



A Three-Tier Hierarchy of Self-Potency: Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self

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Abstract

The self-system consists of three fundamental components: the individual self, the relational self, and the collective self. All selves are important and meaningful and all are associated with psychological and physical health benefits. However, the selves are not *equally* important and meaningful. We propose a three-tier hierarchy of the motivational potency of the self-system, with the individual self on top, followed somewhat closely by the relational self, and followed distantly by the collective self. Engaging in competitive testing, we conducted a variety of experiments in which we implemented diverse methods for controlling the accessibility of the selves, introduced different forms of threat or enhancement, sampled several relational and collective selves, measured the independent reaction of each self, and assessed an array of responses to threat or enhancement (e.g., mood, anger, distancing, impact of feedback, derogation of feedback, impact on life, sentiments of “real you,” goals, monetary allocations). The findings were consistent with the three-tier hierarchy of motivational self-potency.

Identity, or the self-concept, occupies a central role in psychological theory, partly because of its relevance to ensuing cognitive, motivational, affective, and behavioral processes (Alicke, Dunning, & Krueger, 2005; Ellemers & Haslam, 2012; Leary & Tangney, 2012). The self-concept, however, is not a singular experience; although, for convenience, it is often conceptualized and operationalized as such. Indeed, few would disagree with the notion that the self-concept is diverse or multidimensional within the person. As such, theory development compels a nuanced understanding of that diversity (Bodenhausen, 2010; Sedikides & Spencer, 2007). Our effort in understanding and systematizing the diversity has been guided by a basic question: What is the hierarchical nature of the self-concept’s multidimensionality?

There are several ways to approach this question. An investigator can take a purist “cognitive structure” approach and apply priming, content analytic, compartmentalization, factor analytic, or multidimensional scaling techniques to the understanding of the issue (Burris & Rempel, 2004; Greenwald & Pratkanis, 1984; McConnell & Strain, 2007). Alternatively, an investigator can capitalize on the rich emotional network that imbues the self-concept: pride, shame, guilt, gratitude, embarrassment, nostalgia,

and regret (Emmons & McCullough, 2004; Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Routledge, 2008; Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007). Finally, an investigator can focus on the motivational significance of the self: What is it about the self-concept that makes it feel like a prized possession—staunchly protected and often lavishly flaunted (Alicke & Sedikides, 2011; Baumeister, 1998; Leary, 1995)?

Despite our proclivity toward eclecticism, the emphasis in our research program has been on the emotional and, more decidedly, the motivational sphere (Gaertner & Sedikides, 2005; Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, & Iuzzini, 2008; Gaertner, Sedikides, & O'Mara, 2008; Sedikides & Gaertner, 2001a, 2001b, 2006). Yet, we started with a structural proposition. We endorsed the notion that the self-concept consists of three fundamental representations (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Kashima et al., 1995; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001a): the individual self, the relational self, and the collective self. We define them next.



1. THE TRIPARTITE SELF

1.1. Individual self

The individual self reflects a person's subjective uniqueness. This representation comprises characteristics—such as traits and behaviors, hobbies and interests, aspirations and goals—that differentiate the person from others. Also, this type of self is relatively independent of dyadic relationships or group memberships.

1.2. Relational self

The relational self reflects dyadic bonds or attachments (e.g., romantic liaisons, friendships). This representation comprises characteristics that are shared with close others and may define roles within the relationship. The characteristics differentiate the relationship from the relationships that other people have.

1.3. Collective self

The collective self reflects membership in, as well as similarity and identification with, valued social groups. This representation comprises characteristics that are shared with ingroup members and may define roles within the group. The characteristics differentiate the ingroup from relevant outgroups.

1.4. Commonalities among selves

The selves have notable commonalities. Their social nature is one. An easily recognizable cliché in social psychology is that the self is social, and, being the compliant scholars that we are, we will dutifully adhere to this generalization in the current article (although other areas of psychology, such as cognitive, neuroscience, developmental, or clinical, would likely be more rebellious than we are). We will assume, then, that all three selves are social; in particular, we will assume that social sources are equally responsible in shaping the content or characteristics of the individual, relational, and collective self.

Also, the formation, maintenance, and change of each self are largely due to assimilation and contrast processes. Such processes, though, differ depending on the type of self. Assimilation and contrast occur between and within (1) *persons*, in the case of the individual self; (2) *dyads*, in the case of the relational self; and (3) *groups*, in the case of the collective self.

Finally, each self is vital to humans (Hawkey, Browne, & Cacioppo, 2005; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001b). As an example, having a strong individual self (e.g., relatively high self-concept clarity, personal self-esteem, or resilience), a strong relational self (e.g., relatively high relational self-esteem derived from stable and satisfying dyadic bonds), and a strong collective self (e.g., relatively high collective self-esteem derived from membership in meaningful groups) are each uniquely associated with psychological and physical well-being (Chen et al., 2006; Dufner et al., 2012; Gramzow, Sedikides, Panter, & Insko, 2000; Hardie, Kashima, & Pridmore, 2005; Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009; Ritchie, Sedikides, Wildschut, Arndt, & Gidron, 2011; Taylor, Lerner, Sherman, Sage, & McDowell, 2003; Uchino, Cacioppo, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 1996). Also, each self is meaningful to human experience: Meaning in life can originate from self-knowledge and personal goals (individual self), fulfilling attachments (relational self), or belongingness in groups (collective self) (Hicks & Routledge, in press; Markman, Proulx, & Lindberg, in press). In sum, the selves are each vital and meaningful.

1.5. Are the selves *equally* vital and meaningful?

Although the selves are each vital and meaningful, they may not be equally vital and meaningful. It is possible that the selves differ in their motivational potency or utility (i.e., primacy). One self may be more central to human experience, may lie closer to the motivational core of the self-system, or

may reflect better the psychological “home-base” or essence of selfhood. That is, one self may be motivationally primary.

The issue of motivational self-primacy is as old as philosophy and the origins of psychology. The issue has preoccupied philosophical theorizing and social science research ever since [Aristotle \(350 BC/1925\)](#) invented the terms “self-love” and “other-love.” The issue, for example, is central to the Hume–Rousseau debate in Western philosophy ([Hume, 1739/2000](#)), the Xunzi–Mencius quarrel in Confusion philosophy ([Xunzi, 250 BC/1985](#)), and the Machiavelli–Botero argument in politics ([Botero, 1589/1956](#)). It is reflected in [James’s \(1890\)](#) assertion that “A tolerably unanimous opinion ranges the different selves of which a man may be ‘seized and possessed,’ and the consequent different orders of his self-regard, in an hierarchical scale” (p. 313). It lies at the heart of economists’ ongoing dispute on whether human decision making is necessarily self-oriented or can be other-oriented ([Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003](#)). It informs evolutionary discourse on individual-selection versus group-selection processes ([Wilson & Sober, 1994](#)). And it has sparked the Batson–Cialdini debate on the existence of altruism ([Cialdini, 1991](#)).

Which self, then, is motivationally primary? Four perspectives, each backed by a sizeable literature, offer competing accounts. We provide a thumbnail coverage of each perspective in [Section 2](#) and a more detailed discussion later in [Section 5.4](#).



2. THEORETICAL ACCOUNTS AND EVIDENCE ON MOTIVATIONAL PRIMACY

2.1. Individual-self primacy perspective

This perspective regards the individual self as motivationally primary. The core characteristics of the individual self are generally positive, are held with conviction, are resistant to unfavorable feedback but amenable to flattering feedback, and influence processing of information about the person ([Markus, 1977; Sedikides, 1993](#)). Stated otherwise, most people are keenly motivated to protect, maintain, or elevate the positivity of the individual self. They consider their individual self better than the average peer, claim personal responsibility for dyadic or group successes but apportion responsibility for failure to dyadic or group members, derogate critical evaluators, undervalue the feedback dimension when the evaluation is critical, express undue optimism about the future, and poorly recall unfavorable feedback ([Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Hoorens, 1993; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003](#)). Hence, this

literature is consistent with the possibility that the individual self constitutes the motivational hub of the self-system.

2.2. Relational-self primacy perspective

This perspective regards the relational self as motivationally primary. People prefer stable interpersonal relationships, protect and enhance their attachments (e.g., by considering them better than others' attachments), resist their dissolution, and suffer psychologically and physically following breakups (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Chen et al., 2006; Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003; Murray, 1999; Rusbult, Van Lange, Wildschut, Yovetich, & Verette, 2000). Also, relationships influence goal pursuit as well as perceptions, affective reactions, and behavior toward new acquaintances and others' relationships (Denissen, Penke, Schmitt, & van Aken, 2008; Sedikides, Olsen, & Reis, 1993; Wood & Forest, 2011). This literature, then, is consistent with the possibility that the relational self constitutes the motivational hub of the self-system.

2.3. Collective-self primacy perspective

This perspective regards the collective self as motivationally primary. People manifest a strong preference for group belongingness, protect and maintain or elevate a positive group image, and favor—both attitudinally and behaviorally—members of their group (Boldry & Gaertner, 2006; Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002; Hogg, 2001). Moreover, it has been claimed that the collective self imparts the optimal level of identity by meeting concurrently competing needs for assimilation (via intragroup comparisons) and differentiation (via intergroup comparisons; Brewer, 1991; Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010); although, as we argued earlier, the individual and relational self can also meet these needs given their susceptibility to assimilation and contrast processes. Regardless, this literature is consistent with the possibility that the collective self constitutes the motivational hub of the self-system.

2.4. Contextual-primacy perspective

This perspective advocates the contextual self. It maintains that there is nothing inherently primary about the individual, relational, or collective self. Instead, self-primacy is a function of contextual forces. Research on the working self-concept (Markus & Wurf, 1987), symbolic interactionism or role theory (Stryker & Statham, 1985), and the kaleidoscopic self

(Deaux & Perkins, 2001) demonstrates identity shifts in response to norm salience, role importance, or transient social environments, respectively. Further, research on self-categorization theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994) indicates that identity ebbs and flows between the individual and collective self as a function of contextual configurations, with the individual self becoming accessible in intragroup contexts and the collective self becoming salient in intergroup contexts. This body of literature, then, is consistent with the possibility that the self rendered momentarily accessible by the social context constitutes the motivational hub of the self-system.



3. COMPARATIVE TESTING ON MOTIVATIONAL PRIMACY: I

As stated above, the four perspectives appear to be credible in their own right (although the issue will be addressed further in later sections of the chapter). Each perspective, when considered alone, seems to be buttressed by a web of theory and data. It follows that the current state of knowledge is generally compatible with the notion that all selves are vital and meaningful to the person. It is also compatible with the notion that the selves often have a symbiotic, dialectic, or harmonious relation (Murray & Holmes, 2008; Reid & Deaux, 1996; Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). For example, individual-self affirmation, when induced with writing about one's core values, may reflect feelings of loving and connectedness toward close others (Crocker, Niiya, & Mischkowski, 2008). Relational-self affirmation serves esteem-repair functions, especially for persons for whom a dyadic bond constitutes a core identity component (Chen & Boucher, 2008, Experiment 2). The content of the collective self, and in particular normative perceptions of the group, influences the content of the individual self and vice versa (Latrofa, 2010). Finally, the collective self (i.e., group membership) acts as a resource strengthening the psychological utility of processes related to the individual and relational self (Correll & Park, 2005).

