
Articles

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, STATUS-BASED IDENTITY UNCERTAINTY, AND SELF-CONCEPT CLARITY IN IRAN: THE ROLE OF INDEPENDENT AND INTERDEPENDENT SELF-CONSTRUALS

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Социально-экономический статус, неопределенность идентичности, основанная на статусе, и ясность Я-концепции в Иране: роль независимых и взаимозависимых Я-конструкций

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Abstract

Previous research showed the association of socioeconomic status (SES) with both interdependence and independence in collectivistic cultures and the socioeconomic disadvantages of mismatch between the individual and the overarching culture. This study investigated whether interdependent-independent self-construals are linked to SES in Iran, if the culture-incongruent self is related to status-based identity uncertainty (SBIU), and if self-concept clarity

Резюме

Предыдущие исследования показали связь социально-экономического статуса (далее — СЭС) как с взаимозависимостью, так и с независимостью в коллективистских культурах, а также негативные социально-экономические последствия несоответствия между индивидом и его этнической культурой. В данном исследовании изучалось, связаны ли взаимозависимо-независимые Я-конструкции (термин для обозначения способа конструирования собственного Я) с СЭС в Иране, связано ли не соответствующее культуре Я с неопределенностью

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(SCC) could suppress this relationship. A cross-sectional correlational study with self-report measures was implemented. Results indicated that individuals with higher subjective SES are more interdependent, whereas no relationship existed between SES and independent self. Increased social solidarity following the Iranian protests of 2022 and unemployment were also linked to interdependence. Furthermore, culture-incongruent self as reflected by independence was related to greater SBIU and SCC, with SCC suppressing the link between independence and SBIU. This study highlights the role of interdependence in accessing socioeconomic resources in honor cultures and that the link between SES and independence may not exist in South Asian cultures with high in-group collectivism and low assertiveness. It also underscores that individuals who deviate from the culturally-dominant self-construal feel uncertain about their socioeconomic standing, unless they have a clear enough self-concept. Future research may clarify the direction of pathways between cultural mismatch, SBIU, and SCC, and investigate whether social resources themselves should be included in the measurement of SES in honor cultures.

Keywords: interdependence, independence, self-construals, socioeconomic status, status-based identity uncertainty, self-concept clarity, honor culture.

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идентичности, основанной на статусе, и может ли ясность Я-концепции снижать эту взаимосвязь. Авторами было проведено кросс-секционное корреляционное исследование в Иране. Результаты показали, что индивиды с более высоким СЭС более взаимозависимы, в то время как между СЭС и независимым Я не существует никакой связи. Возросшая социальная солидарность после иранских протестов 2022 г. и безработица также были связаны с взаимозависимостью. Кроме того, не соответствующее иранской культуре самосознание, характеризующее независимостью, было связано с более выраженной неопределенностью идентичности, основанной на статусе, и большей ясностью Я-концепции. При этом связь между независимостью Я и неопределенностью идентичности, основанной на статусе, снижалась под влиянием ясности Я-концепции. Это исследование подчеркивает роль взаимозависимости в доступе к социально-экономическим ресурсам в культурах чести и то, что связь между СЭС и независимостью может отсутствовать в южноазиатских культурах с высоким внутригрупповым коллективизмом и низкой ассертивностью. Это также подчеркивает, что люди, которые отклоняются от доминирующей в культуре Я-конструкции, чувствуют неуверенность в своем социально-экономическом положении, если у них нет достаточно четкой Я-концепции. Будущие исследования могут прояснить направление связей между культурным несоответствием, неопределенностью идентичности, основанной на статусе, и ясностью Я-концепции, а также выяснить, следует ли включать сами социальные ресурсы в измерение СЭС в культурах чести.

Ключевые слова: взаимозависимость, независимость, Я-конструкции, социально-экономический статус, неопределенность идентичности, основанная на статусе, ясность Я-концепции, культура чести.

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Over the past three decades, psychological research has highlighted the interaction of culture and socioeconomic contexts with individuals' self-construals and identities, revealing their global variations (Miyamoto et al., 2018; Stephens et al., 2014; Vignoles et al., 2016). It is suggested that individuals attuned to their dominant cultures often have a higher socioeconomic status (SES). However, this dominant culture varies globally, leading to diverse correlates of SES. In collectivistic Confucian cultures, high-SES individuals exhibit both independent and interdependent orientations in their sense of self, while in Frontier cultures, high-SES individuals primarily display independence, with decreased interdependence as SES rises (Miyamoto et al., 2018).

This cultural match-mismatch impacts individuals' future resource access, as mainstream institutions are often structured to favor the skills acquired in high-SES cultural contexts, systematically disadvantaging low-SES individuals (Stephens et al., 2014). Furthermore, low-SES individuals in high-SES settings may experience status uncertainty, adversely affecting their well-being, employment, and relationships (Destin et al., 2017) and contributing to socioeconomic inequality (Stephens & Townsend, 2015).

Exploring socioeconomic and cultural influences on selves and identity across countries is crucial for developing culturally-informed policies of reducing inequality. Despite its pivotal impact on clarifying culture-SES-self dynamics, this research primarily focuses on West-East comparisons or on Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) populations (Henrich et al., 2010; Uskul et al., 2023), leaving a gap in understanding regions beyond this dichotomy.

Addressing this gap, the study aims to explore the link between self-construals, SES, and status uncertainty in Iran, a region largely overlooked in psychology (Atari et al., 2020; Razavi et al., 2023), despite its extensive cultural background and historical influence in the Middle East (Goldschmidt & Al-Marashi, 2018). Moreover, the extremity of social mobility in Iran (Ghahremanpour, 2003) make it an apt context for examining status instability. This research marks the first attempt to assess this problem in the Iranian context, offering novel insights into the complex interplay

between cultural, socioeconomic, and psychological dimensions within a non-WEIRD setting and thereby broadening our understanding of global cultural variations.

