

## 6. The Social Self: The Quest for Identity and the Motivational Primacy of the Individual Self

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The theme of this volume is the social mind. The volume aspires to unravel the tangled web of interconnections between the individual and the social environment. This ambition represents a time-honored and cherished tradition of theorizing, echoed by pivotal works in social sciences such as those of Cooley (1902), Mead (1934), Durkheim (1950), and Weber (1964).

From a social and personality psychology perspective, the interconnections between the individual and the social environment manifest themselves in life transitions, concerns, and objectives, which have received several labels such as *personal strivings* (Emmons, 1986), *personal projects* (Little, 1983), *life tasks* (Cantor, Markus, Niedenthal, & Nurius, 1986), and *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In this chapter, we conceptualize these transitions, concerns, and objectives as direct or indirect endeavors to clarify and articulate the self. We conceptualize them as the quest for self-definition or identity.

The quest for identity is perhaps the most central, persistent, and challenging component of human development (Breytspraak, 1984; Damon, 1983). Success or failure in achieving a well-articulated identity has implications for a variety of key psychological functions such as self-regulation, the processing of self-referent information, the experience of affect, the setting of goals, the perception of others, and the behavior toward others (for a review, see Sedikides & Strube, 1997).

Identity can be derived from several within-person sources, such as the individual self, the relational self, the familial self, and the

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collective (i.e., ingroup) self. These four cognitive representations are relatively independent (Andersen and Berenson, this volume; Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gaines et al., 1997; Trafimow, Silverman, Fan, & Law, 1997; Trafimow & Smith, 1998; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991). In the present chapter, we will concentrate on two of these representations or sources of identity: the individual self and the collective self. Additionally, we will be interested in features of the social context that shape the self – what we call the *contextually determined self*.

### Sources of Identity

#### *The Individual Self*

The *individual self* refers to personal characteristics. These are traits or attributes that distinguish the person from other ingroup members. These aspects of the self-concept make the person unique and set him or her apart from other members of the ingroup. Stated otherwise, the individual self is an identity that is independent of group membership.

There is a lot to be said for the view that the individual self constitutes the primary basis for identity (*individual-self primacy hypothesis*). The core conceptions of the individual self are relatively stable (Bem & Allen, 1974; Pelham, 1991), resistant to change (Sedikides & Strube, 1997), and susceptible to confirmation rather than disconfirmation (Swann, 1990) – especially when the self-conceptions are positive (Sedikides, 1993).

Existing literature is supportive of the privileged status of the individual self in identity-seeking. For example, persons evaluate the individual self more positively than the ingroup (Lindeman, 1997; Lindeman & Sundvik, 1995), regard the self as more resistant to media propaganda than the ingroup (Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1995), and take personal credit for the achievements of the ingroup while denying personal blame for the failures of the ingroup (Mullen & Riordan, 1988). Furthermore, persons accentuate intragroup differences to a greater degree than intragroup similarities (Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995).

#### *The Collective Self*

The *collective self* refers to characteristics that an individual assumes as a group member. These traits or attributes differentiate the group

member from members of antagonistic outgroups. These aspects of the self-concept are shared by members of a given ingroup and distinguish the ingroup members from members of the outgroup. Stated otherwise, the collective self is an identity that is dependent exclusively on group membership.

A compelling case can be made for the thesis that the collective self constitutes the primary basis of identity (*collective-self primacy hypothesis*). The behavior of individual group members is shaped substantially by the group, as attested to by phenomena such as social influence (Asch, 1951; Crano, this volume), group decision making and performance (Kaplan & Wilke, this volume; Kerr, this volume; Myers & Lamm, 1976), social facilitation (Zajonc, 1965), and ostracism (Williams, Wheeler, & Harvey, this volume). In fact, it has been argued that the collective self provides the optimal level of self-definition, as it affords both assimilation with the ingroup and differentiation from outgroups (Brewer, 1991; Hornsey & Hogg, 1999).

Extant research backs the collective-self primacy hypothesis. For example, persons consider negative traits as more descriptive of the self than of the ingroup (Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996, Study 1) and feel worse following an ingroup as opposed to an individual performance failure (Hirt, Zillman, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992, Exp. 2).

#### *The Contextually Determined Self*

There is an alternative to the previously mentioned hypotheses: the *contextual primacy hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, the kind of self (i.e., individual or collective) that will be used for self-definition is dependent on characteristics of the social context. These characteristics are situational features that render one self momentarily more accessible than the other self. The self that is rendered cognitively accessible at any particular moment will guide self-definition. Momentary accessibility of the self, in this case, is equated with self-definitional primacy.

