

A Homecoming to the Individual Self

Emotional and Motivational Primacy

CONSTANTINE SEDIKIDES
LOWELL GAERTNER

This edited volume pays tribute to the multidimensionality of the self, and rightfully so. In light of the rise of compelling research on the relational, collective, and contextual self, the traditional way of equating the self with the individual self does not seem to hold up anymore.

Nevertheless, as much as the authors of this volume are friendly to revisionism and change, there is something to be said about being traditional—not for the sake of comfort and validation, but rather as a means of revisiting and reexamining time-honored constructs with an eye toward eventual integration. Apparently, the current authors can be revisionists, traditionalists, and idealists—all at the same time!

Why, then, should we host a homecoming to the individual self? Let us clarify from the outset that our intention is not to offer a diatribe in exalting the virtues of the individual self. Rather, our intent is to provide a rationale, a justification better yet, for why the *individual self* deserves to be at the cornerstone of social psychological approaches to the self.

We will begin by justifying the central place of the individual self based on recent empirical evidence generated in our laboratory and in laboratories of several colleagues. Our justification will continue with a more general discussion of issues pertaining to the individual self. We will conclude with an attempt at synthesis.

THESES THAT WE DO NOT ADVOCATE

Before we begin, however, we would like to articulate the theses that we definitely do not advocate. Our proposal is not a restatement of self-interest theory; that is, we do not equate the individual self with material self-interest, a notion derived from the homo-economicus model of human behavior (Miller, 1999). Furthermore, we do not equate the individual self with egocentrism, selfishness, arrogance, and disregard for others, although the individual self can give rise to such phenomena (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Bushman & Baumeister, 1998; Rhodewalt & Morf, 1998). More generally, we do not argue that having an individual self is necessarily an asset; in fact, it is because of the individual self that such uncomfortable, if not painful, states as guilt, shame, embarrassment, existential anxiety, loneliness, and alienation are experienced (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997; Rosenberg, 1988; Tangney, Burggraf, & Wagner, 1995). Last but not least, we do not advocate that the individual self is asocial or that it exists in a social or cultural vacuum. Indeed, we wholeheartedly accept the notion that humans are fundamentally social (Kashima, Kashima, & Aldridge, chap. 15, this volume; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998; Stryker & Statham, 1985).

The issue, then, is about balance and relative importance. It is about experiencing the individual self and what this experience means to humans. It is about the degree to which the individual self is subjectively valued, and about the ways in which a threat to this type of self-oftentimes felt as a treasured possession-is handled psychologically.

Of course, our aim is not to review the voluminous literature on protection of the individual self. Instead, we will engage in comparative contrasts that are rather scarce in our field. The main comparative contrast is between two self-representations, the individual self and the collective self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Trafimow, Silverman, Fan, & Law, 1997; Trafimow & Smith, 1998; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991).

The questions that we ask are: Is the individual self valued and thus protected more forcefully than the collective self? Or, is it that the individual self and collective self are equally valued and hence protected psychologically, with contextual changes determining momentary shifts toward protecting one self more forcefully than another? Is the individual self emotionally and motivationally primary?

Granted, primacy can be a slippery construct, especially when it comes to operationalization and measurement. In our research, we adopted the following well-established principle in assessing emotional and motivational primacy: Threatening feedback will be experienced more negatively and will be reacted to more intensely when the feedback pertains to the more primary self (K. W. Campbell & Sedikides, 1999).

EMOTIONAL PRIMACY OF THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

Does unfavorable feedback hurt more when it is directed to the individual as opposed to the collective self? Do participants feel worse when they are told bad news about the individual self rather than the collective self.? Alternatively, do participants feel equally bad regardless of whether the threat is targeted at the individual self or the collective self?