However, the selves may also have an antagonistic relation. It is in these cases where the question of which self is more vital and meaningful (i.e., motivationally potent and useful) for the person becomes relevant. And it is in these cases that the current state of affairs, namely that all perspectives are equally credible, renders itself problematic. To begin with, there is inherent confirmation bias in single-theory testing, a notion shared by many scholars and philosophers of science (Gould, 1981; Lakatos, 1970;

Mahoney, 1977; Rosenthal, 1966; Westfall, 1973); as such, testing the importance of just one of the selves is a form of single-theory testing that introduces confirmatory bias regarding the importance of that self. Further, the current state of knowledge is not fit to answer the pertinent question of which self is more vital and meaningful for the person. Which of the four perspectives *best* accounts for motivational primacy in identity? More generally, there is something unappealing about the notion that “all perspectives are equally correct.” This notion is vaguely reminiscent of impasses created by countless philosophical (and theological) debates. Scientific disciplines ought to be able to resolve such impasses through comparative testing (Platt, 1964). In such testing, the perspectives are pit head-to-head and are allowed to showcase their merit in accounting for the data. And it is this kind of testing that we implemented in our research program.

We assumed, in line with theory and evidence, that people are motivated to protect or enhance each of the three selves. At the same time, we created conditions that prompted people to protect or enhance their selves. Specifically, we observed in a comparative manner how the three selves would react in the face of criticism or threat (e.g., unfavorable feedback) versus praise or flattery (e.g., favorable feedback; Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Miller, Maner, & Becker, 2010; Park, 2010). We reasoned that the self that constitutes the motivational hub of identity would react most negatively to threat and most positively to applause. The motivationally primary self will be the one that most strongly rejects criticism and embraces accolade. Metaphorically speaking, the most primary self will scream the loudest when harmed and smile the brightest when praised.

To meet methodological standards for diagnostic hypothesis testing, we conducted multiple experiments, each with its own methodological nuances. More importantly, we implemented various controls over variables that had the potential to compromise the outcome of comparative testing. Thus, across experiments, we used different procedures for controlling the accessibility of the selves, introduced various forms of threat or flattery, assessed a variety of reactions to threat or flattery, sampled an assortment of relational and collective selves, and measured the independent reaction of each self. We describe our research below.

3.1. Individual-self primacy, collective-self primacy, or contextual-self primacy?

We will discuss, in this section, experiments that gauged the relative primacy of the individual, collective, and contextual self. In a later section, we will

enter the relational self and cultural context into comparative testing. Note that comparative-testing studies have not examined the role of self-esteem (and, more generally, individual-difference variables); we return to this issue briefly in [Section 5.3](#).

3.1.1 Distancing from future threat

There are many ways through which persons inoculate themselves against threats to a favorable self-view, such as motivated reasoning, self-handicapping, or disidentifying with a chronically threatened aspect of self ([Leary, Terry, Allen, & Tate, 2009](#); [vanDellen, Campbell, Hoyle, & Bradfield, 2011](#)). An intriguing self-protective tactic involves the preemptive avoidance of threat in favor of enhancement ([Sedikides & Gregg, 2008](#); [Sedikides & Strube, 1997](#)). Persons, for example, actively focus on desirable attributes and shun undesirable attributes when contemplating core self-attributes ([Sedikides & Green, 2004](#)), while selectively engaging in tasks diagnostic of desirable core self-attributes and avoiding tasks diagnostic of undesirable core self-attributes ([Sedikides, 1993](#)). We capitalized on this tactic. We examined motivational primacy in a threat-avoidance paradigm, with the rationale that persons will avoid more fervently a threat to their more primary selves ([Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012](#), Study 2).

We threatened either the individual self or the collective self and subsequently assessed protection motivation. Some participants thought and wrote about what makes them a unique person. This was the individual-self condition. Other participants thought and wrote about what they share in common with members of the most important group to which they belonged. This was the collective-self condition. Here, both selves were idiographically derived, that is, were defined by the participant rather than the experimenter. Also, both selves were considered important to the person (at least every effort was made for the collective self to be maximally important, assuming that the individual self was so as well). Finally, both selves were rendered accessible—the individual self in the individual-self condition and the collective self in the collective-self condition; stated otherwise, we varied the social context in a way that the accessibility of one self was maximized while the accessibility of the other self was minimized. This would allow us to compare reactions of the individual and collective selves to threat in situations where each self was accessible, as per a requirement of the contextual-self primacy perspective.

Next, all participants read a story (after [Lockwood, 2002](#)) ostensibly written by a recent university graduate who encountered difficulties finding

employment and achieving life fulfillment. Participants were told first that “The experiences of graduates ranged from being very positive and fulfilling to very negative and devastating. Below is an excerpt written by one of those students. As you can see, this student was facing increasing real world difficulties.” The excerpt read as follows:

I tried to get a job, but it's harder than I expected. I haven't been able to find a good job. I have spent a lot of time working in fast food places, and doing some pretty boring stuff. I really expected that things would get easier after I graduated, but people are right when they say it's tough out there. Right now I'm pretty down about things. I'm not sure where I'm going to go from here—I can't afford to go back to school, but I also can't find a good job...this is not where I expected to be at this point in my life!

Afterward, participants learned: “We are interested in why some college graduates experience the kind of difficulties like those of the graduate you just read about. As a college student yourself, you probably have some idea of the kinds of negative things that could happen.” Finally, participants in the individual-self condition were asked to “describe in as much detail as possible what you think could cause you to have a negative experience when you graduate from college, similar to the student you just read about,” whereas participants in the collective-self condition were asked to “describe in as much detail as possible what you think could cause a member of your most important group (other than you) to have a negative experience when she or he graduates from college, similar to the student you just read about.”

We zeroed in on protective responding (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Sedikides & Alicke, 2012). To what extent would participants distance psychologically—as manifested in an off-topic description—from facing future threat (Lieberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007; Sedikides, 2012)? That is, to what extent would they shun the threat of future negative life events by discounting the experimenter's request to describe the occurrence of negative events and instead providing a largely irrelevant response? Thus, we coded participants' responses for whether they faced the threat by writing as instructed or evaded the threat by writing off topic.

The three perspectives offer contrasting predictions. According to the individual-self primacy perspective, future negative events would evoke more threat for the individual than collective self; hence, participants would bypass future threat to the individual self. According to the collective-self primacy perspective, future negative events would present more threat to the collective than individual self; hence, participants would sidestep future threat to the collective self. Finally, according to the contextual-self primacy

perspective, negative future events would be equally threatening to the two selves; hence, participants would be equally likely to sidestep future threat to the selves. The results were in line with the individual-self primacy perspective. Whereas only a fraction of participants (7%) avoided the threat to their most important group, a sizable proportion of participants (40%) wrote off topic and avoided describing how future negative events could befall them personally.

3.1.2 Anger at insults

The contextual-self primacy perspective may have been given short shrift in Study 2 of Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al. (2012). This perspective stipulates that identity (or self-definition) fluctuates toward the individual self in interpersonal contexts and the collective self in intergroup contexts (meta-contrast principle; Onorato & Turner, 2004; Turner et al., 1987, 1994). Thus, in another experiment (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999, Investigation 3), we also varied (as in Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2) the social context in an effort to maximize the accessibility of one self while minimizing the accessibility of the other self, but the context this time (in contrast to Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2) was either interpersonal or intergroup. We then delivered insulting or non-insulting feedback to the individual self (in the interpersonal context) or the collective self (in the intergroup context). We were thus able to assess the relative reactions of the two selves to feedback, when each self was maximally accessible in its proper context.

In particular, we used a 2 (activation of individual self vs. activation of collective self) \times 2 (insulting feedback, noninsulting feedback) between-subjects design. We tested six undergraduate students per session. In the individual-self condition, participants were randomly divided into three 2-person dyads. Each dyad member was seated in a separate booth, expected to interact with the other member on a Prisoner's Dilemma Game (PDG), and received either insulting or noninsulting feedback from that member. In the collective-self condition, participants were randomly divided into two 3-person groups. Each group was seated in a separate booth, expected to interact with the other group on a PDG, and received either insulting or noninsulting feedback from the other group.

Each person or group was instructed how to read a three-choice PDG and completed a comprehension exercise. Under the ruse of saving time, the experimenter distributed evaluation forms and suggested that each person (group) examines the accuracy of the other person's (group's) exercise.

Participants received their opponents' answers (in actuality, a standardized form), rated these answers, and supplied written comments if they so desired. The experimenter then returned the original exercises along with bogus feedback. Participants in the insult condition received a low rating and the following written comment: "This person (group) did not do well. He or she (they) must be a little slow." Participants in the noninsult condition received a high rating and the following comment: "This person (group) did well. He or she (they) really seem(s) to know what's going on." Finally, participants recorded how angry they felt at the moment.

The individual-self primacy perspective predicts that participants would be angrier when the insult was directed at the individual than collective self, whereas the collective-self primacy perspective predicts the reverse and the contextual-self primacy perspective predicts equivalent levels of anger in the two selves. As depicted in [Figure 5.1](#), the results were consistent with the individual-self primacy perspective. Insulting feedback directed at the individual self instigated more anger than insulting feedback directed at the collective self. (Noninsulting feedback evoked equally low levels of anger in the two selves.)

3.1.3 *Felt impact, similarity, and identification as a function of feedback*

Instead of alternative accessibility between selves ([Gaertner et al., 1999](#), Investigation 3), we next introduced concurrent accessibility in the

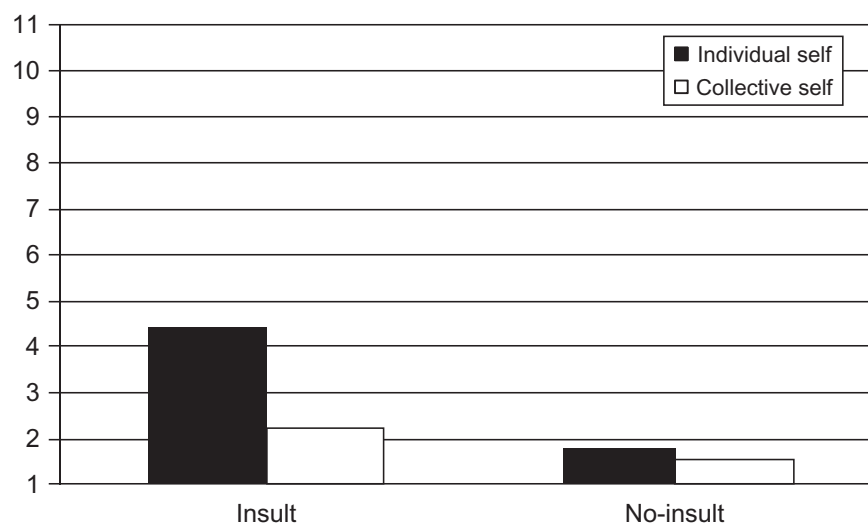


Figure 5.1 Anger as a function of insult and self. Note: Anger was reported on a scale from 1 to 11 with higher numbers indicating more anger.

selves (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 1). Also, we used a different manipulation of unfavorable feedback, and we assessed multiple reactions to it. We rendered cognitively accessible both the individual self and the collective self; subsequently, we either threatened/praised the individual self or we threatened/praised the collective self. Specifically, the experimental design was a 2 (feedback valence: negative, positive) \times 2 (feedback recipient: individual-self, collective-self) between-subjects factorial. Following the manipulations, we assessed responses to threat or praise on three dependent measures: felt impact of feedback (to the individual or collective self), similarity (with the individual or collective self), and identification (with the individual or collective self). We provide a more thorough description below. Note that the identification measure assessed post-feedback identification as a unique individual versus group member rather than preexisting levels of group identification. In a subsequently described experiment, we assessed prefeedback group-identification for purposes of testing moderation.

