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Familial Self as a Potent Source of Affirmation: Evidence From China

Huajian Cai[1], Constantine Sedikides[2], and Lixin Jiang[3]

Abstract

Does affirmation of familial self have a distinct buffering function compared to affirmation of close other (friend, partner) self or individual self? We addressed this question in an East-Asian culture (China) that places particularly high value on familial self. Familial self-affirmation (compared to other forms of self-affirmation as well as low affirmation) curtailed the mortality salience–induced intolerance to birth-control policy (Experiment 1), reduced female participants' performance detriments—due to stereotype threat—on mental rotation (Experiment 2), and diminished the disadvantageous influence of negative feedback on further interest in information about one's weaknesses (Experiment 3). Close other self-affirmation, devoid of family context, was no more potent than individual self-affirmation or low affirmation. The findings underscore the utility of distinguishing among different sources of self-affirmation, highlight the relevance of familial self-affirmation to self-affirmation theory, and call for research testing the germaneness of familial self (and, more generally, the construct of family) in other Eastern, as well as Western, cultures.

Keywords

self-affirmation, individual self, relational self, familial self, culture

Self-affirmation theory (Steele, 1988) posits that bolstering the self in one domain (e.g., core values) helps ward off threat-induced inadequacy (e.g., incompetence, attitude–behavior inconsistency) in another domain, thus restoring self-integrity. The theory has been well supported by evidence (Sherman & Cohen, 2006; Sherman & Hartson, 2011). For example, after affirming values or attributes that are important to the self, people (1) experience less stress, psychologically and physiologically (Creswell et al., 2005); (2) are more likely to seek, accept, or recall unfavorable feedback (Aspinwall, 1998; Green, Sedikides, & Gregg, 2008); (3) reduce ruminative thinking upon acceptance of unfavorable feedback (Koole, Smeets, van Knippenberg, & Dijksterhuis, 1999); (4) respond with less downward (defensive) and more upward social comparison (Spencer, Fein, & Lomore, 2001); (5) negate attitudinal change in the forced-compliance paradigm (Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1999); (6) are more tolerant to opposing political views (Cohen, Aronson, & Steele, 2000); and (7) acknowledge their engagement in risky past behavior rather than reject threatening health information (Harris & Napper, 2005).

Moving Beyond Affirmation of Individual Self

In most of relevant literature, it is the individual self that is affirmed. This type of self consists of qualities (e.g., behaviors, traits, interests, goals) that differentiate the person from others (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). And yet self-affirmation effects have been obtained with another type of self, the relational self, which consists of qualities that define the person in conjunction with close others (Chen, Boucher, & Tapias, 2006; Kashima et al., 1995). To begin with, individual self-affirmation, when induced with writing about one's core values, may reflect positive feelings (e.g., loving and connectedness) toward close others (Crocker, Niiya, & Mischkowski, 2008). Also, relational self-affirmation serves esteem-repair functions, especially for persons for whom a dyadic bond represents a core identity component (Chen & Boucher, 2008, experiment 2).

Relational self-affirmation ought to be especially potent in East-Asian culture, which values interdependence, affiliation, and social harmony (Hoshino-Browne, Zanna, Spencer, Kitayama, & Lachenbauer, 2005; Kitayama, Snibbe, Markus, & Suzuki, 2004). Preliminary evidence is consistent with this proposition. When subjected to individual self-affirmation, Westerners and bicultural East-Asians evince dissonance reduction in the free-choice paradigm (Heine & Lehman, 1997), whereas monocultural East-Asians evince no dissonance reduction (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne

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et al., 2005, studies 3–4). Further, when subjected to relational self-affirmation (compared jointly to individual self-affirmation and no affirmation), monocultural East-Asians manifest dissonance reduction (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005, study 3).

Affirmation of Familial Self

The relational self can be subdivided into the familial self (involving family bonds) and the close other self (involving connections with a friend or romantic partner). It is possible, then, that the defensiveness-soothing effects of relational self-affirmation (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005) are due not to dyadic connections but rather to familial bonds. The objective of our research was to contribute to self-affirmation theory by highlighting the distinctive contribution of familial self-affirmation relative to close other self-affirmation and individual self-affirmation.