The Ebb and Flow of the Berkeley Personality Inventory

We addressed the above questions empirically (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999, Experiment 1). We operationalized the collective self in terms of "University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) women." We rendered cognitively accessible both the individual self and the collective self by repeatedly priming participants with their simultaneous status as unique individuals and members of the group, UNC-CH women. We mentioned to participants that the experiment was conducted by the Department of Psychology, allegedly on behalf of the Office of Student Affairs (OSA). Each participant would need to take a computerized version of the Berkeley Personality Inventory (BPI), which was described as a reliable and valid instrument.

We had established, through pilot testing, that our population considered "moody" to be the most negative group-typical trait. In the first part of the BPI, female undergraduates completed self-descriptiveness ratings on 30 statements that appeared to be related, albeit nondiagnostically, to the trait moody (e.g., "Sad movies touch me deeply"). In the second part of the BPI, participants indicated the frequency in which they experienced each of 30 mood states (e.g., cheerful, sad) in the last month. Participants then received the computerized BPI score which, in actuality, was the experimental manipulation.

Participants received unfavorable feedback relevant to either the individual self or the collective self. Let us begin by considering the condition in which the feedback was relevant to the individual self. Participants were told that the BPI allegedly measured moodiness, defined as an "inability to control one's mood state." Moodiness was not to be taken lightly as a trait, given that it ostensibly predicted long-term personal and professional failure. Personalized feedback followed. Participants learned that, according to the BPI, they were "excessively moody."

Let us continue by considering the condition in which the unfavorable feedback was relevant to the collective self. Participants were informed that they would not receive personalized feedback, because their anonymous responses already had been forwarded directly to the OSA. The feedback would refer to all UNC-CH women (excluding their own score) who were

tested so far. After being introduced to the rhetoric on the importance of the trait moody, participants learned that, according to the BPI, "UNC-CH women are excessively moody."

The findings confirmed the notion that the individual self is emotionally primary: Participants regarded unfavorable feedback to the individual self as a more serious threat than unfavorable feedback to the collective self. That is, participants perceived unfavorable feedback to the individual self as being more negative, and they were more displeased with it. It hurts for the individual self to be the recipient of bad news, whereas bad news for the collective self can be handled with relative poise.

It also should be noted that contextual views on the self (e.g., Markus & Kunda, 1986; McGuire, McGuire, & Cheever, 1986; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McCarty, 1994) were not supported. Such views reject the emotional primacy notion and, instead, propose that the two selves are equally important. Primacy depends entirely on context. These theoretical propositions would anticipate that unfavorable feedback be experienced as equally displeasing regardless of whether the feedback was directed to the individual self or the collective self. Clearly, this was not the case.

Does Strength of In-group Identification Matter?

Group members differ in the degree to which they identify with the ingroup. Low group identifiers are members who identify weakly with the group, whereas high group identifiers are members who identify strongly with the group. Group identification may be a critical component to a contextual perspective on the self. This perspective would maintain that the individual self is emotionally primary among low group identifiers, whereas the collective self is emotionally primary among high group identifiers only. Perhaps, strength of group identification moderates the findings of the previous experiment.

In Experiment 2 (Gaertner et al., 1999), we operationalized the collective self in terms of "UNC-CH students." Through pilot testing we established that, compared to low group identifiers, high group identifiers considered their university a valued part of their identity. Male and female participants were told that they would be involved in a creativity experiment. They completed a face-valid creativity test (see Sedikides et al., 1998), and subsequently received unfavorable feedback that pertained either to the individual self ("Your score is worse than 69% of the creativity scores in the normative reference sample") or to the collective self ("UNC-CH's total score [excluding the participant's] is worse than 69% of the creativity scores in the normative reference sample"). We assessed the emotional primacy of the individual self by gathering participants' responses to 14 adjectives indexing negative mood (e.g., annoyed, irritated, upset, disappointed, down, sad).

Strength of group identification did not moderate the emotional primacy of the individual self. Regardless of their level of group identification, participants felt worse when the unfavorable feedback was directed at the individual self rather than the collective self. As in the previous experiment, no support was obtained for contextual views of emotional primacy.