Literature Review

The Interplay of Culture, Socioeconomic Context, and Self

Culture, an integrated system of ideas, practices, and social institutions, facilitates behavioral coordination within societies (Markus & Hamedani, 2019). As an accumulation of historical patterns reflected in institutions, practices, and artifacts (Adams & Markus, 2004), culture underpins individuals' psychological processes (Markus & Hamedani, 2019). This has led contemporary psychology to employ frameworks such as individualism-collectivism (individual autonomy vs. group harmony; Oyserman et al., 2002) and dignity, honor, and face logics (individuals' inherent worth, social reputation, and social harmony) to examine cultures (Smith et al., 2021).

These overarching cultural systems regard activities aligned with their values as exemplary, prestigious, and respectable, setting a cultural ideal for individuals (Kitayama et al., 2009; Stephens et al., 2014). Embedded in and propagated by societal sectors including media, education, politics, and law, this ideal links socioeconomic advancement and resource access to compliance with cultural imperatives. Specifically, maintaining a high socioeconomic status¹ (SES) often requires reaffirming dominant cultural views and engaging in culturally prescribed tasks (Stephens et al., 2014). As cultural alignment facilitates occupying influential positions, a reinforcement loop may emerge where high-SES individuals' values become the pervasive societal values. This historical reiteration has shaped current socioeconomic contexts, tightly linking the culture of high socioeconomic settings with overarching cultural norms (Miyamoto et al., 2018).

This association is sustained and transmitted through the socialization practices of schools and families, impacting individual-level beliefs and behaviors. For instance, in Japan, high-SES schools emphasize culturally ingrained values like group cohesion and social responsibility more than low-SES schools. This differential exposure makes culturally-prescribed tasks more habitual for high-SES individuals (Ibid.).

Building on these culture-SES-socialization dynamics, examining their interaction with internal constructs like sociocultural self-construal is crucial. As illustrated by Figure 1, recent research positions self-construal within the socioeconomic context and broader national culture² (Kraus et al., 2019; Oyserman

¹ Socioeconomic status is the relative social and economic standing of an individual, marked by objective measures of education, income, occupation, as well as their subjective perception of their status (Kraus & Stephens, 2012).

² It is essential to note that the interconnections among culture, socioeconomic context, and the self are not linear. Adams & Markus (2004) underscore that cultural patterns are both a product of historical actions and influencers of future behaviors. Thus, culture operates in a cyclical manner, shaping individuals' actions while simultaneously being shaped by them.

& Markus, 1993; Stephens et al., 2014). These self-construals refer to the extent individuals define themselves as independent from or interconnected with others. An interdependent self entails viewing close relationships, social roles, and group memberships as central to self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), and is more commonly prescribed in collectivistic cultures (Cross et al., 2011). In contrast, an independent self elicits viewing internal attributes, such as traits and abilities, as central to self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and is associated with individualistic cultures (Cross et al., 2011).

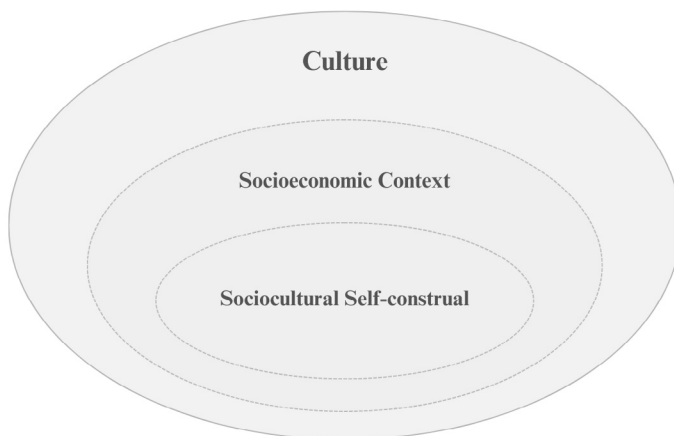
In individualistic societies, higher SES fosters an independent self-construal (Kraus et al., 2019). While SES is not associated with interdependence in most of these cultures, Frontier cultures show a negative SES-interdependence correlation. Conversely, in Confucian cultures, higher SES is associated with both independence and interdependence. While the high SES-interdependence link is exclusive to Confucian cultures, the high SES-independence connection spans 60 nations, except South and Southeastern Asia (Miyamoto et al., 2018). This particular observation remains unexplained in psychology.

The context of Iran

Relatedly, global empirical studies situate Iran within the South Asian culture cluster, despite its location in West Asia (Javidan & Dastmalchian, 2003). This commonality stems from extensive historical cultural exchange between Iran and South Asia, spanning art, philosophy, architecture, and literature, alongside mutual

Figure 1

Self within Socioeconomic Context and Culture



Note. It is essential to note that the interconnections among culture, socioeconomic context, and the self are not linear. Adams & Markus (2004) underscore that cultural patterns are both a product of historical actions and influencers of future behaviors. Thus, culture operates in a cyclical manner, shaping individuals' actions while simultaneously being shaped by them.

linguistic influences and the role of Persian in chancery and bureaucratic practices in South Asia from 1500 to 1900 (Cole, 2002). As a result, examining Iranians' SES relation with sociocultural selves could contribute to our understanding of SES correlates in South Asian culture clusters, offering insights into Miyamoto et al.'s (2018) observations.

To hypothesize about Iran's culture-SES-self-construal relationships, considering the prevailing cultural paradigm is necessary. While honor logic might better reflect Iranian culture, we employ the collectivism-individualism and independence-interdependence frameworks, aligning with Miyamoto et al. (2018) approach.

