

# Motivation, Gender, and Possible Selves

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Despite the consistency with which gender differences have been found in second language motivation, little systematic research has taken place on motivation and gender to date. Permeating self-concept development, gender impacts not only current selves but also future-oriented possible selves. In construing possible selves, females tend to emphasize interdependence, meaning they invest more in interpersonal relationships and self-other interaction. Based on instruments measuring ideal language-speaking/using selves and an interdependent self-construal in a sample of 140 female and 129 male adolescents enrolled in the final year of secondary education in Sweden, and using confirmatory factor analysis, support was found for the hypothesis that gender-related variance on a measure of the ideal language-speaking/using self could be accounted for by an interdependent self-construal. In discussing the results, further avenues for exploring the impact of gender on possible selves using more contextually sensitive research designs are presented.

**Keywords** L2 motivation; gender; possible selves; self-construal; multilinguals; L3 selves

## Introduction

Reviewing the literature on gender and second language (L2) motivation, the consistency with which differences have been found on affective variables is striking. Time and again differences have been observed both in studies

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conducted in social psychological research where integrativeness is the focal construct (e.g., Bacon & Finnemann, 1992; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Phillips & Filmer-Sankey, 1993; Sung & Padilla, 1998; Williams, Burden, & Lanvers, 2002), as well as on measures of language-speaking/using self-concepts in possible selves paradigm research (Henry, 2009; Henry & Apelgren, 2008; Kim, 2009; Kim & Kim, 2011; Ryan, 2009). Results reveal an almost invariant pattern of higher scores for females, with no-difference findings extremely rare (for a review, see Henry, 2010a). This suggests deep-rooted differences in the ways in which females and males identify with target language (TL) speakers and how they envisage future situations involving interpersonal communication. As Dörnyei and Csizér (2002; see also Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005) make clear, despite the consistency of the findings, little systematic research on the effects of gender on L2 motivation has taken place. Further, when explanations are offered, they tend to focus on the effects of processes of gender socialization and gender stereotyping on language attitudes (see, e.g., Kissau, 2006a, 2006b; Kissau & Turnbull, 2010; Sung & Padilla, 1998).

For researchers working in the possible selves paradigm (Dörnyei, 2009a), the role of gender needs to be more closely considered. Gender is a pervasive social and cognitive construct that, across the lifespan, permeates self-concept development (Cole et al., 2001). Impacting not just on the construction of self-concepts, it also exerts an influence on the ways in which they are construed (Cross & Madson, 1997). Not only do females and males construe current self-concepts differently, with females placing a greater emphasis on relationships and self-other interaction, but this difference also extends to the ways in which future-oriented self-concepts are construed (Knox, 2006). The greater concern for interpersonal interaction characteristic of females' self-concept construals is likely to have an impact on the ideal language-speaking/using selves they develop. Specifically, our argument is that females' ideal L2 selves are motivationally more powerful because, in envisioning situations involving future language use, imagined communication with TL-speaking interlocutors is likely to be more vivid and elaborate. Accordingly, the purpose of this article is to consider whether differences in self-construal might explain a proportion of any gender-related variation in ideal language-speaking/using selves.

## Literature Review

In the sections that follow, we outline a number of theories that can be used to understand gender divergences in language-speaking/using self-concepts. We

begin by discussing gender differences in the self-concept, and proposals of a fundamental difference in the ways in which self-concepts are construed, where for females establishing and maintaining relationships with others is of central importance (Cross & Madson, 1997). We then move on to explain how this important divergence also extends to possible selves (Knox, 2006) and how it can impact on ideal language-speaking/using selves.

### **The Role of Gender in the Construction and Construal of Self-Concepts**

The first attempt to theoretically explain differences in the identities of females and males can be found in Bakan's (1966) agency/communion theory where gender differences are related to degrees of agency. While men are regarded as inherently disposed to an egotistic, autonomous, and *agentic* centering of the self, manifested, for example, in the display of greater instrumentality and self-assertion, women are theorized as having an inherent disposition toward a social and *communal* centering that finds expression in the desire to develop and maintain relationships. Recognizing the traits predicted by agency/communion theory, but rejecting its biological essentialism, subsequent scholars (Gilligan, 1982; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Miller, 1986) have argued that while for men the social construction of the self privileges separation and uniqueness, women's selves are defined by greater emotional involvement with others.

Focusing on self-construal, the way in which one sees oneself in relation to others, Markus and Kitayama (1991) identified two fundamentally different construal types. While an *independent* self-construal stems from the notion of an inherent separateness from other individuals, an *interdependent* self-construal arises from a belief of being embedded in a larger social whole. In the interdependent construal type representations of relations with others form a composite part of the self while for the independent type self-other relationships lack a self-defining function. For individuals who construe the self-concept primarily in *independent* terms, normative goals involve discovering and expressing ways that emphasize uniqueness and separation from others. For those with an *interdependent* self-construal, however, behavior is directed more toward the formation and maintenance of social relationships. These construal differences are important because they impact on cognition, motivation, and behavior. Thus, in situations where gender-appropriate responses are anticipated, self-construal functions as a means of channeling behavior in norm-congruent directions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; see also Cross & Madson, 1997).