This position also enjoys theoretical and empirical support. The working self-concept (i.e., the part of the chronic self-concept that is temporarily active in working memory) is malleable and amenable to contextual variation (Markus & Kunda, 1986; McGuire, McGuire, & Cheever, 1986). This point has been refined and extended by self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Whether persons will

define themselves as unique individuals versus interchangeable group members depends on social contextual contrasts. These can be summarized through the principle of meta-contrast: Social categories become salient to the extent to which the average perceived difference between stimulus aggregates exceeds the average perceived difference within stimulus aggregates. This principle predicts that self-definition fluctuates toward the individual self in intragroup contexts and toward the collective self in intergroup contexts. Indeed, persons are more likely to use the collective self as a basis for self-definition in intergroup than intragroup settings (Hogg & Turner, 1987) and when the ingroup is a numerical minority rather than a majority (Simon & Hamilton, 1994).

### Will the Most Primary Self Please Stand Up? Testing the Relative Merit of the Three Hypotheses

Clearly, there is merit to all three theoretical views when each is considered individually. However, in our research program, we asked a different set of questions: Which view affords the most satisfactory account of the quest for identity? Which self constitutes the primary basis for identity? Do persons "care" for one self more than the other? Are persons more likely to *protect* one self more than the other in the face of adversity (e.g., threatening feedback)? If so, which self are persons more likely to protect? Does context determine which self is protected?

To begin answering these questions, a researcher would need to engage in competing hypothesis testing. Thankfully, as our review so far indicates, such testing exists. However, we have several misgivings about the conclusiveness of these tests. Before we state our misgivings, though, we acknowledge that, more often than not, the objective of prior research was to test hypotheses that differed from the ones that we presently assess. We take the liberty to view this prior research from our own tilted perspective.

We will express our misgivings in the form of guidelines toward achieving conclusiveness in competing hypothesis testing. We will introduce four guidelines. *First*, feedback to the individual self should be relevant only to this self; likewise, feedback to the collective self should be relevant only to this self. This provision ensures a valid assessment of the strength of the independent motivational properties of each self. Past research (e.g., Biernat et al., 1996; Mullen & Riordan,

1988) has been unclear on this issue. *Second*, the two selves should receive feedback on the same domain, and the domain should be of equal importance to the two selves. Providing feedback on domains that are dissimilar for the two selves (e.g., Hirt et al., 1992) confounds target of threat (i.e., individual vs. collective self) with domain importance. *Third*, the impact of feedback on the two selves should be measured immediately rather than after a delay. Delayed assessment (e.g., Moghaddam, Stolkin, & Hutcheson, 1997) can mask the impact of feedback, as equilibrium processes may take place. *Fourth*, the accessibility of each self should be controlled or manipulated. This guideline is responsive to the proposition of the contextual primacy hypothesis that primacy varies with relative accessibility.

With these guidelines in mind, we designed several experiments to test the motivational primacy of the bases for identity (see Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999, for a more detailed exposition). In our research, (1) the feedback was directed at either the individual or the collective self, (2) the feedback was identical and pertained to the same self-aspect, (3) the reactions to feedback were measured immediately, and (4) the accessibility of the two selves was either controlled or manipulated. We will describe this research subsequently.

#### Which Self Is Protected?

The collective self in our first experiment was University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) women. Our initial task was to derive traits that UNC-CH women would regard as most typically positive or negative of their ingroup. In a pilot study, we asked UNC-CH women to generate group-stereotypic positive and negative traits. In a second pilot study, we asked a new sample of UNC-CH women to rate the previously generated traits for group-stereotypic positivity/negativity. The two pilot studies revealed that UNC-CH women regarded the trait "emotionally expressive" as the most positive group-stereotypic trait, whereas they regarded the trait "moody" as the most negative group-stereotypic trait.

To overview our experiment, we directed either unfavorable or favorable feedback at either the individual or the collective self. Specifically, participants were informed that the experiment was conducted by the Department of Psychology on behalf of the (fabricated) Office of Student Affairs (OSA). We made every effort to prime both the individual and the collective self. In order to prime the individual self,

we told participants that students at UNC-CH are "extremely diverse; after all, each one of you is an individual with your own unique background, personality traits, skills, abilities, and hobbies." In order to prime the collective self, we told 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. That is, you are female, and you share membership in the social group UNC-CH women." Furthermore, we mentioned to participants that the OSA has authorized the Psychology Department to collect information about the characteristics of the female student body (priming of the collective self). To accomplish this, each participant would need to complete a computerized version of the Berkeley Personality Inventory (BPI). The BPI was described as a "reliable and valid measure of personality characteristics and traits" (priming of the individual self).