How Does It Feel to Be Disparaged?

In our next experiment (Gaertner et al., 1999, Experiment 3), we used an even stronger version of unfavorable feedback, a disparagement. We wanted to know whether the individual and collective selves would be equally affected when the feedback is particularly threatening. We measured emotional primacy via a self-reported anger rating scale. In one case, feedback ostensibly was given by another participant (interpersonal context condition) and thus, was directed to the individual self. In another case, feedback ostensibly was given by a group (intergroup context condition) and was directed to the collective self. The targeted selves were rendered maximally accessible by disparaging the individual self and collective self in an interpersonal and intergroup context, respectively (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Consequently, this contextual targeting of each self provided yet a stronger test of a contextual perspective on the self.

Each testing session consisted of six participants. We established the interpersonal context by randomly allocating the participants to three dyads. We established the intergroup context by randomly allocating the participants to two three-person groups. Each member of the dyad believed that he or she would interact on a "social decision-making task" (actually, a Prisoners Dilemma Game [PDG]) only with the other dyad member. Each group believed that they would interact on the social decision-making task with the other group. Participants read instructions to the PDG and, subsequently, engaged (either individually or as a group) in a matrix comprehension exercise, in an ostensible attempt to improve their understanding of the matrix payoff structure. Next, the experimenter indicated that, for the purposes of saving time, each participant (or group) would evaluate the other participant's (group's) level of matrix payoff understanding. Participants (groups) completed evaluation forms. The experimenter collected the forms, went to another room, and came back announcing the evaluations that actually were the bogus feedback.

In the interpersonal context condition, each participant received a low score and was additionally informed by his or her opponent that, "This person did not do well. He/She must be a little slow." In the intergroup context condition, each group received a low score and was additionally informed by their opponent that, "This group did not do well. They must be a little slow." Finally, all participants filled out (in private carrels) a measure of felt anger. We used the individual as the unit of analysis in the interpersonal context

condition, and we used the group as the unit of analysis in the intergroup context condition. The findings attested to the emotional primacy of the individual self. The unfavorable feedback generated more anger in the interpersonal than the intergroup context condition. Evidently, disparaging the individual self hurts more than disparaging the collective self, with context not seeming to play a substantial role.

Summary

Using varied procedures and dependent measures, three experiments (Gaertner et al., 1999) established the emotional primacy of the individual self. It is worth noting that research findings obtained in different laboratories corroborate the emotional primacy of the individual self. Specifically, in a metaanalysis (Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2000), we found that participants were more displeased following threats to the individual self than to the collective self. Strength of in-group identification did not moderate this empirical pattern. Likewise, contextual shifts did not alter the pattern.

MOTIVATIONAL PRIMACY OF THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

Does the individual self have motivational primacy over the collective self? Will people adhere more to the individual self as the basis for selfdefinition than to the collective self? Stated otherwise, when the individual self is threatened, will people use the collective self as a protective buffer? Will their identity shift toward the collective self? What will the corresponding changes be when the collective self is threatened? Or, does it all depend on context?

The Ebb and Flow of the Berkeley Personality Inventory

Experiment I of Gaertner et al. (1999) addressed the above questions. After going through the experimental manipulation that involved alleged feedback on the BPI, participants responded to several questions. Specifically, participants made similarity judgments: They indicated whether their momentary self-definitions were similar to the individual self (e.g., "My beliefs and values are totally unique") or the collective self ("My beliefs and values are quite similar to the beliefs and values of UNC-CH women"). Participants also made identification judgments: They indicated whether they identified with the individual self (e.g., "I value being myself") or the collective self (e.g., "I value my membership in the group UNC-CH women").

When the threatening feedback (i.e., "You are excessively moody") pertained to the individual self, participants expressed high similarity with the

in-group and identified strongly with the in-group. When faced with negative information about the individual self, participants buffered the threatened individual self by redefining themselves in terms of their collective self. The collective self was in the service of the individual self. This pattern is congruent with the thesis that the individual self is motivationally primary.