Markus and Kitayama's (1991) line of reasoning was developed further by Cross and Madson (1997), who argued that while the independent self-construal type is generally truer for men, the relationally oriented interdependent self-construal type is more characteristic of women. These gender-related differences are nowhere more evident than in interpersonal interaction. While people with an independent self-construal tend to be less conscious of and less responsive to the thoughts and emotions of those around them, for those with an interdependent construal of the self, social relations are characterized by attentiveness, responsiveness, assumptions of reciprocation, and beliefs in the existence of a mutual desire to maintain the relationship (Cross & Madson, 1997).

### **Self-Construal and Possible Selves**

Possible selves, the lynchpins of Dörnyei's (2005, 2009a) L2 Motivational Self System, are **domain-specific**, situationally conditioned representations of the self in future states (Markus & Nurius, 1986). They encapsulate ideas of what the individual *would like* to become (the ideal self), what they are *afraid of* becoming (the feared self), as well as what they *might* become (a most likely or default outcome) (Markus & Nurius, 1986). As Dörnyei (2009a) explained, Markus and Nurius's notion of possible selves is centered on the ways in which people conceptualize yet to be realized potential and thus involves a complex interplay of current and imaginative self-identities.

As with current here-and-now selves, the role and effects of gender will be no less salient for possible selves (Anthis, Dunkel, & Anderson, 2004). Just like current selves, the possible selves females and males develop differ along gender lines, with differences in construal type pertaining equally to possible selves (Knox, 2006). As a result of their greater concern with social relationships, the possible selves females develop are, for example, less likely to be formulated through introspection and self-appraisal, and more in terms of the understanding of others' views of the self. Representations of relations with others feature more prominently in females' possible selves, and they are more highly characterized by interpersonal and relational qualities. Females' possible selves are also more likely to be commensurate with the performance of others in the social environment and are more likely to incorporate the expectations others have for them (Knox, 2006).

In empirical research Segal, DeMeis, Wood, and Smith (2001) found that, when projecting into the future, women were more concerned with interpersonal issues and more likely to imagine situations involving relationships with others. When writing personal narratives about anticipated futures, women used more

words to describe relationships, expressed greater concern with interpersonal interaction, and devoted more space to communal themes. In studies examining gender differences in the possible selves of adolescents, females' academic possible selves have been found to include a pronounced interpersonal element (Kemmelmeyer & Oyserman, 2001), while their feared selves were more strongly characterized by self-other relationships (Anthis et al., 2004; Knox, Funk, Elliott, & Greene Bush, 2000; Shepard & Marshall, 1999).

As regards the interdependent construal type more characteristic of women (Knox, 2006), two important points need to be made. First, it has been suggested that gender differences may also exist within interdependence (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Gabriel & Gardner, 1999). Men, it is argued, may have higher levels of collective interdependence, where group membership—for example, of business organizations, sports teams, and student fraternities—is emphasized. Consequently, they may be more attuned to information pertaining to other in-group members and more motivated to behave in ways that support such people. Women, on the other hand, may emphasize relational interdependence more highly, meaning that interpersonal relationships will have greater importance. Thus, women may be more likely to have deeper emotional experiences involving relationships, be better attuned to the relationships of others, and be more motivated to behave in ways that maintain interpersonal relationships (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999).

The second point to be noted is that, in developing the idea of distinct construal types, both Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Cross and Madson (1997) were primarily concerned with close relationships. However, Cross and Madson (1997) stressed that this does not mean that in situations involving impersonal relationships the effects of differing self-construals will not also be at play. Indeed, in such situations people with interdependent self-construals are likely to be better attuned to the individual(s) with whom they interact and have a greater interest in fostering interaction in that they are better equipped to establish, develop, and maintain social relationships.

### **The Impact of an Interdependent Self-Construal on Ideal Language-Speaking/Using Selves**

Gender differences in the construal of possible selves may be of particular salience for ideal language-speaking/using selves. In the development of an ideal language-speaking/using self, the learner projects into the future, imagining her-/himself in situations using the TL (Dörnyei, 2009a). Although the language use envisaged might occur in different contexts (taking place, for example, when traveling, on holiday, or at work), and take different forms

(either face-to-face or via digital media), communication with TL-speaking interlocutors is likely always to be a prominent feature. In creating these images, the relational concerns characteristic of females' construals of possible selves are likely to play an important role. Because females tend to construe possible selves in an interpersonal manner (Knox, 2006), the images of future TL communication they generate are likely to be more elaborate, more vivid, more varied, and phenomenologically more robust. Moreover, because females are more sensitive to interaction within relationships, are generally better attuned to the others with whom they are communicating, and have a greater interest in developing and maintaining relationships (Cross & Madson, 1997), the images of future self-other TL communication they create are more likely to incorporate the expectations of imagined interlocutors. Reciprocated social interaction—the very essence of TL learning goals—is likely therefore to be representationally more prominent in the ideal language-speaking/using selves generated by females than by males.

