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# Self-concept Orientation and Organizational Identification: A Mediated Relationship

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# Self-concept orientation and organizational identification: A mediated relationship

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**Self-Concept Orientation and Organizational Identification: A Mediated Relationship**

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The present study tests a mediated model of the relationship between self-concept orientation (individualist and collectivist) and organizational identification (OrgID, Cooper and Thatcher, 2010), with proposed mediators including the need for organizational identification (nOID, Glynn, 1998) as well as self-presentation concerns of social adjustment (SA) and value expression (VE, Highhouse *et al.*, 2007).

**Design** – Data were collected from 509 participants in seven countries. Direct and mediation effects were tested using structural equation modeling (AMOS 25.0).

**Findings** – Individualist self-concept orientation was positively related to VE and collectivist self-concept orientation was positively related to nOID, VE and SA. VE mediated the relationship between both self-concept orientations and OrgID. In addition, nOID mediated the relationship for collectivist self-concept orientation.

**Practical Implications** – This study identifies underlying psychological needs as mediators of the relationship of self-concept orientation to organizational identification. Understanding these linkages enables employers to develop practices that resonate with the self-concept orientations and associated psychological needs of their employees, thereby enhancing organizational identification.

**Originality/Value** – This study provides a significant contribution to the organizational identification literature by proposing and testing for relationships between self-concept orientations and OrgID as mediated by underlying psychological needs. The results provide support for the mediated model as well as many of Cooper and Thatcher's (2010) theoretical propositions, with notable exceptions.

**Keywords** Collectivist self-concept orientation, Individualist self-concept orientation, Need for Organizational Identification, Organizational Identification, Social Adjustment, Value Expression

**Paper Type** Research paper

# Self-Concept Orientation and Organizational Identification: A Mediated Relationship

## Introduction

Organizational identification (OrgID) has been defined as perceived oneness with an organization and the experience of the organization's successes or failures as one's own (Mael and Ashforth, 1992). As such, the individual has a perception of being psychologically intertwined with the organization (Wan-Huggins *et al.*, 1998), including it in his/her self-concept. According to Ashforth and Mael (1989), the organization is one of the most influential in forming one's social identity. Understanding the OrgID phenomenon is important due to its observed relationships to organizational citizenship behavior, cooperation, loyalty and turnover (Abrams *et al.*, 1998; Dukerich *et al.*, 2002; Johnson *et al.*, 2006; Riketta, 2005; Wan-Huggins, *et al.*, 1998).

A person's self-concept orientation is considered particularly important to understanding variations in OrgID (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010). Markus and Kitayama (1991) specified two self-construals that underlie self-concept orientations. In the *independent* self-construal, one perceives the self as distinct and separate from others with behavior deriving from one's own thoughts and feelings as opposed to the thoughts, feelings and actions of others. The *interdependent* self-construal entails "seeing oneself as part of an encompassing social relationship...[where] behavior is determined, contingent on, and to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings and actions of others in the relationship" (Markus and Kitayama, 1991, p. 228). Both types of self-construal coexist within individuals and can be chronically accessible (stable over time and situations) or situation-specific (Johnson *et al.*, 2006). In considering the likelihood of organizational identification, theoretical interest has

focused on the chronically-accessible self-concept, known as one's *self-concept orientation*, which predisposes an individual to emphasize one self-concept over the other (Brewer and Chen, 2007; Cooper and Thatcher, 2010). These self-concept orientations provide different cognitive filters through which organizational information is sorted and interpreted, ultimately shaping individual attitudes and behaviors (Flynn, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2006). Accordingly, each is thought to have a different theoretical relationship with the OrgID target (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010). The independent self-construal will hereafter be referred to as "Individualist" and the interdependent self-construal will be "Collectivist."