Familialism reflects an orientation toward family relationships or a concern for the welfare of one's family (Gaines et al., 1997). Research has established familialism as a cultural value distinct from individualism and from romanticism (romantic partner orientation; Gaines et al., 1997; Gaines, Larbie, Patel, Pereira, & Sereke-Melake, 2005). Familial bonds are unlike dyadic connections and group belongingness; more specifically, they constitute a unique mixture (Kashima et al., 1995). In particular, familial bonds involve a nexus of dyadic relationships. They also involve interdependent, emotionally involved, and long-lasting relationships. Of course, familial bonds encompass groupness (the family is a group, after all), but they encompass a special kind of groupness. Not only is the group ''family'' of paramount importance—perhaps the foremost group for many—and a source of shared identity (Cigoli & Scabini, 2006), but it also entails the appreciation of the unique identities of each member. Stated otherwise, familial bonds involve both uniqueness-based bonding and membership-based bonding (Hogg & Hardie, 1991), although we argue that the former kind of bonding lies closer to the heart of family than the latter. Nevertheless, it is this dualism, that is, (a) concern both for the uniqueness of family members and for the shared membership in combination with (b) the depth of relational attachments as well as their lasting influence on one's socialization, emotional makeup, and self-definition (Scabini & Manzi, 2010) that renders familial bonds special. The evolutionary significance of family (the survival of relatives' genes being as essential to a member as her or his survival; Dawkins, 1976; Hamilton, 1964) also renders familial bonds special.

Familialism is considered particularly important in collectivistic cultures (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Gaines et al., 1997; Triandis, 1995). We focused in this research on China as the largest and arguably most representative collectivistic culture (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Chinese are reported to be highly familial, as family (rather than dyadic connections or the individual) has traditionally been the fundamental cultural unit (Ho, 1998a). In ancient times, if a person committed a political crime (e.g., treason), not only he or she but also all of their relatives would be punished under the law of Nine Exterminations or Family Execution (Jia, 2008). In contemporary Chinese culture, children learn that to be moral they will need to show filial piety, that is, to submit to their parents and earn honors for their family (Deng, 2004; Ho, 1998b). Being a good person means fitting in with family and pursuing family-shared goals. Indeed, the union with the family (*jiaren*) is unconditional and unbreakable, whereas the connection with friends and acquaintances (*shouren*) can be fleeting (the notion of *Yuan*; Yang & Ho, 1988) and depending on reciprocal exchange (the notion of *Renqin*; Yan, 1996). Neuropsychological evidence is suggestively consistent with the idea that family is especially important among the Chinese. For example, ''self'' and ''mother'' activate the same brain region (medial prefrontal cortex; Zhu, Zhang, Fan, & Han, 2007). Also, Chinese attend to ''mother'' as much as they do to ''self,'' whereas Westerners (Americans) attend to ''self'' more than they do to ''mother'' (Sui, Zhu, & Chiu, 2007). Furthermore, compared with Westerners (Canadians), Chinese value self-family connectedness more so than self-friend connectedness (Li, 2002).

Familialism, then, is a highly internalized and core value in Chinese culture. If so, it may have distinct self-affirmatory potential. Familial self-affirmation may constitute a more potent buffer against threat than other forms of self-affirmation. Note that Hoshino-Browne et al. (2005, study 3) did compare familial self-affirmation (which they called interdependent self-affirmation) with individual self-affirmation (which they called independent self-affirmation). The difference between them was not significant ($p < .14$; p. 304). This comparison involved Asian Canadians, whereas our research involved Chinese in China. Also, their research involved postdecisional justification after participants had made choices for their *close friends*, which may constitute a potential confounding from the standpoint of the present investigation. Finally, these authors did not compare familial self-affirmation with close other self-affirmation.

The Present Research

We aimed, in three experiments, to provide a more decisive and comprehensive test of the distinctiveness of the familial self's affirmatory potential. We compared the potency of affirmation of familial self (familial self-affirmation) with that of affirmation of individual self (individual self-affirmation), affirmation of friends/romantic partners (close other self-affirmation), and affirmation of stranger or generalized other (low affirmation). We also included a *no affirmation* control group—a novel feature of our research. We assumed that the effects of a specific affirmation form depend on its importance (Chen & Boucher, 2008).

In all experiments, we induced self-affirmation with the standard value-expressive procedure (McQueen & Klein, 2005): participants elaborated on a value that was important (1) to them and their family (familial self-affirmation; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005, study 3), (2) to them (individual self-affirmation; Steele, 1988), (3) to them and their friends/romantic partners (close other self-affirmation), and (4) to the

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Table 1. Means (*SD*) and Cell Sizes in Experiments 1–3.

