behavior and a negative relationship with social attitude toward behavior. Therefore the data were consistent with the hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4 anticipated that the strength of interdependent self-construal had a negative association with personal attitude toward behavior, but a positive association with social attitude toward behavior. Because of the high correlation between personal and social attitudes toward behavior, again semipartial correlations were used to test the hypothesis. As shown in Table 2, the strength of interdependent self-construal was negatively correlated to personal attitude toward behavior, but positively related to social attitude toward behavior. Therefore the data were consistent with the hypothesis 4.

Table 2 summarizes the correlation findings for hypotheses 3 and 4, and shows separate analyses for each culture. The separate analyses revealed that in Hawaii and the mainland U.S., the strength of independent self-construal was positively related to personal attitude toward behavior, while the strength of interdependent self-construal was positively related to social attitude toward behavior. In Korea, both independent and interdependent self-construal were positively related to social attitude toward behavior, but not significantly related to personal attitude toward behavior.

**R 2: Cultures and Self-Construals.** The second research question asked if self-construal would mediate the effects of culture on the normative and attitudinal determinants of behavioral intention. Since differences in “culture” between individuals participating in this study were not measured (rather, they were assumed to be based on location), a quantitative value was created to reflect each culture. The value corresponded to the empirical rankings of individualism and collectivism found by Hofstede (1983). Korea was given 1, Hawaii given 2, and the mainland United States 3. Four path analyses were conducted to investigate if self-construals mediate the effects of culture on attitude toward behavior and subjective norm. Figure 2
THEORY OF REASONED ACTION

\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{Culture} & \rightarrow \text{Ind. SC} \rightarrow \text{Attitude} 
\end{align*} \]

**Note.** Overall fit, \( \chi^2 (1) = 16.06, p < .05; \)
Missing link between culture and attitude, \( t (426) = -23, p < .001, \) error \( t = -27; z = 4.01, p < .001. \)

\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{Culture} & \rightarrow \text{Ind. SC} \rightarrow \text{Subjective Norm} 
\end{align*} \]

**Note.** Overall fit, \( \chi^2 (1) = 33.14, p < .05; \)
Missing link between culture and subjective norm, \( t (383) = -39, p < .001, \) error \( t = -39; z = -5.79, p < .001. \)

\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{Culture} & \rightarrow \text{Int. SC} \rightarrow \text{Attitude} 
\end{align*} \]

**Note.** Overall fit, \( \chi^2 (1) = .02, p > .05; \)
Missing link between culture and attitude, \( t (426) = -23, p < .01, \) error \( t = -01; z = -15, p > .05. \)

\[ \begin{align*} 
\text{Culture} & \rightarrow \text{Int. SC} \rightarrow \text{Subjective Norm} 
\end{align*} \]

**Note.** Overall fit, \( \chi^2 (1) = 3.19, p > .05; \)
Missing link between culture and subjective norm, \( t (383) = -39, p < .001, \) error \( t = -11; z = -1.79, p > .05. \)

Ind. SC: Independent Self-Construal
Int. SC: Interdependent Self-Construal

FIGURE 2
Path Coefficients Among Culture, Independent Self-Construal, Interdependent Self-Construal, Attitude, and Subjective Norm.

summarizes the findings. Overall, the data were consistent with the possibility that interdependent self-construal mediates the effect of cultures on attitude toward behavior and subjective norm. On the other hand, the data were not consistent with the mediation model specifying independent self-construal as mediator of the effect of cultures on attitude toward behavior and subjective norm.

**Additional Analyses**

**Theory Testing.** It was tested if the Theory of Reasoned Action worked cross-culturally. Regression analysis showed that, when entered simultaneously, attitude toward behavior and subjective norm contributed significantly in predicting behavioral intention, \( F(2, 373) = 37.11, p < .001 \) [\( F(2, 131) = 10.39, p < .001 \), in Korea;
F(2, 102) = 10.18, p < .001, in Hawaii; F(2, 134) = 9.83, p < .001, in the mainland U.S.). Therefore, it is concluded that the theory holds its utility value across various cultures.