Iran is not easily categorized as dominantly collectivist or individualistic. Hamedani et al. (2012) regard Iranians as moderately collectivist, equally valuing individual uniqueness and group relations. Joshanloo and Ghaedi (2009) also found the endorsement of collectivistic values (e.g., conformity) alongside individualistic values (e.g., self-direction). Similarly, a positive correlation between allocentrism and idiocentrism is observed (Ghorbani et al., 2004). Cultural values like preserving group unity, generosity, and tight kinship networks are also highly salient (Bateson et al., 1977; Atari et al., 2020). Conversely, Fouladian & Rezai-Bahrabad (2019) highlights egocentrism as a dominant trait. Javidan and Dastmalchian (2003) mentions high humane-orientation (generous and caring behavior toward others; related to interdependence) and low assertiveness (less confrontational and competitive; related to independence) as cultural features of Iran.

To reconcile these mixed findings, two significant cross-cultural studies provide insight. First, Iran strongly exhibits honor culture traits (Atari et al., 2020; Razavi et al., 2023). In honor cultures, individuals possess a blend of interdependence (e.g., connection to others) and independence (e.g., uniqueness, self-direction). Yet, these independent features serve relational functions of preserving an "honorable" social image for self and family (Uskul et al., 2023), where self and close others strongly overlap, personal honor intertwines with family honor, and one's actions impact family reputation (Uskul et al., 2019). This reveals a distinct individualism expression within honor cultures, oriented toward collectivist goals of enhancing social reputation.

Second, in the GLOBE study, Javidan and Dastmalchian (2003) provided evidence for strongly high in-group collectivism (interdependence among small groups), low institutional collectivism (low interdependence toward the broader society/institutions), and low assertiveness (less confrontational and competitive; related to independence and often assessed in self-orientation measures) in Iran. This cultural tendency of strong family/friend attachment but detachment from out-group Iranians and institutions is historically confirmed (Katouzian, 2010).

In summary, while studies indicate both independence and interdependence in Iran, we speculate interdependence, particularly within small groups, takes precedence over independence. This speculation is based on 1) independence's social functions in honor cultures, and 2) high in-group collectivism and notably low assertiveness.

Consequently, Iranians' SES relation with sociocultural selves may be informed by the broader cultural emphasis on small group interdependence. Research in this

area is limited. Only one relevant study found a negative SES-egocentrism/social separateness relationship in Iran (Fouladian & Rezai-Bahrabad, 2019), suggesting independence's negative role in attaining resources, without examining interdependence. Additionally, Iranian middle managers highly desire humane-oriented leaders (modest, generous, compassionate; Dastmalchian et al., 2001), implying cultural expectations for high-SES Iranians (leaders in this case) to prioritize other-oriented values.

Aggregating between these observations and acknowledging that high-SES individuals often reflect the dominant culture (Miyamoto et al., 2018), we posit that Iranians with high-SES are likely to exhibit interdependent self-construals. Therefore, our first hypothesis suggests a positive correlation between SES and interdependent self among Iranians, with SES as the independent variable aligning with approaches of prior research and orientation of self within socioeconomic context (Miyamoto et al., 2018; Kraus et al., 2019). Furthermore, given the role of revolts and revolutions in increasing Iranians' societal interdependence (Katouzian, 2010), this hypothesis will control for recent changes in social solidarity, due the timing of our research coinciding with Mahsa Amini protests - waves of women's rights protests that snowballed throughout Iran in 2022–2023 (Khatam, 2023).

Culture-Incongruent Self-Construal and Status-Based Identity Uncertainty

Another interaction point of self-construal and SES is through status-based identity, which is situated within the broader sociocultural self and is defined as “the subjective understanding, meaning, and value that people attach to their SES from moment to moment in real time” (Destin et al., 2017, p. 271). Due to SES's malleable nature and the possibility of social mobility, status-based identity can fluctuate, leading to experiencing status-based identity uncertainty (SBIU), defined as “the extent to which people have a strong and stable (vs. weak and unstable) understanding of their SES.” (Ibid.). Status identity uncertainty may relate to self-construals through cultural mismatch and self-concept clarity.

Individual differences in adherence to cultural self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) may lead to cultural mismatch when one's self-construal deviates from the culturally-dominant self. The cultural mismatch theory of inequality posits that discrepancies between the dominant culture of institutions and those of minority social groups perpetuate socioeconomic inequality (Stephens & Townsend, 2015). Accordingly, Destin et al. (2017) suggests that cultural mismatch caused by social mobility (for example, a low-SES student with an interdependent background entering a high-SES independence-oriented university) could trigger status-based identity uncertainty. This assumption may also extend to individuals with culture-incongruent self-construal (regardless of social mobility), as they may also face socioeconomic disadvantages due to this mismatch.

While culture-incongruent self may increase status uncertainty, self-concept clarity (SCC), which is negatively associated with status uncertainty (Destin et

al., 2017), may protect against it. Self-concept clarity refers to the clarity, internal consistency, and temporal stability of one’s self-concept (Campbell et al., 1996). Research suggests that the self of individuals with high self-concept clarity is less susceptible to be shaped by the social environment (Campbell, 1990); for instance, non-conformers have a higher self-concept clarity compared to majority opinion holders (Rios Morrison & Wheeler, 2010). Therefore, we propose that high self-concept clarity may initially keep the individual from being shaped by the dominant culture and lead to, for example, remaining independent in a collectivistic culture. Furthermore, individuals with high self-concept clarity are less influenced by anxiety-provoking stimuli and are only affected by social cues consistent with their self-belief (Campbell, 1990), implying that they are less likely to experience uncertainty in self-inconsistent settings (e.g., an independent person in an interdependent workplace). Hence, culture-incongruent self may lead to status identity uncertainty if the individual lacks self-concept clarity, while it could also negate status identity uncertainty if their culture-incongruence was a result of having a high enough self-concept clarity that had protected them from conforming to the environment. These propositions are not covered by the current literature.

