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Newcomer Conformity

How Self-Construal Affects the Alignment of Cognition and Behavior With Group Goals in Novel Groups

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Abstract. The present research is the first to examine the impact of self-construal on newcomers' motivation to conform with the goals of a novel group. We argue that when social identity (i.e., individuals' concern for a specific group) has not yet been developed, newcomers rely on self-construal (i.e., individuals' chronic concern for ingroups and connectedness with others in general) to derive norms for group-serving vs. self-serving behavior. Results of an experiment ($N = 157$) supported this prediction: Self-construal moderated the relationship between group goals and individual goals (cognitive conformity) as well as the relationship between group goals and members' effort (behavioral conformity). Specifically, low independent and high interdependent self-construal was associated with greater cognitive and behavioral alignment of the self with the group compared to high independent and low interdependent self-construal. Findings are discussed regarding the role of self-construal as a precedent of conformity.

Keywords: newcomers, self-construal, conformity, self-regulation, group goals

Integrating oneself in new groups is the key to a successful future as a group member. Whether we change employers, join a choir, or enter a dinner party – in order to fit into the group, we have to integrate. Such integration is usually achieved during a process of socialization (Levine & Moreland, 1994). One feature of successful socialization within a new group is the alignment of individual goals with the group's goals and standards; in other words, self-stereotyping and conformity to group norms. Research provides ample evidence for the phenomenon of self-stereotyping and the conformity to ingroup norms (Pickett, Bonner, & Coleman, 2002; Postmes & Spears, 2002; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995; Sassenberg, 2002; Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006; Terry & Hogg, 1996). Earlier research in this domain focused on attitudes toward the group as a consequence of self-stereotyping and conformity to group norms. The present research extends these inquiries by addressing the transfer of group goals to members' personal goals and behavior.

Most people feel uncertain when they enter a novel social context. Part of this subjective uncertainty arises from uncertainty regarding how to behave. Research demonstrated that uncertainty is an aversive state that people aim to reduce, for instance by conforming to ingroup norms and displaying group-serving behavior (Smith, Hogg, Martin, & Terry, 2007). However, when joining a novel group, one does not immediately know this group's norms. Also a social identity that could prescribe group norms has not yet developed. In such situations, people initially sample from past experiences as members of different groups and use these samples to provide them with a standard for behavior in the new social context (Bettenhausen & Murnigham, 1985, 1991).

The current research investigates how this becomes evident in the alignment of personal goals and behavior with group goals. Moreover, we focus on another aspect of group members' self-concept beyond personal and social identity: the independent and interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). We argue that the self-construal should moderate the impact of group goals on personal goals and group-serving behavior.

Independent and Interdependent Construals of the Self

Cross-cultural psychology has provided a vast amount of empirical evidence for the existence of scripts that encode individuals' general concern for ingroups (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). At a between-culture level, these scripts are reflected in the distinction between collectivism and individualism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis et al., 1988); at a within-culture level, people can be differentiated with respect to their construal

of the self as relatively independent or relatively interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994). Self-construal refers to the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as separate from or as connected to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994).

The two self-construals represent relatively chronic differences regarding how the self is related to ingroups (Brown et al., 1992), which systematically impact on cognition, emotion, and motivation (Cross & Madson, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Important for the present research is that a high independent self-construal relates to a greater emphasis of individual achievement and independence from groups, whereas a high interdependent self-construal relates to a greater emphasis of collective achievement and interdependence with fellow group members (see Brown et al., 1992; Triandis et al., 1988). Likewise, individuals with a high independent self-construal are committed to self-interest and personal goals, whereas individuals with a high interdependent self-construal are committed to group welfare and conformity to group goals (Brewer & Chen, 2007). Together, this indicates that individuals' behavior is likely to differ as a function of self-construal in novel social contexts: Groups matter more to individuals low in independent or high in interdependent self-construal.

Importantly, when the unit of analysis is the individual, both dimensions of self-construal have to be taken into account. Thus, independent and interdependent self-construals do not represent a single, bipolar measure (Singelis, 1994). An individual's cultural background affects the complexity of independent and interdependent aspects of the self: In collectivistic cultures, interdependent aspects of the self are more complex, whereas in individualistic cultures, independent aspects of the self are more complex (Triandis, 1989, 1994). Consequently, both aspects of the self coexist within a person (Singelis, 1994; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991; Triandis, 1989), though variations in independent, as compared to interdependent, aspects of the self are likely to be more diagnostic for social behavior in individualistic societies.

