The Independence Paradox

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In the 1960s, Ayn Rand convened an intellectual salon that she called The Collective. Coming from the founder and articulator of Objectivism, a philosophy of radical individualism, this was a deliberately provocative, tongue-in-cheek name. Yet it captured an important truth about Rand’s followers: They were truly followers. They were influenced by her philosophy, her vision, and wanted to share their views with like-minded others. True, those views espoused the intellectual and moral primacy of the individual – the “virtue of selfishness,” as Rand and Branden (1964) termed it – but the intellectual movement that grew up around those ideas was formed and sustained by group processes. The Collective spawned numerous institutes, think-tanks, and newsletters designed to draw in new members; there were struggles for status within the group; and Rand herself became an extremely powerful figure, surrounded and protected by a fiercely loyal inner circle. Indeed, a number of commentators have likened the Objectivist movement to a cult (e.g., Shermer, 1993; Walker, 1999).

The Collective provides an excellent illustration of what we refer to as the *independence paradox*. In groups that value individuality, ranging in scale from Rand’s Collective to North American societies, acts of independence have a paradoxical status: They both challenge the group’s power and conform to its norms. These acts signify personal freedom and, at the same time, collective identification (see also Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002). The prototypical members of individualistic groups are mavericks, iconoclasts, and deviates who, by rejecting their embeddedness in groups, embody the values of these groups. The peripheral members of these groups are conformists, followers, and team players who, by recognizing and even embracing their embeddedness, reinforce their marginality. In this chapter, we aim to conceptualize the paradoxical interplay of conformity and independence in the psychology of people at both ends of this spectrum. The latter part of the chapter is devoted to
describing our model of the self-regulatory dynamics that characterize acts of (non)independence within cultures that value independence, and the experimental evidence that supports the model. We begin, however, with an overview of research on a construct that we believe holds the key to understanding the independence paradox: the independent self-construal.

The Independent Self-Construal

The story of the independent self-construal begins with the cognitive revolution of the mid-1970s, when social cognition researchers showed a burgeoning interest in social representations. Markus (1977) contributed to this approach by conceptualizing the self as a knowledge structure, analogous to the knowledge structures that organize information about other people, social groups, and both social and non-social categories. Markus introduced the concept of a *self-schema* – a cognitive generalization about the self that serves to organize self-knowledge and facilitate social information processing. She maintained that individuals vary in the contents of their self-schemas, and, in her empirical research, examined differences between individuals who had self-schemas in a particular content domain and those who did not. She defined *schematics* as people who considered themselves relatively extreme on a given dimension of self-assessment and also considered that dimension to be highly self-relevant, and *aschematics* as those who did not consider the dimension to be particularly self-relevant.

Markus’ research interest was not in schematicity per se, but rather in its profound functional consequences for the processing of self-related information. As she put it: “Once established, these schemata function as selective mechanisms which determine whether information is attended to, how it is structured, how much importance is attached to it, and what happens to it subsequently” (Markus, 1977, p. 64). Markus demonstrated that schematic self-knowledge was stable across time and was linked to memories of past behavior as well as
expectations for future behavior. Interestingly, her early studies focused on the dimension of independence-dependence, exploring differences between individuals who were independent-schematic, dependent-schematic, or aschematic. This choice was somewhat arbitrary; Markus used the independence-dependence dimension solely because her research participants varied on that dimension in an empirically useful way. Nevertheless, this research provided an early empirical investigation of independence, conceptualized as a stable self-knowledge structure.