These constructs are yet to be investigated in Iran, but one study found communal factors better predicted a healthy identity among Iranians, compared to individualistic values (Ghorbani et al., 2004). Also, based on the previous remarks, independent self-construals may be the culture-incongruent self in Iran. Therefore, our second, third, and fourth hypotheses state that independence is positively related to both status identity uncertainty and self-concept clarity, with self-concept clarity suppressing the link between independence and status identity uncertainty.

Method

Design

This study used a cross-sectional correlational design. Independent, dependent, and control variables of our hypotheses are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Overview of Variables

	IV	DV	Control variables
H1	SES	Interdependent self-construal	Age, gender, employment, solidarity change
H2	Independent self-construal	SBIU	Age, gender, SES, SCC
H3	Independent self-construal	SCC	Age, gender, SES, SBIU
H4	Independent self-construal (mediator: SCC)	SBIU	Age, gender, SES

Note. H = hypothesis, IV = independent variable, DV = dependent variable, SBIU = status-based identity uncertainty, SES = socioeconomic status, SCC = self-concept clarity.

Data Collection

Aggregating between the hypotheses, based on G-power calculations for linear multiple regression with ten predictors, a sample size of 118 is required to detect a medium effect ($f^2 \geq .15$) with 80% power and a probability of a type I error of .05. The study aimed for a minimum sample size of 118.

To obtain this sample, we prepared an online questionnaire on Porsline (the common platform for online surveys in Iran) and distributed it via a Telegram channel (Farsi Tweets [توییت‌های فارسی]) with approximately 500,000 subscribers and no specific topic other than re-publishing viral tweets. We provided a general description of the study (“We are collecting data for studying the relationship between SES, collectivism, and individualism”), statements of anonymity/confidentiality, and a chance to win 300,000 Tomans as an incentive for participation.

After screening and excluding two cases under 18 and one with unacceptable Mahalanobis distance, the final sample met size requirements with 162 participants (72.2% women, 27.8% men) ($M = 29$, $SD = 9$), with 45.1% being employed and 54.9% unemployed. The (un)employment percentages reflect broader societal patterns, with Iran’s 2017 employment-to-population ratio at 39.7% (International Labour Organization, 2017). Participants had an appropriate variation in terms of SES ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.67$, Skewness = 0.06, Kurtosis = -0.20) and education (PhD = 4.3%, master’s degree = 11.1%, associate’s or bachelor’s degree = 29%, high-school diploma = 28.4%, less than high-school diploma = 27.2%)

Measures

The measures, all administered in Persian, are as follows.

Self-Construal. We used the Self-Construal scale (α for independence = .70, α for interdependence = .74; Singelis, 1994), translated and validated by Alvandifar et al. (2018) to measure independent and interdependent self-construals. This measure includes two subscales of interdependence (α in our study = .72; 15 items; e.g. „حتی زمانی که به شدت با اعضای گروه مخالفم، از بحث و جدل اجتناب می‌کنم.“, [Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument]) and independence (α in our study = .76; 15 items; e.g. „از اینکه منحصر به فرد باشم و از بسیاری“ [I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects]). Answers ranged on a 7-point Likert Scale (1= “strongly disagree”; 7 = “strongly agree”).

Socioeconomic Status. We used Ghodratinama et al. (2013) scale of SES in Iran, validated by Eslami et al. (2014) ($\alpha = 0.83$; in our study, $\alpha = 0.76$). This scale measures SES on a family level and has six items regarding family income, subjective SES, highest education of the individual, highest education of either of their parents, the value of their house (if applicable), and financial ability to buy a house (example: “اگر مردم را به پنج طبقه‌ی اجتماعی اقتصادی تقسیم کنند، خانواده‌ی خود را در کدام طبقه؟:” [If people are divided into five socioeconomic classes, in which class

would you consider your family?]). Responses had Likert-type scales with verbal anchors (e.g., 1 = “Absolutely insufficient”, 5 = “Absolutely sufficient”).

Status-based Identity Uncertainty. We translated and validated ($\alpha = .85$; Khezri & Tatarko, 2023) the SBIU self-report scale (Destin et al., 2017). There are 11 items in this scale (e.g., “به نظر می‌رسد که باورهای من در مورد جایگاه اقتصادی اجتماعی که در جامعه دارم مکرراً [My beliefs about where I stand in society seem to change frequently]”) with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”, 7 = “strongly agree”).

Self-concept Clarity. The English SCC scale (Campbell et al., 1996) has been translated and validated in Iran ($\alpha = 0.83$, Razian et al., 2019; in our study, $\alpha = 0.85$). There are 12 items (e.g., “به نظر می‌رسد که باورهای من در مورد خودم مکرراً تغییر می‌کنند [My beliefs about myself seem to change very frequently]”) with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree”, 7 = “strongly agree”). Khezri and Tatarko (2023) established the conceptual distinction of this construct from SBIU.

Recent Change in Social Solidarity. As we collected data during the 2022–2023 Mahsa Amini protests, we used one item to account for potential changes in social solidarity. This item was “با توجه به وقایع ماه‌های اخیر، احساس همبستگی [Due to the events of recent months, the feeling of social solidarity has increased in me]”. Participants indicated their agreement on a 7-point Likert Scale (1 = “strongly disagree”, 7 = “strongly agree”).

Sociodemographic variables. We collected data on gender, age, and employment status using corresponding questions.