Participants were informed that the BPI consisted of two parts. In the first part, participants responded to 30 statements that were related vaguely (but nondiagnostically) to the trait emotional or moody (e.g., "One of my favorite pastimes is sitting in front of a crackling fire," "Sad movies touch me deeply"). In the second part, participants indicated how frequently, during the last month, they felt each of 30 emotions (e.g., cheerful, sad). Next, participants were informed that the computer would begin scoring their responses. While they waited, we initiated the manipulations.

The computer provided participants with feedback that was either favorable or unfavorable and was directed at either the individual or the collective self. Participants in the *unfavorable feedback directed at the individual self* condition were informed that the BPI assesses the trait moodiness. Moodiness was defined ("inability to control one's mood state"), and its negative consequences (e.g., disrupting social interactions) were described. Furthermore, the importance of moodiness was overstated, as the trait was said to predict future poor adjustment as well as personal and professional failure. Next, participants were informed that scoring of the BPI was completed and, according to their individualized profile, they were "excessively moody." Participants in the *favorable feedback directed at the individual self* condition were told that the BPI assesses the trait of emotional expressiveness. This trait was defined ("one's ability to express appropriately a wide array of emotions"), and its positive consequences (e.g., facilitating social interactions) were described. Furthermore, emotional expressiveness was

said to predict future adjustment as well as personal and professional success. Next, participants were told that scoring of the BPI was completed and, according to their individualized profile, they were "very emotionally expressive."

Participants in the *unfavorable feedback directed at the collective self* condition were instructed that they would not receive personalized feedback because their responses had already been forwarded directly to the OSA, given that OSA required anonymity in responding. Instead, they would receive feedback pertaining to all UNC-CH women tested so far, excluding their own score. Subsequently, the trait moodiness was defined, and its negative consequences and predictive power were emphasized. Finally, participants received feedback on the BPI in aggregate form (i.e., "UNC-CH women are excessively moody"). Participants in the *favorable feedback directed at the collective self* condition were also told that only feedback pertaining to UNC-CH women as a group (excluding their own scores) was available. After learning all about the ostensible merits of emotional expressiveness, participants received feedback that "UNC-CH women are very emotionally expressive."

In the end, participants responded to three sets of questions. The *first set* assessed the degree to which participants perceived themselves as similar to the group (i.e., "I am very similar to UNC-CH women," "My personality attributes are quite similar to the attributes of UNC-CH women," "My beliefs and values are quite similar to the beliefs and values of UNC-CH women") or perceived themselves as unique individuals (i.e., "I am a unique individual," "My personality attributes are totally unique," "My beliefs and values are totally unique"). The *second set* of measures assessed the degree to which participants identified with the group (i.e., "I strongly identify with the group UNC-CH women," "I am proud to belong to the group UNC-CH women," "I value my membership in the group UNC-CH women") or identified with the individual self (i.e., "I only identify with myself," "I am proud to just be myself," "I value being myself"). Note that these two sets of measures have been used successfully to index the collective self in previous research from a self-categorization theory perspective (e.g., Simon et al., 1995; Simon, Hastedt, & Aufderheide, 1997; Turner et al., 1987). In our research, we adapted these measures slightly and implemented them as indicators of both the collective and the individual self. The *third set* of measures assessed participants' perceptions of the severity of feedback (i.e., "Was the feedback you received negative or

positive?"; "How displeased or pleased with the feedback did you feel when you received it?").

The three theoretical views make contrasting predictions. According to the *individual-self primacy hypothesis*, the individual self has a higher motivational value for identity-seeking than does the collective self. Hence, participants will regard a threat to the individual self as more severe than a threat to the collective self. When the individual self is threatened, participants will use the collective self as a protective buffer for the individual self; that is, participants will derive identity from the collective self. However, when the collective self is threatened, participants will not move to derive identity from the individual self. We label this absence of identity-seeking *motivational apathy* or *indifference*. According to the *collective-self primacy hypothesis*, the collective self has higher motivational value for identity-seeking than does the individual self. Consequently, participants will regard a threat to the collective self as more severe than a threat to the individual self. When the collective self is threatened, participants will use the individual self as a protective buffer of the collective self. However, a threat against the individual self will be accompanied by motivational apathy. Finally, according to the *contextual primacy hypothesis*, threats against the individual self and the collective self will be perceived as equal in severity. As a result, participants will be likely to use either self as a protective buffer. When the collective self is threatened, identity will be derived from the individual self, and when the individual self is threatened, identity will be derived from the collective self.