Notably, a corresponding shift in identity did not occur when the feedback threatened the collective self (i.e., "UNC-CH women are excessively moody"). In this case, participants did not resort to the individual self; they were not motivated to use the individual self as a buffer for protection of the collective self.

Likewise, identity did not shift as a function of context. Given that contextual views assign equal motivational primacy to the two selves, one would expect for identity to be derived from the collective self when the individual self is threatened, and from the individual self when the collective self is threatened. However, identity invariably was derived from the individual self regardless of the target of psychological threat.

Solidarity hypothesis. As noted above, the experience of threat to the collective self was met with motivational apathy. Why such apathy? One explanation is that participants adhered to their collective self as a means for expressing group solidarity. Threatening information may have become "a source of pride at the group level—a badge of distinction rather than a mark of shame" (Brewer, 1991, p. 481).

As a reminder, in Experiment 1 of Gaertner et al. (1999), participants had indicated their perceptions of feedback valence (i.e., how unfavorable or favorable they had perceived the feedback and how displeased or pleased they were with it). The solidarity hypothesis would imply that motivational apathy is due to the transformation of the valence of feedback. That is, participants transform the meaning of the feedback (at either the individual or the collective level) and, consequently, perceive it as less negative.

We provided a test of the solidarity hypothesis by reanalyzing the data of Gaertner et al.'s (1999) Experiment 1. Specifically, we examined shifts in similarity and identification after covarying out perceptions of feedback valence. We reasoned that, by partialing out (and, hence, neutralizing) perceptions of feedback valence, we substantially lower the possibility of transformations in the meaning of feedback. The results were identical to those reported above. The solidarity hypothesis did not seem to account for motivational apathy. A more plausible explanation for motivational apathy is the relative unimportance of the collective self.

Does Strength of In-group Identification Matter?

We engaged in an alternative test of the group solidarity hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, high group identifiers will derogate feedback that threatens the collective self more than will low group identifiers. In an

effort to affirm their association with the group, high group identifiers will discard group-threatening feedback.

In Experiment 2 of Gaertner et al. (1999), we had directed unfavorable feedback (i.e., poor performance on a face-valid creativity test) either to the individual self or the collective self. We assessed feedback derogation by asking participants to indicate their perceived importance of the outcome of the creativity test either for "you" (individual self) or "UNC-CH" (collective Self).

The responses of high and low group identifiers were virtually identical. Both undervalued the importance of the test when the test outcome threatened the individual rather than the collective self. These findings provide additional confirmation for the motivational primacy of the individual self.

Summary

Our experimental work (Gaertner et al., 1999, Experiments 1 & 2) showed that the individual self is motivationally primary. Encountering a threat to the individual self ignited protective strategies; namely, an identity shift to the collective self. Corresponding protective strategies were not activated when experiencing a threat to the collective self. (For conceptually similar findings, see Cialdini et al., 1976; Rothgerber, 1997). Likewise, contextual influences (e.g., group identification, simultaneous activation of selves) did not affect identity shifts. Finally, the solidarity hypothesis did not appear to account for our findings, although more direct tests of the hypothesis certainly are needed.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION OF OUR FINDINGS

We believe that our experimental work and the meta-analysis established the privileged status of the individual self. However, we would like to further consider our findings in light of potential rival hypotheses and qualifications (see also Sedikides & Gaertner, in press).

One issue is whether we have paid justice to strength of in-group identification as a moderator of the primacy of individual self, given the relevance of this variable in research on intergroup perception (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Spears, Doojse, & Ellemers, 1997).