Across cultures, the relative weights of attitude toward behavior (β = .28, t = 5.31, p < .001) and subjective norm (β = .21, t = 3.98, p < .001) were significant. When the relative weights of attitude toward behavior and subjective norm were analyzed within each culture, it was found that only attitude toward behavior carried significant weight in predicting behavioral intention in Korea (β = .30, t = 3.34, p = .001) and the mainland U.S. (β = .31, t = 3.62, p < .001), while the weight of subjective norm was not significant (β = .13, t = 1.41, p = .16, in Korea, β = .09, t = 1.05, p = .30, in the mainland U.S.). On the other hand, in Hawaii, both of the attitude toward behavior (β = .22, t = 2.29, p = .024) and subjective norm (β = .28, t = 2.91, p = .004) were significantly predictive of behavioral intention.

**Self-Construals and the Relative Weights of the Two Components.** Hierarchical regression analysis was used to test if the strength of independent self-construal was related to the relative weights of attitudinal and normative components in predicting behavioral intention. To conduct the analysis, scores on the behavioral intention were first regressed onto scores for the attitude toward behavior, subjective norm, and independent self-construal, and then onto the attitude × independent self-construal and subjective norm × independent self-construal. Results showed that when entered together, the main effects accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in behavioral intention, $R = .40$, $F(3, 369) = 23.93, p < .001$. When the two-way interaction terms were entered into the equation, they did not account for a significant increase in the proportion of explained variance, $R^2\text{change} = .01, F(2, 367) = 1.33, p = .27$.

A similar procedure was conducted for interdependent self-construal in testing the impact of interdependent self-construal on the relative importance of the two components. Subjective norm, attitude, and interdependent self-construal together accounted for a significant portion of the variance in behavioral intention, $R = .40$, $F(3, 364) = 23.44, p < .001$. The two-way interaction terms accounted for a small but significant increase in the proportion of explained variance, $R^2\text{change} = .02, F(2, 362) = 3.68, p = .03$. The overall equation was statistically significant, $R = .42$, $F(5, 362) = 15.74, p < .001$.

Table 3 summarizes the results for the final regression models. From the above analyses, it is concluded that the strength of independent self-construal does not influence the relative weight of attitudinal and normative components in predicting behavioral intention, while the strength of interdependent self-construal does influence the relative weights of attitudinal and normative components. The stronger one’s interdependent self-construal, the stronger the relationship between subjective norm and behavioral intention and the weaker the relationship between attitude toward behavior and behavioral intention.

**Culture and Self-Construals.** To further explore the relationship between culture and self-construal, two separate ANOVAs were used. The first ANOVA with independent self-construal as a dependent variable revealed a significant main effect for the culture, $F(2, 428) = 16.60, p < .001, \eta^2 = .07$. Planned comparisons at $p < .05$ level showed that every cultural group was different from each other, in the order of the mainland U.S. as being the highest ($M = 5.80$), followed by Hawaii ($M = 5.58$) and Korea ($M = 5.28$). The second ANOVA with interdependent self-construal as a
TABLE 3
REGRESSION OF BEHAVIORAL INTENTION ON ATTITUDE, SUBJECTIVE NORM, SELF-CONSTRUALS, AND INTERACTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Self-Construal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude Toward Behavior (AB)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>4.63***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Norm (SN)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>4.59***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Self-Construal (Ind SC)</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>4.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB × Ind SC</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN × Ind SC</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-69</td>
<td>-1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent Self-Construal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude Toward Behavior (AB)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>5.02***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Norm (SN)</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>3.37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdependent Self-Construal (Int SC)</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB × Int SC</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.76</td>
<td>-2.57*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SN × Int SC</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>1.98*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.
***p < .001, **p < .01, *p < .05.

dependent variable also showed a significant main effect for the culture, $F(2, 423) = 84.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .29$. Planned comparisons at $p < .05$ level showed that every cultural group was different from each other, in the order of the Korea as being the highest ($M = 5.07$), followed by Hawaii ($M = 4.24$) and the mainland U.S. ($M = 3.95$). Figure 1 illustrates the mean scores.

As shown in figure 1, it appears that there may be a cross-cultural difference in the magnitude of difference between independent and interdependent self-construal mean scores within a culture. An additional analysis was conducted to test the possibility. A new variable (alpha = .86) was created by subtracting each individual's interdependent self-construal score from his/her independent self-construal score. An ANOVA with the new variable as a dependent variable revealed a significant main effect for the cultures, $F(2, 419) = 92.89, p < .001, \eta^2 = .31$. Post hoc comparisons at $p < .05$ level showed that there were significant differences in every pair of cultural groups. The participants from the mainland U.S. ($M = 1.88$) indicated the highest difference in their ratings of self-construals, followed by the participants from Hawaii ($M = 1.36$) and the ones from Korea ($M = 0.22$).