### The Present Study: Purpose and Hypothesis

Over the years a consistent pattern in favor of females has been found on affective variables (Henry, 2010a; see also Kissau & Turnbull, 2010). However, relative to its importance, the systematic investigation of gender differences in L2 motivation has received little attention (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2002) and explanations for observed phenomena rarely extend beyond the identification of the effects of social conditioning and the stereotyping of languages as a girls' subject (e.g., Kissau, 2006a, 2006b; Sung & Padilla, 1998). The shift to an identity-based approach to motivation means that the effects of gender require more careful consideration. At the same time it brings with it new possibilities for investigating the impact of gender on L2 motivation, with differences in the ways in which self-concepts are construed providing a particularly promising line of enquiry.

Drawing on Knox's (2006) extension of theories of self-construal type to possible selves, our aim is therefore to consider whether an interdependent self-construal emphasizing a connectedness with others can provide a way of understanding gender-related divergences in ideal language-speaking/using selves. Specifically, the purpose of our study is to test the hypothesis that a proportion of any gender-related variance on a measure of the ideal language-speaking/using self can be accounted for by an interdependent self-construal.

## Method

### Setting

The setting in which the hypothesis was tested is one of the most demanding imaginable. As recent international indexes have shown, levels of gender-equality are extremely high in Sweden. For example, in the Gender Inequality Index section of the United Nations Human Development Index (UN HDI; United Nations Human Development Programme, 2011), Sweden was ranked first among the 187 participant nations. Compared to many other Western countries, boundaries between traditional gender roles and occupations are less rigid in Sweden, and young women and men grow up with broadly similar expectations and aspirations for their futures. As, for example, Nordenmark (2011, October 27) has demonstrated, if current trends continue, in the decade 2020–2030 women and men will spend equal amounts of time in paid employment as well as equal time in domestic roles (including child raising). By contrast, social conditions in the United States, where the research reported on in the literature review has been carried out, are considerably different; on the same UN HDI Gender Inequality Index the United States was ranked in 47th place. Thus the interdependency characteristic of females' self-concept construals may be less pronounced in a Swedish sample such as the present one than in previous U.S. samples.

Not only is the setting challenging with regard to interdependency in self-construal, but it also presents a challenge in terms of the position of English. In the previous two decades the status of English has undergone considerable changes in Sweden as in many other countries. From, a generation ago, being a foreign language where production (speaking and writing) largely took place in school, English is now part of a basic social literacy and a medium of expression used extensively in everyday life, particularly among young people. As Dörnyei and his colleagues (Dörnyei, Csizér, & Németh, 2006; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011) have explained, English's status as a foreign language is, in many parts of the world, being called into question and it is in the process of being remolded into a basic educational priority alongside first language literacy and mathematics. In Sweden not only do young people spend ever-increasing amounts of time in English-language environments outside the classroom (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012; Swedish Media Council, 2010), but it is also a medium in which core identities are created (Henry, 2013). Thus the gender differences in the affective domain of L2 motivation found in previous studies may not be as apparent in a sample of young people from Sweden.

In sum, there is reason to believe that gender matters in the construal of L2 selves—even in Sweden, where previous studies have indeed found

gender differences in students' ideal L2 English selves (Henry, 2009; Henry & Apelgren, 2008). On the other hand, Sweden offers a particularly challenging ground to test our hypothesis not only because gender roles are among the most egalitarian known in Western countries, but also because the use of English among young people in Sweden is changing at a rapid rate. For this reason we decided to survey a sample of young people learning both English as an L2 and an additional foreign language, that is, a third language (L3). Learning two foreign languages is the norm in Sweden and a majority of students will graduate from secondary school with a passing grade in English and either French, German, or Spanish (Henry, 2012). Thus, the hypothesis was tested both for English, the first foreign language learnt in school in Sweden, and for students' second foreign language, namely French, German, or Spanish. This means that, in ascertaining whether a proportion of gender-related variance could be accounted for by an interdependent self-construal, the hypothesis is tested for both the ideal L2 (English-speaking/using) self, and the ideal L3 (French-/German-/Spanish-speaking/using) self. Our assumption is thus that the multilingual learner has distinctly different ideal language-speaking/using selves for each language being learnt (Henry, 2010b, 2011).

## **Participants**

The participants were 271 students (140 females and 129 males, with data missing for two students) enrolled in the final year of secondary education (average age 15½) at six schools in a medium-sized industrial town in the west of Sweden. All were studying L2 English. As an L3, 33 students (12.2%, females = 19, males = 14) were studying French, 96 students (35.8%, females = 52, males = 44) were studying German, and 136 students (50.6%, females = 68, males = 68) were studying Spanish. Data on the L3 studied were missing for 4 students (1.5%), one of them a female. Although the distribution of students across the three languages reflects national trends, the number of students learning French is somewhat lower than national averages, while the number studying German is somewhat higher (Tholin & Lindqvist, 2009). The sample represents the total population of students studying two languages at the six schools.

## **Instruments**

To test our hypothesis, two instruments were used. The first was a measure of interdependent self-construal and the second of ideal language-speaking/using selves. Both employed identical 5-point Likert scales.