Previous research has demonstrated that conformity is higher in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures (see Bond & Smith, 1996, for a meta-analysis). However, these findings were based on comparisons between different (individualistic and collectivistic) cultures. Our approach differs from the between-cultural approach to conformity in that we investigate the impact of individual differences regarding the construal of the self on conformity. Thus, we take a within-culture perspective that allows us to draw inferences about individuals' cognitive and behavioral conformity when they enter novel social groups. To our knowledge, the impact of self-construal on conformity has not yet been investigated. We believe that this topic is of great relevance for understanding how individuals adjust to novel social groups, a task people are frequently confronted with.

In sum, we expect that self-construal will affect individuals' behavior in novel social contexts. Specifically, the adoption of and the effort on behalf of group goals is expected to be more pronounced among newcomers with low independent or high interdependent self-construal, in contrast to newcomers with high independent or low interdependent self-construal. Based on the notion that, in individualistic societies, independent as opposed to interdependent aspects of the self are more complex, we expect a greater impact of independent self-construal in the present research.

How Are Group Members Affected by Group Goals?

A vast amount of research has demonstrated that group members adhere to group norms when group membership is salient in a given context, or when they chronically identify with a group (e.g., Reicher et al., 1995; Terry & Hogg, 1996). The process underlying this relationship is that important groups are included in the self-concept (Brewer & Caporael, 2006; Tropp & Wright, 2001). By including others in one's self, previously externally motivated norms and goals are transformed into internally motivated goals (for a similar argument in the context of interpersonal relationships, see Moretti & Higgins, 1999). Thus, group goals guide behavior for high identified individuals because they have been internalized as a part of the self-concept (Sassenberg, Matschke, & Scholl, 2011; Sassenberg & Woltin, 2009).

The main moderator of the impact of group goals on individual striving research focused on so far is social identification: Higher levels of social identification lead to stronger adherence to group norms (Terry, Hogg, & White, 1999; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Intriguingly, the different inclusion of important ingroups into the self associated with high levels of social identification is also indicative of individuals with a high interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). This provides yet another argument for the hypotheses that groups matter more for individuals high in interdependent self-construal. What distinguishes social identification and self-construal is that social identification refers to the relevance of a specific group for an individual (Tropp & Wright, 2001), whereas self-construal refers to the chronic relevance of groups for an individual (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

In sum, the different chronic concern for ingroups and the readiness to cooperate with ingroup members as a function of self-construal is expected to manifest in newcomers' motivation to cognitively and behaviorally conform to group goals. We expect that the chronic inclusion of ingroups into the self among newcomers with a low independent or high interdependent self-construal results in greater alignment of individual goals and behavior with

group goals. Conversely, the lesser chronic inclusion of ingroups into the self among newcomers with a high independent or low interdependent self-construal should result in lower alignment of individual goals and behavior with group goals.

The Present Research

The present study examines individuals' cognitive and behavioral conformity to group goals as a function of self-construal. A quasi minimal group setting was adopted to ensure that participants did not relate the experimental setting to any specific group they belonged to. Conformity to group goals was assessed using an indirect (cognitive) and a direct (behavioral) measure. Specifically, we examined participants' alignment of their individual goals with the group's goals and the effort they exhibited to attain the group's goals.

Efforts on behalf of the group were assessed via response time in a coordination task. In our study, newcomers set a goal regarding what they would like to accomplish with their group. Task performance was a function of response time, with faster responses resulting in more points. Consequently, conformity with the group goal is reflected by a negative association between group goals and response time (i.e., more ambitious goals should elicit faster responses).

Importantly, participants generated the group goals themselves rather than being provided with an assigned group goal. We chose this procedure for two reasons: First, in many natural social contexts, group goals are rather implicit and newcomers have to figure them out over time. Therefore, self-set group goals reflect social reality better than assigned group goals. Second, assigned group goals cannot be adjusted, which makes inferences about the nature of discrepancies between group goals and individual goals problematic: Discrepancies could either indicate reluctance to conform to the group goal or the perception that the group goal is unrealistically high or low.