3.1.3.1 Operationalizations and feedback

We operationalized the collective self in terms of membership in the group University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) women, and indeed, all participants were female undergraduates at that institution. Computerized instructions informed participants that the Department of Psychology, on behalf of the (fabricated) Office of Student Affairs (OSA), was embarking on an assessment of the “attributes and characteristics” of female undergraduates. We embedded in the instructions, phrases that were intended to prime both the individual and collective self. For example, to activate the individual self, instructions informed participants that the student body at UNC-CH was “extremely diverse; after all, each one of you is an individual with your own unique background, personality traits, skills, abilities, and hobbies.” To activate 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.”

Next, participants completed the “highly reliable and valid” Berkeley Personality Inventory (BPI). In the first BPI section, participants responded to 30 items vaguely linked to emotionality or moodiness (e.g., “Sad movies touch me deeply,” “One of my favorite pastimes is sitting in front of a crackling fire,” “When I am nervous, I get shaky all over”). In the second BPI

section, participants responded to another 30 items assessing how frequently, during the past month, they felt each of the 30 emotions (e.g., sad, cheerful, afraid). They were subsequently informed that the computer was in the process of scoring their answers. While they waited, we introduced the manipulation of threat or praise directed at either the individual or the collective self.

To beget threat, we provided feedback about the trait “moodiness,” a trait that a pilot sample of female UNC-CH students considered unfavorable and typical of their ingroup. Instructions explained that the BPI assesses 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.” Supplementary instructions informed participants 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 announced that the scoring of the BPI was complete. We subsequently directed threat (i.e., unfavorable feedback) to either the individual or the collective self. To threaten the individual self, we provided computerized feedback that the participant was “excessively moody.” The feedback reiterated the previously presented information regarding the trait moodiness and its harmful repercussions (i.e., “Moodiness refers to an inability to control your mood state. . .”). We provided similar feedback when threatening the collective self. However, instructions here indicated that the OSA would not allow the presentation of personalized or customized feedback. Instead, participants would be informed of the average score of the 1500 UNC-CH women tested so far (i.e., their group), excluding their own score. Participants learned that “UNC-CH women are excessively moody” and were reminded of the pernicious repercussions of that trait (i.e., “Moodiness refers to an inability for UNC-CH women to control their mood state. . .”).

To beget praise, we instructed participants that the BPI assesses “emotional expressiveness,” a trait that a pilot sample of female UNC-CH students considered favorable and typical of their ingroup. We defined this trait as “one’s ability to express appropriately a wide array of emotions (e.g., joy, contentment, anger). Emotionally expressive persons reveal, rather than suppress, their feelings.” Supplementary instructions informed

participants that “Emotional expressiveness aids social interaction, because others are better able to respond to one’s needs. Emotional expressiveness is a very important personality trait. High levels of emotional expressiveness have been found to be related to successful adjustment to college life, optimism, mental health, satisfactory social relationships, academic success, and success after college.”

The computer then announced the completion of BPI scoring. We proceeded to direct feedback either at the individual or collective self. To praise the individual self, we gave participants computerized feedback that they were “very emotionally expressive.” The feedback repeated the information about emotional expressiveness and its positive repercussions. To praise the collective self, we informed participants that only group-level feedback (i.e., referring to UNC-CH women but not them personally as per OSA rules) was available. Participants then learned about emotional expressiveness and its beneficial effects, were informed that UNC-CH women were very emotionally expressive, and were reminded of the ostensible benefits of this trait.

3.1.3.2 Measures and results

Finally, participants completed three sets of measures: felt impact of feedback, similarity, and identification. As a reminder, participants completed these measures once and only after the threat or praise. We will describe each measure, detail its theoretical relevance, and report the findings.

3.1.3.2.1 Felt impact of feedback This measure consisted of assessing how negatively or positively participants experienced the feedback, and how displeased or pleased they were with it. The individual-self primacy perspective would be supported, if participants (a) considered unfavorable feedback more negative and reported being more displeased with it, and (b) considered favorable feedback more positive and reported being more pleased with it, when, in either case, the feedback was directed at the individual than collective self. On the other hand, the collective-self primacy perspective would be supported, if participants (a) considered unfavorable feedback more negative and reported being more displeased with it, and (b) considered favorable feedback more positive and reported being more pleased with it, when, in either case, the feedback was directed at the collective than individual self. Finally, neither of these patterns would be anticipated by the contextual-self primacy perspective, as it assigns no inherent motivational significance to the individual or collective self.

Confirming our manipulation, participants felt more pleased and considered the feedback to be more positive when either the individual or collective self was praised than threatened. The results, however, were consistent with the individual self-primacy perspective. Participants were (a) more displeased and considered the feedback more negative when threat was directed at the individual than collective self and (b) more pleased and considered the feedback more positive when praise was directed at the individual than collective self. The individual self screamed the loudest when threatened and smiled the brightest when praised.

3.1.3.2.2 Similarity and identification As part of the similarity measure, participants were offered the opportunity to define themselves in accordance with their individual self (“I am a unique individual,” “My personality attributes are totally unique,” “My beliefs and values are totally unique”) or their collective self (“I am very similar to UNC women,” “My personality attributes are quite similar to the attributes of UNC women,” “My beliefs and values are quite similar to the beliefs and values of UNC women”). As part of the identification measure, participants were offered the opportunity to identify with their individual self (“I only identify with myself,” “I am proud to just be myself,” “I value being myself”) or their collective self (“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”). We reasoned that participants could buffer themselves from the unfavorable feedback by shifting strategically away from the threatened self—that is, expressing reduced similarity and identification with that self; moreover, participants could embrace the flattering feedback by shifting toward the praised self—that is, expressing increased similarity and identification with that self.

According to the individual-self primacy perspective, participants would strategically shift away from their individual self toward their collective self in the face of threat to their individual self. That is, participants would tactically use the collective self as a temporary hideout to protect against threat to the individual self (e.g., “it’s not really me who’s moody, it’s *women* who are moody”). Figuratively speaking, the individual self would “use” the collective self for its own benefit. However, a similar shift away from the collective self and toward the individual self in the face of threat to the collective self would not occur. The collective self would not resort to the individual self as a refuge. This is because it would not hurt as much for the collective self to take the blame as for the individual

self to take the blame (e.g., “as long as women are moody, but not necessarily me, that’s OK”).

The collective-self primacy perspective predicts the opposite pattern: Participants would strategically shift away from their collective self toward their individual self in the face of a threat to (vs. praise of) their collective self, but a similar shift away from the individual self would not occur because the collective self is more primary.

Finally, the contextual-primacy perspective predicts a third pattern of results: Participants would be equally likely to use each self as temporary solace in the face of a threat to the other self. When the individual self is threatened (vs. praised) participants would shift toward their collective self. When the collective self is threatened (vs. praised) participants would shift toward their individual self.

The results, once more, supported the individual-self primacy perspective. Participants strategically shifted self-definition in the face of threat of only their individual self. When the individual self was threatened, participants emphasized their similarity (Figure 5.2) and identification (Figure 5.3) with their ingroup more than when the individual self was praised. Such a protective identity-shift did not occur in the face of threat to the collective self (for similar patterns, see Crawford, 2007; Crocker, Voelki, Testa, & Major, 1991; Mussweiler, Gabriel, & Bodenhausen, 2000).

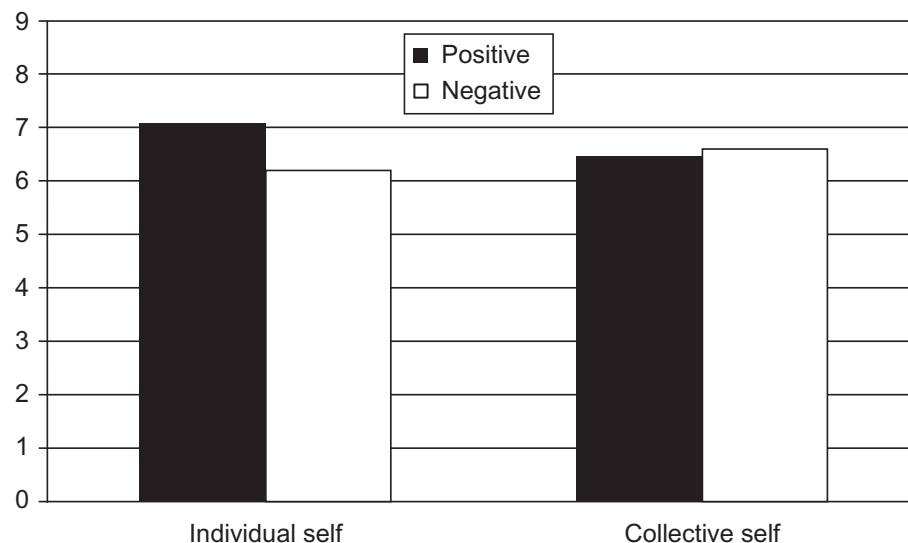


Figure 5.2 Similarity as a function of feedback valence and type of self. *Note:* Ratings ranged from 1 to 9 with lower numbers indicating a perception of self as being similar to the group UNC women and higher numbers indicating a perception of self as being a unique individual.

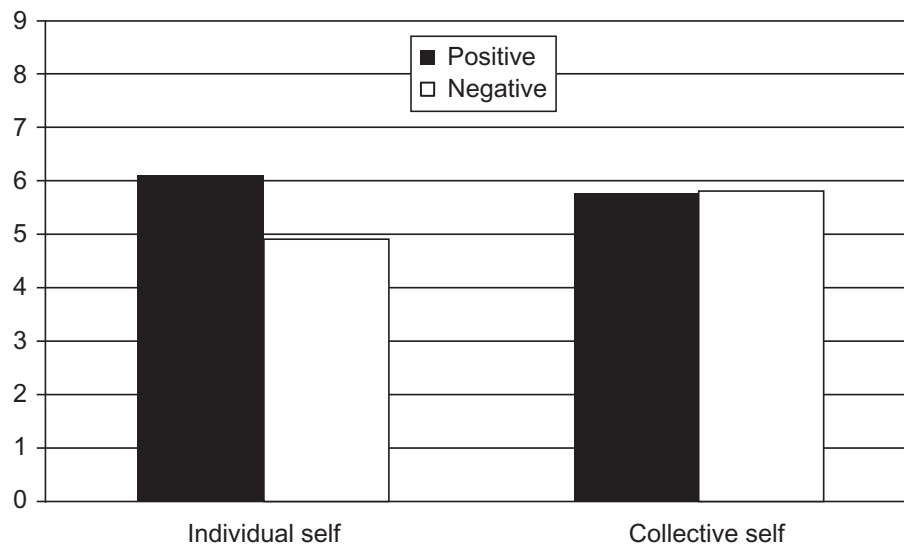


Figure 5.3 Identification as a function of feedback valence and type of self. *Note:* Ratings ranged from 1 to 9 with lower numbers indicating identification with the group UNC women and higher numbers indicating identification with self as a unique individual.