Experiment	FA/threat	Experimental conditions			
		CA/threat	IA/threat	LA/threat	NA/No threat
1	7.26 (1.70) $N = 39$	–	4.92 (2.32) $N = 39$	5.79 (2.29) $N = 38$	7.00 (1.72) $N = 38$
2	16.93 (3.68) $N = 30$	14.93 (4.67) $N = 30$	14.37 (4.10) $N = 30$	14.10 (5.09) $N = 30$	16.43 (4.00) $N = 37$
3	7.01 (1.04) $N = 30$	6.17 (1.45) $N = 30$	6.18 (1.36) $N = 30$	6.33 (1.11) $N = 30$	–

Note. FA = familial self-affirmation; CA = close other self-affirmation; IA = individual self-affirmation; LA = low affirmation; NA = no affirmation.

average university student (low affirmation). We moved away from the free-choice dissonance paradigm on which the scant relevant literature (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005, study 3) has relied, and we implemented disparate paradigms, for generalizability purposes. Specifically, following affirmation, we administered several types of threat: mortality salience (Experiment 1), involvement in a test (mental rotation) that reinforced stereotypes among female participants (Experiment 2), and failure in a purported creativity test (Experiment 3). Finally, we collected divergent-dependent measures: favorability toward the state birth control polity (Experiment 1), performance on a mental rotation test (MRT; Experiment 2), and interest in liability-focused feedback (Experiment 3).

We hypothesized that familial self-affirmation would be more potent than any other (individual self-affirmation, close other self-affirmation, low affirmation), offering the strongest buffer against threat. Moreover, we wondered whether close other self-affirmation, devoid now of family context, would actually be more potent than individual self-affirmation. Lastly, and in line with literature (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005), we did not expect for individual self-affirmation to be more potent than low affirmation. Debriefing ensured that no participant was aware of the experimental purpose or procedures. No gender differences emerged in Experiments 1 and 3.

Experiment 1: Familial Self-Affirmation and the Birth-Control Policy

The threat of mortality salience augments the desire to have children (Wisman & Goldenberg, 2005). Correspondingly, mortality salience increases disapproval toward the Chinese birth-control policy (Zhou, Lei, Marley, & Chen, 2009; Zhou, Liu, Chen, & Yu, 2008). Mortality salience effects, however, can be alleviated by self-affirmation (Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). We asked whether self-affirmation would decrease defensiveness, allowing for less intolerance or more openness toward the birth-control policy. We compared familial self-affirmation with individual self-affirmation and low affirmation while including, for control purposes, a no affirmation/no mortality salience condition. (We also compared individual self-affirmation with low affirmation.) In this initial experiment, we engaged in a preliminary test of the potency of familial self-affirmation. We hypothesized that familial self-affirmation would act as a stronger buffer against threat than either individual self-affirmation or low affirmation; that is familial self-affirmation would reduce defensiveness the most, thus engendering the highest level of favorability toward the birth-control policy.

Method

Participants and Design

One hundred fifty-five Sun Yat-Sen University undergraduates (105 female, 47 male, 3 unidentified) participated in the experiment in exchange for small gifts (pens, notebooks). Their mean age was 19.97 ($SD = 1.02$). They were randomly assigned to the conditions of a one-factor design: familial self-affirmation/threat, individual self-affirmation/threat, low affirmation/threat, no affirmation/no threat (Table 1).

Procedure

In three of the four conditions, participants were subjected to a threat manipulation (mortality salience). However, prior to the manipulation, participants in these three conditions undertook a different self-affirmation task (Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). In the familial self-affirmation/threat condition, they (1) chose one value, from a list of four (financial wealth, art/creativity, social network, knowledge—abstracted from past self-affirmation research) that they and their family cherished most, (2) recorded why their chosen value was important to them and their family, and (3) described an experience in which they realized how important this value was to them and their family. In the individual self-affirmation/threat condition, participants chose one value that they cherished most from the same list of four, and then similarly recorded why this value was important to them and also described an experience in which they realized how important the value was to them. In the *low affirmation/threat* condition, participants (1) chose a value that was least important to them, (2) recorded why this value might be important to the average student, and (3) described an experience in which they realized that this value was important to the average student.