We included a manipulation of group-based performance feedback because feedback usually elicits cognitive and behavioral changes (Carver & Scheier, 1998). This allowed us to examine whether individual and group goals as well as effort and group goals are adjusted simultaneously and in the same direction. Thus, the feedback manipulation exclusively served to produce variance in the cognitive and the behavioral measures of alignment and was not included in the hypotheses.

The following hypotheses were tested: Participants with low independent or high interdependent self-construal align their individual goals with the group's goals to a greater extent than participants with high independent or low interdependent self-construal (Hypothesis 1). Further, participants with low independent or high interdependent self-construal exhibit more effort to attain the group's goals than participants with high independent or low interdependent self-construal (Hypothesis 2). Finally, self-construal might affect cognitive and behavioral alignment with the self-generated group goal more in the early stages of group membership, because then uncertainty is highest. Thus, a three-way interaction of time, group goals and self-construal was expected (Hypothesis 3).

Method

Participants and Design

A group of 157 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 21.94, *range* 18 to 31; 100 female, 57 male) were randomly assigned to the conditions of a single-factor design (Performance Feedback: success vs. failure). The experimental factor served to produce variance in goals and effort and was included in the analyses only for the purpose of controlling its effects.

Procedure and Dependent Measures

Participants first completed the Social-Autonomous Self-Esteem Scale (SAS; Pöhlmann, 2000). This scale was developed and validated in German and has been used in a number of empirical studies (e.g., Pöhlmann, 2000; Pöhlmann, Hannover, Kühnen, & Birkner, 2002). Specifically, the SAS assesses whether a person derives self-esteem from sources that emphasize independence or interdependence. The scale is a valid indicator for an independent vs. interdependent construal of the self and reflects the differences between persons with independent and interdependent self-construal within one culture, as described by and empirically closely related to Singelis (1994). Each subscale consisted of 11 items (e.g., "I like myself" and "So far, I experienced many positive things" for the independent subscale; "My family can rely on me" and "I feel comfortable when I am together with my friends" for the interdependent subscale; from 1 = *not at all* to 7 = *completely*). The items were averaged to form single scales ($\alpha_{independent}$ = .86, $\alpha_{interdependent}$ = .76).[1]

The experiment was introduced as a study comparing

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[1]   The SAS is a carefully validated measure building on the notion that a person's self-esteem is associated with the culture-dependent development of self-construal (Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai, 1999). The authors (Pöhlmann, 2000; Pöhlmann et al., 2002) demonstrated that, among individuals with an independent self-construal, only the independent subscale of the SAS correlated with implicit self-esteem. Among individuals with interdependent self-construal, only the interdependent subscale of the SAS correlated with implicit self-esteem. Because of its careful construction and validation, we feel confident that the issues traditional measures of self-construal have been criticized for (Levine et al., 2003) do not apply to the SAS.

performance of face-to-face workgroups with computer-mediated workgroups. Supposedly, the same study had been conducted during the previous semester with face-to-face workgroups whose performance had been summarized in a ranking. Participants were ostensibly assigned to a group of four students connected via a computer network. The groups had to work on four consecutive tasks with their group. After completion, their group's performance would be included into last semester's ranking. Thus, performance of participants' computer-mediated workgroup would be compared with the performance of last semester's face-to-face workgroups. Participants were instructed to aim for "a good placing in the ranking" with their group. To avoid personal goals being made salient, the outcome – the team's place in the ranking – was entirely group-based. Consequently, the only incentive for participants was their novel group's place in the ranking. This was important to ensure that we were indeed assessing conformity to group goals, rather than striving for personal goals.

For each of the four subsequent tasks, the computer screen was divided into four parts. Each participant was supposedly responsible for one of the four divisions and had to press a green button as fast as possible if a symbol appeared in this part of the screen. If the symbol appeared in one of the other parts of the screen, a red button had to be pressed as fast as possible. Group performance was introduced as a combined measure of team members' coordination success and reaction time. Prior to each task, participants were provided with the average amount of points to be earned in that specific task (for task 1: 20 points, for task 2: 30 points, for task 3: 25 points, for task 4: 25 points). This information was ostensibly based on the results of the face-to-face workgroups that performed these tasks in the last semester. The average amount of points was intended to provide an anchor for goal-setting in order to avoid too much variance in the goals participants set. Serving the same purpose, participants were informed that one key feature of successful groups is realistic goal-setting. Group goals were measured by asking participants to indicate, from their perspective as a group member, how many points the majority of the members of their group wants to reach in the following task.[2] Individual goals were measured by asking participants to indicate, from their personal perspective, how many points they want to reach in the following task.