The results of the experiment were consistent with the *individual-self primacy hypothesis*. To begin with, participants regarded unfavorable feedback to the individual self as a more serious threat (i.e., they perceived it as more negative and were more displeased with it) than unfavorable feedback to the collective self. More important, participants buffered their threatened individual self by redefining themselves in terms of their collective self. No such shift occurred in response to the threatened collective self.

Let us elaborate on this latter pattern. First, we will consider the case in which feedback was directed at the individual self. Participants were more likely to indicate similarity with the ingroup and identify more strongly with the ingroup when the feedback was unfavorable than when it was favorable. In the face of threat, participants resorted to the ingroup and used it as a buffer to protect the individual self. This identity shift was not evident when feedback was directed at the collective

self. Unfavorable feedback did not affect participants differently than favorable feedback. They did not use the individual self as a protective buffer for the collective self. Participants manifested motivational apathy.

We wondered about the self-definitional immovability of participants who received feedback at the collective-self level. Why were they apathetic? One explanation is group solidarity. Participants remained with the ingroup in the face of threat as an expression of solidarity. In fact, it is likely that unfavorable information "becomes a source of pride at the group level – a badge of distinction rather than a mark of shame" (Brewer, 1991, p. 481). However, this explanation is rendered rather implausible by our results. If participants manifested solidarity, (1) they should be more likely to define themselves in accordance with the group in the unfavorable rather than the favorable feedback condition, and at the very least, (2) they should define themselves as group members in absolute terms (i.e., compared to the scale midpoint). Neither of these two predictions was borne out.

Nevertheless, our findings may be qualified by a relevant individual difference variable: group identification. High group identifiers are persons who identify strongly with the ingroup, whereas low group identifiers are persons who identify weakly with the ingroup. By definition, the collective self is more primary than the individual self for high identifiers, whereas the individual self is more primary for low identifiers. Research findings are consistent with this proposition: High identifiers are more likely to protect the group identity (e.g., through outgroup derogation or expression of higher ingroup homogeneity) under conditions of threat than nonthreat, whereas low identifiers do not exhibit such group-identity enhancement strategies (Branscombe & Wann, 1994; Spears, Doojse, & Ellemers, 1997).

In summary, our first experiment provided preliminary evidence for the primacy of the individual self. However, a conclusion in favor of the individual-self primacy hypothesis may be premature given the possibility that group identification moderates self-definitional primacy. A new experiment is needed. The finding that high group identifiers are more likely to use the collective rather than the individual self as a basis for self-definition will give the contextual primacy hypothesis a boost. On the other hand, the finding that the motivational importance of the individual self does not differ in high and low group identifiers will be in line with the individual-self primacy hypothesis. Finally, the finding that the collective self is of equal motivational

importance to high and low group identifiers will support the collective-self primacy hypothesis.

#### *Does Group Identification Moderate Identity Preferences?*

We addressed the question of whether group identification moderates identity preferences in a second experiment. Specifically, we examined the reactions of high and low group identifiers to unfavorable feedback directed at either the individual or the collective self. These reactions were mood states and feedback derogation. We reasoned that a threat targeted at the more primary self will result in stronger feedback derogation and more negative mood states than a threat targeted at the less primary self.

The pertinent collective self was UNC-CH students. We classified participants into high and low group identifiers based on their responses to the following three questions: "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?" We mentioned to participants that the experiment was conducted allegedly on behalf of a national testing agency that gathered data on creativity. They would be tested on a valid creativity test. (Note that we gathered pretest data on the perceived importance of creativity for both the individual self and the collective self, and we controlled statistically for preexisting differences.) Next, we administered a face-valid creativity test, the "Lange-Elliot" creativity test (Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998). We presented participants with the names of two objects (*brick* and *candle*), one at a time. Participants were given 5 minutes to generate as many functionally distinct uses as possible for each object. They wrote each use on a slip of paper, folded the paper, and dropped it in a box next to them. In the end, the experimenter summed up the total number of functionally distinct uses that each participants had generated. This sum constituted the overall creativity score. Next, the experimenter delivered to participants uniformly unfavorable feedback.

In the case of *threat to the individual self*, participants were informed that "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." In the case of *threat to the collective self*, participants were informed that, for ethical reasons, we could not give personalized feedback, but we could give feedback about the average

performance of UNC-CH students, excluding their own score. Participants were told that "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."