Cooper and Thatcher's (2010) theory further incorporates the role of innate psychological motivators or needs including *self-enhancement* (the desire to view oneself positively relative to others), *self-consistency* (the desire to express personal attributes through organizational affiliation), *uncertainty reduction* (defining oneself in terms of group membership) and *depersonalized belonging* (the desire to experience similarity with a group). In the current study, self-enhancement and self-consistency needs are operationalized as Highhouse *et al.*'s (2007) *social adjustment* (SA), the need to impress others and *Value Expression* (VE), the need to express one's values through organizational affiliation, respectively. Uncertainty reduction and depersonalized belonging are operationalized with Glynn's (1998) *Need for Organizational Identification* (nOID), conceptualized as the psychological need for perceived oneness with an organization. It is proposed that these underlying needs create the linkage between self-concept orientations and organizational identification.

The current study makes a significant contribution to the organizational identification literature by empirically testing several of Cooper and Thatcher's (2010) theoretical propositions about the relation of individualist and collectivist self-concept orientations to OrgID. Rather than



treating self-concept orientations holistically, as most studies do, the proposed model delves beneath the surface by examining psychological needs that theoretically underlie self-concept orientations and predispose some, but not all individuals to identify with their organizations. In addition, the study advances theories regarding the psychological mediators themselves.

Although nOID has previously been examined as a predictor of OrgID (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004), it has not been examined for its relationship to self-concept orientations or as a potential mediator. The self-presentation needs of VE and SA have been studied in the context of job preferences (Highhouse *et al.*, 2007) but have not been previously examined in studies of OrgID or self-concept orientations. In addition to theoretical advances, results of this study might inform the development of organizational practices that are designed to fulfill psychological needs for individuals with different self-concept orientations.

### **Theoretical and hypothesis development**

According to Cooper and Thatcher (2010), self-concept orientations differentially relate to organization targets (organization as a whole, coworkers, or workgroups). Individuals might identify with all three targets simultaneously (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008), but generally feel the strongest identification with one target relative to the others (Brewer and Chen, 2007; van Dick *et al.*, 2008). Since this study examines organizational identification specifically, the focus will be on Cooper and Thatcher's (2010) propositions about self-concept orientations as they relate to the organizational identification target.

#### *Self-concept orientation and organizational identification*

*Individualist orientation.* The individualist orientation is characterized by an independent self-construal, seeing oneself as unique and separate from others (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Priority is placed on individual interests over collective interests, promoting one's own goals,

and expressing oneself (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). These characteristics indicate “a worldview that centralizes the personal” and “peripheralizes the social” (Oyserman *et al.*, 2002, p. 5), leading Cooper and Thatcher (2010) to theorize that people with an individualist orientation would be less likely to identify with the organization. Further, if any relationship exists, it would be indirect through the associated motives of self-enhancement and self-consistency.

*Collectivist orientation.* The collectivist orientation has an interdependent self-construal in which individuals become meaningful through membership in a group (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Collectivists place priority on group over individual goals and emphasize obligations to the group (Triandis *et al.*, 1988). The definition of oneself in terms of group membership increases the likelihood that people with a collectivist orientation will feel a strong identification with the organization (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010) and such relationship would be direct. Hence it is expected that,

H1: Collectivist self-concept orientation will be positively related to OrgID.

#### *Psychological underpinnings*

##### *Depersonalized belonging/uncertainty reduction (Need for Organizational Identification).*

Ashforth and Mael (1989) maintain that there is an underlying psychological need for all human beings to identify with the social systems to which they belong. However, Glynn (1998) proposes that individuals vary in their underlying need for organizational identification (nOID) and this variation is potentially an important factor influencing the identification process (Ashforth *et al.*, 2008; Glynn, 1998; Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). Individuals who have a high nOID are interdependent, have a desire to be “imprinted upon” and be inseparable from the

organization (Glynn, 1998, p. 238). The interdependent nature of high nOID fits well with the collectivist self-concept (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010; Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

Cooper and Thatcher (2010, p. 527) note that people with a collectivist orientation have “depersonalized belongingness” and “uncertainty-reduction” as motives for organizational identification. Defining the world in terms of groups, these motives encapsulate the basic desire to be part of a group (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010, p. 527). While not specifically addressed in their article, the depersonalized belongingness and uncertainty-reduction motives have strong conceptual similarity to the nOID construct. The difference is that nOID specifically relates to the need for identification with an organization rather than an amorphous, unspecified group. In contrast, depersonalized belongingness and uncertainty-reduction were not expected to be motives for those with an individualist orientation due to their independent self-construal (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010).