We believe that we have made a bona fide effort to test the moderational influence on this variable both in our laboratory work and in our meta-analysis. Note also that the trait domains on which participants protected the individual self were typical of the collective self rather than the individual self. Had the trait domains been typical of the individual self, emotional and motivational responses to threat would likely be stronger. In

fact, we think that an alternative variable worth considering is strength of identification with the individual self. People who have a clear conception of the individual self (J. D. Campbell et al., 1996), a hardy personality (Wiebe, 1991), a resilient ego (Block, 1961), or high self-esteem (Blaine & Crocker, 1993) would likely react more intensely to the threatened individual self.

Another concern is whether we have paid adequate attention to a relevant variable, uncertainty orientation (Sorrentino & Short, 1986). For example, it is likely that participants in Gaertner et al.'s (1999) Experiment 1 responded more defensively to feedback directed at the individual self because they were more certain about this representation than the collective self. Although a systematic investigation of the role of uncertainty would best address this issue, we have reasons to doubt that this variable influenced our empirical findings. As a reminder, participants were threatened on a domain (i.e., moodiness) considered typical of the in-group. Hence, participants were likely more certain of their collective self than their individual self. Importantly, the results of Experiment I were replicated conceptually in Experiment 3—an experiment in which differential uncertainty for the individual versus the collective self was not an issue.

ADDITIONAL MATTERS

Our theoretical postulate on the primacy of the individual self is consistent with several lines of inquiry. Klein (chap. 3, this volume) has documented the memorial primacy of the individual self. Research on self-regulation relegates social context to the background in which the person acts (Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Higgins & May, chap. 4, this volume). Likewise, self-determination theory points to the importance of the person's strivings for autonomy and competence while assigning a supporting role to social context (Deci & Ryan, 1985, in press). Personal goals are the guiding force in people's lives (Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal, & Nurius, 1986; Emmons, 1986; Little, 1983). Finally, the self-aspect model proposes that those aspects of the individual self that are positive and important are the ones that form the basis for the collective self (Simon & Hastedt, 1999; Simon & Kampmeier, chap. 11, this volume). The emotional and motivational primacy of the individual self is not surprising, given the availability, accessibility, and inescapability of private feelings and thoughts (Andersen, 1984; Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998; Andersen, Lazowski, & Donisi, 1986).

Granted, there are many circumstances in which the importance of the collective self is undeniable (Caporael, chap. 13, this volume; Hogg, chap. 8, this volume). Also, there are many circumstances in which contextual influences are impactful (Onorato & Turner, chap. 9, this volume; Turner et al., 1987). Indeed, social context can affect whether people **do** define them-

selves as unique individuals versus interchangeable members of the in-group. For example, people derive identity from the collective self in intergroup (as opposed to intragroup) settings (Hogg & Turner, 1987) and when their group is a numerical minority than majority (Simon & Hamilton, 1994).

However, the acid test of self primacy is the case in which people experience some sort of conflict between the individual self and the collective self. It is in those cases that the primacy of the individual self is manifested. For example, people evaluate the individual self more positively than the in-group (Lindeman, 1997; Lindeman & Sundvik, 1995), consider the self as being more capable of resisting media propaganda than the in-group (Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1995), and claim personal credit for the accomplishments of the in-group while, at the same time, denying personal blame for the failures of the in-group (Mullen & Riordan, 1988). So high is the need for uniqueness, that people accentuate intragroup differences to a greater degree than intragroup similarities (Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995).

These findings are consistent with the view that a most important function of the group is to serve the needs of the individual (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997, 2000). Along these lines, research findings on employee-employer relations have suggested that employees regulate decisions to remain in or disengage from their corporations depending predominantly on personal gains (e.g., satisfaction, resources, opportunities for promotion) rather than corporate loyalty (Rusbult, Farrel, & Rogers, 1983; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988). Similar findings have been reported by a social hierarchy analysis of intergroup relations (Seta & Seta, 1996). Members disengage from successful in-groups when intragroup comparisons threaten the individual self, whereas people strengthen their membership in unsuccessful in-groups when intragroup comparisons bolster the individual self.