### *Interdependent Self-Construal*

To measure self-construal type, a number of self-report instruments have been used (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Leung & Kim, 1997; Singelis, 1994). Among these the Singelis Self-Construal Scale (SSCS) is the instrument most frequently employed, often in cross-cultural comparisons of self-construal (Levine et al., 2003). It has on occasion also been used in examinations of gender differences in monocultural samples (e.g., Reid, 2004). Items collapse into orthogonal subscales of independent (12 items) and interdependent (12 items) self-construals.<sup>1</sup> While Gudykunst and Lee (2003) point to a range of studies using the scale that have delivered theoretically consistent findings, Levine et al. (2003) argue that, in the form of two orthogonal constructs, the SSCS lacks construct validity. In that there is little to be gained theoretically by the specification of orthogonality, Levine et al. suggest therefore that the independent/interdependent constructs ought not to be regarded as distinct. In the present study, the interdependent scale of the SSCS is used as a free-standing measure.

With regard to relational/collective aspects of interdependence (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999), the SSCS interdependent scale is particularly well-suited for the purposes of the current study in that it focuses on relational aspects. Not only is it directed to relationships within groups and with other group members, but it also lacks the type of items measuring group affiliation and group membership normally contained in measures of collective interdependence (see, e.g., Cross et al., 2000).<sup>2</sup>

The scale items, together with the respective variable codes used in the analyses, the descriptive statistics, and the reliability (Cronbach's alpha) scores, are set out in Table S1 on the Supporting Information online. In the remainder of the article, we refer to the SSCS as the Interdependent Self-Construal scale, for ease of reading.

### *The Ideal Language-Speaking/Using Self*

To measure ideal language-speaking/using selves, the Ideal L2 Self scale developed by Ryan (2009) was used. Ryan reports the scale as having high internal reliability ( $\alpha = 0.85$ ) and strong positive correlations both with integrativeness ( $r = 0.59$ ) and intended learning effort ( $r = 0.77$ ). In the current study, two versions of the scale were used; one measuring the Ideal L2 (English) self and the other measuring the Ideal L3 (French/German/Spanish) self. The scale items for the Ideal L2 Self scale, together with the respective variable codes, descriptive statistics, and reliability (Cronbach's alpha) scores, are set out in

Table S2 in the Supporting Information online. Similar data for the Ideal L3 Self scale are provided in Table S3 also there.

### **Translation, Piloting, and Procedure**

The questionnaires were administered in the participants' L1. To the best of our knowledge, neither the SSCS (Singelis, 1994) nor Ryan's (2009) Ideal L2 Self scale have previously been translated into Swedish. Thus, in accordance with the method described by Brislin, Lonner, and Thorndike (1973), where a target language version is translated back into the source language as a means of verification, translations and back-translations of the instruments were carried out.

Piloting of the questionnaires was carried out in two stages. In the first stage a questionnaire containing the translated scales was administered to a class of 18 similarly-aged students not participating in the survey. In the second stage the questionnaire was then administered to five similarly aged students from another class also not participating in the survey. Here the first author went through the questionnaire item-by-item inviting the students to think aloud as they responded. After both sessions slight modifications to the wording of some items were made.

The final versions of the questionnaires comprising the Interdependent Self-Construal scale, the Ideal L2 Self scale, and the Ideal L3 Self scale were administered personally in the six schools by the first author in April 2011. The administrations took place either in the students' classrooms (three schools), or in the schools' assembly halls (three schools). On each occasion the first author was assisted by research colleagues from the university. Class teachers were always present during the administrations.

## **Results**

### **Missing Data and Reliability Measurements**

The total amount of internal missing data for the three scales (Interdependent Self-Construal scale, Ideal L2 Self scale, and Ideal L3 Self scale) were 15 scores distributed across the totality of items. Although the amount of missing variables was very small, in order to include all of the collected information, the missing data modeling procedure implemented in the Mplus program was used (Muthén, Kaplan, & Hollis, 1987). This procedure yields unbiased estimates under relatively moderate assumptions, which in the current study are fully satisfied (Allison, 2003; Schafer & Graham, 2002).

For each instrument Cronbach's alpha measures of internal consistency were obtained (see Tables S1, S2, and S3 in the Supporting Information online). The alpha score for the Singelis Interdependent Self-Construal scale is somewhat below  $\alpha = 0.70$ , the cutoff point normally regarded as indicating reliability. However, because confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) uses latent variables which are free from sources of influence irrelevant to the abstract concept intended to be captured, the problem associated with a low alpha estimate does not arise, provided that the model fit is acceptable (Brown, 2006).