Data Processing

We conducted the analyses using R and SPSS. We first evaluated descriptive statistics, skewness, kurtosis, and the Mahalanobis distance values to assess the normality of distributions and detect outliers and missing values. We then used hierarchical linear multiple regressions and regression with mediation to test our hypotheses and also conduct exploratory analysis.

Results

Following the initial data diagnosis, we removed one participant with unacceptable Mahalanobis distance. Missing data was less than 5%, which is negligible. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics and the correlation matrix of the continual variables in primary and exploratory analyses. The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of these relationships.

Self-Construals and SES

Our first hypothesis was that SES positively predicts interdependent self when controlling for gender, age, employment, and recent change in social solidarity. We expected no relationship for SES and independent self. Analyses of SES indices-self-construals links were exploratory. We used hierarchical linear multiple regressions to evaluate these paths. All models met the regression assumptions.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Between Variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	29.09	9.38												
2. Solidarity Change	5.38	1.82	.05											
3. Interdependence	4.99	0.67	.09	.20*										
4. Independence	4.96	0.68	.01	.06	-.00									
5. SBIU	4.01	1.06	.09	.04	.05	-.01								
6. SCC	4.15	1.32	.14	.01	-.03	.20*	-.61**							
7. SES	2.59	0.67	-.16*	-.06	.02	.04	-.25**	.10						
8. Income	2.44	1.07	-.12	-.04	.13	-.01	-.24**	.06	.75**					
9. Subjective SES	2.69	0.75	-.05	-.06	.14	.05	-.18*	.15	.79**	.61**				
10. Education (self)	2.98	0.90	.19*	-.06	-.09	.01	.06	-.04	.39**	.11	.18*			
11. Education (parent)	2.37	1.13	-.38**	-.04	-.09	-.02	-.22**	.05	.67**	.37**	.39**	.11		
12. House value	3.06	1.05	-.16	.09	.01	.15	-.16*	.08	.74**	.46**	.61**	.17*	.44**	
13. House purchase ability	2.01	1.06	-.09	-.16*	.01	-.03	-.25**	.08	.68**	.49**	.50**	.11	.32**	.32**

Note. M = mean, SD = standard deviation, SBIU = status-based identity uncertainty, SCC = self-concept clarity, SES = socioeconomic status.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

As presented in Table 3, we regressed the control variables and SES (mean of all indices) on interdependence in two steps. The control model was overall significant. Recent change in social solidarity was the strongest and positive correlate of interdependence, while employment was a negative correlate. However, age and gender were not significantly related to interdependence. As for the predictor model, the addition of SES to this regression was not significant, suggesting overall SES (mean of all indices) is unrelated to interdependence.

Further exploring the role of SES, we conducted another regression wherein we simultaneously entered the indices of SES into the model to assess their predictability of interdependence (Table 4). Control variables were the same as mentioned. We excluded 16 cases with missing house value/affordability data. This change did not alter the results of the control model. As for the predictor model, the addition of the totality of SES indices was not significant, but when considered separately, subjective SES was significantly related to interdependence. Other SES indices showed no significant relationships.

We took the same steps to examine SES-independent self links. As shown by Table 3, neither the overall control model nor the individual effect of each control

Table 3

Regression of SES on Self-Construals

Variables	Model 1				Model 2			
	β	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>DV: Interdependent Self</i>								
Gender ^a	-.07	.11	-0.99	.32	-.07	.11	-1.00	.31
Age	.11	.00	1.42	.15	.12	.00	1.59	.11
Employment ^b	-.18	.10	-2.23	.02*	-.19	.11	-2.38	.02*
Solidarity Change	.19	.03	2.57	.01*	.20	.03	2.62	.009**
SES					.08	.08	1.01	.31
<i>R</i> ² / <i>F</i>	.07/3.26*							
$\Delta R^2/\Delta F$.00/1.03			
<i>DV: Independent Self</i>								
Gender ^a	.09	.12	1.07	.28	.09	.12	1.07	.28
Age	.03	.00	0.39	.69	.04	.00	0.53	.59
Employment ^b	-.07	.11	-0.84	.40	-.08	.11	-0.96	.33
Solidarity Change	.05	.03	0.70	.48	.06	.03	0.75	.45
SES					.06	.08	0.76	.44
<i>R</i> ² / <i>F</i>	.02/.75							
$\Delta R^2/\Delta F$.00/.00			

Note. Control variables were entered in model 1. SES (socioeconomic status) was added as the predictor in model 2. Effects are standardized. SE = standard error, DV = dependent variable.

^a Female = 1, Male = 0. ^b Employed = 1, Unemployed = 0.

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01.

variable was significant. Adding SES to the predictor model was also insignificant, showing a lack of relationship between SES and independence.

We also examined the individual effect of SES indices on independence (Table 4). After accounting for the variance of control variables (again, the difference with the control model in Table 3 was the exclusion of 16 cases with missing house value/affordability data, with no change in significance levels), none of the SES indices associated with independence.

Table 4

Regressions of Indices of SES on Self-Construals

Variables	Predictor Model			
	β	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>DV: Interdependent Self</i>				
Gender ^a	-.09	.12	-1.13	.25
Age	.05	.00	0.61	.54
Employment ^b	-.22	.12	-2.50	.01*
Solidarity Change	.25	.03	3.12	.002**
Income	.08	.05	0.76	.44
Subjective SES	.30	.07	2.51	.01*
Education (self)	-.00	.06	-0.00	.99
Education (parent)	-.16	.05	-1.68	.09
House value	-.13	.05	-1.23	.22
House purchase ability	-.04	.05	-0.43	.66
$\Delta R^2/\Delta F$.07/1.97			
<i>DV: Independent Self</i>				
Gender ^a	.12	.13	1.40	.16
Age	.05	.00	0.58	.56
Employment ^b	-.05	.13	-0.52	.60
Solidarity Change	-.01	.03	-0.13	.89
Income	-.02	.07	-0.22	.82
Subjective SES	.00	.11	0.01	.99
Education (self)	-.02	.07	-0.23	.81
Education (parents)	-.00	.06	-0.08	.93
House value	.21	.07	1.90	.06
House purchase ability	-.11	.06	-1.11	.26
$\Delta R^2/\Delta F$.04/.91			

Note. To avoid repetition, the control model was not reported. SES (socioeconomic status) indices were added as predictors. SE = standard error, DV = dependent variable.

