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A Hierarchy Within On the Motivational and Emotional Primacy of the Individual Self

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Extend to someone the seemingly straightforward invitation “So, tell me about yourself,” and prepare for a narrative barrage of traits, interests, roles, and relationships. To say the least, the self-concept is a complex collection of diverse representations, definitions, or motivationally- and emotionally-laden personality aspects. Of particular relevance to the current chapter are two general forms of self: the individual and collective. The individual self represents unique aspects that distinguish a person from others. The collective self represents aspects shared with ingroup members that assimilate a person with others. In other words, people conceptualize themselves both as unique or independent entities and as undifferentiated or interconnected group members. The coexistence of these different (and sometimes antagonistic) forms of self raises an interesting and important question regarding the essence of the self-concept: Does either self deserve the status of “primary?”

In this chapter, we review a program of research that addresses empirically the issue of self-definitional primacy from a motivational and emotional framework. According to this framework, the more primary self is the one that reacts most intensely to threat and enhancement. Metaphorically speaking, the more primary self is the one that screams the loudest when harmed and smiles the brightest when praised. Capitalizing on the fact that this framework is more textured than an “either/or” argument, our research program addresses three competing hypotheses.

THREE HYPOTHESES OF MOTIVATIONAL AND EMOTIONAL PRIMACY

The Individual-Self-Primacy Hypothesis

According to this hypothesis, the individual self is primary and provides the motivational and emotional essence of the self-concept. This hypothesis is supported, in part, by research on: (1) self-stability, (2) self-enhancement, and (3) the role of the individual in natural selection.

Stability of the Individual Self

The core individual self consists of self-schemas that are held with high certainty and regarded as important. These self-schemas remain relatively stable across time (Pelham, 1991; Pelham & Wachsmuth, 1995) and situations (Bem & Allen, 1974; Roberts & DelVecchio, 2000). Being resistant to internal (e.g., mood; Sedikides, 1995) and external (e.g., feedback; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998) changes, self-schemas perpetuate by incorporating affirming information (Sedikides, 1993) and facilitating memorial and behavioral confirmation (Swann, Pentfrow, & Guinn, 2003). The self-schemas further promote stable self-perceptions by guiding the processing of information about self (Markus, 1977) and others (Sedikides, 2003) as well as projecting onto meta-perceptions of self (Kenny & DePaulo, 1993). Attesting to the self-schemas' tenacity, stability, and deflection of undesirable information, Greenwald (1980) likened them to a totalitarian regime.

Enhancement of the Individual Self

Research reveals a strong motivation to protect and to enhance the individual self (for reviews, see Baumeister, 1998; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). For example, people are more likely to make internal attributions for favorable than unfavorable outcomes (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999), avoid social comparison following poor personal performance in self-relevant domains (Gibbons, Persson Benbow, & Gerrard, 1994), perceive their own attributes as more positive than those of the average person (Alicke, 1985; Alicke & Govorun, this volume), and have better memory for positive than negative self-relevant attributes (Sedikides & Green, 2004; Walker, Skowronski, & Thompson, 2003). In group settings, members take individual credit for the group's success and deny individual blame for the group's failure (Mullen & Riordan, 1988; Schlenker & Miller, 1977). The motive to protect and enhance the individual self is not only pervasive but also functional: Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, and McDowell (2003a, b; but see Kwan, John, Kenny, Bond, & Robbins, 2004) have documented a relation between enhancement of the individual self and psychological / biological health.

The Individual in Natural Selection

Classic evolutionary theory argues that natural selection operates on the individual of a given species (Dawkins & Krebs, 1978; Wiley, 1983; Wallace, 1973). More

recent theory construes the individual self as a human trait that evolved in response to ecological and social forces and, consequently, affords the human organism with several advantages such as social-information processing, affect regulation, and goal-pursuit (Sedikides & Skowronski, 1997, 2000, 2003; Sedikides, Skowronski, & Gaertner, 2004). This perspective suggests that the primacy of the individual self is a consequence of selection pressures that favored the welfare of the individual.

The Collective Self Primacy Hypothesis

According to this hypothesis, the collective self is primary and provides the motivational and emotional essence of the self-concept. This hypothesis is supported by (1) theories involving social groups in natural selection and (2) the perspective that the collective self is the optimal self.

Social Groups in Natural Selection

Despite periods of waxing-and-waning popularity, theories of group selection suggest that natural selection operates on groups of a given species and selection pressures favor, at times, traits and behavioral tendencies that promote the welfare of the collective (Bulmer, 1978; Wilson & Sober, 1994). A somewhat different view on human evolution regards the social group as the primary environment for individual-level selection (Caporael & Brewer, 1991; Caporael & Baron, 1997). This view, however, also suggests that selection pressures favor traits and behaviors that promote the welfare of the group: individuals less fit for a group environment (e.g., unwilling or unable to cooperate and display loyalty) were less likely to be accepted in the group and, consequently, less likely to reap the survival advantages of group living (e.g., shared resources, cooperative child-rearing). In summary, these perspectives suggest that the primacy of the collective self is a consequence of selection pressures that favored the welfare of the group.

The Collective Self as the Optimal Self-Definition

Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT; Brewer, 1991; Brewer & Roccas, 2001) states that fluctuations in self-definition arise in response to competing needs for assimilation and differentiation. Definition in terms of the individual self maximizes differentiation but at the expense of assimilation. Definition in terms of the collective self, however, enables the simultaneous satisfaction of assimilation and differentiation via intragroup and intergroup comparison, respectively. Given its ability to provide an optimal level of self-definition, the collective self arguably has a privileged status within the self-concept.

THE CONTEXTUAL-PRIMACY HYPOTHESIS

According to the contextual-primacy hypothesis, neither self is inherently primary. Instead, contextual factors that influence the relative accessibility of the individual

and collective self determine *momentary* primacy. Perspectives that emphasize the context dependent nature of self-definition support this hypothesis.