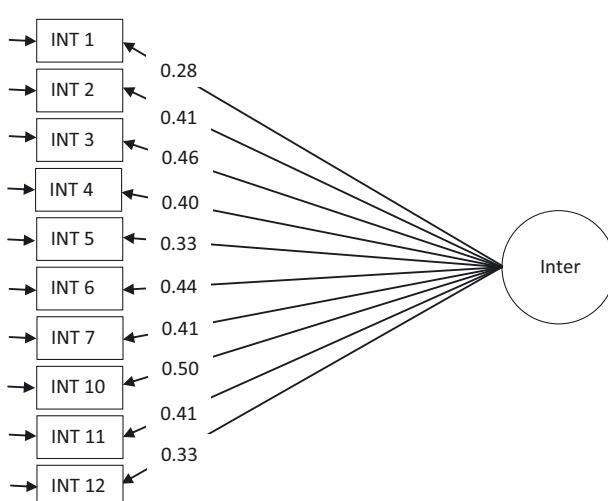
### Testing for Gender Differences

As a part of the model construction, all three instruments were tested for gender differences. Although significant gender differences were found for the Interdependent Scale and the Ideal L3 Self scale, no difference was found on the Ideal L2 Self scale. For this reason the Ideal L2 Self scale was not used in the construction of a model to test the hypothesis and all results reported on in the sections that follow are for the Interdependent Scale and the Ideal L3 Self scale.

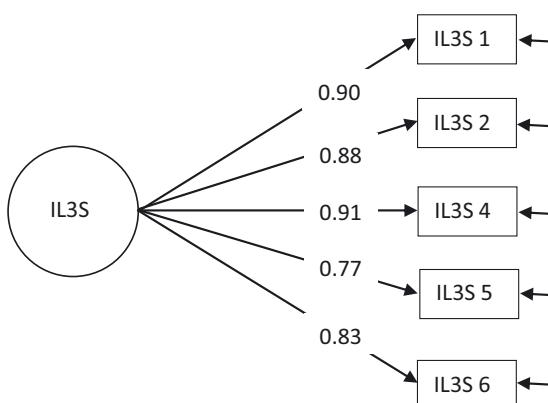
### Main Results: Model Construction

In the CFA modeling, the Interdependent Self-Construal scale (Inter), the Ideal L3 Self scale (IL3S), and gender (GEN) formed the three variables. Factor analysis was carried out using Mplus, version 5 (Muthén & Muthén, 2009) under the STREAMS (Gustafsson & Stahl, 2005) environment. The modeling took place in four stages. First, Inter and IL3S were tested to confirm the factor loadings and to ascertain the acceptability of the model fit. These models are referred to, respectively, as Model A1 and Model B1 (shown in Figures 1 and 2). In a second stage, each of these single-factor models was separately extended by the addition of GEN to create Model A2 and Model B2 (not shown in this article). In the third stage, a new model, Model C1, was created by combining models A1 and B1 (also not shown). Finally this too was extended to include GEN in Model C2 (shown in Figure 3). In what follows, we provide details on how each stage of the model construction proceeded.

The analysis began in stage one by testing the factor loadings and model fit for Inter (Model A1) and IL3S (Model B1) (see Figures 1 and 2). As measures of model fit, the  $\chi^2$  goodness-of-fit test, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) assessments were used. The RMSEA is strongly recommended as a tool when evaluating model fit since it takes account of both the number of observations and the number of free parameters. An acceptable model fit is indicated by values of less than 0.08, while values of less than 0.05 imply a

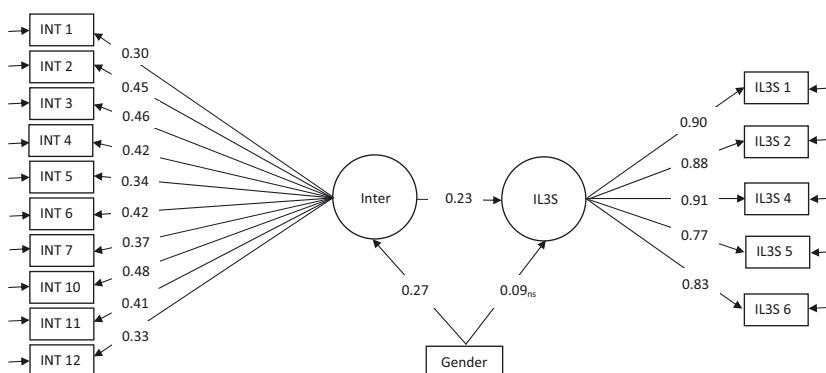


**Figure 1** The one-factor model containing 10 of the 12 items on the Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (Model A1).



**Figure 2** The one-factor model containing five of the six items on the Ideal L3 Self Scale (Model B1).

good model fit. SRMR can range from 0 to 1, where 0 is indicative of perfect model fit and values of 0.08 or smaller indicate an acceptable model fit (Brown, 2006). When evaluating model fit, the reasonableness of parameter estimates was also attended to.