Gender^{aa} Female = 1, Male = 0. ^b Employed = 1, Unemployed = 0.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Altogether, these results provided partial support for the first hypothesis, as subjective SES – but not other SES indices – was associated with interdependent self. Additionally, age and gender were unrelated to interdependent self, while unemployment and recent change in social solidarity predicted higher interdependence levels. Independent self-construal showed no correlation with SES or control variables.

*Self-Construals, Status-Based Identity Uncertainty (SBIU),
and Self-Concept Clarity (SCC)*

Regarding self-construals, SBIU, and SCC, we first hypothesized that the independent self-construal positively correlates with SBIU when controlling for gender, age, SES, and SCC. The second hypothesis indicated that independent self positively correlates with SCC when controlling for gender, age, SES, and SBIU. The final hypothesis was that SCC mediates the relationship between independence and SBIU, when controlling for gender, age, and SES. We did not formulate a hypothesis about the relationship of interdependence with SCC or SBIU, so the corresponding analyses were exploratory. We used hierarchical linear multiple regressions and mediation regression for our analysis. All models met the regression assumptions.

As demonstrated by Table 5, we regressed the control variables and self-construals on SBIU in two steps. The control model was overall significant, explaining 43% of the variance in SBIU, with SCC having the biggest share of variance in SBIU. SES also negatively correlated with SBIU, showing that people with lower levels of SES have higher levels of uncertainty about their status. Age had a positive association with SBIU. Gender was not a significant predictor. When we added the independent self-construal as the predictor, the model remained significant, which indicates more independent people exhibit more uncertainty in their status-based identity. In contrast, interdependent self was not significantly related to SBIU.

We took similar steps to examine the link between self-construals and SCC. As shown by Table 5, analysis confirmed the significance of the control model. SBIU negatively correlated with SCC, while age had a significant positive relationship. However, there were no significant effects of gender and SES on SCC. We then added the independent self-construal to the regression, and the model remained significant, accounting for 4% of the variance in SCC, which reveals more independent individuals have higher levels of SCC, with the link of independence with SCC being stronger than the link of independence with SBIU. However, when we changed the predictor to interdependent self-construal, the model failed to be significant, demonstrating that unlike independence, interdependent self-construal is not related to SCC.

Next, we conducted a mediation regression with covariates (age, gender, and SES) to determine if SCC is a suppressor mediator of the relationship between independence and SBIU. We followed Hayes (2013) Macro Process via bootstrapping method (5000 re-samples). According to Table 6, when we entered

Table 5

Regression of Independent and Interdependent Self-Construals on SBIU and SCC

Variables	Model 1				Model 2			
	β	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	β	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>DV: SBIU</i>								
Gender ^a	.09	.14	1.55	.12	.08	.14	1.30	.19
Age	.15	.00	2.48	.01*	.15	.00	2.50	.01*
SCC	-.60	.05	-9.81	<.001***	-.62	.05	-10.10	<.001***
SES	-.16	.09	-2.74	.006**	-.17	.09	-2.81	.005**
Independent self					.12	.09	1.97	.04*
R^2/F	.43/35.97***							
$\Delta R^2/\Delta F$.01/3.9*			
Interdependent self					.01	.09	0.23	.81
$\Delta R^2/\Delta F$.00/.05			
<i>DV: SCC</i>								
Gender ^a	.02	.18	0.35	.72	-.00	.18	-0.02	.98
Age	.19	.00	3.03	.001**	.18	.00	3.02	.002**
SES	-.03	.12	-0.49	.62	-.04	.12	-0.65	.51
SBIU	-.63	.08	-9.81	<.001***	-.63	.08	-10.10	<.001***
Independent self					.20	.11	3.32	.001**
R^2/F	.40/26.58***							
$\Delta R^2/\Delta F$.04/11**			
Interdependent self					-.02	.12	-0.32	.74
$\Delta R^2/\Delta F$.00/.11			

Note. Control variables were entered in model 1. Sociocultural selves were added as the predictor in model 2. To avoid repetition, controls were only reported once. The line within the table indicates separation of regressions. SE = standard error, DV = dependent variable, SBIU = status-based identity uncertainty, SCC = self-concept clarity. SES = socioeconomic status.

^a Female = 1, Male = 0.

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

SCC as the mediator, the direct effect and indirect effect of independent self on SBIU were both significant, but in opposite directions. The confidence intervals excluded zero. Considering the effects are of equal size but in opposite directions, the total effect is canceled out and consequently not significant, establishing a suppressor mediation (also called inconsistent mediation; MacKinnon et al., 2000).

Table 6

Suppressor Effect of SCC on the Relationship between Independence and SBIU

Paths (SBIU as Y)	Independent Self-Construal
Direct	.12* [.00, .37]
Indirect (SCC as mediator)	-.12*[-.23, -.03]
Total	-.00 [-.24, .22]

Note. SBIU = status-based identity uncertainty. SCC = self-concept clarity. First rows are standardized beta coefficients. Second rows are lower and upper confidence intervals (95%).