A more deliberate focus on independence was a central aspect of Markus’ later work, which introduced another way of thinking about self-schemas: as self-knowledge structures shaped profoundly by cultural values. In this view, independence was not just an available self-schema that gave rise to differences between individuals; it was a cultural product, the psychological vehicle through which cultural values are expressed in individual behavior. This reconceptualization of the independent self-schema (now termed the independent self-construal) owed much to the ascendant cultural psychology tradition of the late 1980s. After long assuming that the processes they studied were invariant across cultures, psychologists awoke to the fact of cultural differences in even the most basic cognitive and perceptual processes (see Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996, for a review). To study these differences, they needed a way of identifying and conceptualizing one or a small number of dimensions along which the world’s cultures predictably varied. Fortunately, prominent anthropologists had, nearly a half-century before, advanced the idea that certain fundamental differences existed between East Asian and North American cultures (see, e.g., Benedict, 1946). Drawing on this work and a growing body of empirical evidence of their own, cultural psychologists converged on the dimension of individualism–collectivism as one that captured the primary differences between East Asian and Western cultures (see Triandis, 1990).
The question then was how to conceptualize the psychological mechanism through which a culture’s location on the individualism-collectivism dimension was expressed in the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of that culture’s members. Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that, within any given culture, these dominant ideas would be manifested in how culture members came to perceive themselves with respect to others. In other words, culture-level ideas would shape the structure of the self. Although the original focus in this literature was on broad differences in cultural emphases, over time social psychologists and cultural psychologists together became interested in how those broad differences produced two quite distinct ideas about the self: one in which the self is perceived as bound to others (interdependent self-construal) versus another in which the self is perceived as distinct from others (independent self-construal).

Measurement of the Independent Self-Construal

The changing role of the independent self-construal, from individual difference variable to cultural product and mediator of cultural differences, required a change in measurement strategy. Markus’s (1977) original measure of the independent self-schema was individualized and labor-intensive to use; it was therefore not well suited to the conduct of cross-cultural research. A much simpler, standardized measure of independent and interdependent self-construals was developed by Singelis (1994), and it very quickly gained popularity. Indeed, in the decade and a half since the article describing this measure was published, it has been cited over 500 times.

The Singelis scale has informed a substantial amount of published research and has been administered to samples around the globe. However, the ongoing accretion of data has yielded decidedly mixed evidence for the ideas on which the scale was based. In some cases, the results have re-affirmed the notion that the cultures of North America and Western Europe tend to be
more individualistic than East Asian and South Asian cultures, but in other cases, that distinction has not held up well (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; see also Church et al., 2003, Study 3).

There are at least two ways to interpret these mixed results. One traces the problem to the scale and its psychometric properties. Although Singelis (1994) demonstrated the scale’s construct validity in early samples (see also Singelis & Sharkey, 1995), more recent investigations have been much less supportive (see, e.g., Bresnahan et al., 2005; Levine et al., 2003). In addition, the scale has been plagued by unsatisfactory reliabilities, prompting researchers to re-assess Singelis’s claim for a two-factor structure (see, e.g., Grace & Cramer, 2003; Hardin, 2006). These challenges to the validity and reliability of the Singelis scale may explain why the original article’s citation rate appears to have dropped off slightly in recent years.

An alternative interpretation is that the problem lies in the theory, not the measure. That is, the Singelis scale may offer a psychometrically adequate measure of the independent self-construal, but the field’s understanding of how culture, self-construal, and behavior interrelate may be lacking. One indication that theory, rather than measurement, may be the problem is the failure of existing models to account for within-culture variability, the magnitude of which often swamps between-culture variability (Matsumoto, 2006; Suh, Diener, & Updegraff, 2008). We ourselves have acquired scores on the independent self-construal subscale from over 600 American college students and observe that although the distribution’s mean is shifted above the midpoint of the scale ($M = 4.62$ on a scale from 1 to 7), scores are not very tightly clustered around that mean (see Salvatore, 2007; Salvatore & Prentice, 2009).
We find the spread of this distribution particularly interesting. In a culture that values independence (Kim & Markus, 1999), what does it mean to be a high scorer (whom we will term a *high independent*) or a low scorer (a *low independent*)? What does it mean to believe strongly in one’s own independence? Consider two possibilities, both suggested by previous research on the independent self-construal: One, this belief may reflect an accurate assessment of one’s own behavior, past and present. High scorers may be those individuals who march to the beat of their own drum, those who act consistently on their own attitudes and dispositions. Alternatively, this belief may reflect a high value placed on being independent, an aspiration for the self, a standard for self-regulation. High scorers may be those individuals who most strongly identify with the cultural value placed on independence, those who are most inclined to conform to the norms of the group. Similar logic applies to the question of what it means to believe strongly that one is *not* independent: Dependent individuals make take their cues from those around them and blow with the prevailing wind, or they may be bold and self-determined enough to go against the individualistic norms of their culture. Note that these interpretations are not mutually exclusive and that both are broadly consistent with the way independence has been conceptualized and studied. Indeed, scores on the Singelis scale crystallize the tension between the formal semantic meaning of independence and the concept’s master status as a pervasive, culturally sanctioned guide for behavior. The question then becomes: What do individual differences in independent self-construal scores reflect -- conformity to cultural norms or deviation from them? Some clues may be found in previous research on correlates of the independent self-construal. We turn now to a consideration of this research.