The construct of a working self-concept (Markus & Kunda, 1986; Markus & Wurf, 1987), for example, accounts for the stability and malleability of self-definition. The working self-concept consists of the subset of self-aspects that are currently accessible, with accessibility influenced by the chronic activation of a self-aspect as well as situational factors that render self-aspects immediately salient. Likewise, self-categorization theory (SCT; Onorato & Turner, 2004; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994) suggests that *fluctuations in self-definition arise from contrasts afforded by the social context*. Based on SCT's principle of meta-contrast (i.e., social categories become salient to the extent to which the degree of difference perceived between aggregates of stimuli outweigh the degree of difference perceived within aggregates of stimuli), the collective self becomes increasingly salient in intergroup contexts and the individual self becomes increasingly salient in intragroup contexts.

In summary, three equally plausible hypotheses offer rival accounts of the essence of the self-concept. Each hypothesis is reasonable in its own right and draws from a body of psychological theory for support. Nonetheless, these hypotheses are not mutually compatible, and, likely one hypothesis is more empirically plausible and tenable than the others. So, which self provides the essence of the self-concept? Is the individual-self primary? Is the collective-self primary? Does primacy depend on contextual factors?

To discern the most empirically tenable hypothesis, we designed a program of research that pitted the hypotheses head-to-head in an empirical competition—a sort of self-Olympics. We hosted the initial competitions in the domain of threat.

PRIMACY IN THE DOMAIN OF THREAT

In three studies, we compared relative reactions to threats against the individual versus collective self with the rationale being that threatening stimuli are experienced more negatively and reacted to more forcefully when directed to the more primary self. Of course, careful methodological control was of crucial importance to maintain the validity of our comparisons. We directed threatening information at one self without simultaneously threatening the other self to provide an accurate assessment of the unique motivational or emotional potential of each self. We varied across studies the dimension on which the selves were threatened and held constant the particular dimension of threat within a study to prevent confounding the target of threat (individual, collective) with a particular dimension of threat. We assessed varied reactions to threat across studies to rule out the possibility that any conclusion regarding primacy is unique to a particular reaction. Finally, across studies we implemented different procedures of controlling the relative

accessibility of the individual and collective self in order to be able to carry out a valid assessment of the contextual-primacy hypothesis.

Threat and Concurrent Accessibility

In an initial study (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999, Investigation 1), we first rendered cognitively accessible both the individual self and the collective self and then threatened one of those selves. Participants were female undergraduates at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). We operationalized the collective self in regard to membership in the group UNC-CH women. Computerized instructions informed participants that the Department of Psychology was assessing the characteristics of female undergraduates on behalf of the (fabricated) Office of Student Affairs (OSA).

We imbedded in the instructions phrases intended to prime both the individual and collective self. For example, to prime the individual self, instructions indicated that the student body at UNC-CH is “extremely diverse; after all, each one of you is an individual with your own unique background, personality traits, skills, abilities, and hobbies.” To prime the collective self, instructions also informed participants that “you also share membership with other students in various social groups . . . [O]ne of the most important social groups to which people belong is gender . . . you are female, and you share membership in the social group UNC-CH women.”

Participants completed the “highly reliable and valid” Berkeley Personality Inventory (BPI). For the first half of the BPI, participants responded to 30 statements vaguely related to emotional states (e.g., “Sad movies touch me deeply”). For the second half of the BPI, participants indicated how frequently during the previous month they experienced each of 30 emotions (e.g., cheerful, afraid). Instructions subsequently informed participants that the computer was in the process of scoring their responses to the BPI. During this time, we initiated our manipulation of threat directed either at the individual or collective self.

To instigate threat, we provided feedback regarding the trait “moodiness,” a trait that a pilot sample of female UNC-CH students considered negative and stereotypic of women. Instructions explained that the BPI assesses the trait moodiness, which refers to “an inability to control one’s mood state. People who are moody experience frequent and inconsistent shifts in their feelings in response to various situational cues. Moodiness creates potential problems in social interactions, because others are unable to anticipate one’s mood state and behavior.”

Additional information indicated that moodiness “is a very important personality trait. High levels of moodiness have been found to be related to poor adjustment to college life, pessimism, poor mental health, unsatisfactory social relationships, low academic success, and even low success after college.” The computer then informed participants that the scoring of the BPI was complete.

To threaten the individual self, we provided computerized feedback indicating that “participant #53191 is excessively moody.” The feedback reiterated the

previously presented information regarding the trait moodiness and its negative consequences in the second person (i.e., “Moodiness refers to an inability to control your mood state . . .”).

We provided similar feedback when threatening the collective self. However, instructions indicated that the OSA would not allow the presentation of personalized feedback. Instead, participants would receive feedback concerning the average score of the 1,500 UNC-CH women tested, excluding their own score. Feedback indicated that “UNC-CH women are excessively moody” and reiterated the previously presented information regarding the trait moodiness and its negative consequences in reference to UNC-CH women (i.e., “Moodiness refers to an inability for UNC-CH women to control their mood state . . .”).

So, which self, if either, metaphorically screamed louder? Participants’ reactions were consistent with the individual-self-primacy hypothesis. Participants considered the threatening feedback to be more negative and reported feeling more displeased when the feedback threatened the individual than collective self.

Despite support for the individual-self-primacy hypothesis, it is possible that the methodology of this initial study was inadequately refined and, indeed, biased against the other hypotheses. In particular, participants may have responded more passively to a threat of their collective self because the group that comprised the collective self (i.e., UNC-CH women) was of minimal importance. Research suggests that high group identifiers are more apt to protect their group’s identity under conditions of threat than nonthreat (e.g., Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Spears, Doojse, & Ellemers, 1997). Consequently, we decided to “raise the bar” in our second round of empirical tests and differentiate between low and high group identifiers. The contextual-primacy hypothesis suggests that the individual self is primary among low group identifiers, whereas the collective self is primary among high group identifiers.

Threat and Group Identification

In the second study (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 2), we informed male and female undergraduates at UNC-CH that we were conducting a project on behalf of a national testing agency that gathered data on the creativity of college students. An experimenter explained that the students would complete a highly valid creativity test, but first they would answer a demographics questionnaire. We embedded in the questionnaire three items that assessed identification with UNC-CH: “How important is your university to you?”, “To what extent does being a member of your university reflect an important aspect of who you are?”, and “How much do you identify with your university?”

To control for the possibility that the dimension of threat (i.e., creativity) was of differential importance to the individual and collective self, we administered a prethreat measure of importance. Participants rated how important creativity

is to “you” or “UNC-CH students” depending on whether they would receive a threat to their individual or collective self, respectively. Both low and high group identifiers considered creativity more important to the individual than collective self. Consequently, we included this prerating of importance as a covariate in all statistical comparisons to adjust for the differential importance of the dimension of feedback.