Participants learned that they would perform four subsequent tasks together with their team members, with each task consisting of 16 trials. We explained that the task was a joint team task with the computer screen being divided into four parts (i.e., top left, top right, bottom right, bottom left), and that each participant was supposedly responsible for one of the four divisions. We stressed that the computer randomly assigned team members to those parts of the screen they were responsible for. The part of the screen that participants were responsible for changed across tasks, but not across trials per task. Hence, for the first task a participant could be instructed "You are responsible for the top right division of the computer screen." The participants' task was to press a green button as fast as possible if a symbol appeared in the top right division of the screen, and to press a red button as fast as possible if the symbol appeared in any of the other divisions of the screen. Symbols changed across tasks, but not across trials per task.

We introduced group performance as a combination of team members' coordination success (i.e., how often did they press the correct buttons) and reaction time (i.e., how fast they were). Their team would earn points for coordination success (pressing the correct buttons), and points would be subtracted for coordination failure (pressing the incorrect buttons). Participants were not told anything else about the calculation of team performance. We deliberately kept the calculation procedure for team performance vague with the aim to prevent participants from relying on their fellow team members' performance.

In the positive feedback condition, participants learned that their group had earned 25 (after task 2: 37 points, after task 3: 30 points, after task 4: 29 points) points and would likely achieve a placement in the upper third of the ranking if their group's performance remains stable. In the negative feedback condition, participants learned that their group had earned 15 (after task 2: 23 points, after task 3: 12 points, after task 4: 11 points) points and would likely achieve a placement in the lower third of the ranking if their group's performance remains stable. Following performance feedback, the next task and the corresponding questionnaire were introduced. The order of the dependent measures was held constant across the four rounds of the task. After completing the four tasks, participants were thanked and debriefed.

Results

Analysis

The unit of analysis were the measurement points ($k = 4$) per participant. The repeated measurement occasions were nested within persons. This approach accounts for the dependency of the repeated measures taken from participants (Singer & Willett, 2003) and allows us to treat time as an explicit factor. The expected number of observations in the current study (157 participants × 4 measurements points = 628) dropped to a minimum of observations of 593 due to missing values.

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[2] In order to uphold participants' perception that the group is new and unfamiliar to them, we resigned from a consensus-establishing procedure and relied on participants' self-derived group goal. This is in line with the notion that norms "need not be explicitly recognized or discussed to wield considerable behavioral force" (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991).

Table 1. Regression coefficients for the dependent variables individual goals and reaction time as a function of group goals, measurement occasion, self-construal, and performance feedback

	Dependent variable					
	Individual goals			Response time		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Individual goal	–	–	–	.11	.08	.10
Group goal	.85	.03	.85***	−.22	.08	−.21**
Measurement	.01	.02	.01	.06	.04	.06
Independent self-construal	.07	.03	.07*	−.02	.05	−.02
Interdependent self-construal	−.04	.03	−.04	.05	.05	.05
Performance feedback	−.03	.02	−.04	.01	.04	.01
Group goal × Independent self-construal	−.05	.03	−.05	.14	.05	.14**
Group goal × Interdependent self-construal	.05	.03	.05	−.08	.05	−.08
Group goal × Independent self-construal × Measurement	.17	.03	.18***	−.03	.05	−.03
Group goal × Interdependent self-construal × Measurement	−.12	.03	−.12***	.03	.05	.03

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

Variance of Self-Construal

Supporting the assumption that independent, rather than interdependent, aspects of the self are more complex in individualistic societies, a GLM analysis with self-construal as within-subjects factor revealed that independent self-construal showed greater variance than interdependent self-construal, $F(1, 627) = 129.18$, $p < .001$. Independent self-construal ranged from 2.82 to 6.91 ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 0.88$). Interdependent self-construal ranged from 3.45 to 7.00 ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 0.65$).