*Correlates of the Independent Self-Construal*
Over the past two decades, a variety of scholarly literatures have accumulated evidence about the psychology of high and low independents, though it is worth noting that virtually all of these studies have focused on individuals raised and socialized within individualistic cultures. A number of differences between high and low scorers have emerged, starting at the level of basic perception and cognition. In general, independents tend to be more ‘context-blind’ in their information processing; for example, Kuhnen, Hannover, and Schubert (2001) provided participants with embedded figures and found that independents were insensitive to the context in which they occurred.

High and low independents also differ in their motivational orientations: high independents are more promotion focused (see, e.g., Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Elliot, Chirkov, Kim, & Sheldon, 2001). Our own correlational data corroborate and extend this robust effect. High independence scores are associated with chronic promotion focus, but not with chronic prevention focus. As a manifestation of this general approach orientation, high scorers are absorbed with independence as a “life task” (Zirkel & Cantor, 1990): they report higher levels of engagement with the goal of “being my own person, independent of others,” and see that task as both more important and more rewarding (Salvatore, 2007). Importantly, independents may be more preoccupied with this personal project, but they see it in positive terms (staying resolute, focused on the self) rather than in negative terms (avoiding conformity, worrying about how they look to others). Like others’ findings, ours converge upon a coherent, holistic picture of high scorers: instead of relating anxiously to others (as potential influencers to be feared and avoided), they experience themselves as easily, organically independent.

Their promotion focus has both positive and negative consequences for high independents. On the one hand, they sometimes fail to self-regulate appropriately. For example, high
independents engage in more compulsive consumption than low independents do (Zhang & Shrum, 2009). More generally, though, it appears that (at least in a North American context) independence facilitates a highly functional way of being. Independents tend to score high on measures of self-esteem and well-being (Kim, Kasser, & Lee, 2003) and low on measures of social anxiety and distress (Okazaki, 1997). Consistent with their general promotion focus, high independents are interpersonally proactive, at least when it comes to giving voice to relationship dissatisfactions (Sinclair & Fehr, 2005).

 Acting Independently

The foregoing review suggests that individual differences in the independent self-construal relate meaningfully and predictably to various aspects of individual and social functioning; it does not, however, demonstrate that high independents act more independently. That is, high independents see themselves as separate, bounded units, focus on themselves, promote themselves, and benefit psychologically from being self-focused. But does their belief in their own independence insulate them from social influence? Do high independents behave more independently? Surprisingly few investigations have addressed this question directly (Suh, Diener, & Updegraff, 2008), and the existing literature is equivocal. Some findings, especially from the interpersonal domain, suggest that high independents may be less interpersonally sensitive and connected than low independents. In addition, on the basis of a meta-analysis of responses to the Asch (e.g., 1956) line-matching paradigm, Bond and Smith (1996) concluded that participants from collectivistic (East Asian) countries conformed more than those from individualistic (Western) countries. There is every reason to think that self-construal might mediate this effect, just as it mediates so many other culture-level mean differences.
However, other lines of evidence suggest that high scorers may be just as socially embedded, if not more socially embedded, than low scorers. For example, our own data showed that independence scores were negatively associated with seeing oneself as lonesome and positively associated with seeing oneself as amiable, agreeable, and likable. These correlations suggest that high independents may hold their own sociability in higher regard than do low independents. What accounts for this somewhat surprising result? One possibility is that high independents are measuring themselves against lower standards for sociability than are low independents. However, it is also possible that their perceptions are accurate – that high independents are more central members of their social groups than low independents, and therefore are more amiable, agreeable, likable, and socially connected.