Participants subsequently completed a 10 minute creativity test in which they listed as many uses as possible for a brick and then for a candle. The experimenter scored the test and provided participants with written feedback.

The threat to the individual self-informed participants “Your total score . . . was calculated to be at the 31st percentile. This means that your score is worse than 69% of the creativity scores in the normative reference sample.” A histogram providing a graphic depiction of the student’s performance accompanied the written feedback.

The threat to the collective self-informed participants that, for ethical reasons, we could not provide personalized feedback, but we could provide feedback about the average performance of UNC-CH students, excluding their own score. Written feedback indicated “UNC-CH’s total score . . . was calculated to be at the 31st percentile. This means that UNC-CH’s score is worse than 69% of the creativity scores in the normative reference sample.” A graphic depiction of UNC-CH’s performance accompanied the written feedback.

We measured two reactions to the threatening feedback: feedback derogation and mood state. To assess derogation, we asked participants to rate the importance of the outcome of the test for either “you” or “UNC-CH students,” depending on whether the feedback pertained to the individual or collective self, respectively. Participants subsequently rated the extent to which 14 unpleasant-mood adjectives (e.g., upset, miserable, threatened) described their feelings. Research indicates that the tactic to disparage threatening-feedback serves a self-protective function (e.g., “sour grapes;” Wyer & Frey, 1983). Consequently, a threat to the more primary self should result in a more negative mood and a stronger derogation of the feedback.

The results conceptually replicated the previous study and were fully consistent with the individual-self-primacy hypothesis. Regardless of group identification, participants experienced more emotional-distress and disparaged the threat more vociferously when the threat pertained to the individual than collective self. In particular, group identification did not moderate reactions to the threatening feedback. Both low and high identifiers reported a more negative mood state and considered creativity less important when they personally were characterized as relatively uncreative as opposed to when UNC-CH students were characterized as relatively uncreative. After two rounds of competitive hypothesis testing, the individual-self-primacy hypothesis best accounts for the available data and is ahead in the Olympics.

Threat and Alternating Accessibility

We approached the accessibility issue in the previous studies either by making both selves accessible or differentiating participants in regard to their level of group identification. In a third study (Gaertner et al, 1999, Investigation 3), we varied a contextual factor that influences the relative accessibility of the selves. In particular, the meta-contrast principle of self-categorization theory suggests that the individual self becomes increasingly salient in interpersonal contexts and the collective self becomes increasingly salient in intergroup contexts (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Turner et al., 1987). Following such a principle, we directed either threatening or nonthreatening information to the individual self in an interpersonal context or to the collective self in an intergroup context. In other words, we maximized the accessibility of one self and minimized the accessibility of the other self—a practice that enabled us to compare the relative reaction of the individual and collective self in contexts in which each self is maximally accessible. The reaction that we assessed was self-reported anger.

Six UNC-CH undergraduate students participated per session. In the individual-self condition, we randomly divided participants into three 2-person dyads and each participant sat in a separate cubicle. Participants anticipated interacting with their partner on a Prisoner's Dilemma Game (PDG) and subsequently received either insulting or noninsulting feedback from their partner. In the collective-self condition, we randomly divided participants into two 3-person groups and each group sat in a separate cubicle. Each group anticipated interacting with the other group on a PDG and subsequently received insulting or noninsulting feedback from the other group.

Each person or group received instructions on how to read a 3-choice PDG and completed a brief comprehension exercise. To ostensibly save time, the experimenter distributed evaluation forms and suggested that each person (or group) check the accuracy of the other person's (group's) comprehension exercise. Participants received their opponent's answers (actually a standardized form), rated the answers, and, if desired, provided written comments. The experimenter returned the original exercises along with bogus performance feedback.

Participants in the noninsult condition received a high rating and a written comment indicating, "This group (person) did well. They (he or she) really seem(s) to know what's going on." Participants in the insult condition received a low rating and a written comment indicating, "This group (person) did not do well. They (he or she) must be a little slow." Participants subsequently indicated how much anger they felt at the moment.

The individual-self-primacy hypothesis suggest that an insult will arouse more anger when directed to the individual than to the collective self, but noninsulting information will be equally (non)arousing to the individual and collective self. However, the collective-self-primacy hypothesis suggests that an insult will arouse more anger when directed to the collective than individual self, but noninsulting

information will be equally (non)arousing to the individual and collective self. Finally, the contextual-primacy hypothesis suggests that an insult will arouse equivalent anger in the two selves and both selves will express stronger anger in response to insulting than noninsulting information.

The results, once again, were consistent with the individual-self-primacy hypothesis. Noninsulting information aroused equally low levels of anger when directed to the individual versus collective self. Insulting information, on the other hand, aroused more anger when directed to the individual than collective self. Even in contexts that maximize the accessibility of the relevant selves, threat to the individual self elicited a stronger reaction than did threat to the collective self.

Prior to our competitive hypothesis tests in the domain of threat, three rival hypotheses offered equally plausible accounts of self-primacy. In the aftermath of those empirical competitions, only one hypothesis remained unscathed and capable of accounting for the data. The empirical competitions controlled contextually relevant variables (e.g., level of group identification, accessibility of the selves) and potential confounding variables (e.g., relative importance of the threat dimension). Even with those methodological controls, participants considered a threat more severe, experienced a more negative mood state, felt more angry, and more vigorously derogated the source of the threat when the threat pertained to the individual self. These findings suggest that the individual self is motivationally and emotionally primary (Sedikides & Gaertner, 2001a, b).

A META-ANALYTIC SYNTHESIS

Encouraged by the consistent results of our laboratory experiments, we engaged an alternative method of testing the three hypotheses (Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2002). That alternative method was a meta-analysis (Johnson & Eagly, 2000). We approached the meta-analysis with two objectives: to test the hypotheses in the domains of enhancement and threat, and to address a potential criticism endemic to our laboratory studies.