Variance of Group Goals and Individual Goals

Across all four tasks, participants' self-set group goals ($M = 25.12$, $SD = 6.68$) and individual goals ($M = 24.79$, $SD = 7.26$) were relatively close to the average points intended to provide participants with an anchor for goal-setting. Prior to the analyses, all dependent variables and the moderator variable were z-transformed in order to account for possible differences in the absolute values of these measures due to different scaling. Hence, the analyses reported below rely on z-transformed goal scores. The assumption underlying this indicator is that conformity to group goals is indicated when individual and group goals are simultaneously adjusted upward or downward.

Measurement of Behavioral Conformity

On average, participants were correct in their responses: Across all four tasks correct responses were significantly above chance, all $ts(156) > 27.90$, all $ps < .001$. For the analyses, we therefore relied on participants' reaction time in milliseconds per task (averaged across trials per task) as an indicator of group-based effort and thus behavioral conformity.

Analysis of Cognitive and Behavioral Conformity

Regression analyses were performed for the two dependent variables. Both dependent variables were regressed on group goals, measurement point, independent and interdependent self-construal, and performance feedback. Additionally, the two-way interactions of independent and interdependent self-construal with group goals, and the three-way interactions of independent and interdependent self-construal, group goals, and measurement occasion, were included. Table 1 summarizes the results.

Cognitive Conformity with Group Goals

The regression model was significant regarding individual goals, $F(9, 597) = 149.79$, $p < .001$, $R_{adj}^2 = .69$. Both three-way interactions were significant, indicating that the impact of self-construal on the alignment of individual goals with group goals changed over time. To resolve the three-way interaction, we performed regression analyses for each measurement occasion separately. Individual goals at each measurement occasion were regressed on the group goal of the same measurement occasion and on all preceding group goals, on independent and interdependent self-construal, on performance feedback, and on the two-way interactions of independent and interdependent self-construal with the group goal of the measurement occasion under investigation. Results showed that self-construal affected participants' conformity with the group goal only at time 1, all other $t < 1.9$, $p > .06$. At all other measurement occasions, individual goals were a function of the corresponding group goal only. Consequently, only the results for time 1 are reported.

The regression model for time 1 was significant, $F(6, 137) = 36.81$, $p < .001$, $R_{adj}^2 = .61$. The interaction term of independent self-construal and group goal was negative ($B = −.34$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$), and the interaction term of

interdependent self-construal and group goal was positive ($B = .30$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$). The interaction terms were dissolved into simple slopes to illustrate the impact of self-construal on participants' motivation to conform with the group's goals. Figure 1 (top) depicts the simple slopes for independent self-construal. A main effect of the magnitude of group goals was evident, such that higher group goals were associated with higher individual goals and lower group goals were associated with lower individual goals. Consistent with expectations, this relationship was more pronounced among participants with low ($B = 1.16$, $SE = .09$, $p < .001$) compared to high independent self-construal ($B = .47$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$). Figure 1 (bottom) depicts the simple slopes for interdependent self-construal. Again, a main effect of the magnitude of group goals was apparent. Consistent with expectations, this relationship was more pronounced among participants with high ($B = 1.10$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$) compared to low interdependent self-construal ($B = .53$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$).

Together, these findings support the assumption that low independent or high interdependent self-construal are associated with greater cognitive conformity with group goals in a new group. Additionally, results indicate that the impact of self-construal was most pronounced in the earliest phase of group membership.

To substantiate our proposition that self-construal affects the alignment of individual goals with group goals, rather than the alignment of group goals with individual goals, we performed a regression analysis to test the reverse direction. Group goals at time 1 were regressed on individual goals at time 1, independent and interdependent self-construal, and the corresponding two-way interactions of self-construal and individual goals. The regression model was significant, $F(6, 137) = 18.60$, $p < .001$, $R_{adj}^2 = .44$. The analysis revealed a main effect of individual goals ($B = .74$, $SE = .07$, $p < .001$), all other effects were nonsignificant ($t < 1.6$, $p > .11$). The interaction terms were nonsignificant for independent self-construal ($t < -0.2$, $p > .90$) and for interdependent self-construal ($t < -0.3$, $p > .75$). Supporting the notion that self-construal affected the alignment of individual goals with group goals, rather than the reverse direction, confidence intervals for the predicted direction did not overlap with confidence intervals for the reverse direction (for independent self-construal: $CI_{predicted} = -.13$, $-.02$; $CI_{reverse} = -.04$, $.07$; for interdependent self-construal: $CI_{predicted} = .03$, $.14$; $CI_{reverse} = -.11$, $.01$).