In addition, the literature contains a few, albeit scattered, examples of links between independent self-construals and forms of social influence. First, a consistent finding in the consumer persuasion literature is that people have better memory for (Aaker & Lee, 2001) and are more persuaded by (Chang, 2009) appeals that are based on a regulatory focus congruent with their self-construal. Thus, people with an independent self-construal can be persuaded, so long as the appeal is promotion-focused and thus resonates with their pre-existing sense of self. Second, Zhang, Feick, and Price (2006) showed that high independents’ overall tendency to evaluate angular shapes more positively than rounded ones is more pronounced when they believe they are being evaluated by an ingroup member. Again, then, people with an independent self-construal can be sensitive to social evaluation. Like the first finding, this one underscores the point that people with independent self-construals are subject to social influence, especially when that influence reflects their sense of their own independence and is endowed with
relevance and meaning by a source that reflects their connection to a group (for a similar point, see Hornsey & Jetten, 2004).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the belief in one’s own independence might translate poorly into the enactment of independence (see also Prentice, 2006). Of course, such a disjunction between self-belief and behavior has ample precedent in the literature: Countless investigations have shown that people’s behaviors often belie their most cherished self-beliefs (Armor, 1998; Pronin, Lin, & Ross, 2002). Disjunctions between self-beliefs and behaviors arise most commonly for qualities high in social desirability: objectivity, fairness, freedom from bias. Presumably, the desire to have these highly valued qualities, to be exemplary members of society, leads people to overlook or reinterpret any actions that counter-indicate them. We have good reason to expect self-beliefs about independence to be similarly insulated from behavioural disconfirmation. Indeed, in one particularly relevant demonstration, Pronin, Berger, and Molouki (2007) showed that people have a blindspot when it comes to their own conformity – actions they see as conformist in others are interpreted as preference-driven in the self.

This analysis, if correct, complicates predictions about the relationship between scores on the independent self-construal scale (Singelis, 1994) and independent behavior in cultures where independence is strongly valued (i.e., in North American and European societies). Despite the substantial within-culture variability in independent self-construals, cultural values still function as strong prescriptive norms in these cultures. Thus, people who see themselves as high in independence are seeing themselves in socially valued terms; indeed, as we noted at the beginning of the chapter, they are an individualistic culture’s prototypical members. As such, they may be much more tightly engaged with the collective and with its project of promoting independence than they realize or acknowledge. Their high scores on the independent self-
construal scale reflect their commitment to being independent, to be sure, but these scores also reflect a self-definition that is culturally prescribed. Low independents, on the other hand, may be explicitly open to influence, and yet these individuals are out of step with cultural norms in the way they define themselves. In short, there may be two self-definitional processes working in opposition here: an explicit process that reflects chronic self-understanding and an implicit process that reflects prepotent sociality, or a chronic orientation to others. Both of these processes may be reflected by scores on the Singelis scale, and both may influence behavior. Although this possibility is broadly consistent with a great deal of theory and empirical evidence, it has not been formalized or tested empirically. In the next section, we describe a dual-process model of the self-regulation of independence and present some initial empirical support for the model.