We achieved our first objective by identifying existing studies that empirically compared reactions of the individual and collective self to threat and enhancement, respectively. Of course, the vast majority of those studies were designed with a purpose other than examining the primacy issue. Nonetheless, a meta-analysis would enable us to integrate the results of those studies and empirically compare which of the three hypotheses best accounts for the existing data. Concerning our second objective, the potential criticism of our laboratory studies is that the results are limited to the particular procedures, threats, and social groups that we used. The meta-analysis is particularly appealing because it enables the application of a random-effects analysis, which tests whether inference generalizes to other *possible* studies varying in particular procedures and characteristics (Hedges & Vevea, 1998; National Research Council, 1992).

Literature Search

We began our meta-analysis with a search of the literature for data relevant to the primacy issue. We searched the database of PsychINFO between the years of 1970 and April 2000 using the broad search terms “individual” and “group,” as well as the focused terms “individual self,” “individual identity,” and “personal identity” for the individual self and “collective self,” “collective identity,” and “social identity” for the collective self. We subsequently searched the Social Sciences Citation Index for articles citing authors who, according to our PsychINFO search, published research relevant to the primacy issue. Furthermore, we browsed the social and personality psychology journals between January 1970 and April 2000. Our search identified 37 effects that met our inclusion criteria.

Inclusion Criteria

Because the majority of the studies were not designed to test the primacy issue, we included studies only if they met explicit criteria that enabled a meaningful comparison of the competing hypotheses. The independent variable separately threatened the individual and collective self or separately enhanced the individual and collective self. Likewise, the dependent variable assessed comparable responses of the individual and collective self, such as mood state, perceived valence of feedback, and trait ratings of the individual and collective self. Gaertner et al. (2002) list the included and excluded studies and offer a description of the inclusion criteria.

Studies included in the domain of threat, for example, provided unfavorable information about the performance or characteristics of the individual and collective self, respectively, or used a within-subjects format in which participants rated the individual and collective self, respectively, on unfavorable traits. Likewise, studies included in the domain of enhancement provided favorable information about the performance or characteristics of the individual and collective self, respectively, or used a within-subjects format in which participants rated the individual and collective self, respectively, on favorable traits.

Quantifying the Primacy Hypotheses

We calculated an effect size from each study by standardizing the mean difference between the response of the individual versus collective self to threat or enhancement. In other words, the effect-sizes assessed the extent to which the individual self reacted to a threat (or enhancement) relative to the extent to which the collective self reacted to a threat (or enhancement). The competing hypotheses offer unique predictions regarding the pattern of aggregated effect-sizes.

The individual-self-primacy hypothesis predicts that persons will (1) react more vigorously to threat or enhancement of the individual than collective self and will (2) more willingly deny threatening information or accept enhancing

information when the information pertains to the individual than collective self. On the other hand, the collective-self-primacy hypothesis predicts the opposite pattern. Persons will (1) react more vigorously to threat or enhancement of the collective than individual self and will (2) more willingly deny threatening information or accept enhancing information when the information pertains to the collective than individual self.

The contextual-primacy hypothesis predicts that contextual factors will moderate the relative reaction of the individual and collective selves to threat and enhancement. We coded the effect sizes for two contextual variables relevant to the primacy issue: identification and type of group. Identification reflects the extent to which the social group momentarily provides self-definition (Abrams, 1994; Branscombe & Wann, 1994). We coded each effect size as reflecting high or low group identification. For some effect sizes, the primary study directly assessed whether identification was high or low. For other effect sizes, we inferred level of identification based on a meta-contrast criterion derived from self-categorization theory: We coded effects from intergroup contexts as high-identification and effects from intragroup contexts as low identification. Whether identification was determined by the primary study or by the meta-contrast criterion did not influence the results of the meta-analysis.

We coded as a second contextual moderator the type of group on which the collective self was based. Some studies used natural groups (e.g., fraternity or sorority affiliation, gender, political party membership, university affiliation). Other studies established novel groups using the minimal-group paradigm (Tajfel, 1970). Minimal and natural groups differ in several respects (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992) that could influence the relative primacy of the collective self. Minimal groups, by definition, are novel. Members have negligible familiarity and experience with such groups and are less committed and invested in them (compared to natural groups).

The contextual-primacy hypothesis anticipates that identification and type of group moderates the relative reaction of the individual versus collective self to threat and enhancement. In particular, a pattern of individual-self-primacy should emerge when persons identify weakly with the social group or when a minimal group provides the basis of the collective self. On the other hand, a pattern of collective-self-primacy should emerge when persons identify strongly with the social group or when a natural group provides the basis of the collective self.

Which Hypothesis Best Accounts for the Existing Data?

The pattern of the effect-sizes was uncomplicated and consistent with only the individual-self-primacy hypothesis. Neither identification nor type of group moderated the relative reaction of the individual versus collective self to threat or enhancement. Persons reacted more strongly to both threatening and enhancing information when the information was directed to the individual self than to the collective self.

In terms of the estimated effect sizes, persons responded 5/10ths of a standard deviation more strongly ($g = 0.546$) when a threat was directed to the individual self than to the collective self, and they responded approximately 4/10ths of a standard deviation more strongly ($g = .383$) when enhancement was directed to the individual self than to the collective self. Furthermore, the random-effects analysis broadens our scope of inference beyond the specifics of the studies included in the analysis and allows for the probability that the strong tendency toward individual-self-primacy generalizes across forms of enhancement and threat, modes of reaction, and groups upon which a collective-self is based.

PANCULTURAL VITALITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

Our laboratory studies and meta-analysis provide a remarkably consistent and sizeable pattern of effects suggesting the presence of a basic social psychological phenomenon: the motivational and emotional primacy of the individual self. Challenging such an assertion, however, is what some might consider the ultimate contextual moderator of social functioning: culture.

The cultural-self perspective is based on Triandis' (1989) conceptualization of self in cultural context and is exemplified by Markus and Kitayama's (1991a, b) theory of independent versus interdependent self-construal. The core tenet of this perspective is that the cognitive, emotional, and motivational elements of the self-system are culturally constructed. Social institutions, teachings, proverbs, and symbols transmit cultural norms and ideals that articulate standards of behavior and social values. Those norms and ideals define the essence of what it means to be a good person and, when internalized as a self-construal, shape the self-system such that cognitive processes, emotional experiences, and motivational strivings are orchestrated in accordance with cultural standards and values.