Behavioral Conformity With Group Goals

To show that group goals predict response time after individual goals have been taken into account, individual goals were covaried in the analysis. Regarding response time, the regression model was significant, $F(10, 593) = 1.91$, $p = .041$, $R_{adj}^2 = .02$. Importantly, group goals but not individual goals predicted response time (see Table 1). The two-way interaction of independent, but not of interdependent self-
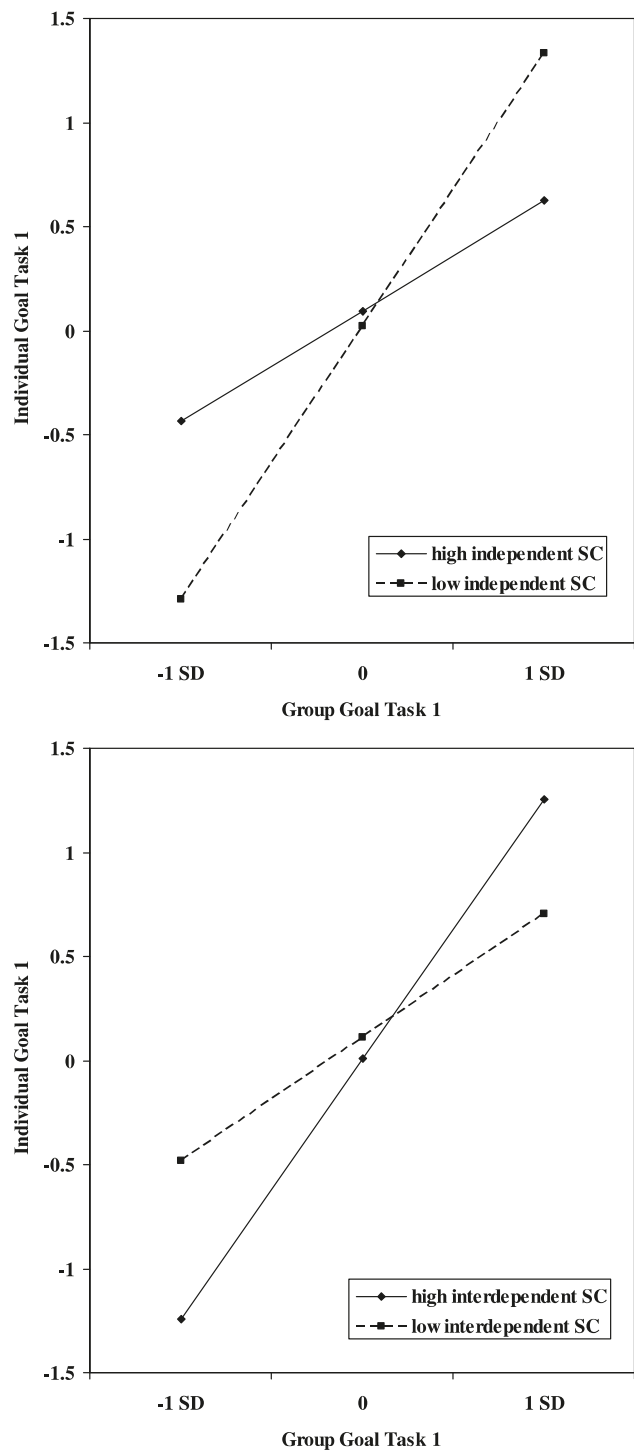

Figure 1. Individual goals as a function of group goals and self-construal for independent self-construal (top) and interdependent self-construal (bottom).