**Figure 3** The full structural model (Model C2).

In Model A1 significant factor loadings were obtained for all 12 items on Inter, with the exception of INT 8 (i.e., item 8 on the Inter scale), which was not significant. This item was therefore removed. Further, because an unsatisfactory model fit was obtained for a model including INT 9, this too was removed. In the pilot, the original item for INT 9 (*It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group*) had proved problematic in that the use of the definite form caused students to ask about the group referred to (cf. “my” group [INT 2], “the group I am in” [INT 6], “a group” [INT 10], and “group members” [INT 12], where relative and personal pronouns and indefinite forms are used in relation to groups and group membership). To get around this problem, in the final questionnaire we rephrased the item to read (directly translated) (*If I am in a group I think it is important to respect the group’s decisions*). However, the departure from the format of the other items by having a conditional at the beginning may be responsible for reducing the goodness of fit. The new model containing the remaining 10 items produced an acceptable goodness of fit (see Table 1). The standardized factor loadings for Model A1 ranged from 0.28 to 0.50 and all were significant. Model A1 is set out in Figure 1.

In Model B1 all of the factor loadings on IL3S were significant. Here, though, it was found that IL3S 3 and IL3S 5 (i.e., items 3 and 5 on the IL3S scale) together made the model bidimensional. However, when either was removed, unidimensionality was achieved. For this reason IL3S 3, that with the lowest factor loading, was removed. A good goodness of fit was achieved (see Table 1). The standardized factor loadings ranged from 0.77 to 0.91, all of which were significant. Model B1 is set out in Figure 2.

**Table 1** Goodness of fit indices for Models A–C

Model	$\chi^2$ value	Df	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI
A1	79.78	35	0.07	0.06	0.77
A2	100.82	44	0.07	0.06	0.74
B1	5.17	5	0.01	0.01	1.00
B2	11.88	9	0.04	0.02	1.00
C1	165.18	89	0.06	0.06	0.94
C2	191.93	102	0.06	0.06	0.93

In the next stage of model construction, stage two, both Model A1 and Model B1 were extended by including gender. When Model A1 was extended to form Model A2 by adding GEN, the factor loadings for the relations on the individual items changed only marginally. The variance in Inter accounted for by GEN was 7.2%. The factor loading for GEN on Inter was 0.27 and the effect size, calculated in accordance with the method outlined by Bobko, Roth, and Bobko (2001), is indicative of a substantial difference:  $d = 0.56$ .

Similarly Model B1 was extended by including GEN to form Model B2. Even in this new model the factor loadings did not change. The variance in IL3S accounted for by GEN was 2.3%. The factor loading for GEN on IL3S was 0.15 and the effect size was  $d = 0.31$ , which is indicative of a substantial difference. Goodness-of-fit data are provided in Table 1.

In stage three, the first step was to combine Model A1 and Model B1, by a relation from Inter to IL3S, to form Model C1. Here a significant factor loading with an estimate of 0.25 between the two latent variables emerged.

Finally, in stage four, Model C1 was further extended by including GEN to form Model C2 (Figure 3). When GEN was added a significant proportion of the gender difference in IL3S was explained by the gender difference in Inter, in that the direct effect of GEN on IL3S (cf. Model B2) is reduced to a nonsignificant level while the effect of GEN on Inter remains unchanged 0.27;  $d = 0.55$  (cf. Model A2). The results indicate thus that the effect of GEN on IL3S is mediated via Inter. A full correlation matrix for Model C2 is provided in Table S4 in the Supporting Information online.

### Model Construction for Separate Languages

As a means of ascertaining whether the impact of gender on IL3S mediated via Inter was language-invariant, the very final stage of our analyses involved running the exact same four-stage procedures as described above for subgroups of students studying first Spanish ( $n = 136$ ; f = 68, m = 68) and then German

( $n = 96$ ;  $f = 52$ ,  $m = 44$ ). (For the group of students learning French ( $n = 33$ ;  $f = 19$ ,  $m = 14$ ) carrying out similar CFA procedures was felt not to be meaningful due to the low numbers of students in relation to the number of included parameters.) In both cases the patterns for the gender relationships found above were replicated across all of the six models (A1, A2; B1, B2; C1, C2) separately constructed for each language (i.e., L3 Spanish and L3 German).

## Discussion

### Lack of Gender Differences in the Ideal L2 Self

The lack of gender differences on the Ideal L2 English Self scale was not entirely unexpected. Although in previous studies gender differences have been found in Swedish students' ideal L2 English selves (Henry, 2009; Henry & Apelgren, 2008), the use of English among young people in Sweden is changing at a rapid rate. Ever-increasingly acquired outside of school (Olsson, 2011; Sundqvist, 2009), it is highly implicated in the cultural practices of young people (Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2012) and a non dissociable part of the environments in which identities are created (Henry, 2013). Evidence of the changing social/educational status of English in Sweden can, for example, be seen in the decreasing predictive power for subsequent educational achievement of grades in English which have become substantially weaker predictors than school-based subjects such as Swedish and mathematics (Thorsen, 2012; Thorsen & Cliffordson, 2012). Thus, the absence of a gender difference can be seen as an indication that, in the process of being reframed as a basic must-have social and educational skill, English is losing its foreign language status (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011).