The cultural-self perspective distinguishes between the self-construals fostered by Western versus Eastern culture. Western culture (e.g., North America, North and Western Europe, Australia) emphasizes independence, uniqueness, and personal success (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Cahoon, 1996; Spindler & Spindler, 1990). That is, the normative imperative of Western culture is to "become independent from others and to discover and express one's unique attributes" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, p. 226). Internalizing the Western mandate fosters an independent (i.e., idiocentric, separate, individualistic) self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991ab; Triandis, 1989).

Eastern culture, in contrast, emphasizes interpersonal harmony, the importance of others, and group cohesion (Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982; De Vos, 1985; Hsu, 1948; Leung, 1997). That is, the normative imperative of Eastern culture is to "maintain...interdependence among individuals" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, p. 227). Internalizing the Eastern mandate fosters an interdependent (i.e., allocentric, connected, collectivistic) self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991a, b; Triandis, 1989).

The cultural-self perspective casts doubt on the functioning of the individual self in Eastern culture and suggests that primacy varies by culture or, more specifically, cultural self-construal: The individual-self is primary among persons with (or in cultures that promote) an independent self-construal, whereas the collective self is primary among persons with (or in cultures that promote) an interdependent self-construal. We explored this culture-as-contextual-primacy hypothesis in three studies. In one study, we explored self-generated descriptions of the individual and collective self as a function of self-construal. In two studies, we compared enhancement of the individual self as a function of nationality and self-construal.

Self-Description and Self-Construal: Who Am I?

Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991) report data that, in our opinion, provide evidence of the pancultural primacy of the individual self. These researchers primed either the individual or collective self of North American and Chinese university students. The students subsequently performed a self-description task in which they completed 20 statements beginning with "I am." Trafimow et al. coded descriptions of personal qualities as indicators of the individual self and descriptions of demographic categories and social groups as indicators of the collective self.

Chinese students and students whose collective self was primed listed more descriptions of their collective self than did American students and students whose individual self was primed. Of greater interest, neither culture nor priming moderated the relative frequency of individual- versus collective-self descriptions. Students listed more descriptions of their individual than collective self regardless of their culture of origin and priming condition.

Describing one's self predominantly in terms of individual qualities is certainly consistent with the individual-self-primacy hypothesis. Nevertheless, several caveats challenge a pancultural generalization of this interpretation. It is possible that the Chinese sample had only a minimal interdependent self-construal. Enrolled in a North American university, the Chinese students may have developed a predominantly independent self-construal. This acculturation account, however, is inconsistent with the tendency for Chinese students to list more collective-self descriptions compared to American students. Alternatively, the greater relative frequency of individual-self descriptions may be an artifact of the self-description task. Requiring students to describe the self with "I am" phrases may have biased self-descriptions toward the individual self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Furthermore, the coding technique may have disproportionately favored the tally of individual-self descriptions. Some of the attributes coded as descriptions of the individual self may have been considered by students as overlapping with the collective self.

We addressed these caveats with a conceptual replication and a refined procedure (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 4). During an initial session, students completed the self-construal scale (Singelis, 1994) which assesses levels of independent and interdependent self-construal. A week later, students listed 20 statements

that “generally describe you.” This revised task does not mention “I” or “we” and, consequently, favors neither the individual nor collective self—“you” can refer to either self. Next, students were provided with explicit definitions of the individual and collective self, and they proceeded to indicate whether each of their 20 statements described one or the other self. We defined the individual-self for participants as “attributes and characteristics that are unique to you as an individual. That is, the individual self is composed of attributes or characteristics that differentiate you from all other people.” We defined the collective-self for participants as “attributes and characteristics that you share with members of important groups to which you belong. That is, the collective self is composed of attributes or characteristics that make you similar to other people in your groups.”

The results replicated those of Trafimow et al. (1991). Students with a higher level of an interdependent self-construal listed more descriptions of their collective self than did students with a lower level of an interdependent self-construal. More importantly, self-construal did not moderate the relative frequency of individual versus collective-self descriptions. Students listed more descriptions of their individual than collective self, regardless of their level of independent or interdependent self-construal. These results demonstrate the cultural consistency of individual-self-primacy.

Pancultural Enhancement of the Individual-Self: I am More Modest than Others?

When we introduced the individual-self-primacy hypothesis, we discussed research that points to a strong motivation to protect and enhance the positivity of the individual-self. The majority of such research, however, was conducted in Western culture and the cultural perspective has raised the argument that self-enhancement is a motive unique to Western culture (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999). Although positively distinguishing self from others promotes the normative imperative of Western culture, such a motivation ostensibly is antagonistic to the Eastern imperative of maintaining connectedness. Consistent with this argument are cross-cultural comparisons indicating that European Americans and Canadians self-enhance more strongly than do Japanese, for whom a self-effacing (or critical) orientation appears characteristic (Heine & Renshaw, 2002; Heine, Kitayama, & Lehman, 2001; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, Norasakkunkit, 1997). Assessing the literature, Heine et al. (1999) concluded that “the need for positive self-regard . . . is not a universal, but rather is rooted in significant aspects of North American culture” (p. 766).

Such an argument is certainly at odds with the individual-self-primacy hypothesis. The extant data, however, are not fully consistent with the cultural perspective. Implicit assessments of self-regard manifest individual-self enhancement in Eastern cultures, such as Japan (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997; Kobayashi & Greenwald, 2003), Singapore (Pelham, Koole, Hetts, Hardin, & Seah, 2002),

Thailand (Hoorens, Nuttin, Erdelyi-Herman, & Pavakanun, 1990), and southern European countries (Nuttin, 1987). Furthermore, omnibus comparisons of self-enhancement between cultures potentially conceal an alternative effect of culture. As we subsequently elaborate, cross-cultural research needs to be sensitive to the dimensions on which self-enhancement is expressed and assessed.

Candid and unswerving self-aggrandizement is unsavory even in Western culture and yields mockery and disdain (Leary, Bednarski, Hammon, & Duncan, 1997; Paulhus, 1998; Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Rather than indiscriminately enhancing the individual self, Westerners (and, as we suspect, Easterners) enhance strategically (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Self-enhancement, for example, is expressed most vociferously on important attributes (Alicke, 1985; Alicke & Govorun, this volume; Dunning, 1995). To the extent to which cultural mandates differentially imbue attribute dimensions with meaning and importance, we would expect to find cultural differences on the dimensions on which self-enhancement is expressed. Stated otherwise, the need to enhance the individual self may be a universal motive whose expression is culturally shaped.