H2a: Collectivist self-concept orientation will be positively related to nOID.

H2b: The relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and OrgID will be mediated by nOID.

*Self-enhancement needs (social adjustment and value expression)*. People in all cultures strive to obtain positive self-regard (Sedikides *et al.*, 2003), which may be facilitated through organizational membership (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Mignonac *et al.*, 2006). Self-esteem is fostered by obtaining social approval as part of individuals’ “social-identity consciousness” (Highhouse *et al.*, 2007, p. 138) wherein “individuals desire to be viewed as appropriate, good and significant in their own culture” (Heine and Hamamura, 2007; p. 5). This public self-consciousness comprises two self-presentation concerns: the *social adjustment (SA) need* (the need to impress others through membership in a particular organization) and the *value*

*expression (VE) need* (the need to express, through one's choice of an employer, personal values that are socially approved). The distinctive *other-orientation* and focus on prestige distinguishes the SA need from the VE need that embodies a more values-centered, internalized focus.

However, both SA and VE are self-presentation needs that derive from public self-consciousness; as such, they have some degree of interrelatedness (Highhouse *et al.*, 2007).

Similar to self-concept orientations, SA and VE needs may coexist within an individual, but generally one or the other is emphasized (Highhouse *et al.*, 2007).

*Individualist orientation.* Differences in self-concept orientations may be a useful heuristic for understanding variation in the emphasis placed on the two self-presentation needs. The underlying motivation for a person with an individualist orientation is to view *oneself* positively, as opposed to attending to the perspectives of others (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010; Dutton *et al.*, 1994; Heine and Hamamura, 2007). High self-regard derives from "seeing oneself as unique, expressing one's inner attributes and asserting oneself" (Markus and Kitayama, p. 242). For those with an individualist orientation, Cooper and Thatcher (2010) identify self-enhancement (viewing oneself positively relative to others) and self-consistency (alignment between self and organizational attributes) as the primary motives for identifying with organizations and suggest that it is through these motives the individualist orientation-organizational identification connection is made. These motives for organizational identification align well with the self-expression and self-validation characteristics of VE needs (Highhouse *et al.*, 2007). In contrast, SA focuses almost entirely on the evaluations of others, seeking prestige that is socially-ascribed. While Cooper and Thatcher (2010) cite prestige as important to those with an individualist orientation, Markus and Kitayama (1991) theorize that self-esteem for these

individuals is based more on internal assessments as opposed to public evaluation, although both are important. Accordingly,

H3a: The positive relationship between individualist self-concept orientation and VE needs will be stronger than the positive relationship between individualist self-concept orientation and SA needs.

H3b: SA needs will mediate the relationship between individualist self-concept orientation and OrgID.

H3c: VE needs will mediate the relationship between individualist self-concept orientation and OrgID.

*Collectivist orientation.* Cooper and Thatcher (2010) did not identify self-enhancement as a motive for people with a collectivist orientation, since both theory and research suggests that the desire is to fit in rather than stand out (Heine and Hamamura, 2007). However, it is argued that self-enhancement may simply manifest differently for those with a collectivist orientation (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Sedikides *et al.*, 2003). As noted by Heine and Lehman (1999) those with a collectivist orientation are more likely to have motives that are social and other-oriented. Self-esteem derives from one's achievement that serves the purpose of meeting the expectations of significant others, such as one's family (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Since VE and SA are both manifestations of public consciousness, both are expected to be important sources of self-enhancement for those with a collectivist orientation. VE needs would be important because they encompass the evaluations of others regarding the honorable reputation of the organization (Highhouse *et al.*, 2007). Similarly, those with a collectivist orientation would be expected to emphasize SA needs because of the heavy weight placed on the impressions of others and the importance of being perceived as successful by significant others

(Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Symbiotically, SA concerns are almost entirely *other*-focused and are characterized by a preoccupation with external indicators of status (Highhouse *et al.*, 2007).

H4a: Collectivist self-concept orientation will be positively related to VE needs.

H4b: Collectivist self-concept orientation will be positively related to SA needs.