3.1.4 Feedback derogation and mood among high and low group identifiers

Despite support for the individual-self primacy perspective, it is possible that our research was inadvertently biased against the other perspectives. Participants may have responded more passively to threats to the collective self, because a proportion of them may not have valued adequately the group on which their collective self relied. Specifically, the results may have been due to the presence of a good number of low group identifiers. The literature suggests that low (compared to high) group identifiers are less apt to protect and enhance their group's identity under conditions of threat (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997; Voci, 2006). Consequently, we proceeded to differentiate between low and high group identifiers (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 2). The experimental design involved a 2 (feedback recipient: individual-self, collective-self) \times 2 (group identification: low, high) between-subjects factorial.

UNC-CH undergraduates believed that they were participating in a national survey on college students' creativity. First, they answered three "demographic questions" that actually assessed the strength of ingroup identification: "To what extent does being a member of your university reflect an important aspect of who you are?" "How much do you identify with

your university?” “How important is your university to you?” Responses were provided on a 7-point scale. Although response options varied slightly per question, 1 indicated minimal identification and 7 indicated maximal identification. We categorized participants as either high identifiers or low identifiers on the basis of a median split (Median = 5.67). Then, participants rated how important creativity was either to “you” (in the individual-self condition) or to “UNC-CH students” (in the collective-self condition). Given that participants rated creativity as more important to the individual than collective self (arguably, in itself evidence for the individual-self primacy perspective), we controlled statistically creativity importance ratings from all data analyses.

Participants then completed a 10-min creativity test, listing as many uses for a candle and a brick as possible. Unfavorable feedback followed. In the individual-self condition, participants learned: “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 depicted graphically the student’s performance and emphasized the unfavorability of the feedback. In the collective-self condition, participants learned that, for ethical reasons, they could not be given personalized feedback but would nevertheless be provided with the performance scores of all UNC-CH students, excluding their own: “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.” Again, a histogram depicting the scores and emphasizing feedback unfavorability followed.

We assessed the extent to which participants derogated the feedback by asking them to rate the importance of the test outcome either for “you” or “UNC-CH students” (depending on condition). The strategy to disparage negative feedback as unimportant is a valid signature of self-protection (i.e., the sour grapes effect; Kay, Jimenez, & Jost, 2002; Sedikides, Campbell, Reeder, & Elliot, 1998). We reasoned that a threat to the primary self would result in a higher degree of feedback derogation. Finally, we assessed participants’ mood on 14 unpleasant adjectives (e.g., sad, upset, miserable). We reasoned that a threat to the primary self would result in a worse mood.

The individual-self primacy perspective predicts that feedback derogation and negative mood would be worse following threat to the individual than collective self, regardless of ingroup identification strength. The collective-self primacy perspective predicts that feedback derogation and negative mood would be worse following threat to the collective than

individual self, regardless of ingroup identification strength. However, the contextual-self primacy perspective predicts that feedback derogation and mood would depend on strength of group identification: Low group identifiers would evidence the pattern of individual-self primacy and high group identifiers would evidence the pattern of collective-self primacy. Once again, the results backed the individual-self primacy perspective. High and low group identifiers alike derogated the threatening feedback to a greater degree (i.e., rated creativity as less important) and reported more negative mood when the feedback referred to the individual than collective self. Strength of ingroup identification did not moderate these effects.

The finding of individual-self primacy is impressive, given the high level of overall group identification (Median of 5.67 on a 7-point scale). Neither the collective-primacy nor contextual-primacy perspectives could account for individual primacy among a group of participants who manifested such strong group identification. Some readers might think that our lack of evidence for contextual primacy is due to a ceiling effect of identification, but the finding of individual-self primacy is inconsistent with such logic in that we should have obtained evidence for collective-self primacy among our overly identified participants and no evidence of individual-self primacy.

3.1.5 A meta-analytic integration

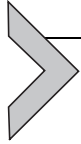
Our laboratory findings point to converging evidence for the individual-self primacy perspective. Nevertheless, the reported results are naturally limited to the specific procedures, manipulations, dependent measures, and social groups that we implemented. Do results obtained in independent laboratories align with our conclusions? Also, our experiments focused disproportionately on reactions of the individual and collective self to unfavorable feedback. Are reactions of the two selves to praise as polarized as reactions to criticism? To find out, we conducted a meta-analysis (Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2002). We opted for a random-effect model, because it tests whether inference generalizes to other possible experiments that vary in procedures and measures (Hedges & Vevea, 1998).

We searched relevant databases for terms that would denote the individual self (e.g., “individual self,” “individual identity,” “personal identity”) and collective self (e.g., “collective self,” “collective identity,” “social identity”). Also, we instituted the following selection criteria: (1) The independent variable ought to threaten or enhance separately the individual and collective self, and (2) the dependent variable ought to assess comparable reactions of the individual and collective self (e.g., mood, felt impact of

feedback, trait ratings). Our search resulted in 37 effects representing experiments that varied in terms of the threat or praise they used, the types of reactions they measured, and the groups that constituted the collective self. These effects 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. In statistical terms, we calculated an effect size (or more) from each experiment by standardizing the mean difference between the reaction of the individual versus the reaction of the collective self to threat or enhancement. Moreover, in an effort to test adequately the contextual-self primacy perspective, we classified the experiments in reference to two contextual variables. One was ingroup identification strength (high, low). Here, we coded the degree to which participants likely identified with their group based on participant-designated (i.e., measured) level of identification or on manipulated (as part of the experimental design) level of identification. The other variable was whether the group that formed the basis for the collective self was minimal (i.e., laboratory-created) or natural (e.g., university affiliation, political party membership, gender, fraternity or sorority). Such groups differ in several ways (Ostrom & Sedikides, 1992) that may impinge on the relative primacy of the collective self. Minimal groups, by definition, are novel and fleeting. Their members are negligibly familiar, committed, and invested in each other and the group. As such, minimal (compared to natural) groups may be a less sustainable, crucial, and accessible foundation of the collective self.

The individual-self primacy perspective predicts that participants would (1) react more strongly to both threat and enhancement of the individual than collective self, and (2) deny more readily threatening feedback or accept more willingly enhancing feedback, when it referred to the individual than collective self. The collective-self primacy perspective predicts the reverse pattern. Finally, the contextual-self primacy perspective predicts that ingroup identification strength and type of group would each moderate relative reactions of the two selves to threat or enhancement. High identifiers and members of natural groups would manifest “collective-self primacy” patterns, whereas low identifiers and members of minimal groups would manifest “individual-self primacy” patterns. Yet, neither ingroup identification nor type of group emerged as moderators. Participants reacted more vigorously to threatening feedback when it was directed at the individual than collective self ($g=0.546$) and reacted more vigorously to enhancing feedback when it was directed at the individual than collective self ($g=0.383$). The individual-self primacy perspective not only received

unequivocal backing but it generalized to other forms of threat and enhancement, additional modes of reactions, and various types of groups that provide the foundation of the collective self.



4. COMPARATIVE TESTING ON MOTIVATIONAL PRIMACY: II

4.1. Where does the relational self lie?

We have presented evidence supporting the perspective that the individual self has higher motivational potency and utility than the collective self or the contextual self. But what about the relational self? Where is the positioning of the relational self within the self-system? What place does it occupy in the motivational hierarchy of selves?

As we argued earlier on, the relational self is vital and meaningful to human experience. Indeed, there are reasons to believe that the relational self, forged via close interpersonal attachments, is more experientially vital and meaningful than the collective self and perhaps even the individual self. The dyad is phylogenetically the most ancient repeated social configuration (Caporael, 1997), which enables internal fertilization and, in humans, provides the initial bond that insures infant survival (Bowlby, 1969). Cognitive representations of significant others influence social perception more decidedly than cognitive representations of groups (Andersen & Cole, 1990, Study 3). Relatedly, a multisample study utilizing the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV) showed that persons regard their relational self as more important than their collective self (del Prado et al., 2007), which suggests that the former has a higher motivational status over the latter. However, in comparisons of AIQ-IV responses for the individual versus relational self, the evidence was mixed. Participants in some samples regarded the individual self as more important, participants in other samples regarded the relational self as more important, and participants in yet other samples regarded the individual and relational selves as equally important. In sum, the place of the relational self in the motivational hierarchy of the self-system is unclear.

4.2. Culture as context

Culture researchers (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989; Wang, 2006) have argued that the cognitive, emotional, and motivational elements of the self-system are culturally constructed. Social institutions, teachings,

proverbs, and symbols convey norms and ideals about behavioral standards and social values. These norms and ideals define what it means to be a good person and, when internalized as self-construals, orchestrate accordingly cognitive processes, emotional experiences, and motivational strivings. In the West (e.g., North America, Northern and Western Europe, Australia), norms and ideals emphasize uniqueness, agency, and personal success, thus forging an independent (i.e., separate, individualistic) self-construal (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Spindler & Spindler, 1990). In the East (e.g., China, India, Japan, South East Asia), norms and ideals emphasize connectedness, communion, and the importance of others, thus forging an interdependent (i.e., connected, collectivistic) self-construal (De Vos, 1985; Hsu, 1948).

The implication of this reasoning is that motivational self-primacy will fluctuate across the broader cultural context. This culture-as-contextual-primacy perspective predicts that the individual self will be at the top of the motivational hierarchy in the West, but it will be subordinate to the relational and collective selves in the East. Tentative evidence is consistent with this perspective. For example, under individual-self affirmation, Westerners and bicultural East-Asians manifest dissonance reduction in the free-choice paradigm (Heine & Lehman, 1997), whereas monocultural East-Asians manifest no dissonance reduction (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005, Studies 3–4). Further, under relational-self affirmation (in comparison to individual-self affirmation and no affirmation), monocultural East-Asians show dissonance reduction (Hoshino-Browne et al., 2005, Study 3). And yet, in other research, individual-self and relational-self affirmation do not differ in their buffering functions (Cai, Sedikides, & Jiang, *in press*).

The relative positioning of the relational and collective selves in the East is less clear (Brewer & Chen, 2007). On the one hand, both representations are amenable to norms of connectedness and the relevance of others, given that the representations reflect the extent to which one perceives herself/himself as an interdependent agent (Kashima et al., 1995); this view implies equivalent primacy of the relational and collective selves. On the other hand, Eastern culture is represented mostly by interpersonal relationships internalized as the relational self rather than ingroup-associations internalized as the collective self (Cai et al., *in press*; Yuki, 2003); this view implies the relative primacy of the relational self.

Other tentative evidence, however, does not favor the culture-as-contextual-primacy perspective. Rather, it is consistent with the

possibility of pancultural primacy of the individual self (Brown, 2010; Cai et al., 2011; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005). One source of evidence is self-description tasks, which paint the picture of a stronger presence of the individual than collective self. In particular, persons convey richer descriptions (i.e., more facets) of the former than the latter. This results pattern replicates across (1) persons with an independent self-construal typifying Western culture and persons with an interdependent self-construal typifying Eastern culture (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 4), (2) North American and Chinese students (Ross, Xun, & Wilson, 2002; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991) as well as Mexican and Filipino students (del Prado et al., 2007), and (3) persons who provide self-descriptions after having been exposed to individual-self or collective-self primes (Trafimow et al., 1991). The results patterns are not an artifact of task instructions that may bias in favor of the individual self (e.g., “Who am I” vs. “Who are you”; Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 4) nor of open-ended versus structured measurement techniques (del Prado et al., 2007). Characteristically, del Prado et al. (2007) reviewed multiple studies from many cultures assessing the descriptive preponderance of aspects of the individual versus collective self and reached the conclusion that “the individual-self primacy hypothesis was supported in virtually all of the studies” (p. 1136).