We subjected the latter possibility to empirical scrutiny in two studies (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). Across the studies, we implemented alternative operationalizations of culture. We compared the self-enhancement tendencies of Japanese and American students in Study 1 and of persons with an independent versus interdependent self-construal in Study 2. As determined by pilot testing, half of the attributes upon which participants could self-enhance were relevant to the individualistic mandate of Western culture (e.g., unique) and half were relevant to the collectivistic mandate of Eastern culture (e.g., compromising).

Participants imagined being part of a 16-person task force and interacting with the other 15 members (of the same gender, ethnicity, age, and education level of the participant) in an attempt to solve various business problems (e.g., budget, recruitment). Next, participants rated the extent to which each of the individualistic and collectivists attributes described themselves versus the typical group member ($-5 =$ *much worse than the typical group member*, $0 =$ *as well as the typical group member*, $5 =$ *much better than the typical group member*). That is, participants compared self and other on individualistic and collectivistic dimensions, and the rating scale provided the possibility to self-enhance by positively distinguish self from other (i.e., positive numbers), self-efface by negatively distinguishing self from other (i.e., negative numbers), or not differentiate self and other (i.e., rating of 0).

The patterns of self-other ratings were remarkably similar across studies and revealed a pancultural motive to enhance the individual self on culturally relevant dimensions. Figure 10.1 presents the average self-other ratings on the individualistic (light bars) and collectivistic (dark bars) dimensions as a function of Nationality (Study 1) and self-construal (Study 2). Within-culture comparisons (i.e., comparing the magnitude of the light and dark bars within samples) revealed that Americans and persons with an independent construal self-enhanced (i.e., positively differentiated self from other) more strongly on the individualistic than

collectivistic dimension, whereas Japanese and persons with an interdependent construal self-enhanced more strongly on the collectivistic than individualistic dimension. Likewise, between-culture comparisons (i.e., comparing the light and dark bars, respectively, across samples) revealed that Americans and persons with an independent construal self-enhanced more strongly than did Japanese and persons with an interdependent construal on the individualistic dimension, whereas Japanese and persons with an interdependent construal self-enhanced more strongly than did Americans and persons with an independent construal on the collectivistic dimension.

Furthermore, importance ratings obtained in Study 2 provide insight as to why self-enhancement varies across dimensions of social comparison as a function of culture. The importance ratings tracked the patterns of self-enhancement such that persons with an independent self-construal rated the attributes of the individualistic dimension to be more personally important and persons with an interdependent construal rated the attributes of the collectivistic dimension to be more personally important. Mediation analyses were consistent with the possibility that culture affected the perceived importance of an attribute, which, in turn, affected the extent to which persons self-enhanced. By shaping social conceptions of what is good, valued or ideal, culture affects the dimensions upon which the

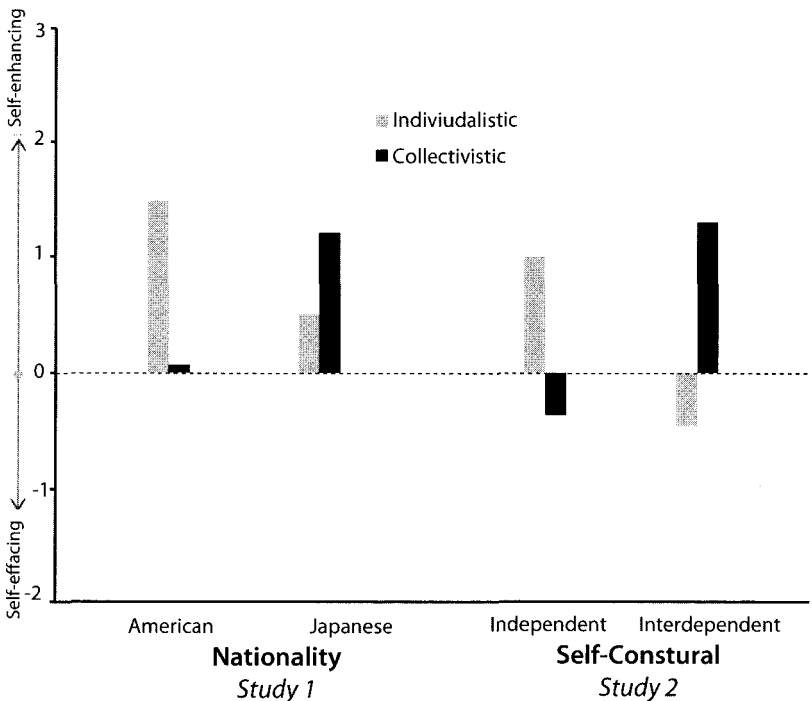


FIGURE 10.1

self-enhancement motive is expressed. Although cultures vary in terms of what attributes are considered important, members of those cultures share in common the universal need to enhance the individual self and they do so strategically on dimensions that are deemed important or culturally relevant.

Culture-as-Contextual-Primacy-Hypothesis in Review

The cultural perspective posits that culture molds the cognitive, motivational, and emotional structure of the self. Such a perspective is at odds with the individual-self-primacy hypothesis and implies that the essence of the self-concept varies as a function of cultural-context (or self-construal). However, the results of our experimental studies on self-definitional preference and individual-self enhancement tell a different story. Members of Eastern cultures and persons with an interdependent self-construal share in common with members of Western cultures and persons with an independent self-construal (1) a preference for describing themselves in regard to their individual self and, more important, (2) a tendency to strategically enhance the individual self. Our findings are congruent with an emerging literature on the panculturality of the individual self (Brown, 2003). Despite rumors to the contrary, the individual self is alive and well in Eastern culture.

NOVEL INGROUPS AND THE INDIVIDUAL SELF

In this section, we demonstrate the utility of the individual-self-primacy hypothesis as a framework for developing new or revisiting existing psychological theory. As an example, we reveal the influence of the individual self in a context in which existing theories attribute the regulation of social judgment to the collective self. The context is the minimal group paradigm (MGP; Tajfel, 1970) and the judgment involves intergroup perception.