construal and group goals was significant, indicating that the impact of independent self-construal on the relationship between group goals and effort remained constant over time. The interaction term was dissolved into simple slopes to illustrate the impact of independent self-construal on
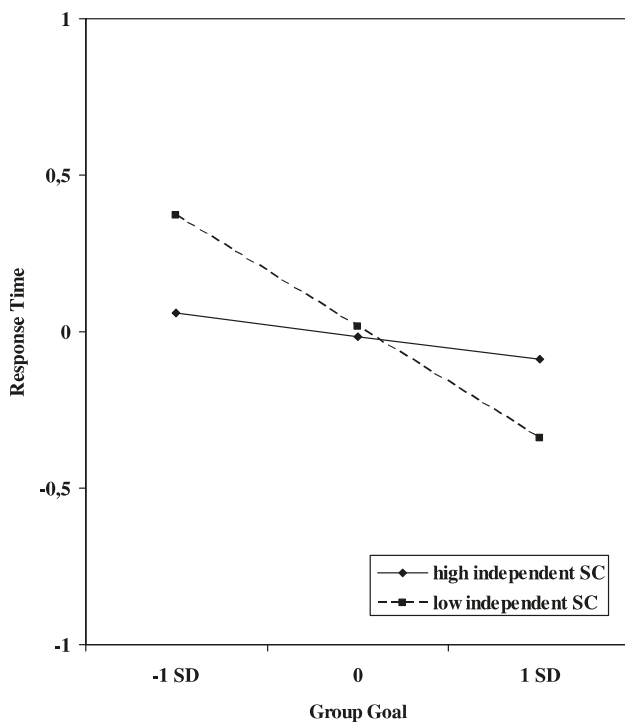
Figure 2. Effort exhibited on behalf of the group (measured via response time) as a function of group goals and self-construal for independent self-construal.

participants' effort on behalf of the group (Figure 2). In support of Hypothesis 2, participants with low independent self-construal exhibited more effort (i.e., reacted faster) when group goals were high and exhibited less effort (i.e., reacted slower) when group goals were low ($B = -.36$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$). This relationship was not evident among participants with high independent self-construal ($B = -.07$, $SE = .09$, $p > .40$). These findings support the assumption that participants behaviorally conformed with the group's goals more when independent self-construal was low rather than high.[3]

In sum, the assumption that the impact of self-construal differs over time (Hypothesis 3) received support regarding participants' cognitive conformity to group goals, but was not supported regarding participants' behavioral conformity with group goals.

Discussion

The present research investigated the impact of self-construal on individuals' cognitive and behavioral alignment with group goals when entering a novel social context.

Self-construal reflects individuals' chronic concern for ingroups. We predicted that differences in self-construal are associated with differences regarding the alignment of individual goals and behavior with group goals when entering a new group. In support of this, low independent and high interdependent self-construal, both relating to a greater chronic concern for ingroups, elicited greater alignment of individual goals with group goals. This relation was evident only at the first of four measurement points.

The impact of time was not evident with regard to the display of effort on behalf of the group. The alignment of behavior with group goals was greater when independent self-construal was low rather than high, and this relationship remained stable across four measurement occasions. This finding indicates that newcomers who initially aligned vs. not aligned their behavior with the group's goals maintained this tendency over time in the current study. One possible alternative explanation is that rather than conforming to group standards, participants in the failure condition lost motivation. Our results, however, provide little support for this explanation. A loss of motivation should be evident in an impact of time on the association between self-construal, group goals, and effort. As demonstrated in the analyses, this was not the case.

But did the results differ between the self-report measure of individual goals and the actual effort? The explicit, repeated request to give a rating about one's individual goals might have affected the response, just as the repeated presentation of similar items (Strack, Martin, & Schwarz, 1988). Measuring similar items repeatedly can lead to contrast effects, such that respondents try to provide additional information each time they answer a question. Hence, the self-construal by group goal interaction on the individual goal measure might have occurred only at the first assessment even though the effect on effort lasted throughout the whole study. Behavioral measures are less vulnerable to such contrast effects. Consequently, the low inclusion of ingroups into the self that characterizes individuals with relatively high independent self-construal (e.g., Triandis, 1989) was manifest in behavior within a new group and appeared to be stable over time.

Intriguingly, even though individual goals and group goals were highly correlated, only group goals predicted newcomers' effort on behalf of the group. This finding supports our notion that the way in which people predominantly construe their self is diagnostic for the relationship between their personal goals and the goals of novel social groups they enter. It further suggests that to account for effects of self-construal on conformity, the context is a crucial factor that needs to be considered. Recent research demonstrated that people with an interdependent self-construal assign more relevance to social as compared to individual goals (van Horen, Pöhlmann,

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3   We did not test the reverse relationship here because group goals could not be a consequence of effort due to the experimental design. Additionally, the impact of self-construal on the relationship between group goals and effort vs. between individual goals and effort was not expected to differ because people are generally motivated to preserve the integrity of their self-image (Tajfel, 1969; see Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996). Consequently, a test of the reverse relationship appears somewhat redundant.