*CI excludes zero.

These results indicate that SCC is a significant mediator, suppressing the link between independent self-construals and SBIU.

Taken together, in support of our hypotheses, these results show a positive association of the independent self-construal with status identity uncertainty and self-concept clarity, as well as a mediatory role for self-concept clarity, while interdependence was unrelated to both status identity uncertainty and self-concept clarity.

Discussion

This study explored the associations between self-construals and SES in Iran, examined if status identity uncertainty is linked to culture-incongruent self-construal, and if self-concept clarity mitigates this link. The results partially confirmed the hypothesis of SES-interdependence link, with subjective but not objective SES measures associating with interdependence. Unemployment and increased social solidarity during Iranian protests of 2022 also related to interdependence. Furthermore, this research found support that more independent people have higher self-concept clarity, while also exhibiting higher levels of uncertainty in their status-based identity. Yet, high enough self-concept clarity suppressed the relationship between independence and status identity uncertainty. Interdependent self, however, was unrelated to these constructs. Moreover, older individuals had higher self-concept clarity but also higher status identity uncertainty. These results are further discussed.

Culture, SES, and Self-construals

As noted, Iran is not easily categorized as collectivistic or individualistic, with evidence suggesting a mixture of both themes. Accordingly, our findings reveal that participants' self-construals displayed a balanced mix of independence and interdependence, with negligible mean differences. Yet, a significant relationship with subjective SES was observed exclusively for interdependent self-construals.

The features of honor cultures may shed light on this finding. We argue that within an honor culture like Iran, social resources themselves may be a defining

component of SES. Explicitly, honor cultures often emerge in ecological contexts with limited resources and inadequate institutional protection of assets (Uskul et al., 2019). In these circumstances, individuals in close-knit groups heavily rely on each other for protection and collaboration to safeguard their resources (Sommers, 2009). Historical evidence also supports the significance of families in accessing and preserving resources in Iran (Katouzian, 2010). Consequently, we may infer that relationships are a means of accessing and preserving resources, and therefore an integral constituent of SES in honor cultures. This interpretation might explain why the subjective, but not objective, SES measure predicted interdependence, as our objective measures did not have any social characteristics.

This finding may be further clarified by the social role of independence in honor cultures, where independence is esteemed for its capacity to uphold and enhance the family's social standing. For instance, an individual's personal achievements highly elevate the family's respectability and admiration among the community (Cross et al., 2014; Uskul et al., 2023). Consequently, we may infer that despite the prevalence of independence, the broader cultural context remains interdependence-oriented, with individuals' self-definitions closely dependent on others' perceptions. This interpretation aligns with the idea that high-SES individuals tend to and are expected to reflect the dominant culture, while also reinforcing the culture due to their greater access to resources and influential positions (Miyamoto et al., 2018). Thus, the link between subjective SES and interdependence might stem from high-SES individuals embodying and perpetuating culturally valued forms of interdependence.

Another relevant point is that Iranians are often financially supported by families until marriage, even if they are employed (Abbasi-Shavazi & Bagi, 2020). This practice could result in higher subjective SES for the individuals in more interdependent families, as they can save their personal income while their living expenses are covered by parents. This expense structure is again a facet that may only be captured by the subjective measure.

Conversely, there was no relationship between any indices of SES and independent self-construal. This result aligned with the lack of relationship between self-orientation and SES in South Asian cultures (Miyamoto et al., 2018). Although Miyamoto et al. (2018) attributed this finding to the caste system in India, the same pattern emerged in Iran, where no caste system exists. Hence, the underlying reason may lie in features specific to South Asian cultures. These cultures are marked by high in-group collectivism and humane orientation paired with low assertiveness (House et al., 2004), which could lead to a cultural imperative for high-SES individuals to be other-oriented and avoid displaying independence. Overall, our finding along with Miyamoto et al. (2018) results cast doubt on the universality of resource-based perspective of SES that states high-SES individuals are more likely to exhibit independence due to their greater freedom and resources (Kraus et al., 2012).

This research also established a connection between recent changes in social solidarity and interdependent self-construal, meaning that people who experienced a stronger sense of societal interdependence during the 2022-2023 Mahsa Amini

protests were more interdependent. As those with interdependent selves are more sensitive to the context, social environment, and social influence (Cross et al., 2011), we propose that, in the context of protests where the social environment called for union and collective action, highly interdependent individuals experienced heightened social solidarity.

We also observed a link between unemployment and interdependence. One argument is that unemployment leads to more financial reliance on family, fostering interdependence. Another standpoint is that among more interdependent families that fully support their children's finances, individuals are less motivated to seek employment. Another factor could be that unemployed individuals are more likely to live in their parents' house, further promoting interdependence.

Culture-incongruent Self-Construal and Status-based Identity Uncertainty

This analysis revealed a potential link between culture-incongruent self-construal and status-based identity uncertainty, specifying that in Iran, more independent individuals are less assured of their social standing, compared to less independent ones. We may attribute this finding to cultural mismatch, implying compromised access to resources and means of achieving status stability for those deviating from the dominant interdependent self-construal. This interpretation confirms the cultural mismatch theory of inequality (Stephens & Townsend, 2015), suggesting that such mismatches may lead to feelings of status uncertainty, potentially reinforcing patterns of inequality.

Alternatively, we may infer that it is not culture-incongruence per se, but the independence itself that is directly linked to status identity uncertainty, given that independence relates to less reliance on social support systems (Goodwin & Hernandez Plaza, 2000) and thus more vulnerability to stress caused by life changes (Cohen & Hoberman, 1983), such as status change. This interpretation holds particular significance in honor cultures, because being independent in a culture wherein in-groups are essential to survival (Sommers, 2009) could exacerbate this sense of vulnerability.