The Self-Regulation of Independence

Our model draws on recent conceptualizations of self-regulation as an effortful process. Numerous studies have shown that regulating behavior – bringing behavior into line with self-beliefs, for example – consumes a global, yet limited, resource (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, & Tice, 1998). When that resource is available – that is, when people have self-regulatory capacity – they use their self-beliefs to guide their behavior. However, when self-regulatory capacity is impaired, people are unable to override prepotent thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, those that are triggered by the dispositional and situational cues that are salient in the moment. They are unable to act like the people they want (and, here, believe themselves) to be. Thus, when in a state of ego depletion, people do not show correspondence between their self-beliefs and their behaviors. Researchers have used a muscle metaphor (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000) to emphasize the speed with which self-regulatory capacity can be exhausted in the short
term but also its ability to grow in strength with repeated exercise (Muraven, Baumeister, & Tice, 1999).

Two Processes of Independence Regulation

We maintain that the independent self-construal functions as a self-regulatory standard: It serves as a goal to which behavior is directed. The significance of that goal, its power to channel behavior, depends on two factors. The first is the strength of the independent self-construal, the importance an individual attaches to the goal of being independent. This factor is captured by scores on the Singelis measure. The second is regulatory capacity, the resources an individual has available to control his or her behavior. These two factors interact, such that when regulatory capacity is high – when people have mental energy available – those with a strong independent self-construal seek to avoid social influence whereas those with a weak independent self-construal do not. When regulatory capacity is low – when mental energy is depleted – self-construals do not control behavior. Instead, people are guided by whatever responses are prepotent.

Thus far, our model offers a standard self-regulatory analysis of independent behavior. The twist comes when we consider the prepotent responses that guide behavior when regulatory capacity is impaired. What might these responses be? One sensible and well-supported proposition is that, with impaired self-regulatory capacity, people are reflexively social: They look to others for cues about appropriate behavior. The literature is replete with evidence for people’s reflexive sociality, and for their failure to appreciate it fully (e.g., Vorauer & Miller, 1997; Pronin et al., 2007; Sinclair, Lowery, Hardin, & Colangelo, 2005). If this is the case, everybody should show a high level of conformity when regulatory capacity is depleted, and individual differences should emerge only when regulatory capacity is intact.
There is, however, an additional observation to incorporate into the framework: People vary in their reflexive sociality. Some people are more attuned, and therefore more inclined to conform, to their social surroundings than others. How can we capture this variation in the implicit inclination to conform? Ironically, the independent self-construal scale (Singelis, 1994) may serve admirably in this role. As we noted earlier, scores on the independent self-construal scale are valid indicators of not one but two underlying constructs: the belief in one’s independence and the congruence of self-beliefs with cultural norms. This latter construct may serve as an excellent proxy for the inclination to conform without being aware of it.

Thus, our model posits that independence is regulated by two processes that work in opposition to each other. One process is implicit conformity – that is, the reflexive attunement to social norms. This process is implicit and automatic, and produces a negative relationship between independent self-beliefs and independent behaviors. The second process is self-regulation – that is, the conscious attempt to act in accordance with the self-concept. This process is explicit and effortful, and produces a positive relationship between independent self-beliefs and behaviors. When regulatory capacity is intact, both of these processes operate simultaneously, leading to an overall null relationship between independent self-beliefs and behaviors. When regulatory capacity is depleted, self-regulation is compromised; thus, behavior is a function of implicit conformity alone, leading to a negative relationship between independent self-beliefs and behaviors.

**Empirical Evidence**

This model inspired our own empirical research on how people regulate the alignment between independent self-beliefs and behaviors (Salvatore, 2007; Salvatore & Prentice, 2009). Preliminary evidence in support of the model came from correlations we observed in our initial
studies: Self-construal scores were associated with systematic patterns of trait endorsement. Although all of our participants tended to rate socially desirable traits as more self-descriptive, this correlation varied as a function of scores on the independent self-construal scale: The higher the independence score, the stronger the correlation. This finding suggests that high independents see themselves as being very much in step with societal norms for appropriate behavior. In addition, independent self-construal scores were associated with a tendency to rate ambiguously desirable traits as less self-descriptive. In other words, high independents rejected as bases for self-definition traits whose social desirability was unclear, flexible, or contingent.