Koeppen, & Hannover, 2008). The authors also found, somewhat unexpected, that people with an independent self-construal assigned the same importance to both types of goals. Our research suggests that one possible explanation for this finding might be that differences in the construal of the self are more diagnostic in novel social contexts than in general social contexts.

The present research adds to existing knowledge regarding the precedents of cognitive and behavioral conformity to group goals. Social identification has been shown to be a main moderator of the relationship between group goals on individual striving (e.g., Terry & Hogg, 1996; Terry et al., 1999). We extend these findings by showing that conformity is a function of individuals' self-construal when new groups are joined. The present research contributes to our understanding of what motivates the display of group-serving behavior in new social situations. But aspects of the self-concept might also play a role when familiar social contexts change, for instance when organizations merge or departments are restructured. In times of social change, established social identities are challenged (e.g., Gleibs, Mummendey, & Noack, 2008). Consequently, chronic aspects of the self as reflected by self-construal might become more important for group members' cognitive and behavioral alignment with the group's objectives in times of change.

We showed that the different chronic importance of ingroups and connectedness with others evident between independent and interdependent self-construals affected newcomers' group-serving behavior. Other concepts might also affect the general motivation to prioritize group-goals over personal goals. Individuals' need for affiliation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) could be one such candidate. It seems intuitively plausible to assume that individuals with a high need for affiliation would also engage in group-serving behavior in order to belong. On a meta-theoretical level, however, one could argue that if belonging to a group was dependent on prioritizing personal goals over group goals or vice versa, people high in need for affiliation would conform to such expectations in order to belong. Consequently, prioritizing one goal level over the other would be a means to achieve the ends (i.e., belonging to and acceptance by a group), and would thus be variable and context-dependent rather than chronic.

In the present study, group members did not interact and thus did not gain information about the other group members over time. We can thus conclude that the subjective norm rather than the actual group norm was used as the referent for conformist behavior. In this regard, participants adhered to the norms attached to their self-concept. Interestingly, adherence to individual norms might prescribe nonadherence to group norms, for instance among newcomers with high independent or low interdependent self-construal. Future research should examine the interplay between individual norms and group norms in more depth.

People with relatively high independent self-construal are not per se an obstacle to conformity to group norms. Jetten and her colleagues (Jetten, Postmes, & McAuliffe, 2002) demonstrated that, if a group endorses individualistic norms, expressions of individualism paradoxically are a sign of conformity to group norms. Thus, especially high identifiers can be expected to display individualistic behavior, because they conform to the group norm of individualism. However, in the present research, where conformity required cooperation with ingroup members, relatively high levels of independent self-construal were clearly related to low cognitive and behavioral conformity to group goals.

Why was independent self-construal more diagnostic for behavior than interdependent self-construal? In individualistic societies, where the current sample of participants was drawn from, independent aspects of the self are more complex than interdependent aspects of the self (Triandis, 1989). This means that the construal of the self as independent from others likely constitutes the default in individualistic societies. Consequently, variations regarding independent, as opposed to interdependent, aspects of the self are likely to have a greater impact on outcomes such as conformity in group contexts. In support of this rationale, independent self-construal showed more variance (i.e., was more complex) than interdependent self-construal in our sample.

Conclusion

The present research demonstrated that self-construal plays an important role for newcomers' cognitive and behavioral conformity to group goals. We found that individuals' chronic inclusion of ingroups into the self, as reflected by self-construal, provided the background for their alignment of individual goals and effort with group goals in a new group. Our findings add to existing evidence that the inclusion of a specific ingroup into the self is a precedent of conformity (Sassenberg, 2007; Terry & Hogg, 1996) by showing that the chronic inclusion of ingroups into the self yields similar effects. Moreover, we showed that between-cultural differences regarding conformity that are based on the individualistic vs. collectivistic orientation of a culture (e.g., Bond & Smith, 1996) are paralleled in within-cultural differences regarding conformity that are based on the independent vs. interdependent construal of the self. The present research advances our understanding of individuals' self-regulation within new social contexts groups and provides valuable insights into the determinants of newcomers' conformity to group goals.

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