



Independent vs. interdependent self-construal and interrogative compliance: Intra- and cross-cultural evidence



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ABSTRACT

False confessions have been identified as major source of wrongful convictions. One of the major risk factors for false confessions is interrogative compliance (Gudjonsson, 1989). To date, this has been conceptualized as personality characteristic of individuals and was almost exclusively studied in Western cultures. We propose, however, that interrogative compliance is associated with self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and thus expect compliance to differ between cultures and as a function an individual's stable and experimentally induced self-construal. To test this hypothesis we conducted an intra-cultural study (Study 1) and compared participants from two cultures differing in self-construal (China, Germany) with regard to their interrogative compliance (Study 2). Our results draw a convergent picture: Self-construal significantly predicted interrogative compliance and since cultures differ in self-construal, they also differed in interrogative compliance. Members of a culture that fosters the development of an interdependent self-construal more than an independent self-construal are more vulnerable to comply in interrogations and thus to be at higher risk for false confessions.

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1. Introduction

One major source for wrongful convictions are false confessions (e.g., Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). False confessions, in turn, are affected by several factors and one significant personal risk factor is interrogative compliance (Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). To date, this factor has been conceptualized as personality characteristic of individuals and was almost exclusively studied in Western cultures. We propose, however, that interrogative compliance is associated with self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and thus expect interrogative compliance to differ between cultures that differ in their self-construal. To date, there is only tentative evidence for this notion (Leo, Costanzo, & Shaked-Schroer, 2009) since systematic investigations are missing. It is the main goal of the present study to fill this gap and to examine the relationship between interrogative compliance and self-construal.

1.1. False confessions and interrogative compliance

In a disturbing number of cases defendants have been convicted solely on the basis of confessions, which later turned out to be false

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as the defendants were exonerated by conclusive evidence (e.g., Drizin & Leo, 2004; Gudjonsson, 2003; Leo & Ofshe, 1998). It might be difficult to understand why an innocent person would admit to something the person has never done – despite the possible devastating consequences for his own life. By now, however, a number of studies have demonstrated how the situation (interrogation techniques) and personal risk factors on the other hand contribute to false confessions. The impact of the situation has been thoroughly discussed in the context of different interviewing practices (Gudjonsson & Pearse, 2011; Meissner, Russano, & Narchet, 2010). Scientists (e.g., Kassin, Appleby, & Perillo, 2010; Meissner et al., 2010; Snook, Eastwood, Stinson, Tedeschi, & House, 2010) have been particularly critical about the so-called Reid-Technique (Inbau, Reid, Buckley, & Jayne, 2001) that is predominantly used in the U.S. and Canada (Gudjonsson & Pearse, 2011; Snook et al., 2010). Here, the elicitation of a confession is a primary goal in interrogations (see also Chang, 2004 for courtroom questioning in China) and a number of powerful techniques of social influence go into action in order to undo denial of suspects get them to confess (e.g., Inbau et al., 2001; Jayne, 1986; Wakefield & Underwager, 1998). All these efforts from the side of the interrogators come along with more pressure onto the suspect, who may come to see a (false) confession as the only way to escape from this situation (Sigurdsson & Gudjonsson, 1996).

Such kind of false confessions have been termed *compliant false confessions* (Kassin & Wrightsman, 1985) as the suspect complies to confess without actually believing in having committed the crime. That is, internalization of what is publicly stated does not take place (Kassin & Gudjonsson, 2004). By definition, this is normative social influence (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Normative social influence is driven by the goal to obtain social approval from others (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) – even if that involves public statements of what is privately believed to be incorrect (Asch, 1956). It thus reflects the costs of disagreeing in social situations (Wright, Memon, Skagerberg, & Gabbert, 2009). Consequently, the likelihood of obtaining *compliant false confessions* rises with a person's higher susceptibility to normative influence. By now, a number of trait variables have been identified as risk factors (see Gudjonsson, 2011, for an overview). One major personal risk factor for compliant false confessions is an individual's tendency to comply in interrogative situations (Gudjonsson, 1989, 1990, 1999a, 1999b), which comprises of a desire to avoid confrontation and conflict with others (particularly those in positions of perceived authority) as well as the eagerness to please and to do what is expected. Interrogative compliance can be assessed with a scale developed by Gudjonsson (1989) and has mainly been conceived of as personal trait. In the following, however, we will argue that cultures may differ in interrogative compliance – and thus be systematically at a higher risk to falsely confess.