We gauged feedback derogation by asking participants to rate the perceived importance of the test outcome either for "you" (individual self) or for "UNC-CH" (collective self). High derogation was taken as an indicator of higher motivational primacy of the relevant threatened self. We gauged mood states by asking participants to respond to 14 mood adjectives. Seven of the adjectives (i.e., *annoyed*, *angry*, *bitter*, *frustrated*, *irritated*, *threatened*, and *upset*) measured agitation, whereas the remaining seven adjectives (i.e., *blue*, *disappointed*, *down*, *gloomy*, *low*, *miserable*, and *sad*) measured dejection. We will report the pooled mean, as responses to the two sets of adjectives were essentially identical (i.e., they were highly correlated). Increasingly negative mood states are taken as an indicator of the motivational primacy of the relevant threatened self.

In a conceptual replication of our previous experiment, the results were consistent with the individual-self primacy hypothesis. We observed no significant difference in the responses of high versus low group identifiers. Specifically, both high and low group identifiers were more likely to devalue the importance of the creativity test when its unfavorable outcome threatened the individual rather than the collective self. Additionally, both high and low group identifiers felt worse when the unfavorable feedback was directed at the individual rather than at the collective self. Group identification did not moderate the preference for an individual-level identity.

#### *Toward a More Balanced Test of the Contextual Primacy Hypothesis*

The contextual primacy hypothesis states that identity shifts toward the individual self in interpersonal contexts and shifts toward the collective self in intergroup contexts. In a third experiment, we varied the social context. Specifically, we directed either unfavorable or favorable information to either the individual self in an interpersonal context or to the collective self in an intergroup context. In a sense, we maximized the accessibility of one self while minimizing the accessibility of the other. Thus, we were able to observe and compare the reactions to unfavorable information (i.e., an insult) on the individual self and the collective self in settings in which each self was maximally

accessible. Self-reported anger served as an indicator of motivational primacy.

The three theoretical views make contrasting predictions. For illustrative purposes, we will formulate these predictions only for the case of unfavorable feedback. According to the *individual-self primacy* hypothesis, an insult to the individual self will instigate more anger than an insult to the collective self. According to the *collective-self primacy* hypothesis, an insult to the collective self will induce more anger than an insult to the individual self. Finally, according to the *contextual primacy* hypothesis, insulting information will make participants angry, regardless of the type of self (i.e., individual or collective) to which the feedback is targeted.

We solicited participants in aggregates of six for an experiment on "social decision making." Our first task was to create an interpersonal versus intergroup context. We established the *interpersonal context* (i.e., individual-self condition) by dividing the participants randomly into three 2-person dyads. After the division into dyads, each participant was escorted to a separate room. Participants anticipated interacting with their partner in a Prisoners Dilemma Game (PDG). We established the *intergroup context* (i.e., collective-self condition) by dividing the participants randomly into two 3-person groups. Subsequently, we escorted ingroup members into a common room. Each group anticipated interacting with the opposing group in a PDG.

Participants were told that they could expect to earn money as a result of their interactions with the other person (group). The interactions would occur on a three-choice PDG matrix. Each person (group) was given a copy of the matrix, examples, and a decision record sheet on which they would presumably record their decisions for 10 trials. Next, participants completed a matrix comprehension exercise in an alleged effort to increase their understanding of the payoff matrix. In particular, participants completed three sentences of the form "A person (group) would choose "X" ("Y" or "Z") if they (he/she) wanted to . . ." In the individual-self condition, each person completed the sentences separately. In the collective-self condition, each group completed the task as a whole. Participants also completed a prefeedback measure of anger.

Then the experimenter told participants that, in the interest of saving time, they would evaluate their opponents' comprehension exercise. Each person (group) received an evaluation form and a comprehension exercise completed allegedly by their opponent. Participants rated their

opponent's comprehension of the PDG matrix and were given the option of providing written comments.

The experimenter collected all forms and returned the original comprehension exercises and bogus evaluations. Participants in the *unfavorable feedback* condition received a low score and a disparaging comment ("This person [group] did not do well. He/She [they] must be a little slow"). Participants in the *favorable feedback* condition received a high score and praise ("This person [group] did well. He/She [they] really seems to know what's going on"). Finally, all participants completed (in their private cubicles) a postfeedback measure of anger.

In the interpersonal context condition, we used the individual as the unit of analysis, whereas in the intergroup context condition, we used the group as the unit of analysis. No differences were observed among the four conditions as far as the prefeedback measure of anger is concerned. Importantly, however, differences were obtained in the postfeedback anger measure.