H4c: VE needs will mediate the relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and OrgID.

H4d: SA needs will mediate the relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and OrgID.

Finally, due to their interdependent self-construal, those with a collectivist orientation are expected to be more sensitive to social approval of their organizations than are those with an individualist orientation. To support this view, research has found that collectivist job seekers attached more importance to the prestige and reputation of an organization than did individualists (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2010; Woodard *et al.*, 2016) and collectivists placed more weight on prestige as a work value (Hartung *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, it is expected that

H5a: The positive relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and VE needs will be stronger than the positive relationship between individualist self-concept orientation and VE needs.

H5b: The positive relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and SA needs will be stronger than the positive relationship between individualist self-concept orientation and SA needs.

Country-level differences were not hypothesized since the focus was on self-concept orientations that are known to be individualized, vary widely within country cultures

(although one type may be predominant) and are often associated with gender and personal history (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

## **Methods**

Survey participants were experienced professionals and part-time MBA students in seven countries with wide variation in Hofstede's (2017) IC scores. The study comprised two surveys that were administered approximately two weeks apart.<sup>i</sup> The temporal separation of the instruments was intended to minimize common method variance issues (Chang *et al.*, 2010). The survey matching process was determined by the participating professors with the goal of maintaining anonymity. The first survey collected demographic information, self-concept orientation and nOID. The second survey collected data about self-presentation needs (SA and VE) as well as identification with the respondent's current (or most recent) organization (OrgID). Participants received extra class credit. The US survey was administered online whereas the remaining data were collected in-person. Full (100%) participation was possible only if students completed both surveys. Numbers of matched surveys (time 1 and time 2) and response rates were as follows: Brazil (51/100%), China (68/100%), India (78/42%), Ireland (45/75%), Lithuania (78/100%), Turkey (87/73%) and the U.S. (102/91%) for a total sample size of 509. Average age of respondents was 30 years (*s.d.* 7.4); 75% were currently employed; 61% had managerial jobs; average number of years with current employer was 3.3 (*s.d.* 4.2); average total years of working experience was 9 years (*s.d.* 7.8), with 4.3 years (*s.d.* 5.4) as a manager. Median organization size was 100-500 employees, with 40% of the sample working for organizations of 1000 or more. The sample was 45% female.

## *Measures<sup>ii</sup>*

For measures of the following constructs, participants used a 6-point scale (1= disagree, 6 = agree) to avoid the central tendency bias common in collectivist cultures (Hui *et al.*, 2004).

Exploratory factor analysis of the measures was performed and items with factor loadings of .40 and above were retained, resulting in 1-item deletions for VE, SA, and nOID measures.

The measure of the *Need for Organizational Identification* (nOID) comprises 6 items ( $\alpha = .68$ ) from Kreiner and Ashforth (2004). A sample item is “Without an organization to work for, I would feel incomplete.”

The measure of *Social Adjustment need* (SA) comprises 4 items ( $\alpha = .81$ ) from Highhouse *et al.* (2007). A sample item is “Working for an impressive company would make me seem impressive to others.”

The measure of *Value Expression need* (VE) comprises 4 items ( $\alpha = .66$ ), also from Highhouse *et al.* (2007). A sample item is “I want to be proud of the company I work for.”

The measure of *Organizational Identification* (OrgID) comprises 6 items ( $\alpha = .86$ ) from Kreiner and Ashforth (2004). Respondents were asked to evaluate their degree of identification with their current or most recent employer. A sample item is “When someone criticizes my organization, it feels like a personal insult.”

Measures of *Individualist and Collectivist Self-Concept Orientations* were from the reduced form (Triandis, 1996) of the Singelis *et al.* (1995) IC scale. A detailed analysis of the Singelis *et al.* (1995) IC measure (Taras *et al.*, 2010) found that horizontal individualism (HI) was conceptually the same as Hofstede’s individualism construct and horizontal collectivism (HC) was its opposite. In addition, the HC items in Singelis *et al.* (1995) focus solely on group relationships. This is consistent with Cooper and Thatcher’s (2010) collectivist construct in which people view themselves in terms of group memberships. The remaining quadrants are not



used in this analysis because they are believed to measure different constructs such as competitiveness and power distance (Brewer and Chen, 2007; Oyserman *et al.*, 2002; Schimmack *et al.*, 2005; Taras *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, in this study the measure of *collectivist orientation* comprises 4 items from the HC quadrant ( $\alpha = .65$ ). A sample item is “It is important to me to maintain harmony within my group.” The measure of *individualist orientation* comprises 4 items from the HI quadrant ( $\alpha = .73$ ). A sample item is “Being a unique individual is important to me.”