The MGP provides a highly controlled context to examine the development and progression of intergroup relations. Methodological control is achieved by categorizing participants into novel groups (e.g., Groups W and X). Because those groups are novel, participants do not have ready-formed stereotypes specific to the groups, nor do the groups have a history of contact. Surprisingly, in this minimal context, participants favor their novel ingroup over the novel outgroup in terms of cognition, evaluation, and behavior (Brewer, 1979; Mullen, Brown, & Smith, 1992).

Prevailing theories suggest that the collective self regulates such ingroup favoritism. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), for example, suggests that persons internalize group membership as a social identity (i.e., a collective self) and subsequently favor the ingroup over outgroups as a means of enhancing their social identity. Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) suggests that intergroup contexts accentuate perceived similarity among self and ingroup members on dimensions that distinguish the ingroup from outgroup and that

shared similarity generates attraction to the ingroup. Common to these theories is the assumption that the collective self, derived from the salient ingroup, regulates intergroup relations.

In contrast, we suggest that the individual self regulates ingroup favoritism between minimal (or, more generally, novel) groups (for related perspectives, see Cadinu & Rothbart, 1996; Eidelman & Biernat, 2003; Otten, this volume). The scarcity of information about novel groups makes it unlikely that group members *redefine* themselves in terms of the group. We find it more plausible that members define the novel group (at least initially) in terms of the individual self—a social object about which members possess a multitude of knowledge. What follows are descriptions of data consistent with the influence of the individual self on intergroup cognition, evaluation, and behavior in the MGP.

Intergroup Cognition

Schaller and Maass (1989) attribute a recall advantage for negative ingroup information to the additional processing required to reconcile the negative information with a positive ingroup expectation. We (Gramzow, Gaertner, & Sedikides, 2001) recently extended this explanation by demonstrating that the individual self provides the recall advantage. We conducted a two-session study to test whether the individual self serves as an information base when processing information about novel ingroups. In the initial session, participants judged whether each of 18 positive behaviors and 18 negative behaviors was self-congruent (i.e., “me”) or self-discrepant (i.e., “not me”). One to 2 weeks later participants returned to the laboratory, and we categorized them into novel groups. We represented participants with the 36 behaviors which ostensibly were enacted by either ingroup or outgroup members. Participants read the 18 ingroup and 18 outgroup behaviors (counterbalanced for valence and presentation order) with the instructed goal of forming an impression of each group. Participants subsequently recalled as many behaviors as they could for each group, with half the participants beginning the recall task for the ingroup behaviors and the other half beginning with the outgroup behaviors.

Integral to our hypothesis was the finding from past research that information that is both negative and self-discrepant is more threatening to the self-concept than information that is simply negative or simply self-discrepant (Green & Sedikides, 2004; Sedikides & Green, 2000; Sedikides, Green, & Pinter, 2004). Accordingly, we hypothesized that, if the individual self serves as an information base about novel ingroups, then negative-self-discrepant information linked to the self via ingroup membership would receive additional processing to reconcile it with positive expectations about the individual self and, consequently, would be recalled more frequently than negative-self-discrepant information not linked to the self. Results were consistent with the hypothesis. The only intergroup difference in recall was for negative-self-discrepant behaviors: participants more frequently recalled negative-self-discrepant behaviors ostensibly performed by other ingroup

than outgroup members. These findings indicate that the individual self guided the processing of information about the novel ingroup.

Intergroup Evaluation

We recently extended the self-as-information-base hypothesis to account, in part, for evaluative favoritism in the minimal group paradigm (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005). Meta-analytic research indicates that individual-self esteem (i.e., global evaluation of one's self-worth as an individual) positively predicts the extent to which persons *directly* evaluate ingroups more favorably than outgroups (Aberson, Healy, & Romero, 2000). This tendency implies the possibility that the individual self serves as an evaluative basis of novel ingroups. Indeed, our own research indicates that evaluative favoritism of novel ingroups versus outgroups is predicted more strongly by level of individual-self esteem than collective-self esteem—a pattern that holds regardless of whether individual and collective esteem are measured 10 minutes (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005, Study 1) or 7 days (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005, Study 2) before persons are categorized into novel groups.

A third study in this line of research suggests that the global evaluation of the individual self automatically extends to novel ingroups via an unmotivated consistency process (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005, Study 3). In an initial testing session, participants completed a measure of individual-self esteem and a measure of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA), which predicts ingroup favoritism via a social identity motive (Altemeyer, 1981). A week later, we categorized participants into novel groups and manipulated whether they completed a self-affirmation task. Fein and Spencer (1997) demonstrated that self-affirmation manipulations reduce the expression of prejudice that is motivated by a need to bolster the self. We obtained conceptually similar results with the measure of RWA. The self-affirmation task nullified the positive association between RWA and ingroup favoritism revealed by participants who did not self-affirm. On the other hand, individual-self esteem continued to positively predict ingroup favoritism, regardless of whether participants had the opportunity to self-affirm. Apparently, the global evaluation of the individual self extends automatically as an unmotivated basis for evaluating novel ingroups (Otten & Wentura, 1999)—a process anticipated by Groucho Marx who self-effacingly remarked, “I don't care to belong to a club that accepts people like me as members.”

Intergroup Behavior

The tendency for members of minimal groups to allocate more resources (e.g., money) to ingroup than outgroup members is construed as evidence of a social-identity enhancement motive (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Because participants cannot directly allocate money to themselves, self-interest is ostensibly absent in the MGP and the favoritism allegedly reflects a concern for the welfare of the ingroup. However, recent research suggests that individual-self interest is present in the MGP and

contributes to the behavioral favoritism (Gaertner & Insko, 2000; Rabbie, Schot, & Visser, 1989; Yamagishi, Jin, & Kiyonari, 1999). In particular, participants allocate money to and *receive* money from other ingroup and outgroup members. Consequently, the allocation task fosters a structure of outcome dependence among ingroup members and participants can indirectly allocate money to themselves by reciprocating favorable allocations with ingroup members. Indeed, eliminating the potential for individual-self profit via reciprocation (e.g., informing participants that other ingroup members are not allocating resources) eradicates behavioral favoritism (particularly among males; Gaertner & Insko, 2000).