The above mentioned analysis indicates that depending on which culture the participants came from, the participants of different cultures exhibited more or less differentiation between independent and interdependent self-construals. This variation in differentiation seemed to occur systematically such that each culture conditioned their members' self-construals to be more independent than interdependent. To test this possibility, $t$-tests were conducted for each culture. Within each culture, there were significant differences between independent and interdependent self-construals, $t(142) = 2.79, p = .006$ in Korea, $t(131) = 14.10, p < .001$ in Hawaii, and $t(145) = 20.76, p < .001$ in the mainland U.S. For every culture, people were higher on independent self-construal ratings than on interdependent self-construal. The mean scores of self-construals are reported in the previous analysis as well as in the Figure 1.

Taken together, the aforementioned three analyses suggest that there are cross-cultural differences in interdependent and independent self-construals. That is, the members of an individualistic culture emphasize independent self-construal more
highly than do the members of a collectivistic culture, and the reverse is true for interdependent self-construal. Further, members of an individualistic culture tend to differentiate between interdependent and independent self-construals more strongly than do the members of a collectivistic culture. However, there is also a similarity. Within each culture, individuals score higher on the independent self-construal scale than on the interdependent self-construal.

Discussion

The findings of the current study showed that the TRA worked cross-culturally. Overall across cultures, attitude toward behavior and subjective norm were able to predict behavioral intention to study. In separate analyses for each culture showed, however, it was attitude toward behavior that had more predictive power than the subjective norm, except for Hawaii where subjective norm was also significantly predictive of behavioral intention.

Self-construals, as an external variable to the TRA, affected the strength of attitudinal and normative components of the theory. The strength of interdependent self-construal was positively related to normative beliefs, motivation to comply, and, consequently, subjective norm, while the strength of independent self-construal was not significantly related to any of these components. With regard to the attitudinal component, the strength of interdependent self-construal was positively related to social attitude toward behavior and negatively related to personal attitude toward behavior. The strength of independent self-construal was positively related to personal attitude toward behavior and negatively related to social attitude toward behavior. It was only interdependent self-construal that mediated cultural effects on the two components of the theory, and that impacted the relative weights of the two components.

When analyzed within each culture, self-construals manifested different effects on dependent variables. In Korea, independent self-construal was positively related to normative beliefs, while it was not significantly related to normative beliefs in Hawaii and the mainland United States. On the other hand, in the mainland U.S., interdependent self-construal was not significantly related to normative beliefs, when it was positively related to normative beliefs in Hawaii and Korea. Regarding the attitudinal component, neither independent nor interdependent self-construals were significantly related to personal attitude toward behavior in Korea, while it was only interdependent self-construal that failed to have a significant relationship with personal attitude in Hawaii and the mainland United States. Likewise, in Korea both independent and interdependent self-construals were positively related to social attitude toward behavior, while only interdependent self-construal had a positive relationship with social attitude in Hawaii and the mainland United States. Therefore, self-construals seem to have different relationships with the dependent variables in different cultures.

Implications for Self-Construal

In the current study, the cross-cultural differences on independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal came out as expected. The members of each culture were significantly different in their mean scores on both types of self-construals and those differences were in the expected order. Across cultures, however, the mean scores on independent self-construal were significantly higher
than the scores on interdependent self-construal, indicating that people from different cultures may all naturally construe themselves more independent than interdependent in relation to others. It was also found that the more individualistic a culture, the more highly its members tend to differentiate their independent and interdependent self-construal types.

The revised version of self-construal scale by Kim and Leung (1997) produced the expected cross-cultural differences in self-construals that have eluded several previous researchers. This scale, however, raised another problem. Everyone scored higher on independent self-construal. A cross-cultural study by Park and Sharkey (1997), that employed the same scale, reported similar results. However, this finding may not be scale specific. The authors' informal review of 13 studies (involving the use of several different versions of self-construal scales) indicate that people from collectivistic cultures usually score higher on independent self-construal than on interdependent self-construal. If everyone, regardless of culture, tends to emphasize their independent self-construal over interdependent self-construal, it is questioned how the theoretical claim that the interdependent self-construal predominates in collectivist cultures can be justified.