Next, participants in these three conditions received the threat manipulation (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997). They described briefly (100 words or less) and clearly (1) how they would feel if they faced death, and (2) what would happen to them physically as they died in a hospital. We implemented, for comparison purposes, a fourth experimental

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condition: *no affirmation/no threat.* Here, participants were not provided with any values from which to choose. They were not threatened either; that is, they did not receive the mortality salience manipulation. Instead, they described briefly (100 words or less) and clearly (1) how they would feel if they had a toothache and (2) what would happen to them physically as they received treatment at a dentist's office. Afterward, participants engaged in a 5-min word puzzle task. Past research has shown that a delay is required between explicit mortality salience induction and collection of dependent measures (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, Simon, & Breus, 1994).

Lastly, participants in all four conditions completed the dependent measures (adapted from Zhou et al., 2008). They read a brief report about the Chinese birth-control policy: "The Chinese government introduced the one-child policy in 1979 to alleviate the overpopulation, social, and environmental problems of China. The one-child policy promotes one couple having only one child. Additional children will result in monetary penalties." Subsequently, participants expressed their attitudes toward this policy (1 = *extremely disagree*, 9 = *extremely agree*).

Results and Discussion

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) on attitudes toward the birth-control policy yielded a main effect, $F(3, 151) = 11.13$, $p < .01$ (Table 1). We followed up with planned comparisons. We began by gauging the effectiveness of the threat manipulation. We assumed that low affirmation is conceptually and functionally similar to no affirmation, as neither condition implicates the self. This assumption allowed us to compare the two conditions on threat alone. Participants in the low affirmation/threat condition expressed a less favorable attitude toward the birth-control policy than those in the no affirmation/no threat condition, $F(1, 151) = 6.78$, $p < .05$. The threat manipulation was effective, in replication of Zhou et al. (2008).

Participants in the familial self-affirmation/threat condition expressed a more favorable attitude toward the birth-control policy than those in the low affirmation/threat condition, $F(1, 151) = 10.10$, $p < .01$; familial self-affirmation was more effective than low affirmation. More important, participants in the familial self-affirmation/threat condition expressed a more favorable attitude toward the birth-control policy than those in the individual self-affirmation/threat condition, $F(1, 151) = 25.75$, $p < .01$; familial self-affirmation was more effective than individual self-affirmation. Finally, and generally consistent with past research (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005), participants in the individual self-affirmation condition tended to express a less favorable attitude toward the birth-control policy than those in the low affirmation/threat condition, $F(1, 151) = 3.60$, $p = .06$, suggesting that individual self-affirmation was ineffective. A limitation of Experiment 1 is the use of a single attitudinal item. We partially address this limitation via conceptual replication in subsequent experiments.

Experiment 2: Familial Self-Affirmation and Stereotype Threat

Experiment 1 established the relative potency of familial self-affirmation over low and individual self-affirmation. In Experiment 2, we sought to replicate and extend this finding in two ways. First, we added a close other self condition. Second, we switched to a new type of threat: stereotype threat. We did so in order to rule out the possibility that the potency of familial self-affirmation, that is, the expression of a more favorable attitude toward the birth-control policy, is due to the high relevance of family to such a policy.

The threat entailed in a stereotypical group identity (e.g., "women are poor in mathematics," "women have trouble with spatial rotation tasks") undermines performance (Martens, Johns, Greenberg, & Schimel, 2006; Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008). However, such performance detriments can be offset by affirmation (e.g., writing about a time that a self-defining characteristic proved important; Martens et al., 2006). We hypothesized that familial self-affirmation would offset spatial-rotation performance decrements among women to a greater extent than would low affirmation, individual self-affirmation, or close other self-affirmation (McGlone & Aronson, 2006). In addition, we tested the relative potency of individual self-affirmation and low affirmation as well as that of close other self-affirmation.

Method

Participants and Design

Participants were 157 Sun Yat-Sen University female undergraduates. Their mean age was 18.83 ($SD = 1.05$). Participants were remunerated with 5 Chinese Yuan (approximately $0.80). They were randomly assigned to the conditions of a one-factor design: familial self-affirmation/threat, close other self-affirmation/threat, individual self-affirmation/threat, low affirmation/threat, and no affirmation/no threat (Table 1).