The pattern of results supports the *individual-self primacy* hypothesis. Unfavorable feedback instigated more anger when it referred to the individual rather than the collective self. (Favorable feedback aroused equally low levels of anger regardless of whether it referred to the individual or the collective self.) Even in social contexts (i.e., interpersonal and intergroup) that maximize the accessibility of each self, a threat to the individual self generates more anger than a threat to the collective self.

## Discussion

We began this chapter by paying tribute to the social mind and, by implication, to the social self. The self has its origins in social context and operates within a social context. The content of the self is fundamentally social (Markus, 1983; Stryker & Statham, 1985).

At the same time, however, we have acknowledged that the individual and the collective self compose two relatively independent and robust cognitive structures (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Trafimow & Smith, 1998; Trafimow et al., 1991, 1997; see also Simon, 1997). This acknowledgment served as the springboard for our research, as we were able to pose the question of self-definition or identity. How do human adults know who they are? When in a state of relative threat (e.g., when receiving unfavorable feedback), how do they go about

seeking and achieving self-definition? On which self do they rely the most? Which self do they rush to protect?

### Summary of Findings

We formulated and comparatively tested three hypotheses. The *individual-self primacy* hypothesis emphasizes the privileged status of the individual self (i.e., attributes that are unique and independent of group membership) in identity-seeking. The *collective-self primacy* hypothesis emphasizes the relevance of the collective self (i.e., attributes that are shared by other members of the ingroup) in the quest for identity. Finally, the *contextual primacy* hypothesis stresses the importance of context (i.e., interpersonal vs. intergroup) in determining whether identity will be derived from the individual or the collective self.

In three experiments, we controlled for several potential confounding variables, such as feedback domain, importance of feedback domain, independence of feedback for each type of self, delay of measurement, and accessibility of the two selves (i.e., rendering each self simultaneously accessible). More important, we manipulated key variables such as feedback referent (individual vs. collective self), feedback valence (unfavorable vs. favorable feedback), level of group identification (high vs. low), and context (interpersonal vs. intergroup). Furthermore, across experiments, we varied the relevant collective self. In particular, we used collective selves that were contingent upon membership in an ascribed group (i.e., women, Experiment 1), an achieved group (i.e., UNC-CH students, Experiment 2), and a context-dependent group (i.e., a minimal group, Experiment 3). Finally, we examined a multiplicity of responses to feedback, such as identity preferences, perception of feedback, derogation of feedback, mood state, and level of anger.

We made a critical assumption, one that is empirically substantiated (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; see also Andersen and Berenson, this volume): A threat to the more primary basis of self-definition elicits more severe reactions than a threat to the less primary basis of self-definition. Despite variations in methodology, the three experiments provided converging results. Compared to a threat directed at the collective self, a threat directed at the individual self (1) led to an increased preference for using the collective self as a source of identity (i.e., participants deemphasized their personal uniqueness and identified more

strongly with the ingroup), (2) was considered more severe, (3) produced a more negative mood state, (4) elicited more anger, and (5) led to stronger source derogation. These results constitute compelling support for the *individual-self primacy* hypothesis. The individual self is the most potent source of identity.

### Qualifications and Alternative Hypotheses

Nevertheless, our findings are arguably subject to qualifications and alternative hypotheses. We will consider these possibilities in the following section.

*Qualifications: Individualism Versus Collectivism.* Our research was conducted in a Western, individualistic culture. To what extent do our findings generalize to collectivistic (e.g., Asian) cultures? Some cross-cultural research indicates that fundamentally different self-processes are at work in these two types of culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For example, Australians are more likely than Japanese to use the first-person pronoun in conversations (Kashima & Kashima, 1997). Also, Americans are likely to self-enhance, whereas Japanese are not (Heine & Lehman, 1997). If anything, Japanese are more likely to self-criticize (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997).

The implication of this counterpoint is that the cultural value orientations of individualism and collectivism moderate the primacy of the individual self. The individual self likely serves as the primary identity basis for persons high on individualism, whereas the collective self likely serves as the primary identity basis for persons high on collectivism.

We tested this moderational argument (Gaertner et al., 1999, Experiment 4). In a preliminary session, we assessed participants' levels of individualism and collectivism using Singelis's (1994) self-construal scale. A week later, we asked these participants to list 20 self-descriptions that "generally describe you." We reasoned that, 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 the level of individualism or collectivism. However, if self-definitional primacy is moderated by the level of cultural value orientation, individual-self primacy would be limited to persons high on individualism. Persons high on collectivism would



instead generate more descriptions pertaining to the collective self than to the individual self. Interestingly, participants listed more traits that referred to the individual self than to the collective self. This finding is consistent with the individual-self primacy hypothesis. Regardless of the levels of individualism and collectivism, the individual self serves as the primary forum of identity-seeking.