Another reason why gender differences were not found for the Ideal L2 English Self could be related to the composition of the scale. Both IL2S 1 (*The things I want to do in the future require me to speak English*) and IL2S 2 (*Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself being able to use English*) focus on the future utility of English. These aspects of a future identity are likely to be less internalized than, for example, IL2S 5 (*I can imagine speaking English with international friends*). Thus, because the Ideal L2 Self scale encompasses dimensions of professional success, this could explain why, for L2 English, but not for L3 French, German, and Spanish, a gender difference did not emerge. For these languages future professional success encapsulated, for example, in IL3S 1 (*The things I want to do in the future require me*

*(to speak French/German/Spanish)* might be part of a much more distinctly personal identity project—not everyone is expected to be proficient in a second foreign language (see Henry, 2011)—and therefore more internalized.

### Gender Differences in the Ideal L3 Self

The finding of gender differences on the Ideal L3 Self scale accords well with the extant research (Henry, 2009; Kim, 2009; Ryan, 2009). In contrast to English, languages such as French, German, and Spanish are rarely encountered outside the classroom. Indeed these languages may share greater similarities with English in other contemporary contexts such as Japan and South Korea, settings where the societal prominence of English is less marked, where it can be regarded as more of a foreign language and where gender differences have been found (Kim, 2009; Kim & Kim, 2011; Ryan, 2009). Further, our finding supports those of previous studies from Sweden where, in comparison to English, gender differences for French, German, and Spanish have been found to be greater (Henry, 2009; Henry, 2012; Henry & Apelgren, 2008).

### The Mediating Effect of an Interdependent Construal

The most important finding we offer in this study is that the impact of gender on the Ideal L3 Self scale was mediated by an interdependent self-construal. As previous research has shown, representations of relations with others feature more prominently in females' possible selves and their possible selves are more highly characterized by interpersonal and relational qualities (Knox, 2006). When projecting into the future, females are more likely to imagine themselves involved in relationships with others and in situations involving interpersonal interaction (Anthis et al., 2004; Cross & Madson, 1997; Kemmelmeir & Oyserman, 2001; Knox, 2006; Knox et al., 2000; Segal et al., 2001; Shepard & Marshall, 1999). As the result here indicates, these differences appear to have implications for foreign language learning motivation. In the ideal language-speaking/using selves that learners develop, communication with TL-speaking interlocutors is likely to be a prominent feature. Because females are more likely to construe possible selves in relational terms where self-other interaction and interpersonal concerns are central, the ideal language-speaking/using selves they develop will be more likely to feature imagined instances of reciprocated interaction with TL-speakers. As a consequence, these selves are likely to be visually more elaborate and phenomenologically more robust (cf. Segal et al., 2001).

The magnitude of the gender effect, mediated as we have shown via an interdependent self-construal, is rather modest. It is, however, important to

bear in mind that the size of this effect will, of course, be a function of the social and cultural context in which the research is carried out. Thus, the effect found here needs to be seen in the context of this particular research setting. Were, for example, the study to be repeated in settings less gender-egalitarian than Sweden, the gender effect might well be higher.

### **Limitations of the Present Study**

One limitation of our study is that a single 5-item instrument was used to measure the affective dimension of L2 motivation. In future research, particularly when CFA and structural equation modeling techniques are used, it would be an advantage to employ more elaborated batteries of items. Moreover, in that the scales used here contained items at varying levels of internalization, measures that separately tap high-internalized, more affective aspects of ideal language-speaking/using selves (e.g., *I often imagine myself as someone who is able to speak English*) and low-internalized, that is, more instrumental aspects (e.g., *Whenever I think of my future career, I imagine myself being able to use English*), would be of value.

Another limitation relates to the subgroups of L3 learners in the sample. While the results of the CFA modeling for the conglomeration of the three L3 languages (French, German, and Spanish) were confirmed by separate modeling procedures for German and for Spanish, unfortunately, due to the low numbers of students in relation to the included parameters, it was not possible to replicate the procedure for the group learning French. Thus, in any future study where more than one language is in focus, it is important to ensure that all language subgroups are of a size sufficient to permit the statistical procedures to be carried out.

Finally, two points concerning measurement reliability should be noted. First, the fit indexes for Models A1 and A2 were not especially good. They are nevertheless above the cutoff point for what is generally regarded as acceptable (Brown, 2006). Second, although the reliability score for the Inter scale was slightly below the 0.70 benchmark, this is mitigated in that the modeling carried out employs latent variables (Brown, 2006).

### **The Limitations of a Self-Construal Approach: Directions for Future Research**

The instruments used in this study measure group-level averages largely free of any contextual influence. In actual processes of language learning, in addition to the effects of self-construal, other gender-related factors are also likely to have an impact on students' ideal language-speaking/using selves.

Generally, people tend to experience well-being and other social and personal benefits when they feel that their behavior converges with gender-normative expectations. Thus, in social situations, females and males tend to endorse and engage in gender-role-congruent behavior and eschew role-incongruent behavior (Diekman & Eagly, 2008). Just as with different current self-concepts, future-oriented possible selves are also affected by patterns of participation in role-congruent behaviors (Brown & Diekman, 2010). In the social interactions that take place in the language classroom, preferences for behaviors perceived as congruent with appropriate gender-roles are therefore likely to have an impact on the student's ideal language-speaking/using self. Of course this impact will vary, the extent a function both of the genderedness of the learning environment at particular points in time and the types of social interaction engaged in. However, in that foreign language classrooms tend often to be environments where gender is highly salient (Carr & Pauwels, 2006), the influence on ideal language-speaking/using selves may be pervasive.