Control variables included gender (0 = female, 1 = male) and tenure with the organization (continuous).

*Construct equivalence tests.* A structural equation modeling approach (SEM, AMOS, 25.0) was employed to examine the cultural invariance of all measures in this study. Following Byrne (2008; 2016), configural equivalence (the factor loading pattern is the same across cultural groups) and measurement model equivalence (parameters of the measurement model are similar across cultural groups) were tested.

Results indicate configural equivalence for nOID ( $\chi^2 = 64.715$ ,  $df = 35$ ,  $GFI = .961$ ,  $CFI = .952$ , and  $RMSEA = .041$ ), VE and SA ( $\chi^2 = 217.009$ ,  $df = 133$ ,  $GFI = .904$ ,  $CFI = .930$ , and  $RMSEA = .035$ ), OrgID ( $\chi^2 = 101.120$ ,  $df = 42$ ,  $GFI = .934$ ,  $CFI = .947$ , and  $RMSEA = .041$ ), individualist self-concept orientation ( $\chi^2 = 32.51$ ,  $df = 14$ ,  $GFI = .970$ ,  $CFI = .959$ ,  $RMSEA = .051$ ), and collectivist self-concept orientation ( $\chi = 31.594$ ,  $df = 14$ ,  $GFI = .939$ ,  $CFI = .971$ ,  $RMSEA = .050$ ). For measurement model equivalence, a series of models were tested where equality constraints were imposed on all factor loadings of a variable across all cultural groups in the study. If the Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) difference between this model and the configural model showed evidence of invariance (i.e. the  $\chi^2$  difference value is non-significant) of all factor loadings, it

was concluded there was measurement equivalence. If the  $\chi^2$  difference showed evidence of noninvariance of all factor loadings (i.e. the  $\chi^2$  difference value is significant), the invariance of the factor loading of each item was tested separately. If the evidence of measurement invariance was identified, the item was retained in the subsequent tests.

The results provide evidence of full measurement invariance for OrgID ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 27.683$ ,  $\Delta df = 25$ , n.s., GFI = .919, CFI = .945, and RMSEA = .045), and collectivist self-concept orientation ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 27.704$ ,  $\Delta df = 18$ , n.s., GFI = .947, CFI = .905, and RMSEA = .041); partial measurement model invariance was found for VE and SA ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 23.172$ ,  $\Delta df = 18$ , n.s., GFI = .895, CFI = .926, and RMSEA = .034) as well as nOID ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 10.793$ ,  $\Delta df = 6$ , n.s., GFI = .955, CFI = .943, and RMSEA = 0.042), and individualist self-concept orientation ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 10.252$ ,  $\Delta df = 6$ , n.s., GFI = .961, CFI = .949 and RMSEA = .048). Since at least two items for each measure were culturally invariant, it was concluded that all study measures were sufficiently equivalent for testing (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Scalar equivalence was established by using procedures recommended by Hult *et al.* (2008).

Bivariate correlations (Table 1) indicate significant correlations between the collectivist self-concept orientation and OrgID ( $r = .28$ ,  $p < .001$ ) as well as mediating variables of SA ( $r = .12$ ,  $p < .01$ ), VE ( $r = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and nOID ( $r = .33$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Individualist self-concept orientation was significantly correlated only with VE ( $r = .17$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and OrgID ( $r = .11$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

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Insert Table 1 here

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### *Hypotheses Testing Results*

SEM (AMOS 25.0) was used to test the direct and indirect relationships among latent variables in the hypotheses. Standardized and unstandardized path coefficients of the SEM model appear in Figure 1.