Indeed, we claim that the individual self is highly prevalent in collectivistic societies. Implicit measures have detected self-enhancement in Japan: Letter and number evaluation tasks show a greater preference for letters and numbers occurring in one's own name and birth date, respectively (Kitayama & Karasawa, 1997). Cross-cultural comparisons of exchange principles make a similar point. Finjeman, Willemsen, and Poortinga (1996) measured expected inputs to and outputs from various relationships (e.g., parents, siblings, cousins, close friends, acquaintances, strangers) in individualistic countries (the Netherlands and the United States) and collectivistic countries (Greece, Hong Kong, and Turkey). Regardless of culture, willingness to provide for others was related to expectations of what would be received from others. The operation of basic exchange principles, equity and reciprocity, indicates that even in collectivistic cultures there is a surprisingly strong concern for self-interest. In a related vein, although persons of color (i.e., African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos) score higher than Anglos on measures of collectivism, they score as high as Anglos on measures of individualism (Freeberg & Stein, 1996; Gaines et al., 1997).

These research findings converge on an important principle. Although level of collectivism can be rather easily influenced by culture (e.g., norms), level of individualism is relatively invariant. Individualism is less amenable to cultural variation. To us, this principle is yet another substantial indicator of the primacy of the individual self.

*Alternative Hypotheses.* We will consider three alternative hypotheses that speak to potential differences between the individual and the collective self: differences in uncertainty orientation, differences in strength of identification, and structural differences. These differences may have accounted for our findings.

**DIFFERENCES IN UNCERTAINTY ORIENTATION.** Two chapters in this volume (by Hogg and by Sorrentino, Hodson, & Huber) make a compelling case for the role of uncertainty orientation in information processing. This perspective has implications for our research.

Arguably, the results of Gaertner et al. (1999, Experiment 1) are due to differences in uncertainty orientation. According to this argument, participants were more certain about the individual self than about the collective self. Consequently, they reacted more defensively against negative feedback directed at the individual self than at the collective self.

Although this issue is best addressed empirically, we doubt that uncertainty played a critical role in our research. To begin with, Gaertner et al. (1999, Experiment 1) preselected traits that were typical of the *ingroup*, not of the individual. As such, participants likely were more certain about the collective self than about the individual self. More important, differential uncertainty was not an issue in Gaertner et al.'s (1999) Experiment 3; interestingly, this experiment replicated conceptually the results of Experiment 1.

**DIFFERENCES IN STRENGTH OF IDENTIFICATION.** The strength of identification alternative advocates that participants protected the individual self at the expense of the collective self because they identified weakly or marginally with the collective self. We addressed this issue empirically (Gaertner et al., 1999, Experiment 2). Furthermore, we conducted a meta-analysis (Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2000) in which we also failed to obtain evidence that strength of identification moderates the primacy of the individual self; that is, participants use the collective self as a buffer for the protection of the individual self, regardless of strength of identification with the *ingroup*.

In fact, the line of argument for this alternative can be easily reversed. We found that participants are primarily interested in protecting the individual self even on traits that are typical of the *ingroup* but not necessarily typical of the individual self (e.g., Gaertner et al., 1999, Experiments 1 and 2). We believe that attempts to protect the individual self will be magnified on traits that are typical of the individual self rather than of the *ingroup*. Additionally, we maintain that attempts to protect the individual self likely will be increased among individuals who have a relatively strong sense of individual self, such as high self-esteem persons (Schütz, this volume) or narcissists (Rhodewalt, this volume).

**STRUCTURAL DIFFERENCES.** According to the structural differences alternative (P. P. Costanzo, April, 1999, personal communication), our findings may be due to the possibility that the two selves have different structural properties. The collective self likely has a categorical structure; that is, a person either belongs or does not belong to

a group. The individual self, on the other hand, likely has a dimensional, trait-based structure; that is, trait self-descriptions differ only in degree.

We would like to challenge the plausibility of the structural differences alternative. To begin with, we controlled for type of individual-self versus collective-self structure: In our first three experiments (Gaertner et al., 1999, Experiments 1–3) the two selves were set to have a dimensional structure, whereas in our fourth experiment (Gaertner et al., 1999, Experiment 4) the two selves were set to have a categorical structure. But, of course, this experimental setup does not address directly the criticism.