We also obtained correlational evidence in support of the idea that individuals who score high on the independent self-construal scale are those who take independence to be an important self-regulatory standard. Specifically, we found that self-construal scores were strong predictors of anticipated social behavior (e.g., high scorers believed they would behave more independently during the course of a group discussion than did low scorers). Interestingly, they were not reliable predictors of past social behavior (e.g., high scorers did not name more examples of independent behaviors they enacted in the past than did low scorers). This pattern of results supports the idea that the beliefs expressed by scores on the independent self-construal scale are more akin to values for the self than observations of the self.

Armed with correlational support for our model’s assumptions, we next sought direct evidence for its main predictions in two laboratory experiments. In both of these experiments, we manipulated the self-regulatory capacity of individuals representing the full range of scores on the independent self-construal scale. Specifically, half of the participants began the experiment with a task designed to deplete their regulatory capacity, whereas the other half completed a control task. All participants then read a brief description of an obscure policy topic and
expressed their support for the proposed policy. For a random subset of the participants in each regulatory-capacity condition, the description included information about their peers’ opinions for the policy, in the form of poll data that were congruent with the facts presented. (That is, the facts suggested that one should support the policy, and the poll data indicated that the majority of people did support it.) These participants thus had an opportunity to conform to or remain independent from their peers’ opinions. The remaining participants received no information about their peers’ opinions.

In the first study, we simply measured participants’ opinions after they had read about the policy topic and observed that, when regulatory capacity was depleted, those participants with the strongest beliefs in their own independence showed the strongest tendency to conform. That is, among participants who received information about their peers’ opinions, we observed a positive correlation between their own independence scores and endorsement of the position supposedly favored by the majority of their peers. There was no relationship between independence scores and opinions for participants who did not receive the poll data and similarly no relationship for those whose regulatory capacity was intact (regardless of whether they received the poll data). These results supported the predictions of our theoretical model.

In a second study, we included a pre-measure of opinions in our design and operationalized independence as the strength of the correlation between this pre-measure and the post-measure of opinions (taken after the manipulations of regulatory capacity and peer information were introduced). The higher the pre-post correlation, the more independent participants were remaining from the information they had received in between. This correlation was very strong for participants who did not receive information about their peers’ opinions ($r = .74$), as we expected. It was also strong for participants in a new condition we added to this study, in which
the information about peers’ opinions conflicted with the background information they received about the topic \((r = .55)\). This result suggests that people are sensitive to the reasonableness of the social information they receive, and are not prepared to conform to majority views that seem unreasonable. The correlation was much weaker for participants who received congruent (i.e., apparently reasonable) information about their peers’ opinions \((r = .31)\). Moreover, the strength of the correlation in this condition varied as a function of independence scores and regulatory capacity: When capacity was intact, the pre-post relationship was positive for high independents and zero for low independents; when capacity was depleted, the pre-post relationship was positive for low independents and zero for high independents. These results were entirely consistent with the model’s predictions.

In sum, the results of our research illustrate how people navigate the independence paradox. In a group or society with strongly individualistic norms, people are faced with a choice: they can conform by deviating or deviate by conforming. We believe they make this choice without realizing it was a choice at all, and experience little tension around their resulting self-beliefs. Nevertheless, when stripped of their capacity to self-regulate, an ironic pattern of behavior emerges: High independents conform to and low independents deviate from the prevailing social norms. Of course, because they cannot closely monitor their behavior in an ego-depleted state, they are unlikely to notice the irony and even less likely to revise their self-views accordingly. Thus, their phenomenological experience encompasses only one side of the paradox, and it does not feel like a paradox at all.

**Implications**

The dual-process model and the evidence we have accumulated in support of it have implications for a number of key issues in the study of self-regulation and cultural differences.
First, consider the implications for the perennial debate about the accuracy of self-knowledge. We have shown that high independents’ strong and consistent beliefs about themselves do not always match up well with their behavior, and that they seem to be insensitive to disconfirming evidence about themselves. One might see them as illustrating the naïveté of the motivated social thinker, whose self-knowledge is deeply imperfect (see also Vazire & Mehl, 2008). This interpretation gains additional support from the recent finding that collectivists predict their future behavior (especially in socially desirable domains) with greater accuracy than do individualists (Balcetis, Dunning, & Miller, 2008). Thus, we might take high independents as poster children for the lack of insight that comes with considering oneself in isolation from other people and from the social context.