Indeed, the origin of intergroup discrimination has been located in individual rather than collective motives. For example, Gaertner and Insko (in press) found that people allocated more money to the in-group than the out-group only when their own earnings could have been influenced by fellow in-group members. Stated somewhat differently, people discriminated only when they could have maximized their personal earnings by reciprocating favorable allocations with in-group members. If people were concerned with enhancing the collective self, they would have favored the in-group regardless of whether they were outcome dependent on other ingroup or out-group members. Conceptually similar findings were reported by Foster and Matheson (1999). As the discrepancy between individual and in-group discrimination decreases, the likelihood of engaging in collective action increases. That is, when discrimination against the in-group is perceived as an attack against the individual self, collective action becomes more likely. There is another line of research that highlights this point. Black children, adolescents, and young adults, groups that are likely to be the target of discrimination, have been found to have higher individual self-

esteem than the correspondent White groups (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000). These differences in individual self-esteem are mediated by racial (i.e., group) identification, with identification, in turn, predicting individual self-esteem (Gray-Little & Hafdahl, 2000; see also Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998). One explanation for these findings is that Blacks increase their racial identification as a strategy for protecting the individual self.

Casual observations of human behavior seemingly contradict the principle that the main function of the social group is to maximize individual needs. People voluntarily fight wars for their country and sacrifice their own lives for the sake of promoting the welfare of their in-group (e.g., suicide bombers). Such behaviors undoubtedly benefit the group. However, we believe that the motivational locus of such behaviors is at the individual level. In cases such as the above, individual and collective welfare are highly interdependent: Outcomes that harm the group harm the individual and outcomes that benefit the group benefit the individual. As an example, the demise of a country may entail the loss of personal freedoms, means of individual expression, and property. Similarly, behaviors that benefit the collective may be motivated by personal gains. For example, interviews with members of Palestinian martyrdom cults revealed that suicide bombers are enticed by the promise of bountiful rewards in heaven (Zwerdling, 1996). Consistent with this line of reasoning, people enact behavior that maximizes the welfare of the individual self when outcomes to the individual and collective self are noncorrespondent (Seta & Seta, 1996). On balance, then, the individual self is motivationally primary.

The conflict between the individual self and the collective self can be placed in cultural context (Kashima et al., chap. 15, this volume; Triandis & Trafimow, chap. 14, this volume). Is the collective self primary in Asian cultures? Certainly, this is the point argued by some recent cross-cultural research (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For example, Japanese are less likely to use the first person conversational pronoun than Australians (Kashima & Kashima, 1997). Also, Japanese are less likely to enhance the individual self than Australians (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). In fact, even whether Japanese have individual self-esteem has recently come into doubt (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999).

One relevant implication of this recent research is that the cultural value orientations of individualism and collectivism moderate the primacy of the individual self. The individual self serves as the primary identity basis for individualists, whereas the collective self likely serves as the primary identity basis for collectivists. We put this moderational hypothesis to a test (Gaertner et al., 1999, Experiment 4). We assessed participants' levels of individualism and collectivism (Singelis, 1994) and, a week later, we asked participants to list 20 self-statements that "generally describe you." If the individual self is the primary identity basis, participants would generate more descriptions pertaining to the individual self than to the collective

self, regardless of levels of individualism or collectivism. On the other hand, if self-definitional primacy is moderated by level of cultural value orientation, the primacy of the individual self would be limited to individualists. Collectivists instead would generate more statements referring to the collective self than the individual self. The results supported the primacy of the individual self. Both individualists and collectivists listed more statements that described the individual self. Importantly, a recent study by Ybarra and Trafimow (1998, Experiment 3) reported converging evidence for this point. These researchers primed participants' individual self or collective self. Following this manipulation, participants in both conditions listed more individual self-descriptions than collective self-descriptions.