Another source of evidence is the previously mentioned AIQ-IV comparisons of regard for each self (del Prado et al., 2007). The tendency for persons to express higher regard for the individual and relational self over the collective self occurred both in individualistic cultures (e.g., Australia, USA) and collectivistic cultures (e.g., Mexico, Philippines). Also, variation in the relative regard for the individual versus relational self did not track predictions of the culture-as-contextual-primacy perspective. In Australia, the individual self and relational self were rated as equally important, whereas, in the United States, the relational self was rated as more (not less) important than the individual self. In Mexico, the relational self was rated as less (not more) important than the individual self, whereas in the Philippines, the individual self and relational self were rated as equally important. These results, however, feature a notable limitation. The individual and relational self ratings shared a substantial correlation (0.56–0.72 across cultures), suggesting that the AIQ-IV does not necessarily constitute a pure method for distinguishing the motivational potency of the individual and relational self. We provide a more decisive test of the culture-as-contextual-primacy perspective in our research program.

4.3. A methodological note

We broadened the examination of the motivational hierarchy of the three selves. In four experimental studies, we used multiple methods and operationalizations of the three selves while assessing the presumed hierarchy in varying cultural contexts (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012). In particular, we controlled the immediate contextual accessibility of the selves with a narrative task in which participants wrote an essay describing who they are in terms of a given self (Andersen, Glassman, Chen, & Cole, 1995) either on a within-subjects (Study 1) or a between-subjects (Studies 2 and 4) basis. The narrative task was absent in Study 3, in an effort to ensure that consequent patterns of motivational primacy were distinct from this task. Also, we tailored the task to capture the broad nature of a self, that is, the self (be it individual, relational, or collective) in its entirety rather than in its isolated aspects (i.e., in terms of specific attributes relevant to each type of self). Additionally, we varied across studies the definitions of the three selves for generalizability purposes, as detailed below and in the [Appendix](#).

Previous comparisons implemented a nomothetic approach to the investigation of the collective self, as they standardized the ingroup for participants in any given study. The narrative task affords an idiographic analysis by enabling participants to select aspects that represent idiosyncratically their individual, relational, or collective self. Tracking those aspects grants access to the subjectively perceived basis of each self and permits a nuanced examination of the moderational role of these bases in patterns of primacy.

4.4. Individual-self primacy, relational-self primacy, or collective-self primacy?

Below, we describe two studies that tested for relative self-primacy in Western culture (i.e., UK, USA).

4.4.1 *Reactions to surgical removal of each self*

In our prior research, we assessed motivational self-primacy by targeting a particular aspect of a given self. For example, participants received feedback indicating that they personally or their group possessed a negatively valued trait, lacked an important ability (creativity), or were deserving of an insult (Gaertner et al., 1999, 2002). Here, we endeavored into a more comprehensive test of the three perspectives: Rather than threatening an aspect of a given self, we threatened the existence of a self as a whole (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).

The experimental design involved a single within-subjects factor (i.e., activation of the individual-self, relational-self, and collective-self). Participants first received definitions of each self in terms of multiple relationships and groups that comprised them (Appendix). Participants proceeded to write a narrative describing themselves in accordance with a given self. Next, they imagined that it is scientifically possible for selves to be removed surgically, and that they awoke one day having lost the self about which they had just written. Subsequently, they registered their reactions to the loss of that self. They estimated the “effect-on-life” the surgical removal of the self would have by responding to “the emotional impact of losing the self,” whether “if I lost this self, I would be exactly the same person” and whether “if I lost this self, my life would be meaningless.” And they judged the extent to which they would experience three negative mood states (sad, unhappy, and blue) and three positive mood states (content, pleased, and happy). Participants completed the paired narrative and imagination task for each of the three selves with the ordering of the selves counterbalanced. Finally, participants engaged in a forced-choice selection among the three selves in answering the question “In what self do you feel most true or ‘at home’? That is, which self is the real YOU?” Participants completed all these tasks with ease. In fact, earlier pilot work had indicated that participants could clearly understand and execute these “meta-attitudinal” tasks.

The results illustrated a three-tiered motivational hierarchy among the selves, with the individual self at the top, followed by the relational self, and trailed at the bottom by the collective self. The study replicated past findings (Gaertner et al., 1999; Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2) on the elevated motivational status of the individual versus collective self: Imagined loss of the individual self elicited stronger reactions (i.e., larger effect-on-life, more negative and less positive mood), while most participants considered this self as more true or real. The study also revealed a more potent motivational presence of the relational than collective self: Imagined loss of the relational self evoked stronger reactions (again, larger effect-on-life, more negative and less positive mood), while the majority of participants considered this self as more real. Finally, the study suggested a higher motivational status of the individual than relational self, albeit the evidence was equivocal: Participants expected that loss of their individual self would bear a larger effect on their lives and felt more real in that kind of self; however, loss of the individual self prompted equally negative (or reduced positive) mood as loss of the relational self. (For a more detailed picture of our findings, see Figures 5.4 and 5.5.)

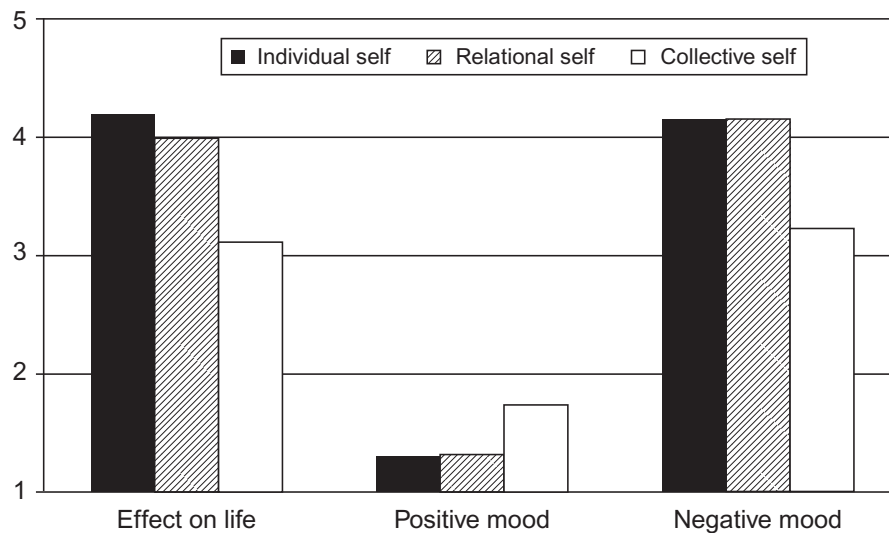


Figure 5.4 Effect on life, positive mood, and negative mood as a function of losing a self. *Note:* Ratings ranged from 1 to 5 with higher numbers indicating a larger effect on life, more positive mood, and more negative mood, respectively.

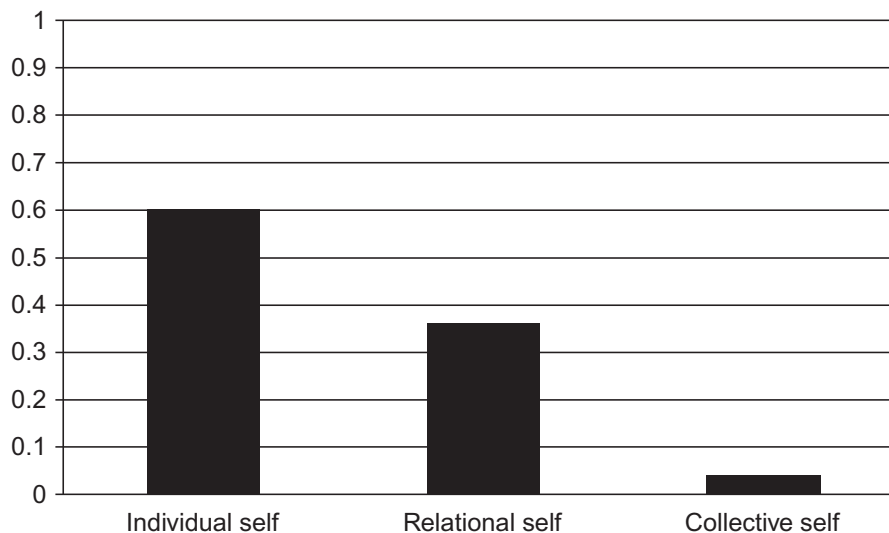


Figure 5.5 Proportion of persons selecting a given self as their "Real You."

4.4.2 Distancing from future threat: A closer look

Follow-up research also relied on participants' subjective reports to explore the structure of the presumed three-tier motivational hierarchy in the self-system. In the previous section, we described a study in which we examined protective responding to future threats and found that only a small fraction of participants (7%) avoided a threat to their most important group whereas a sizeable proportion (40%) avoided a threat to their individual self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2). There was actually a third condition

to which participants were randomly assigned, where participants wrote a narrative about their most important dyadic relationship and subsequently received instructions to describe how that negative event could befall their partner in that most important relationship (i.e., “describe what you think could *cause the person with whom you share that most important relationship* to have a negative experience. . . similar to the student you just read about”). (The [Appendix](#) supplies the definitions that participants received.) Again, the crucial outcome was whether participants faced the threat by writing as instructed or avoided the threat by writing off topic (i.e., not describing how the future threat could befall the given self).

As we previously detailed, comparison of the collective versus individual self replicated our past findings (Gaertner et al., 1999, 2002; Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1) such that more participants avoided threat to their individual than collective self. Replicating Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al. (2012, Study 1), more participants avoided a threat to their relational than collective self (with 30% of participants writing off topic in regard to how a threat could befall their relational self). Once again, though, the evidence on individual-self versus relational-self primacy was equivocal: Although the direction favored individual self-primacy, participants did not reliably differ in avoidance of threat to these two selves. In all, the result patterns (displayed in [Figure 5.6](#)) are consistent with the possibility that the individual and relational selves are closer to each other in motivational potency than they are to the collective self.

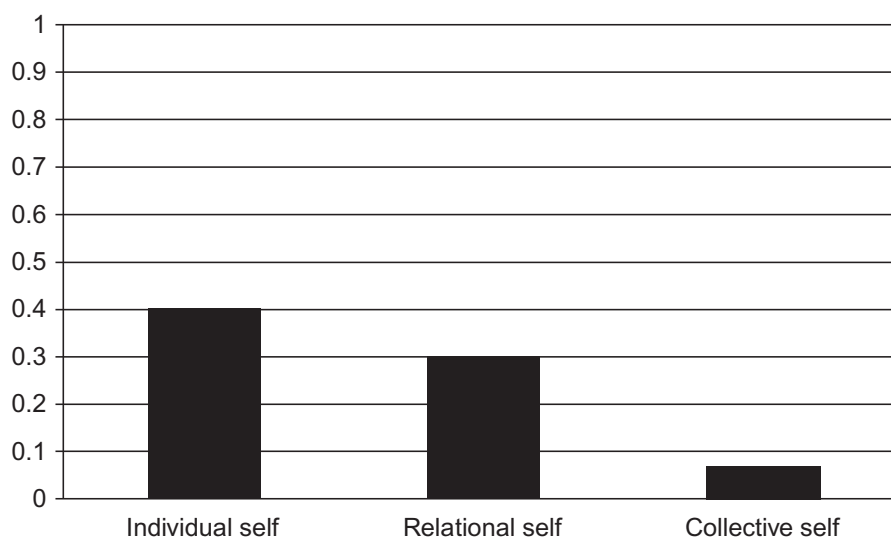


Figure 5.6 Proportion of persons avoiding threat to a given self.