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Insert Figure 1 here

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According to Kline (2005), the first step was to assess the fit of the measurement model, which specifies the connections between the latent variables and their respective indicators, followed by the fit of the hybrid model that specifies the connections between the latent variables and their respective indicators as well as the hypothesized relationships among latent variables. Goodness-of-fit indices of the measurement model were satisfactory ( $\chi^2 = 728.880$ ;  $df = 328$ ,  $CFI = .908$ ,  $GFI = .908$ ,  $RMSEA = .049$ ). Goodness-of-fit indices of the hybrid model were also good ( $\chi^2 = 747.756$ ;  $df = 331$ ,  $CFI = .904$ ,  $GFI = .907$ ,  $RMSEA = .050$ ). Since the hybrid model is nested within the measurement model, a  $\chi^2$  difference test was performed to evaluate the fit of the structural part of the hybrid model. The  $\chi^2$  test shows that the structural model fits the data well ( $\Delta\chi = 18.876$ ,  $\Delta df = 3$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Consequently, the proposed relationships among latent variables were tested.

The results fail to support Hypothesis 1 as the direct relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and OrgID is not significant ( $\gamma = -.036$ ,  $p = 0.721$ , n.s.). Supporting Hypothesis 2a, the path coefficient of the direct relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and nOID is positive and significant ( $\gamma = .678$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Mediation (indirect effect) hypotheses were tested with procedures outlined in Hayes (2018). Hypothesis 2b stated that

nOID would mediate the relationship between collectivist self-concept and OrgID. The indirect effect (.039) was bootstrapped with 2,000 samples and a 95% confidence interval was estimated. The confidence interval excluded zero (.012, .098), indicating the effect was significant ( $p = .002$ ). Hence Hypothesis 2b is supported.

To test Hypothesis 3a – the positive relationship between individualist orientation and VE needs will be stronger than the positive relationship between individualist orientation and SA needs, equality constraints were placed on the structural path of these two direct relationships. Since the model with constraints is nested in the model without constraints,  $\chi^2$  difference tests were conducted. The  $\chi^2$  test results ( $\Delta\chi = 1.510$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p = .219$ , n.s.) failed to support Hypothesis 3a.

Hypotheses 3b and 3c state that SA and VE needs will mediate the relationship between individualist self-concept orientation and OrgID. The indirect effect of SA (.001) was bootstrapped with 2,000 samples and a 95% confidence interval was estimated. The confidence interval did not exclude zero (-.007, .018), indicating the effect was not significant ( $p = .591$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 3b is not supported. The indirect effect of VE needs (.045) was bootstrapped with 2,000 samples and a 95% confidence interval was estimated. The confidence interval excluded zero (.013, .096), indicating the effect was significant ( $p = .002$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3c.

Supporting Hypotheses 4a and 4b, the direct relationships between collectivist self-concept orientation and VE needs is positive and significant ( $\gamma = .419$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the direct relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and SA needs is positive and significant ( $\gamma = .254$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Hypotheses 4c and 4d stated that VE and SA needs would mediate the relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and OrgID. The indirect effect of VE

needs (.206) was bootstrapped with 2,000 samples and a 95% confidence interval was estimated. The confidence interval excluded zero (.105, .358), indicating the effect was significant ( $p = .001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 4c. The indirect effect of SA needs (.035) was bootstrapped with 2,000 samples and a 95% confidence interval was estimated. The confidence interval did not exclude zero (-.012, .103), indicating the effect was not significant ( $p = .133$ ). Hence, Hypothesis 4d is not supported.

To test Hypotheses 5a, equality constraints were placed on the structural path of the relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and VE needs as well as the path of individualist self-concept orientation and VE needs. The  $\chi^2$  test results ( $\Delta\chi = 18.329$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) as well as the coefficients for collectivist self-concept orientation – VE path ( $\gamma = .419$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and individualist self-concept orientation – VE path ( $\gamma = .164$ ,  $p = .004$ ) provided support for Hypothesis 5a. Similarly, to test H5b, equality constraints were placed on the structural path of the relationship between collectivist self-concept orientation and SA needs as well as the path of individualist self-concept orientation and SA needs. The  $\chi^2$  test results ( $\Delta\chi = 11.854$ ,  $\Delta df = 1$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) as well as the coefficients for collectivist self-concept orientation – SA path ( $\gamma = .254$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and individualist self-concept orientation – SA path ( $\gamma = .014$ ,  $p = 0.786$ , n.s.) provided support for Hypothesis 5b.