There are several possible explanations for the finding that, across cultures, individuals tend to be more independent than interdependent. First, viewing self-construal as an individual-level cultural variable may be fundamentally problematic. There are several versions of the self-construal scale used by researchers that are known to the authors. Previous studies with those scales lead one to question the validity of the self-construal concept as individual level culture. As the current path analyses indicate, self-construals do not adequately mediate the impact of cultures on the dependent variables. Only interdependent self-construal mediated the effect of culture on attitudinal and normative components of the TRA. This finding is consistent with Kim et al.'s (1996) study, where only interdependent self-construal mediated the effect of individualism on other-oriented conversational constraints. Individualism had a bigger direct effect on outcome-oriented conversational constraints than did independent self-construal, the mediator. However, because one type of self-construal has been found to mediate cultural differences, and because some cross-cultural studies report expected findings on the topics of interest (e.g., Cross, 1995; Kim et al., 1996; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995), it may be too radical to abandon the self-construal concept completely.

Second, the view of the self as a unique individual with one's own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, may be a universal, and natural facet of human development. Cross-cultural differences then might be seen more clearly when looking at the distinction people make between the types of self-construals. In other words, for the members of collectivistic cultures, independent and interdependent self-construals may not be as clearly distinguished as for the members of individualistic cultures. It is also possible that the theoretical separation of independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal concept at the individual level is a Western concept. The members of Eastern, or collectivistic, cultures, may construe their self-images as independent and/or interdependent with others, depending on situation or task types.

Thus, conceptual modification of self-construals might be needed. In this reconceptualization, the independent self might be seen as a universal, and culture might be
viewed as affecting the distinction between the two types of self-construals rather than the overall acceptance of the two types of self-construals. This modification might also view self-construals more as moderators of cultural effects than as mediators. Thus, cross-cultural communication scholars might shift their focus to investigating how, within different cultures, self-construals interact with culture to affect the topics of interest. Reporting the aggregated effects of self-construals on a certain variable and assuming that independent and interdependent self-construals work in same way in different cultures should be avoided.

Third, the troubling findings may stem, in part, from item wording problems in the interdependence items. One of the weaknesses of the existing scales is that the scales do not specify the specific type of people the respondents are supposedly interdependent with. Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988) reported that there were no differences between the Japanese and Illinois samples in their reactions to parents, while most of the cultural differences were found for acquaintances, coworkers, and friends. Hofstede’s (1980) study also found cultural differences in work-related values among coworkers in multinational organizations. In a study conducted in the United States, Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson (1991) reported that people who are very close to each other tend to see themselves highly interdependent with their partners. Therefore, even the members of individualistic cultures may tend to construe themselves as highly interdependent with their loved ones. So, it is possible that the relationships with people with whom we are neither extremely close (e.g., family or romantic partners) nor extremely distant (e.g., strangers) would illustrate cross-cultural differences in interdependence. Therefore, by specifying the groups or individual whom people may or may not include in their self-image, self-construal scales may become more valid in terms of measuring cross-cultural differences.

Conclusion

Three conclusions can be drawn regarding the current status of the self-construals construct. First, as both previous research and the current study show, hypothesized links between self-construals and dependent variables of interest are usually (but not always) found. Second, findings on the relation between culture and self-construals are equivocal at best. Existing data are not sufficient to justify claims that self-construals are individual level dimensions corresponding to cultural level collectivism and individualism. Third, and as a consequence, ratings on self-construal scales may not reflect reliable cultural differences. Instead, self-construals might have different meanings in different cultures. For example, an interdependent self-construal in the mainland United States might not be the same thing as interdependent self-construal in Korea. Future research on self-construals needs to consider potential culture by construal and construal by relationship interactions, and further conceptual and operational refinement is needed.

Notes

1Separating Caucasians and Asians in the Hawaii sample did not alter the results.
2All interactions were modeled with product terms. Alternative methods of investigating interactions did not reveal additional undetected interactions.
3The attitude × subjective norm and attitude × subjective norm × independent or interdependent self-construal were not reported because they were not theoretically meaningful and they did not significantly contribute to the prediction of behavioral intention.
Separate hierarchical regression analyses were conducted for each culture. The results, however, did not reveal that any of self-construal types influence the relative weight of attitudinal and normative components within any culture.

The studies that used the self-construal scale developed by Singelis (1994) reported that Asian Americans in Hawaii scored higher on interdependent self-construal than on independent self-construal.

References