4.5. Individual-self primacy, relational-self primacy, collective-self primacy, or contextual primacy?

Although the first two experimental studies of Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al. (2012) suggested that the individual self is at the top of the hierarchy, followed closely by the relational self (and remotely by the collective self), the evidence was not definitive. We opted to retest relative self primacy with a new methodology (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 3). More importantly, we engaged in a rigorous examination of the contextual-primacy hypothesis. Is the presumed three-tier motivational hierarchy a function of cultural context? We describe below two relevant studies conducted in Eastern and Western cultures (i.e., China and UK/USA, respectively). The design involved a within-subjects factor (activation of the individual-self, relational-self, or collective-self) and a between-subjects factor (culture: Eastern, Western).

4.5.1 *Bettering, pricing, and selling each self*

We defined the individual, relational, and collective selves in terms of a trait-based conception derived through meta-contrasts with nonself persons, relationships, and groups, respectively (Appendix). Narratives for each self followed. These definitions allowed us to implement a money allocation task in order to assess the extent to which participants valued subjectively the three selves. If participants possessed a putative sum of money, how would they distribute it among the three selves? On the basis of prior work (Lea & Webley, 2006; Li, Bailey, Kenrick, & Linsenmeier, 2002), we reasoned that the value of selves can be expressed via money in the same way as the value of basic necessities (e.g., shelter, food) or companionship (e.g., rentafriend.com).

We assumed that the most valued self would receive the largest allocation, and the least valued self would receive the smallest allocation. As such, relative support for individual-self, relational-self, and collective-self primacy would be straightforward. Of particular interest, however, was testing of the cultural-primacy perspective. Note that the money could be equally divided among the selves; thus, when all three selves are simultaneously accessible (as they were in our allocation task), all three selves could be equally valued as the contextual-primacy perspective predicts.

In particular, if, as this perspective implies, motivational hierarchy is a cultural product, then the pattern of primacy—and, hence, allocations—among the selves would shift across cultures. That is, the individual self would be the most valued self in the West and the least valued self in the

East. Stated otherwise, Western participants would allocate more money to the individual than relational and collective selves, whereas Eastern participants would allocate less money to the individual self than relational and collective selves. However, if individual-self primacy is pancultural, then Western (i.e., British) and Eastern (i.e., Chinese) participants would value the individual self equally in both cultural contexts: They would allocate more money to that self relative to the relational or collective self.

On each of three consecutive tasks, participants allocated a fixed sum of money among the three selves to indicate how much they valued each self. In the UK, the amount was 90,000 British Pounds (GBP), whereas in China it was 900,000 Chinese Yuan (CNY). The two sums had equivalent value in the two cultures. Also, the money could be divided equally among the selves, if participants so desired: For each task, they could allocate any amount from 0 to 90,000 GBP (900,000 CYN) to a given self as long as the total across the three selves was 90,000 GBP (900,000 CNY). The three tasks were (1) how much participants would spend bettering each self, (2) how much each self was worth, and (3) how much participants would expect to receive if they could sell each self. All tasks were presented and completed in the participant's native language.

The results did not vary across the three tasks, and we created a monetary-value index by averaging allocations from each task. The data were consistent with a three-tiered structure of motivational hierarchy, anchored at the top by the individual self, followed by the relational self, and anchored at the bottom by the collective self. Participants allocated more money (bettering, pricing, and selling) for the individual self compared to the relational or collective self, and for the relational self compared to the collective self. Importantly, the results are inconsistent with the contextual-primacy perspective, as this results pattern generalized across cultural context. That is, both British and Chinese participants allocated money primarily to their individual self, secondarily to their relational self, and lastly to their collective self. See [Figure 5.7](#).

There is evidence that money induces a shift away from social interdependence and toward individualism ([Vohs, Mead & Goode, 2006, 2008](#)). If so, the results may be artifacts of the allocation task. However, this alternative cannot account for the primacy of the relational over the collective self, as it would predict equivalent allocation to these two selves if not a lesser allocation to the relational self, which is derived from close, interdependent relationships. Also, the results constituted a conceptual replication of findings produced by methodologically diverse paradigms that

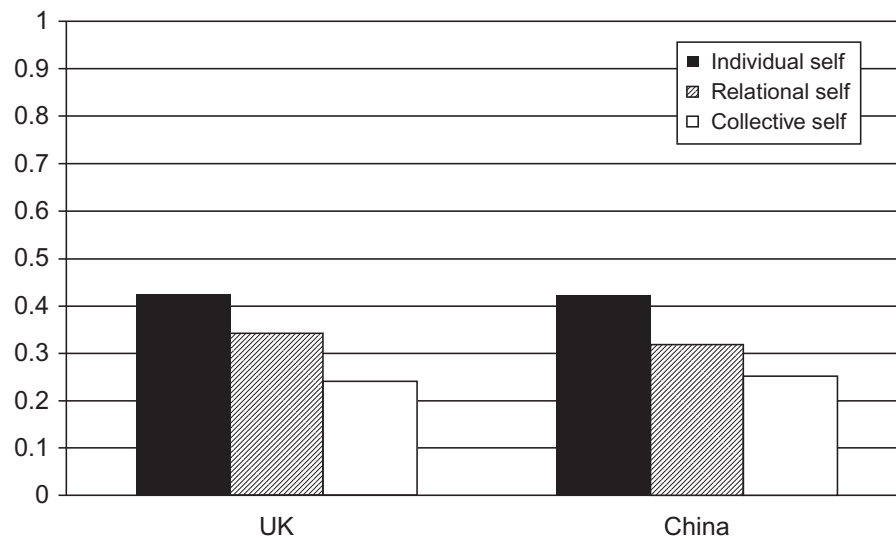


Figure 5.7 Mean proportion of money allocated to each self as a function of culture. *Note:* Participants allocated 90,000 British Pounds (900,000 Chinese Yen) among the three selves indicating (a) how much they would spend bettering a self, (b) the worth of a self, and (c) how much they would receive in a sale of a self, respectively. Plotted is the mean proportion of money allocated to a given self across the three tasks (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 3).

neither invoked nor primed money (del Prado et al., 2007; Gaertner et al., 1999, 2002; Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Studies 1 and 2). Regardless, we proceeded to implement yet another paradigm in an effort to bolster confidence in the findings and provide an additional examination of motivational hierarchy in cultural context.

4.5.2 Linking goals to selves

We were interested in the way in which motivational primacy manifests itself in goal pursuit. Persons engage in proactive functioning by constructing a desired future via goals and ideals (Carver & Scheier, 2002; Oyserman, Bybee, Terry, & Hart-Johnson, 2004). In particular, they set goals relevant to the individual, relational, and collective self (Gore & Cross, 2006; Mitchell & Silver, 1990; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Further, they rejoice when these goals are attained (Emmons, 1986; King, Richards, & Stemmerich, 1998) and hurt when the goals are thwarted (Duval & Wicklund, 1972; Higgins, 1987). In fact, even *imagining* the successful accomplishment of life goals enhances subjective well-being 3 weeks into the future and physical health 5 months into the future (King, 2001).

But, are the three selves equally linked with future goals? Or, is one self a stronger source of future pursuits?

We carried out a study to find out (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 4). Eastern (i.e., Chinese) and Western (i.e., American) participants received a definition of one of the three selves (Appendix) and wrote a relevant narrative. That is, we differentially primed the selves with the narrative as a between-subjects manipulation (i.e., alternative accessibility). Subsequently, they listed 12 goals and classified each goal for whether it belonged to the individual, relational, or collective self. We had participants, rather than detached judges, attribute goals to selves, under the assumption that associations between self and goals can be idiosyncratic. For example, different selves can be linked to the same goal: The goal to quit smoking may reflect the individual self (e.g., promoting individual health and longevity), the relational self (e.g., promoting a long life with a spouse), or the collective self (e.g., minimizing the burden of health care costs for the community). All materials were presented and completed in the participant's native language.

We reckoned that more primary selves would be connected more frequently with future goals and less primary selves would be connected less frequently with future goals. Also, if the hierarchy is a cultural product, goals would be linked more frequently with the individual than the relational or collective self in the USA and less frequently with the individual than the relational or collective self in China. On the other hand, if the three-tiered hierarchy is pancultural, goals would be linked primarily with the individual self, secondarily with the relational self, and least with the collective self in both China and the USA.

The results indicated that goals were tethered to the selves in a way consistent with the three-tiered motivational hierarchy. Participants attributed more goals to the individual self than to either the relational or collective self, and attributed more goals to the relational than collective self. As Figure 5.8 displays, the same pattern emerged for both the Chinese and the American participants.

Further analyses corroborated the generalizability of the three-tier motivational hierarchy of selves across cultures. All of the 489 participants attributed at least one goal to their individual self, whereas 30 participants (8 Chinese, 22 American) did not attribute any goals to the relational self, and 133 participants (70 Chinese, 63 American) did not attribute any goal to the collective self. Further, 86% of Chinese and 89% of American participants attributed goals to the individual self beyond the level of chance, and

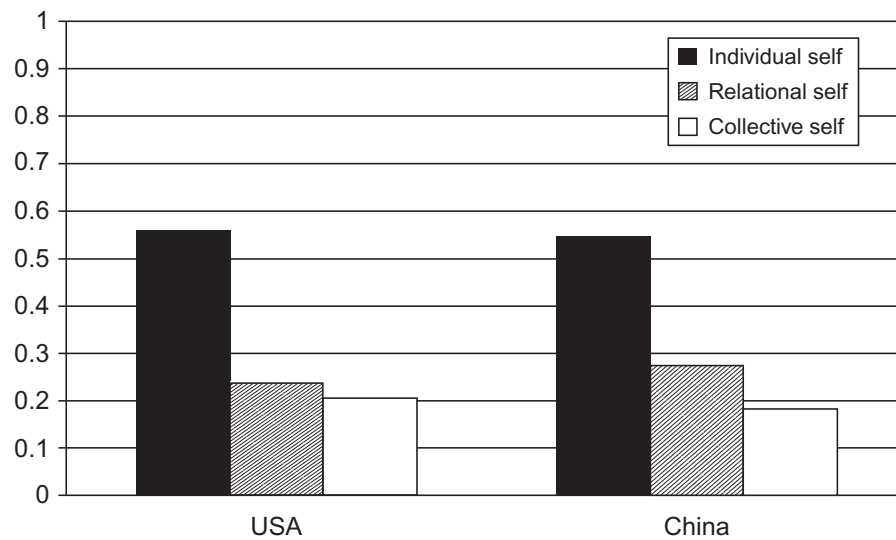


Figure 5.8 Mean proportion of goals attributed to each self as a function of culture. *Note:* Participants listed 12 goals for their future and subsequently attributed each goal to one of the three selves (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 4).

only a minority of participants did so for the relational self (20% of Chinese, 13% of Americans) or collective self (8% of Chinese, 12% of Americans).