## **Discussion**

The current study largely supports the proposed mediated model as well as many of Cooper and Thatcher's (2010) propositions about the relationship between self-concept orientations and organizational identification. Whereas much of the extant research on individualism and collectivism examines these constructs holistically, the current study delves more deeply into the psychological needs that motivate individuals with different self-concept orientations to identify

with their organizations. For the collectivist orientation, it is clear that the deep psychological need for organizational identification (nOID) creates a strong propensity to bond with the employing organization; in fact, it was the strongest path in the model. While a relationship between individualist self-concept and nOID was not hypothesized, it should be noted the bivariate correlation between individualist self-concept orientation and nOID was not significant. This is wholly consistent with the Markus and Kitayama (1991) contention that individualists view themselves as separate and unique, leading to a state where they are neither inclined or disinclined to identify with an organization (Kreiner and Ashforth, 2004). These results lend credence to Glynn's (1998) claim that interdependents (collectivists) have an innate need to identify with an organization whereas independents (individualists) do not. Based on this study, it appears the differences in nOID are at least partially attributable to differences in self-concept orientations.

In addition, nOID was a significant mediator between collectivist self-concept orientation and OrgID. While nOID was previously found to be strongly related to OrgID (Kreiner and Ashforth (2004), the role of nOID as a mediator between self-concept orientations and OrgID has not been previously examined and represents a unique contribution to the organizational identification literature. Recalling the earlier observation that nOID is conceptually aligned with the "depersonalized belongingness" and "uncertainty reduction" motives in Cooper and Thatcher's (2010, p. 522) model, the results of this study support their propositions regarding the relationship of these motives to OrgID.

The self-enhancement variables performed as hypothesized, but not entirely in accordance with Cooper and Thatcher's (2010) model. For those with an individualist orientation, VE (the need to express) fully mediated the relationship to OrgID. This result

suggests that individualists identify with organizations primarily as a *vehicle* for making a statement about their personal values. As such, this result fully supports Cooper and Thatcher's (2010) model in which the individualist self-concept orientation has a weak linkage (if any) to OrgID except through the motives of self-enhancement and self-consistency. However, VE was also a significant mediator of the relationship between those with a collectivist orientation and OrgID. It is possible that this connection is due to the social evaluation properties of the VE self-presentation need, as opposed to the personal expression aspects. If so, this finding supports Markus and Kitayama's (1991) observation that collectivists are sensitive to, and motivated by social evaluation. In fact, the present study suggests that VE and SA needs are greater for those with a collectivist as opposed to individualist orientation, perhaps due to the underlying social evaluation properties of these self-presentation needs. This result suggests a modification to the Cooper and Thatcher (2010) model that includes a self-enhancement motive for those with a collectivist orientation, although the emphasis is on social evaluation and fulfilling the expectations of significant others (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

While the second self-enhancement variable, SA (the need to impress) was also significant for those with a collectivist orientation, SA did not mediate the relationship with OrgID. This indicates that the need to impress others is linked to the collectivist orientation, but it is not sufficient to create a strong identification with the organization. One might extrapolate from this that many organizations could be seen as impressive to significant others, but these organizations might be interchangeable in their ability to serve the SA need. Simply being associated with one of many prestigious employers is insufficient for creating the strong personal bond with the organization that underlies organizational identification (Ashforth and Mael,

1989). Future research might focus on whether organizational prestige is important for attraction but does not forge the organizational bond that is essential for identification.