With a similar focus on context, Oyserman and her colleagues (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012; Oyserman, 2007) argue that future identities (a term Oyserman prefers to possible selves) will be affected by people's interpretations of their social and physical worlds as viewed through "identity-congruent" lenses (Oyserman & Destin, 2010, p. 1003). Evaluations are made as to the identity-congruence of any particular activity. If an activity is interpreted as identity-congruent, greater effort will therefore be expended; difficulties will be seen as challenging, but not impossible. If, though, an activity is interpreted as identity-incongruent, motivated behavior is likely to be less intense, with difficulties indicating that the pursuit of the activity might be unrewarding. Interpretations of this type occur all the time, especially in social contexts such as school where gender is particularly salient (Elmore & Oyserman, 2012; Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Because the learning activities in many language classrooms can often seem more appealing to girls (Callaghan, 1998; Carr & Pauwels, 2006), this means that in many language learning settings, students' ideal language-speaking/using selves are likely to become progressively aligned in directions perceived to be gender-identity congruent.

In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which ideal language-speaking/using selves are likely to differ along gender lines, future research needs therefore to be directed to effects arising from the learning experience. Here the challenge is to develop methodologies that allow the researcher to understand how social interaction in the language classroom and perceptions about the appropriateness of participation in learning activities impact on the perceptions of future self-other TL interaction that form

the phenomenological core of the ideal language-speaking/using self. In this respect, one potentially useful qualitative approach would be to engage students in talking through video-recorded sequences of classroom interaction and processes of engagement in learning activities as a means of accessing ways in which, in the working self-concept (Henry, 2011; Markus & Nurius, 1986), ideal language-speaking/using selves might be affected by events in the surrounding environment.

Further, in the logic of applying identity congruity theories to ideal language-speaking/using selves, there may be specific points in time where the effects of gender-normative behavior patterns are particularly evident (Brown & Diekman, 2010). Thus, it would be of value to study ideal language-speaking/using selves at critical junctures such as, for example, shifts from one period of adolescence to another, or transitions from one school-level to the next. Here, mixed-methods studies (Dörnyei, 2007) and Dynamic Systems Theory-inspired studies (Dörnyei, 2009b; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008) could provide useful ways of understanding the temporally differential impact of gender-role perceptions on ideal language-speaking/using selves.

## Conclusion

In that the ideal language-speaking/using selves developed by females and males are likely to differ in qualitatively important ways, proper account of these effects needs to be taken in L2 motivation research adopting a possible selves approach. This study shows that gender-related variance in ideal language-speaking selves can be accounted for by differences in self-construal. Because females tend to have a greater concern with interpersonal interaction and a greater interest in investing in self-other relationships, it may be easier for them to envision themselves communicating and interacting with TL-speaking others in future situations. Thus, because the ideal language-speaking/using selves they develop are more likely to include representations of reciprocated interaction with TL-speaking others, this means that these representations are likely to be visually more elaborate and phenomenologically more robust.

If supported by future research from other sociocultural contexts, this finding can help in shedding light on a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. In addition to self-construal, other gender-related factors are also likely to have an impact on ideal language-speaking/using selves. Thus in future research, focus needs to be directed to the ways in which, in classroom environments, perceptions about the gender-appropriateness of learning behaviors can affect

ideal selves. Here, role and identity congruity theories (Brown & Diekman, 2010; Oyserman, 2007) have important roles to play. Even though recently developed, the research traditions upon which these theories draw are nevertheless well-established, meaning that for L2 motivation researchers there is a large knowledge base that can inform the refinement of theoretical proposals and the development of methodologies needed for a more comprehensive understanding of gender differences.

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## Notes

- 1 Although the Singelis Self-Construal Scale (SSCS) (Singelis, 1994) is the instrument most frequently employed, the Relational-Interdependent Self-Construal scale (RISC) (Cross et al., 2000) is specifically designed to examine the function of gender in self-construal. However, because of validity problems (Bresnahan, Levine, & Chiu, 2004; Bresnahan et al., 2005) we decided against using it in the current study.
- 2 It is additionally worth noting that when the instrument was piloted students mostly talked about the groups anticipated by the questionnaire items in terms of classroom/school constellations and/or loose collections of friends, as opposed to the more rigid/exclusive types of in-groups—sports clubs, student fraternities, and business organizations—associated with collective interdependence (Gabriel & Gardner, 1999).

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## Supporting Information

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website:

**Table S1.** Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha for the Interdependent Self-Construal Scale.

**Table S2.** Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha for the Ideal L2 Self Scale.

**Table S3.** Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha for the Ideal L3 Self Scale.

**Table S4.** Pearson correlations (2-tailed) for the full structural model (Model C2) containing the Interdependent Self-Construal Scale, the Ideal L3 Self Scale, and Gender.