Procedure. In four of the five conditions, participants were subjected to a threat manipulation (stereotype threat). However, prior to the manipulation, participants in these four conditions were exposed to a different self-affirmation task (Schmeichel & Martens, 2005). In the familial self-affirmation/threat condition and the individual self-affirmation/threat condition, the affirmation tasks were identical to those of Experiment 1. In the close other self-affirmation/threat condition, participants first selected one value that both they and their close relations (friends, romantic partners) cherished most from a list of four (as in Experiment 1) and then recorded why this value was important to them and their close relations. Finally, in the low affirmation/threat condition, the affirmation task was identical to that of Experiment 1.

Following the affirmation tasks, participants learned that they would soon work on the MRT (Vandenberg & Kuse, 1978). They were informed that "Spatial ability is an important aspect of human intelligence; in a short while, you will be

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asked to complete a widely used spatial ability test—the spatial rotation test.'' The stereotype threat manipulation followed. Participants read ''People usually think that *female* students have lower spatial intelligence than male students. One purpose of the present study is to test this wide-spread idea.'' Immediately afterward, participants were asked to indicate their sex at a manifestly demarcated space.

Then, they began working on the MRT. This test contains 24 items. Each item includes one three-dimension target figure on the left, and four three-dimension optional figures on the right. For each item, there is one and only one (out of four) three-dimensional figure that is identical to the left figure but in a rotated angle. Test takers need to identify the rotated figure that is identical to the left (target) figure. After a few practice trials, participants were allotted 15 min to complete the test. The sum of correct choices on the MRT serves as an index of spatial intelligence or the dependent measure, with higher scores implying higher levels of spatial intelligence. Note that, in the fifth experimental condition, no affirmation/no threat, participants were subjected neither to an affirmation nor to a threat (stereotypical performance on MRT) manipulation; these participants were provided with no instructions about gender differences on the MRT.

Results and Discussion

An ANOVA on mental rotation scores produced a main effect, $F(4,152) = 2.53$, $p < .05$ (Table 1). We proceeded with planned contrasts. To find out whether stereotype threat deteriorated performance, we compared the no affirmation/no threat condition with the low affirmation/threat condition; again, we assumed that, since the self was not implicated, the two conditions could be compared on threat alone. The effectiveness of stereotype threat would be attested by better performance in the no affirmation/no threat than the low affirmation/threat condition. A significant effect, $F(1, 152) = 4.58$, $p < .05$, confirmed that stereotype threat was effective.

Participants in the familial self-affirmation/threat condition performed better than those in the low affirmation/threat condition, $F(1, 152) = 6.12$, $p < .05$; in replication of Experiment 1, familial self-affirmation was more effective than low affirmation. Additionally, participants in the familial self-affirmation/threat condition performed better than those in the individual self-affirmation/threat condition, $F(1, 152) = 5.02$, $p < .05$; replicating Experiment 1, familial self-affirmation was more effective than individual self-affirmation. Importantly, participants in the familial self-affirmation/threat condition performed marginally better than those in the close other self-affirmation/threat condition, $F(1, 152) = 3.05$, $p = .08$; familial self-affirmation tended to be more effective than close other self-affirmation. Consistent with Experiment 1 and past research (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005), participants in the individual self-affirmation/threat condition performed no better than those in the low affirmation/threat condition, $F(1, 152) = .05$, $p = .82$. Interestingly, participants in the close other self-affirmation/threat condition performed no better than those in the individual self-affirmation/threat condition, $F(1, 152) = .25$, $p = .62$ (or those in the low affirmation condition, $F(1, 152) = .53$, $p = .47$, suggesting that the close other self, devoid of family context, does not constitute a sufficient buffer against threat. In all, familial self-affirmation emerged as the most potent form of affirmation.

Experiment 3: Familial Self-Affirmation and Failure on a Creativity Test

In Experiment 2, as in Experiment 1, familial self-affirmation emerged as the strongest affirmational source. In Experiment 3, we aimed to replicate and extend these findings by implementing yet another type of threat: failure feedback on a creativity test. Following such feedback, affirmation curtails defensiveness thus strengthening the desire for additional domain-relevant information (Kumashiro & Sedikides, 2005). We hypothesized that participants would be more open to receiving additional information about their weaknesses on the test domain (liability-focused information) when fortified by familial self, than by any other form of, affirmation.

Method

Participants and Design

One hundred twenty (77 female) Sun Yat-Sen University undergraduates took part and received a notebook as a gift. Their mean age was 19.75 ($SD = 1.25$). Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of one-factor design: familial self-affirmation, individual self-affirmation, close other self-affirmation, and no affirmation (Table 1).