In summary, the individual self regulates much of the cognitive, evaluative, and behavioral responses in the minimal group paradigm. Rather than defining the self in terms of novel ingroups, it appears that the direction of inference is reversed. The individual self supplies an informational and evaluative framework that subjectively imbues novel ingroups with defining characteristics and social worth. Of course, we are not suggesting that all group-phenomena boil down to an individual-self analysis. The more general message is of the insight gained by (re)introducing the individual self into psychological theory (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2001; Higgins & May, 2001; Sedikides & Gaertner, 2001a).

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this section, we anticipate and address issues that readers might ponder. We begin with two methodological issues and conclude with a more abstract issue.

Have We Tested Outcomes that Matter to the Collective Self?

As Crocker and Wolfe's (2001) contingency model of self-worth suggests, not all threats and enhancements to the self have equal impact; what matters is the extent to which self-worth is contingent upon the domain in which the threat or enhancement occurs. Consequently, a reader might question whether our comparisons of the individual and collective self were biased by feedback domains that lacked contingency in collective-self worth.

We believe that this was not the case. Indeed, we deliberately controlled for artifacts associated with feedback domain. In our laboratory and meta-analytic research we threatened (or enhanced) the selves on the same domain to avoid confounding target of feedback (i.e., individual vs. collective self) with domain of feedback. Furthermore, by premeasuring the importance of feedback domain to the individual and collective self, we empirically controlled for the possibility that the selves were *differentially* contingent on domain (Gaertner et al., 1999, Study 2). Even with this control, threat to the individual self elicited stronger responses than did threat to the collective self.

Have We Tested The “Real” Collective Self?

Readers might question whether our comparisons of the individual and collective self were biased in that we did not target a collective self that deeply mattered. In response to such an issue, we emphasize two points. First, our laboratory and meta-analytic research included a broad range of groups upon which a collective-self can be derived. Those groups included contextually defined groups (e.g., minimal groups), ascribed groups (e.g., gender), and achieved groups (e.g., university, sorority, political, and career affiliations). Second, given that the meaningfulness of a particular group likely varies across persons we purposefully included level of identification as a potential moderator. Neither our laboratory nor meta-analytic research yielded effects for group identification. Persons who weakly and strongly identified with the targeted groups evidenced stronger reactions to both threats and enhancements of the individual than collective self.

Confident that we provided a balanced test for the collective self, we acknowledge that a third form of self carries the potential to trump the individual self. The relational self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001) is derived from dyadic interpersonal relationships with significant others, such as parents, siblings, offspring, romantic partners, and close friends. Given the developmental (Bowlby, 1969), and social (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) implications of interpersonal relationships, perhaps the relational self stands as primary. Although this is a yet-to-be-explored empirical issue, there is theoretical support for the continued possibility that individual-self-primacy reigns supreme. Self-expansion theory (e.g., Aron & Aron, 1986) suggests that interpersonal relationships influence cognitive, motivational, and emotional functioning to the extent they are integrated into the individual (or what Aron and colleagues refer to as the “personal”) self. In particular, the experience of self-expansion is described such that “the other becomes part of the (personal) self, even confused with the personal self” (Aron & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2001, p. 102). Aron and colleagues offer expansion of the individual self to explain acts of protection and concern for close others. Such a perspective construes the individual-self as a necessary ingredient for altruistic or other-serving actions and motives.

Theories that Emphasize the Collective Self: Much Ado about Nothing?

In light of our findings for an internal hierarchy that favors the individual self, readers might question the value or validity of theories that emphasize the collective self. Before rushing to the wholesale abandonment of such theories, readers should realize that neither our arguments nor data suggest that the collective self is unimportant, irrelevant, or unimpactful. We designed our research to explore the *relative* motivational and emotional standing of the individual versus collective self, not their absolute potencies. Indeed, our research would have been a pointless

exercise and lackluster at best had we considered the collective self to be extraneous to social functioning. We readily acknowledge both the central role of collective self in human functioning and the often symbiotic relation between the individual and collective selves (Hugenberg & Bodenhausen, 2004).

Nonetheless, our findings offer an important message for collective-self theories. Self-functioning might differ considerably from what collective-self theories predict when motivational or emotional facets of the individual self are heightened. The meta-contrast principal of self-categorization theory, for example, provides a cognitive account for shifts between individual and collective self-definition in the form of contextually defined perceptions of relative similarity. Perceiving less similarity within than between social groupings likely promotes an individuated self-definition as self-categorization theory predicts. However, if an individual level threat was introduced into the latter situation (as we did in Study 1 of Gaertner et al., 1999), the cognitive basis of self-definitional shifts would likely play second fiddle to motivated needs of buffering the threat—such as by self-defining at the collective level. Optimal distinctiveness theory, as another example, offers a motivated account of self-definitional shifts in the form of the competing needs for assimilation and differentiation. As Pickett, Bonner, and Coleman (2002, Study 3) indicate, however, satisfying enhancement needs at the level of the individual self facilitates shifts to the collective self in the service of assimilation needs. In particular, persons who were positively differentiated from their ingroup were more willing to subsequently accept negative ingroup stereotypes than were persons who were negatively differentiated from their ingroup.

SUMMATION

We began our chapter pondering the motivational and emotional essence of the self-concept, and considered three possibilities: (1) the individual-self is primary, (2) the collective-self is primary, or (3) primacy is contextually established. We subsequently detailed our program of research that explores the primacy-issue. The initial stage of our research consisted of a series of laboratory studies and a more comprehensive meta-analysis that compared the relative reactions of the individual versus collective self to threat and enhancement. Those projects consistently yielded evidence suggesting that the individual-self is primary.

We broadened our empirical scope in the second stage of our research to examine the possibility that culture contextually moderates the fundamental nature of self. We enrolled in those studies persons who internalized independent versus interdependent cultural mandates and compared their relative self-definitional preference and proclivity to enhance the individual-self. Those studies revealed the cross-cultural vitality of the individual self in that independent and interdependent persons self-defined in terms of the individual self and strategically enhanced the individual self on culturally valued dimensions. In the third stage of our research, we examined the utility of the individual-self-primacy concept as a

tool for understanding social functioning. Our minimal group research indicated that the individual self regulates cognitive, evaluative, and behavioral reactions to novel ingroups. In summation, the self-concept has a motivational and emotional hierarchy at the top of which sits comfortably the individual self.

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