As noted earlier, there is disagreement in the literature as to whether those with a collectivist orientation engage in self-enhancement at all (Heine and Hamamura, 2007; Sedikides, *et al.*, 2003). If self-enhancement means evaluating oneself as superior in abilities and achievement, research suggests that these are motives for people with an individualist orientation (Sedikides *et al.*, 2003). However, as noted by Markus and Kitayama (1991, p. 241), the “motive to achieve need not necessarily reflect a motive to achieve for ‘me’ personally. It can have social or collective origins,” such as the need to fulfill the expectations of significant others. The results of this study suggest that this other-orientation may be the underlying force that drives the self-enhancement motive for those with a collectivist orientation. Future research might examine whether self-enhancement for those with a collectivist orientation is about distinguishing oneself for the sake of others, rather than oneself.

Taken together, this study suggests that people with a collectivist orientation do have an innate need to belong to an organization and be defined by their organizational membership as part of their fundamental social identity. This result is consistent with much of the seminal work on the collectivist self-concept (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Hofstede, 1980; Markus and Kitayama, 1991). This underlying need creates a predisposition towards feeling the organizational bond of identification. In addition, needs for value expression enhance the organizational bond. The stronger the need to express socially approved values through organizational affiliation, the more deeply felt is the sense of oneness with the organization. It should be further noted that our study did not find the expected direct effect between those with a collectivist orientation and OrgID (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010). This finding highlights the



importance of the mediators as psychological underpinnings of the relationship between self-concept orientations and OrgID.

Limitations in the current study should be noted. From a theoretical standpoint, one important omission is the relationist self-concept orientation, with a focus on connections with others through relationships. The relationist self-concept orientation is thought to increase the likelihood of identification with particularized relationships such as coworkers, but reduce the likelihood of identification with a workgroup or organization as a whole (Cooper and Thatcher, 2010). However, Sluss and Ashforth (2008) argue that particularistic ties within the organization enhance the sense of organizational identification, a position that has received empirical support (Jones and Volpe, 2011; Sluss and Ashforth, 2008). Future research might examine the relationist self-concept orientation to determine whether nOID, VE, SA and OrgID are salient even in the absence of particularistic ties. Also, the three mediators are presented in a parallel fashion as that is the way they are presented in the underlying theories (Glynn, 1998; Highhouse *et al.*, 2007). Future research might examine whether self-presentation needs and nOID are interrelated in order to promote a deeper understanding of the model's relationships.

Additionally, the two-stage design of the study was purposeful in its effort to minimize common method variance. However, some data were collected simultaneously (self-concept orientation and nOID in the first stage; VE, SA and OrgID in the second stage) and relationships among these variables could be affected by common method variance. Finally, although established measures were used, three variables had reliabilities below the generally accepted .70 cutoff. Lower reliabilities could lead to an underestimation of the true correlation or path coefficients and/or a reduction in the likelihood of finding significance (Kerlinger and Lee, 1999).

From a practical standpoint, Cooper and Thatcher (2010) note the impact of organizational identification on important organizational outcomes such as employee retention, commitment and performance. To the extent that the relationship between OrgID and self-concept orientations is mediated by underlying needs, it would behoove employers to identify those needs and foster their fulfillment. For example, for employees who have a collectivist self-concept orientation, there is an underlying need for organizational identification. The sense of identification can be fostered by organizational activities (i.e. company-wide picnics, celebrations and award ceremonies) and symbolic displays (i.e. organizational logos on t-shirts, nametags and computer cases). In addition, for individuals with either self-concept orientation, the need to express socially-approved values through organizational affiliation might be served by a company's internal and external communications that advertise commonly-held values (e.g. product safety).

In conclusion, this study provides important new information about the relationship of self-concept to organizational identification. Cooper and Thatcher's (2010) theoretical propositions regarding OrgID were empirically tested with a cross-national sample and culture equivalence of nOID, SA and VE was established for the first time. Further, the Cooper and Thatcher (2010) model is refined by inclusion of the mediators as underlying psychological mechanisms that connect the self-concept orientation and organizational identification. Importantly, these psychological constructs mediated the relationship between self-concept orientations and OrgID. This is a unique contribution to the literature in that the relationship of self-concept orientations to these underlying psychological needs has not been examined previously, nor have these variables been examined as potential mediators in the self-concept orientation/organizational identification relationship.

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<sup>[i]</sup> Portions of this data have been reported elsewhere (Woodard *et al.*, 2016).

<sup>[ii]</sup> Measures are available upon request.