1.2. Interrogative compliance, self-construal, and culture

One fundamental dimension upon which cultures differ refers to the extent to which a culture is based on unique and autonomous individuals or groups of interrelated individuals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Cultures, which emphasize individuals as being autonomous are termed individualistic or *independent* (e.g., North America, West Europe) whereas cultures in which individuals are primarily perceived as embedded in a network of interrelated actors are coined collectivistic or *interdependent* (e.g., East Asia; Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis & Brown, 1995; Triandis, 1989). Cultural differences, in turn, are reflected at the individual level (Singelis & Brown, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Markus and Kitayama (1991) suggested that this cultural emphasis on independence vs. interdependence fundamentally shapes the way individuals construe themselves. Specifically, *independent* cultures will foster the development of an *independent self-construal* in a person, meaning that this person is likely to view himself (and others) predominantly as unique and autonomous entities that are mainly defined by their traits and characteristics. *Interdependent* cultures, in contrast, are presumed to shape an *interdependent self-construal* in their members, which is characterized by the conviction that persons are so tightly linked to significant others that they can hardly be viewed as a single entity. Thus, rather than individual characteristics (traits, attitudes), it is the relationship to others, and one's role in it, that determines perception and behavior (Bagozzi, Wong, Abe, & Bergami, 2000; Kashima, Siegal, Tanaka, & Kashima, 1992; Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Lee, 2000; Sullivan, Peterson, Kameda, & Shimada, 1981). Importantly, it is presumed that both kinds of self-construal do exist in every individual. Chronic accessibility, however, is expected to differ systematically between cultures (Kitayama & Uchida, 2005; Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991; Triandis, 1994).

There is rising evidence for the impact of self-construal on human perception and behavior (see Cross, Hardin, & Gercek-Swing, 2011 for an overview). These show marked differences in the extent to which others play a role in a person's thoughts, needs,

and behavior. Compared to people with a more interdependent self-concept, persons with an independent self-concept view their own needs and goals to be most important (Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín, & Perez-Stable, 1987), are rather guided by their goals than the expectations of others (Bontempo, Lobel, & Triandis, 1990; Lee et al., 2000; Sabogal et al., 1987; Zhang & Mittal, 2007), and prefer to choose and decide themselves (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Moreover, they give more weight to their own welfare (Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001; Gardner, Gabriel, & Dean, 2004) and communicate their interests more directly and show less concern for the thoughts, feelings of others and the potential negative evaluation of themselves (Gudykunst et al., 1996; Mandel, 2003). Likewise, they are more assertive in their communication (Bresnahan, Ohashi, Liu, Nebashi, & Liao, 1999; Oetzel, 1998) and are mainly concerned with their own image when it comes to conflicts (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, Oetzel, & Yee-Jung, 2001).

These elaborations suggest a link between self-construal and interrogative compliance, which comprises of the desire to avoid confrontation as well as the eagerness to please and do what is expected and motivated by social approval of others and leads to agreement with others even if a person believes otherwise (normative influence): The systematically greater concern for others, their expectations, and their image and the lower priority of their own goals and needs as well as a less direct and assertive way of communicating them all indicate higher costs of disagreeing in a social situation. We therefore expect people with an interdependent self-construal to be more vulnerable to comply in an interrogative situation.

To date, there is only indirect evidence for this link. In one study, which assessed the cultural background of their Canadian sample, Asians scored significantly higher on the interrogative compliance scale than did Caucasian participants (Klaver, Lee, & Rose, 2008). Unfortunately, however, that detailed information about the specific cultural background was missing and self-construal had not been assessed.

Further indirect evidence comes from studies investigating conformity, which reflects normative influence as well. In a meta-analysis regarding the Ash task Bond and Smith (1996) found conformity to be significantly higher in collectivist (interdependent) countries than in individualist (independent) countries. Moreover, the impact of cultural variables was greater than any other, in eluding moderator variables such as majority size. They therefore concluded that cultural values are significant mediators in response to group pressure. More directly related to the justice system, the work by Einesman (1999) suggests that the endorsement of interdependent values such as meeting others' expectations and obedience may lead people to waive their own rights (Miranda). The previous findings led Leo et al. (2009) to their conviction that culture plays a significant role in the psychology of confessions. Nevertheless, research explicitly tackling the link between culture and confessions—or aspects related to confessions—is surprisingly rare (Leo et al., 2009).

The present paper therefore seeks to contribute to this gap by investigating directly the link between one variable that has been identified as risk factor for false confessions, namely *interrogative compliance*, and self-construal. Based on the previous evidence we expect interrogative compliance to be predicted by self-construal (interdependent: positive, independent: negative) and thus to differ between a rather independent and a rather interdependent culture.

We investigated these hypotheses with two different approaches. First, we made use of inter-individual differences in self-construal within one culture (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Study 1). Second, we compared individuals

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