The structural differences alternative would gain in plausibility if the structures of the two selves differed naturalistically. We do not believe, however, that this is the case. The structure of the collective self (i.e., group membership) is not necessarily categorical. As we have mentioned repeatedly, ingroup identification is a matter of degree. One can be a member of a group to varying degrees, from leading the group to existing on the fringes of the group. Additionally, it is not clear that the structure of the individual self is dimensional. Most theoretical and empirical statements pertaining to structural properties of the individual self advocate a categorical structure (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Kihlstrom & Klein, 1994), and the representation of other persons is categorical as well (Anderson & Sedikides, 1991; see also Gannon & Ostrom, 1996).

### Concluding Remarks

We believe that we have illustrated a basic personality and social psychological phenomenon, namely, the higher motivational value of the individual self than the collective self. Our theoretical thesis and empirical documentation are consistent with several other lines of research. Self-determination theory emphasizes individual strivings for autonomy and competence and gives secondary importance to the role of social context (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Self-regulation theories also make the point that the social context serves as the background within which the individual acts (Baumeister & Catanese, this volume; Baumeister & Heatherton, 1996; Carver & Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1996). The self-aspect model of the individual self and the collective self states that aspects of the individual self that are positive and important form the basis for the collective self (Simon, 1997; Simon & Hastedt, 1999).

Perhaps a reason for the motivational importance of the individual self is the volume, availability or accessibility, and inescapability of private feelings and thoughts (Andersen, 1984; Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998; Andersen, Lazowski, & Donisi, 1986).

We have considered the self as predominantly an individual structure. Our approach stands in sharp contrast to several other theoretical formulations, including social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). The implications of this contrast are important. Conceptualizing the self as predominantly an intergroup structure leads to the derivation that social antagonism (i.e., stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination) is omnipresent and inevitable (Ehrlich, 1973; Hamilton, 1979; Tajfel, 1981). However, conceptualizing the self as predominantly an individual structure allows for a drastically different (and far more optimistic!) conclusion. Social antagonism is fundamentally a function of differences in the structure of the individual self (Duckitt, 1992). When the individual self is prone toward social differentiation (i.e., "How different am I from others?"), stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination are likely to result. However, when the individual is prone toward social integration (i.e., "How similar to others am I"), social tolerance (i.e., the absence of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination) will be the likely outcome (Phillips & Ziller, 1997).

Consistent with an individual-self primacy analysis of intergroup discrimination, research subsequent to the development of social identity theory located the origin of intergroup discrimination in motives of individual self-interest rather than social-identity enhancement (Gaertner, 1999; Insko et al., 1992; Rabbie, Schot, & Visser, 1989). For example, Gaertner (1999; Experiments 2 and 3) unconfounded outcome dependence and social categorization in the minimal group paradigm and found that category members allocated more money to the ingroup than to the outgroup only when their own earnings could have been influenced by fellow ingroup members. That is, category members discriminated only when they could have maximized their personal earnings by reciprocating favorable allocations with ingroup members. If category members were concerned with enhancing their social identity (i.e., collective self), they should have favored the ingroup regardless of whether they were outcome dependent upon other ingroup or outgroup members. In line with the individual-self primacy perspective, intergroup discrimination is rooted in concern for the welfare of the individual self.

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## 7. Cognitive and Motivational Processes in Self-Presentation

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Self-presentation is one of the paramount interpersonal aspects of the self, involving how persons present themselves to others. Ultimately, shaping a particular and often desirable image of the self to present to others is one of the crucial tasks of interpersonal life. In this sense, the presented self is a powerful tool for relating to other people and an important aspect of the social mind.

The importance of self-presentation is reflected in how pervasive the motivations are. There is a strong and pervasive desire to make a positive impression on others (e.g., Jones & Wortman, 1973; see also Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Sedikides, 1993) or at least to create a desired, if not desirable, impression. (e.g., Leary, 1995; Swann, 1987). In this chapter, we will review some of the cognitive and motivational processes involved in self-presentation.

Self-presentation is an explicitly public phenomenon. Although it can have private implications and consequences, self-presentation is defined as behavior that occurs in a public rather than a private setting. Thus, social interactions are necessary for self-presentation, and, in keeping with a long tradition (e.g., Cooley, 1902; James, 1890; Mead, 1934), most researchers of the self acknowledge the importance of social interaction in constructing and modifying the self-concept. Because the self is publicly constructed and exists in relation to others, public events have greater impact on the self-concept than private events. Public behavior implicates the self more than private behavior: Private behavior can be canceled, ignored, or forgotten, but public behavior cannot because other people know about