Measures and Procedures

Participants took the ''Integrative Orientation Test.'' This was described as a valid measure of integrative ability, which ''has been found to correlate strongly with the ability to come up with creative and unusual solutions to problems in daily life.'' The test was a Chinese version of the 20-item remote associates test (RAT; McFarlin & Blascovich, 1984), which has been implemented successfully in prior research (Brown, Cai, Oakes, & Deng, 2009). Each item included three words. Participants needed to generate a fourth word that was related to the three words. Following test completion (no longer than 15 min), participants learned that they would soon receive individualized test results, but they had to wait a few minutes while their scoring profile were compiled.

During the wait, participants were kindly requested (and all accepted) to take part in an ostensibly unrelated study, which was actually the self-affirmation manipulation. Each participant was assigned to one of the four experimental conditions. The manipulation in each case was identical to the corresponding one in Experiment 2.

Next, participants received failure feedback on the RAT. They learned that they had scored in the bottom 23% of all Sun

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Yat-Sen University undergraduates. Subsequently, they completed a manipulation check, "How pleased are you with your performance on the integrative orientation test?" (0 = *not at all*, 8 = *very much*).

Afterward, all participants were informed that the profile of their integrative orientation ability had been compiled, and they would be given an opportunity to obtain additional performance-related information ("liability-focused information"). This would be a thorough analysis of their integrative orientation ability, with a focus on their weaknesses, which could help them improve in that domain. Participants indicated their interest in such information on the following items: (1) "How interested are you in reading detailed liability-focused information?" (2) "To what extent would you be willing to go out of your way to obtain detailed liability-focused information?" (3) "To what extent would you like us to recommend further sources that would provide you with even more detailed liability-focused information?" and (4) "How detailed would you like the liability-focused information to be?" (0 = *not at all*, 8 = *very much*). Finally, participants responded to two additional manipulation check items: test difficulty ("How easy/difficult do you feel the integrative orientation Test?" 0 = *very easy*, 8 = *very difficult*) and information unpleasantness ("How pleasant or unpleasant do you expect the detailed information about yourself to be?" 0 = *very unpleasant*, 8 = *very pleasant*).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks

One sample *t* tests against the midpoint of the scale (Kumashiro & Sedikides, 2005) showed that participants were displeased with their performance ($M = 2.55$, $SD = 1.86$), $t(119) = -8.54$, $p < .01$; considered the integrative orientation test difficult ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.59$), $t(119) = 3.68$, $p < .01$; and expected the liability-focused information to be unpleasant ($M = 4.38$,, $SD = 1.74$), $t(119) = 2.42$, $p < .05$. In addition, one-way ANOVAs yielded no significant differences in: performance satisfaction, $F(3, 116) = 0.52$, $p = .67$; test difficulty, $F(3, 116) = 0.91$, $p = .44$; and information unpleasantness, $F(3, 116) = 1.72$, $p = .16$.

Interest in liability-focused information. The 4 items testing interest in liability information had satisfactory internal consistency ($\alpha = .77$), and therefore we formed a composite. The ANOVA was significant, $F(3, 116) = 3.06$, $p < .05$ (Table 1). We followed-up with planned contrasts. Participants in the familial self-affirmation condition affirmation expressed stronger interest in liability-focused information than those in the no affirmation condition, $F(1, 116) = 4.38$, $p<.05$; this attests to the effectiveness of the affirmation manipulation. Participants in the familial self-affirmation condition expressed stronger interest in liability-focused information than those in the individual self-affirmation condition, $F(1, 116) = 6.67$, $p < .05$, thus replicating the prior two experiments. Importantly, participants in the familial self-affirmation condition affirmation expressed stronger interest in liability-focused information than those in the close other self-affirmation condition, $F(1, 116) = 6.08$, $p < .05$, thus replicating Experiment 2. Consistent with Experiments 1–2 and relevant research (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005), participants in the individual self-affirmation condition expressed no stronger interest in liability-focused information than those in the low affirmation condition, $F(1, 116) = 0.24$, $p = .63$. Also consistent with Experiment 2, participants in the close other self-affirmation condition did not express stronger interest in liability-focused information than those in the individual self-affirmation condition, $F(1, 116) = 0.001$, $p = .98$ (or those in the low affirmation condition, $F(1, 116) = 0.27$, $p = .61$), suggesting that the close other self per se (in the absence of family context) is not particularly effective in reducing defensiveness. Once again, familial self-affirmation emerged as the soundest basis of affirmation.