We have reasons to believe that the individual self is highly, prevalent in collectivistic societies. Implicit self-enhancement has been detected in Japan: Participants showed a greater preference for letters and numbers occurring in their own name and birth date, respectively (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997). Cross-cultural comparisons of exchange principles have provided converging evidence. Finjeman, Willemsen, and Poortinga (1996) assessed anticipated inputs to and outputs from relationships of differing closeness (e.g., parents, siblings, cousins, friends, acquaintances, strangers) in both individualistic (The Netherlands and United States) and collectivistic (Greece, Hong Kong, and Turkey) cultures. Regardless of type of culture, the willingness to provide for other people was related to expectations of what would be received from these people. The operation of basic exchange principles, equity and reciprocity, indicated that, even in collectivistic cultures, there is a very strong concern for self-interest. Another line of research makes this point compellingly: Although people of other racial and ethnic groups (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos) scored higher than Whites on measures of collectivism, they scored equally high with Whites on measures of individualism (Freeberg & Stein, 1996; Gaines et al., 1997).

A FIRST ATTEMPT AT INTEGRATION- THE BOOMERANG MODEL OF THE SELF

The above-mentioned findings from cross-cultural research open up an intriguing possibility. Although the level of collectivism is malleable and susceptible to the influence of culture (e.g., norms), the level of individualism is relatively stable and invariant. Individualism is less amenable to variation due to culture.

There are several well-reasoned theoretical models in this volume offering interactional (e.g., Brewer & Roccas, chap. 12, this volume; Spears, chap. 10, this volume) or integrational (e.g., Deaux & Perkins, chap. 16, this volume; Kasbima et al., chap. 15, this volume) accounts. Our model, the

boomerang model of the self (BMS) also has integrational aspirations. At the same time, the BMS preserves the spirit of our research findings in assigning primacy to the individual self. The BMS offers four postulates.

The first postulate is that the individual self is the experiential (i.e., emotional and motivational) home base. This home base is relatively stable and invariant (Bem & Allen, 1974; Damon & Hart, 1986; Pelham, 1991), resistant to external influences (Brown & Dutton, 1995; Markus, 1977; Sedikides, 1995), and self-preserving (Greenwald, 1980; Kunda, 1990; Swann, 1990). The home base constitutes 'the essence of the person.

The second postulate of the BMS is that the person uses this home base as the secure and solid springboard for exploration. The person relies comfortably on the individual self as he or she engages in psychological excursions to the social world. The social world, for the purposes of our thinking, is the social group. The person frequently deserts the individual self in order to join various groups, as groups serve important functions for the person and satisfy many critical needs (Hogg, chap. 8, this volume).

According to the third postulate of the BMS, although the person may develop strong ties with the group and even live the group experience to an extreme (Diener, 1980), the person eventually will return to his or her home base, the individual self. As important and necessary as social groups are, they virtually are outposts for maximizing psychological benefits for the individual self (e.g., reducing uncertainty, increasing self-concept clarity, providing emotional support). No matter how critical the social groups are, the person always will boomerang back to the individual self and reuse it as the basis for new explorative attempts.

Given the scope and constraints of our research, we are in no position to generalize the primacy of the individual self to dyadic relationships (see Tice & Baumeister, chap. 5, this volume). Nevertheless, the research of Aron and McLaughlin-Volpe (chap. 6, this volume) and Smith, Coates, and Murphy (chap. 7, this volume) highlights an interesting possibility. Dyadic relationships (and groups, for that matter) become important only to the extent to which they are psychologically glued to the individual self. It is only when partners (or groups) become a psychological part of the self, through expansion or attachment processes, that they are highly valued. This is the fourth postulate of the BMS. External objects (e.g., groups and, even perhaps, relationships) become important only through psychological processes that reduce them to the level of the individual self. They become important only when they are integrated into the individual self.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our major intent in writing this chapter was to justify the usefulness of the construct of the individual self in social psychological approaches to the

self. The individual self is the psychological and experiential home base. This is what it feels like to be connected to the external world, and this is what it feels like to be human. The death of the individual self has been greatly exaggerated.

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