A contrasting characterization would focus not on all behavior, but only on truly self-directed behavior, behavior that is brought into line with self-knowledge. If one adopts this view, the best measure of accuracy might be the ability to realize the desired congruence between self-beliefs and behavior when resources are intact, compared to when they are depleted. By this measure, high independents are accurate indeed. The difference between these views lies in the definition of self, the former relying on a trait-like, backward-looking definition and the latter on a motivational, forward-looking one. By the former definition, high independents are largely inaccurate about themselves; by the latter definition, they are largely accurate.

Our results also speak to the meaningfulness of scores on the Singelis independent self-construal scale and to their utility for predicting behavior. Our experimental evidence, in particular, suggests that what the field needs is not a different measure of the independent self-construal, but rather a different model of how culture and personality combine to produce individual differences in self-beliefs and behaviors. Scores on the independent self-construal
scale do not measure what people do; they measure what people value and believe about themselves, and these beliefs bear a much more complex relationship to behavior than previous research has acknowledged. Our research represents just the beginnings of an attempt to specify formally and disentangle empirically the psychological processes that connect the two.

If our findings complicate the interpretation of self-construal scores in the United States, they complicate the interpretation of scores across cultures to an even great extent and thereby call into question the meaning of the mean-level differences so often observed in cross-cultural research. Earlier in the chapter, we reviewed evidence pertaining to the correlates of the independent self-construal, noting that the preponderance of this evidence comes from individualistic cultures. What might self-construal scores signify among people raised and socialized within collectivistic cultures, where independence is not idealized and collectively valued? We have no evidence with which to answer this question, as our own data come exclusively from the population of North American college students. However, our theoretical model suggests that independence may not have the same paradoxical qualities in collectivistic cultures as it does in individualistic ones. In any culture, some people are more reflexively attuned to their social surroundings than others. In keeping with other universal tendencies that take different forms in different cultures (e.g., self-enhancement; Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999), culture likely shapes the specific manifestations of this temperament. In individualistic cultures, more socially attuned members become high scorers on the independence subscale of the Singelis (1994) self-construal measure, and expend effort trying to be less influenced by others. In line with the data we have already collected, we would expect considerable variability in the behavior of these individuals, as a function of the availability of regulatory resources, and would expect self-regulation to be highly effortful for them. In
collectivistic cultures, more socially attuned members may instead become high scorers on the interdependence subscale, and expend effort trying to be even more attuned to others. Because their temperament and self-regulatory efforts would pull in the same direction, these individuals should expend, and need to expend, less effort on self-regulation. The important point here is that culture interacts with temperament to produce very different patterns of self-experience and behavior. More specifically, this analysis makes clear that culture determines the meaning of the self-construal scale, and that two people with the same score but different cultural backgrounds cannot be counted on to respond similarly to social influence.

Concluding Remarks

Although the Collective broke apart in the 1970s and Ayn Rand herself died in 1982, Rand’s novels and ideas remain popular. Recently, The New Yorker covered the monthly meeting of “a group of Ayn Rand enthusiasts.” Apparently, the inclination of objectivists to collectivize remains strong. The members of this group are presumably people who see themselves as iconoclasts like Howard Roark and John Galt, the heroes of Rand’s two major works of fiction, and disdain collectivism in all forms. And yet, in a remarkable echo of the past, one current enthusiast suggested that Rand’s disciples should “organize an Objectivist gang,” to be called the Galts: a collective dedicated to promoting and enacting individualism. Although it is tempting to present this suggestion in all its ironic and paradoxical splendor, we wish to present it instead as anecdotal evidence in support of our central argument. Independence is clearly an ideal around which many groups and societies rally. For members of these independence-loving groups, the pursuit of autonomy is both an individual and a collective project.
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