5. ADDITIONAL MATTERS

Platt (1964) made a persuasive case for comparative testing. Such practice clarifies the veracity of theoretical claims, reduces theoretical overflow, and accelerates scientific progress. We followed Platt's recommendation as well as his advice: "you must study the simplest system you think has the properties you are interested in" (p. 349). But we also built on his advice. In our research program on the motivational hierarchy of the self-system, we reduced the phenomenon of interest to its crucial elements, while adding relevant permutations.

We found that, although the three selves are vital and meaningful in their own right, they are not equally vital and meaningful. In particular, we obtained converging evidence for a three-tier motivational hierarchy of the self-system. The individual self is at the top (i.e., the most motivationally potent), followed closely by the relational self, which is followed distantly by the collective self. In the remainder of this article, we will summarize the findings, discuss methodological issues, address alternative explanations, link our findings to the literature, and consider broader issues.

5.1. Summary of findings

The three-tier model of motivational self-primacy is supported by direct comparisons between the individual and relational self, the individual and collective self, and the relational and collective self.

5.1.1 *The individual self is more primary than the relational self*

The weight of the evidence favored the individual-self primacy perspective over the relational-self primacy perspective. On balance, participants protected and enhanced the individual self more than the relational self. Specifically, they

1. expected an equally negative (or positive) mood following loss of the individual or relational self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).
2. were equally likely to distance psychologically from a threat to the individual or relational self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2).
3. expected that their life would be impacted more by loss of the individual than relational self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2).
4. thought that the individual self feels more true or “at home” than the relational self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).
5. allocated a larger sum of money toward bettering the individual than the relational self, priced the value of the individual self as higher than the value of the relational self, and anticipated receiving more money for selling the individual than the relational self. These results emerged both in a Western and an Eastern culture (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 3).
6. attributed more goals to the individual than the relational self, in both an Eastern and a Western culture (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 4).

5.1.2 *The individual self is more primary than the collective self*

The evidence robustly favored the individual-self primacy perspective over the collective-self primacy perspective. Participants unequivocally protected and enhanced the individual self more than the collective self. Specifically, they

1. freely generated more statements pertinent to the individual than collective self, regardless of construal level (i.e., independent vs. interdependent; Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 4).
2. became angrier when the individual than collective self was insulted following failure (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 3).

3. experienced unfavorable feedback as more negative and reported being more displeased with it, and experienced favorable feedback as more positive and reported being more pleased with it, when the feedback targeted the individual than collective self (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 1).
4. derogated feedback more vigorously and experienced worse mood, when the feedback targeted the individual than collective self, regardless of strength of group identification (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 2).
5. reacted more negatively (across a variety of domains) when the individual than collective self was threatened and reacted more positively (also across a variety of domains) when the individual than collective self was praised, regardless of strength of group identification (Gaertner et al., 2002).
6. anticipated more negative (and less positive) mood following loss of the individual than collective self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).
7. anticipated that their life would be affected more by loss of the individual than collective self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).
8. were more likely to distance psychologically from a threat to the individual than collective self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2).
9. avoided threat to the individual self by shifting away from it (i.e., reporting higher similarity and identification with the collective self) but did not avoid threat to the collective self (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 1).
10. embraced praise to (i.e., reported higher similarity and identification with) the individual but not the collective self (Gaertner et al., 1999, Investigation 1).
11. thought that the individual self feels more true or “at home” than the collective self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).
12. allocated a larger amount of money to better the individual than collective self, priced the value of the individual self as higher than that of the collective self, and anticipated receiving more money for selling the individual than collective self—both in the West and the East (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 3).
13. attributed more goals to the individual than the collective self, in both a Western and an Eastern culture (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 4).

5.1.3 The relational self is more primary than the collective self

The evidence strongly suggests that the relational self trumps the collective self, both motivationally and affectively. Participants clearly protected and enhanced the relational self more than the collective self. Specifically, they

1. anticipated a more negative (or less positive) mood following loss of the relational than collective self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).
2. anticipated that their life would be affected more by loss of the relational than collective self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).
3. thought that the relational self feels more true or “at home” than the collective self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 1).
4. were more likely to distance psychologically from a threat to the relational than collective self (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2).
5. allocated more money for the betterment of the relational than collective self, priced the value of the relational self as higher than the value of the collective self, and anticipated receiving more money for selling the relational than collective self—both in an Eastern and a Western culture (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 3).
6. attributed more goals to the relational than the collective self, in both a Western and an Eastern culture (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 4).

5.2. Methodological issues

Our research yielded support for individual-self primacy while offering notable methodological improvements over the past literature (which, we emphasize, was not often designed to test the three perspectives). We took every care to apply controls or manipulate factors so that we could avoid erroneous conclusions. We will outline seven relevant steps below.

First, we integrated various aspects of threat, such as varying its type (e.g., future vs. received), controlling the feedback dimension, and controlling for feedback importance. Let us clarify, in particular, the issue of controlling for the relative importance of the feedback domain. Threatening or praising selves in dissimilar domains (Hirt, Zillman, Erickson, & Kennedy, 1992, Experiment 2) may confound feedback target (i.e., individual self, relational self, collective self) with feedback domain importance. This is why we involved the same feedback domain (e.g., moodiness, emotional expressiveness, negative future life events) for all selves.

Second, we threatened or enhanced the selves independently and assessed their independent reactions to these threats or enhancements.

Feedback directed at the collective self may be confounded with feedback directed at the individual (or, for that matter, relational) self (Biernat, Vescio, & Green, 1996; Jaffee & Yinon, 1979; Moghaddam, Stolkin, & Hutcheson, 1997). For example, feedback at the group level may lead a member of the group to assume personal responsibility for collective performance outcomes. In this case, it is unclear whether feedback reaches the group (collective self) or the person (individual self). It is for this reason that we explicitly informed participants that collective-self feedback was not based on their own personal individual performance or character.

Third, we controlled for processes likely to occur between the onset of feedback and the reactions to it (Moghaddam et al., 1997). During this delay, an adjustment and return to equilibrium are possible (Suh, Diener, & Fujita, 1996). For example, a flaw associated with the individual self may be more threatening than a flaw associated with the relational or collective self; over time, however, a coping strategy in the case of individual-self feedback may establish equilibrium, thus masking the initial impact. A delayed measure, then, would not necessarily have been sensitive in detecting the signature of motivated responding to feedback, and that is why we employed an immediate assessment.

Fourth, we defined and operationalized the selves in divergent ways to ensure that our findings are not limited to a particular operationalization (Appendix). Fifth, we assessed a varied set of reactions, such as expectancies for negative or positive mood, actual mood, anger, impact on life by loss of a given self, psychological distancing, strategic self-shifting, feedback derogation, feelings of the “real you,” money allocation, and attribution of goals. Sixth, we implemented a variety of groups to represent the collective self, such as groups that are ascribed (e.g., gender), achieved (e.g., university affiliation), and idiographically designated as most important; we also implemented idiographically important relationships to represent the relational self.

Seventh, we controlled for the contextual accessibility of the three selves (Gaertner et al., 1999, 2002). We did so in two ways: one involved rendering concurrently accessible the selves and the other involved alternating the accessibility of the selves. We will illustrate accordingly by revisiting Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al. (2012). We controlled the accessibility of selves with the narrative task and culture. The narrative task contributed to controlling immediate accessibility. By asking participants to write about a particular self, we rendered immediately accessible a given self before subjecting it to various assessments (Studies 1, 2, and 4). Culture, on the other

hand, contributed to controlling chronic accessibility. By sampling from Western and Eastern cultures, we tested two groups of participants who were differentially socialized via cultural norms that emphasized either independence or interdependence (Studies 3 and 4).

Study 4 of Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al. (2012) was particularly relevant, as it crossed narrative task and culture to produce three possibilities of contextual primacy. The potential Self \times Narrative effect allowed for primacy by means of immediate accessibility: The more primary self would have been the one made accessible by the narrative (i.e., individual self among participants who wrote the individual-self narrative, relational self among those who wrote the relational-self narrative, and collective self among those who wrote collective-self narrative). The potential Self \times Culture effect allowed for primacy by means of chronic accessibility: The individual self would have been primary for Americans and the relational or collective self would have been primary for Chinese. Lastly, the potential Self \times Culture \times Narrative effect allowed for primacy by means of chronic accessibility emphasizing immediate accessibility: The individual self would have been more acutely primary for Americans who wrote the individual-self narrative, the relational-self or collective-self for Chinese who wrote the relational-self or collective-self narrative. Such patterns, however, did not emerge. The three-tiered hierarchy persisted across narratives and cultures, and was backed by a meta-analytical synthesis.

5.3. Alternative explanations

We will now review and address alternative explanations for our findings. One such explanation questions the degree to which the “right” groups or relationships were chosen to represent the collective self. We would point, in response, to the generalizability of the findings across ascribed groups (e.g., gender; Gaertner et al., 1999, Study 1), achieved groups (e.g., university affiliation; Gaertner et al., 1999, Study 2), context-dependent groups (e.g., laboratory-formed ones; Gaertner et al., 1999, Study 3), idiographically generated groups (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Studies 1, 3, and 4), ideographically generated “most important” group (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2), ideographically generated relationships (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Studies 1, 3, and 4), and ideographically generated “most important” relationship (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2). We would also point to cross-cultural generalizability. Indeed, one benefit of the narrative

paradigm employed in the Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al. (2012) studies is that participants' ideographically generated groups (and relationships) provided a rich pool of data regarding the types of groups (and relationships) that constitute the collective (and relational) self. Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al. (2012) coded those types of groups (and relationships) and found that the reported patterns of motivational primacy held across the various types of groups (and relationships) naturally generated by participants.

Another alternative purports that the findings are due to the attenuated impact of threat or flattery on the collective (or relational) self, given that this impact was distributed and diffused across multiple ingroup members (*social impact theory*; Latane, 1981). However, we obtained the same findings for single ingroup members (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2), small and face-to-face three-person groups (Gaertner et al., 1999, Study 3), very large and anonymous groups (Gaertner et al., 1999, Study 1) as well as a variety of relationships (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012).

Might the findings be explained away in terms of differential specificity of the individual self on the one hand and the collective or relational self on the other? Singular referents (e.g., a concrete group member) are evaluated more extremely than generalized referents (e.g., the group as a whole, the relationship as a dyad; Giladi & Klar, 2002; Klar, 2002; Klar & Giladi, 1997). We typically operationalized the individual self as a singular referent and the collective self as a generalized referent. However, we also operationalized the collective self (and routinely) the relational self as a singular referent, that is, in terms of pondering how negative events might befall a particular member of the ingroup or the dyadic partner (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Study 2). Additionally, the singular versus generalized referent account is valid only when the two referents are evaluated in direct comparison with one another (Giladi & Klar, 2002; Klar, 2002; Klar & Giladi, 1997). In much of our research, though, the two referents were not directly compared: We used between-subjects designs where participants were exposed to threat or praise of one self but not another. In all, differential structural complexity of the three selves cannot easily account for the findings.