General Discussion

We aimed to expand self-affirmation theory by illustrating the relevance of familial self. We focused on Chinese culture, given the importance it ascribes to familial self. We hypothesized that familial self-affirmation would constitute a more potent buffering function against threat in comparison to other affirmations (close other affirmation, individual self-affirmation, low affirmation) or to no affirmation. Following the relevant affirmation, we induced threat in the form of mortality salience (Experiment 1), involvement in a MRT that activated stereotypes among female participants (Experiment 2), or failure feedback in an ostensible creativity test (Experiment 3). We assessed attitudinal favorability toward the birth-control polity (Experiment 1), performance on the MRT (Experiment 2), and interest in liability-focused information (Experiment 3).

Individual self-affirmation was ineffective in all experiments (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005). But is familial self-affirmation more potent than close other self-affirmation? The former was more effective in Experiment 3 but only marginally so in Experiment 2. We collapsed across conditions that entailed threat (all Experiment 2 conditions, excluding the no threat/no affirmation one; all Experiment 3 conditions). Also, we standardized the dependent measures (MRT scores in Experiment 2, interest in liability-focused information in Experiment 3) into an index that we entered in 2 (Experiment: 2, 3) × 4 (Condition; familial self-affirmation, individual self- affirmation, close other self-affirmation, low affirmation) ANOVA. Neither the experiment main effect, $F(1, 232) = 0.001$, $p = .996$ nor the interaction, $F(3, 232) = 0.276$, $p = .842$, was significant, suggesting that the restorative effects of affirmation were comparable across the two experiments. Importantly, the condition main effect was significant, $F(3, 232) = 5.14$, $p = .002$. Familial self-affirmation ($M = 0.43$, $SD = 0.81$) was more impactful than close other self-affirmation ($M = -0.20$, $SD = 1.13$), $F(1, 232) = 9.254$, $p = .003$. Further, familial self-affirmation

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was more impactful than individual self-affirmation ($M = -0.19$, $SD = 1.06$), $F(1, 232) = 11.326$, $p = .001$, or low-affirmation ($M = -0.14$, $SD = 0.98$), $F(1, 232) = 10.116$, $p = .002$. Familial self-affirmation was more effective than close other self-affirmation or any other form of self-affirmation. Interestingly, in the above analysis, close other self-affirmation was no more impactful than individual self-affirmation, $F(1, 232) = 0.11$, $p = .75$, or low affirmation, $F(1, 232) = 0.02$, $p = .89$. It is perhaps the fleeting (*Yuan*; Yang & Ho, 1988) and reciprocal-exchange based (*Renqin*; Yan, 1996) nature of connections with nonfamily members that renders close other self-affirmation.

We operationalized the familial self as including both the person and family members. We implemented this definitional practice to be consistent with the most relevant investigation (Hoshino-Brown et al., 2005, studies 3–4). We then defined and operationalize the close other self in an analogous manner (aggregate of the individual self and friends/romantic partner). These definitional practices diverge somewhat from those of Gaertner and colleagues (Gaertner et al., 2012; Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2002) who excluded the individual self from their operationalization of close other self. Future research would do well to replicate the current findings with operationalizations that match those of Gaertner and colleagues, for comparability purposes.

The findings indicate that familialism is a core value in China. We assume that this also holds true in other East-Asian cultures. Yet, future research will need to verify this assumption, given the large variation in some psychological processes not only between cultures but also within cultures (regional differences; Kitayama, Ishii, Imada, Takemura, & Ramaswamy, 2006; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996); such research would also need to examine collectivism as potential moderator of the impact of familial self-affirmation. New empirical efforts would also need to test the replicability of the current findings in Western culture (where family is also important; Lambert et al., 2010; Scabini & Manzi, 2010; Stillman, Tice, Fincham, & Lambert, 2009) as well as with a different set of threat inductions and psychological responses. Finally, such research would find fertile ground in practical implications. Practitioners may implement the concept of familial self in Chinese culture as psychological tool against various types of threat, including existential anxiety, stereotype activation, and failure feedback.

Our research broadens the agenda of the self-affirmation literature, as it highlights the construct of familial self-affirmation and illustrates its potency in Chinese culture. In so doing, our research establishes the utility of subdividing the relational self into the familial and close other self. More generally, our research showcases the relevance of familial self in social psychological research (e.g., self and identity, relationships, intergroup perception, social cognition).

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