Independence, while associated with status identity uncertainty, was also related to higher self-concept clarity. This finding aligns with studies indicating the self in individuals with higher self-concept clarity is less susceptible to be shaped by the social environment (Campbell, 1990). Precisely, Iranians with higher self-concept clarity appear less impacted by the cultural imperative to be interdependent and thus tend to deviate from this norm toward adapting an independent self. An opposite direction may also be assumed where independence itself may foster clearer self-concept.

Interestingly, self-concept clarity suppressed the relationship between independence and status identity uncertainty, as we found that to the extent that independence fosters self-concept clarity, status identity uncertainty could be negated. This finding is in line with the protective role of self-concept clarity against self-inconsistent feedback and anxiety-provoking information (Ibid.), highlighting that a high enough self-concept clarity may bolster assurance in one's

social standing, even if their self is different from the culturally-prescribed self-construal.

Another finding was that older individuals have more self-concept clarity but also greater status identity uncertainty, potentially reflecting how political and economic factors impact those that are in later stages of their lives and expect to have reached status stability, but their goal has been suspended by the volatile economic situation. To be specific, due to governmental influence on social mobility, social classes lack the element of continuity, giving rise to extreme cases of status change across one's life (Gahremanpour, 2003). This situation is not limited to contemporary Iran, as historical accounts reflect that due to the mechanisms of Iranian states, no long-standing social classes have existed in Iran (Katouzian, 2010). Overall, this externally-imposed instability may heighten the relevance of status identity uncertainty for older generations, as they frequently witness the devaluation of their resources amid hyperinflation periods (inflation rates in Iran moved from -0.4% to 49.7% over the past 61 years; World Data, 2022).

Limitations

This study was not without limitations. The interactions between culture, socioeconomic context, self-construal, and identity form a cyclical relationship, complicating their analysis within a predictor-outcome framework. Moreover, the correlational design of this study prevents any causal inferences. Another limitation was the absence of culture-level measures to determine collectivism or individualism predominance, leading us to rely on deductions from prior research. Furthermore, incorporating measures of culture-level and individual-level honor could have provided a more nuanced understanding of Iranian culture, as assessing SES-honor relations compared to independence and interdependence measures may have offered a more comprehensive analysis. Relatedly, self-report measures may not be an accurate assessment of individuals' traits and are more susceptible to social desirability effects in conformist cultures (Steenkamp et al., 2010).

Additionally, the sample was dominantly female and collected online, both of which could bias the results. Finally, it should be emphasized that the relationship between subjective SES and interdependence became significant only after adding the control variables to the model. These points highlight the need for replication studies using larger more representative samples.

Conclusion

This study examined the interplay between socioeconomic status, sociocultural self-construals, status-based identity uncertainty, and self-concept clarity in Iran. Findings revealed a correlation between subjective SES and interdependent self-construal but no relationship with independence, challenging the prevailing assumption that high socioeconomic status universally correlates with independence and suggesting that this link may not hold in South Asian or honor cultures. The results emphasize the importance of considering cultural specificity

when examining the SES-self relationships, highlighting how subjective perceptions of SES may be pivotal within certain cultural frameworks.

Furthermore, this research marked the first investigation of status-based identity uncertainty in relation to self-construals. We provided the novel finding that culture-incongruent individuals, particularly those with a more independent self-construal in a primarily interdependent or honor culture like Iran, may face increased status identity uncertainty. This relationship underscores the impact of cultural alignment on psychological stability, challenging notions about the independence's universal benefits of independence and suggesting that in certain cultural contexts, deviation from the norm can lead to psychological discomfort and uncertainty.

Moreover, this research contributes to the cultural mismatch theory of inequality by highlighting how cultural mismatch may relate to one's sense of instability, doubt, and uncertainty about their social standing. It encourages further examination of how individuals navigate mismatches between personal identity and cultural expectations, particularly during upward or downward social mobility.

Another theoretical contribution is identifying self-concept clarity as a mediator between the independent self-construal and status identity uncertainty. This introduces self-concept clarity as a protective factor mitigating the adverse effects of cultural incongruence on individuals' sense of status stability, providing a nuanced understanding of how internal self-concept clarity can buffer against external cultural pressures.

Methodologically, validating the status-based identity uncertainty scale in Iran lays the groundwork for more inclusive and comparative psychological research, facilitating a deeper comprehension of the universal and culture-specific dimensions of SES, self-construal, and identity.

The practical implications of our findings are manifold. Policies of reducing income inequality can benefit from recognizing how culture may perpetuate inequality, thereby devising solutions to mitigate cultural barriers to social mobility. For instance, educational policies may aim to diversify teaching methods/curricula to include varied cultural backgrounds and learning styles, e.g. assessment methods that consider both collective and independent problem-solving, emphasizing both the self-oriented and communal benefits of education to appeal to diverse goals of students, etc. Employment policies could also urge recruiters to use standardized, transparent evaluation criteria beyond traditional competence measures to include community involvement, resilience, and ability to navigate multicultural environments. Immigration and social integration policies may also benefit from implementing interventions aimed at bolstering self-concept clarity, which could offer essential support for immigrants or international students who may be grappling with uncertainty due to cultural mismatch, helping them reconcile personal identities and societal expectations.

Future research may clarify SES conceptualization and measurement in honor cultures, determining whether it is interdependence that leads to greater access to

resources, or if relationships should themselves be incorporated into SES definitions. Additionally, further studies with more robust measures of SES are needed to evaluate the link between subjective SES and interdependence. Moreover, cross-cultural and experimental investigations are required to establish whether it is an independent self-construal or a culture-incongruent self-construal that is linked to status identity uncertainty.

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