The content of the three selves may not be mutually exclusive. For example, participants may have an individual self that overlaps with their relational self (Decety & Sommerville, 2003) or collective self (Smith & Henry, 1996) and, thus, gains a motivational advantage from the overlap. This alternative, however, could not account for patterns of individual-self primacy in our research that used nomothetic procedures (e.g., Gaertner

et al., 1999). Nevertheless, we tested whether individual-self primacy is driven, in part, by participants who define their individual self in terms of relationships and groups. Specifically, we recoded the individual-self narratives by counting the number of distinct statements a participant made in describing the individual self and coding whether a statement referenced a relationship, a group, or neither. We then reanalyzed the data including only participants whose individual self manifested no overlap with their relational and collective selves. The reanalysis produced identical results to those of the full data set (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Studies 1, 2, and 4). Our findings do not appear to have been due to an artifact of overlapping selves.

It is also possible that the individual self has higher structural complexity than the other selves. However, a differential complexity account would anticipate a weaker (i.e., buffered; Linville, 1985) reaction of the individual self (compared to the two other selves) to threat and cannot account for the stronger reactions of the individual (than collective) self to enhancement (Gaertner et al., 2002; Sedikides & Gaertner, 2001a, 2001b). Further, complexity is a property that varies across persons for the individual self (McConnell & Strain, 2007), the relational self (Showers & Kevlyn, 1999), and the collective self (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). There is no compelling reason to suppose, then, that any one self is generally more complex than another self.

How about the contextual self? We found no moderation by strength of ingroup identification or group type (minimal vs. natural). One can legitimately quibble with different ways to measure group identification (Leach et al., 2008) or propose additional moderators, and future research should explore these options. It should also explore, however, whether individual-self primacy is even higher among persons with high self-esteem (Baumeister, Tice, & Hutton, 1989), high self-concept clarity (Ritchie et al., 2011), or high narcissism (Morf, Horvath, & Torchetti, 2011). Regardless, the contextual-primacy hypothesis also failed to receive empirical backing by the cross-cultural findings.

5.4. Linking our findings to the literature

The claim that the individual self takes precedence over the relational self has received indirect backing in the literature, but the picture is nuanced. This is due to the proximity of the two selves: They develop in tandem and influence each other greatly (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010; Slotter, Gardner, & Finkel, 2010).

Yet, when the esteem or emotional stakes are high, the individual self tends to take precedence over the relational one. For example, people choose self-esteem boosts over seeing best friends (Bushman, Moeller, & Crocker, 2011), and they prioritize self-protection goals over connectedness goals when they cope with threats to their romantic relationships (Cavallo, Fitzsimons, & Holmes, 2009).

People are known to engage in moral hypocrisy, appearing moral to another person while avoiding the actual costs to themselves of moral behavior (Batson & Collins, 2011). Relatedly, evidence for moral outrage (i.e., violation of a moral standard) may have been exaggerated. When one distinguishes moral outrage (i.e., anger at harm to another person) from personal anger (i.e., anger at harm to the individual self), a different picture emerges: People feel personal anger when the victim of unfair exclusion is the self but not when the victim is another person (O'Mara, Jackson, Batson, & Gaertner, 2011). In prosocial exchanges between close relationship partners, the giver focuses on the costs of the prosocial act, whereas the receiver on the benefits she or he has received (Zhang & Epley, 2009). In addition, people are more intolerant of personal disequilibrium (i.e., thwarting of personal growth or goal pursuit) than relational disequilibrium (i.e., thwarting of a partner's personal growth or goal pursuit); alternatively, people are more keen to alter relational than personal disequilibrium (Kumashiro, Rusbult, & Finkel, 2008). Moreover, when one is threatened by the partner's superior performance, one distances the self from (i.e., by reducing perceptions of similarity with) the partner in a strategic move to assuage threat (O'Mahen, Beach, & Tesser, 2000). In general, the individual self appears to be the psychological "home-base": The relational self gains in importance the more it is incorporated into the individual self (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Arguably, some of the effects in the literature that apparently demonstrate the importance of the relational self can be reinterpreted in terms of mattering, that is, the extent to which persons feel that they are making a difference to their interpersonal world (Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004). We advocate here that mattering is, for the most part, an individual-self phenomenon. Sense of mattering, in turn, is associated with a host of well-being benefits (Dixon & Robinson, 2008).

The claim that the individual self is primary to the collective self has received more assured backing, albeit still indirect, in the literature. People accentuate intragroup differences more than intragroup similarities (Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995), a pattern that is indicative of the individual self's strivings for uniqueness (Vignoles, 2009). Also, people evaluate the

individual self more positively than the ingroup (Lindeman, 1997) and assume personal responsibility for the group's successes while blaming it for its failures (Mullen & Riordan, 1988). In addition, they consider the individual self more capable than other ingroup members of resisting undesirable media messages (Davison, 1983) but of yielding to desirable media messages (Duck, Hogg, & Terry, 1995), due to an underestimation of the elasticity of own attitudes (Douglas & Sutton, 2004). Relatedly, people report that they personally experience less discrimination than does their group (i.e., their fellow ingroup members; Olson, Roese, Meen, & Robertson, 1995; Taylor, Wright, Moghaddam, & Lalonde, 1990), a discrepancy that may arise from a self-protective strategy of denying personal discrimination (Crosby, 1984; Quinn & Olson, 2001). Further, group members derogate wayward ingroup members more severely than comparable wayward outgroup members (*the black sheep effect*) as a way to protect the individual self (Eidelman & Biernat, 2003), make group-serving judgments (i.e., attributions of group successes but not failures to internal factors) in order to protect the individual self (Sherman & Kim, 2005), disengage even from successful ingroups when intragroup comparisons threaten the individual self (Seta & Seta, 1996), define justice according to immediate concerns of the individual self (Skitka, 2003), masquerade self-interest as group benevolence (Pinter & Wildschut, 2005), see themselves as exceptionally other-oriented in order to satisfy narcissistic self-motives (Gebauer, Sedikides, Verplanken, & Maio, 2012), and remain or exit their groups (i.e., companies) based more on the criterion of personal gain (e.g., promotion opportunities, resources, satisfaction) than corporate identification (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988).

Moreover, the collective self increases in importance as its association with the individual self becomes closer. Groups become relevant to the person and gain in psychological value when they are incorporated into the individual self (Smith & Henry, 1996); in fact, people often align themselves with groups as a way to increase the positivity of the individual self (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Also, people experience stronger intergroup emotion about issues that are more relevant to the individual self (Iyer & Leach, 2008). In addition, people apportion more resources (i.e., money) to the ingroup than outgroup only when they expect to maximize their own earnings through this ingroup favoritism (Gaertner & Insko, 2000; Rabbie & Lodewijckx, 1994). Arguably, people are threatened more when a stereotype implicates them, personally, than when it implicates other ingroup members. For example, pervasive exposure to stereotyping has negative consequences

for self-esteem and behavior in low-status groups (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999). One reason for these consequences may be that stereotyping threatens the individual self: People would feel personally affected by such stereotypes and thus more threatened. This argument is consistent with research on stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Last but not least, collective self mobilization becomes more likely when discrimination against the ingroup is perceived as an attack against the individual self (Foster & Matheson, 1999). Even seemingly forceful involvement of the collective self in behavior (e.g., suicide bombing) can be explained in terms of individual-self motives (Huddy, Feldman, Capelos, & Provost, 2002; Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman, & Orehek, 2009), although a fusion of the collective with the individual self also provides an explanation (Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009).

Our research and relevant evidence leave open the possibility that the individual self serves as the basis for the formation of the collective self (Simon & Kampmeier, 2001). In particular, people use the individual self—and mainly the positive aspects of the individual self—as (1) a knowledge base to infer characteristics of novel ingroups (Otten, 2002), (2) as a memory basis to recall characteristics of novel ingroups (Gramzow, Gaertner, & Sedikides, 2001), and (3) as an evaluative basis to make judgments about novel ingroup members (Gramzow & Gaertner, 2005). The effects of the individual self on social judgment (e.g., evaluation of relational partners and groups) are ubiquitous (Alicke et al., 2005).

We did not generate support for the contextual-primacy perspective, even when we operationalized it in terms of cultural context. Our findings are compatible with past literature. We (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003) proposed that both Westerners and Easterners satiate their self-enhancement motive by considering the individual self superior to the average peer (i.e., the better-than-average effect) on dimensions that are culturally or normatively important, and thus have been internalized. Westerners (or persons with an independent self-construal) consider agentic traits or behaviors important, and hence they will claim superiority over their peers on these attributes. However, Easterners (or persons with an interdependent self-construal) consider communal traits or behaviors important, and thus will claim superiority over peers on those attributes. The results of several studies (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Chang, 2008; Sedikides et al., 2003) and a meta-analysis (Sedikides et al., 2005) were consistent with this proposal (Figure 5.9). In addition, enhancement of the individual self confers psychological health benefits both in the

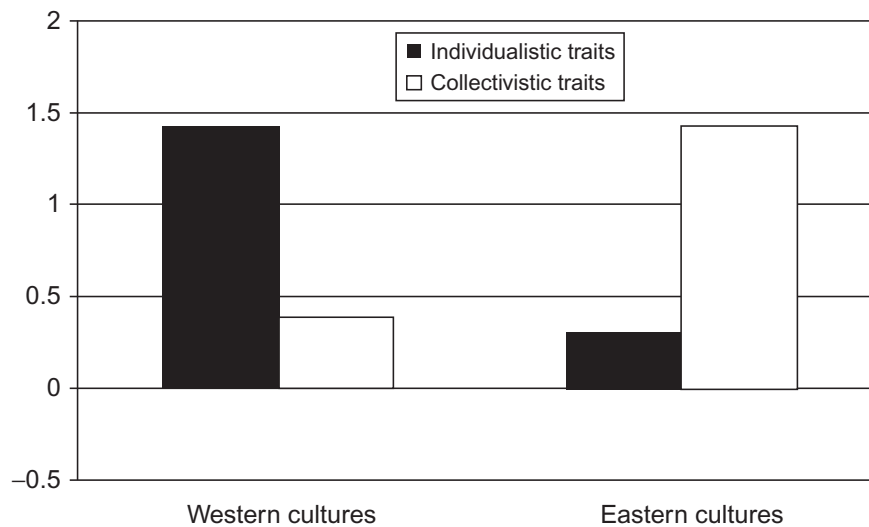


Figure 5.9 Individual-self enhancement as a function of culture and trait dimension. *Note:* A positive (negative) effect size indicates that a trait was considered more (less) descriptive of self than of peers (Sedikides et al., 2005).

West (O'Mara, Gaertner, Sedikides, Zhou, & Liu, 2012) and the East (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Chang, 2008; O'Mara et al., 2012). Finally, the motive to enhance the individual self is particularly potent both in the West (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Cai, 2012; Hepper, Gramzow, & Sedikides, 2010) and the East (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Cai, 2012; Hepper, Sedikides, & Cai, 2013). The findings, once again, pointed to the cross-cultural vitality of the individual-self primacy perspective.

We relied on the exclusive use of explicit measures in our research. How about implicit measures? Of relevance are data from North America, Europe, China, and Japan involving implicit measures that directly pit (1) evaluation of individual self versus evaluation of best friend or an ingroup member (Yamaguchi et al., 2007), (2) evaluation of self versus one's most favorite person (e.g., child, spouse, best friend; Gebauer, Görtz, Hofmann, & Sedikides, 2012), and (3) evaluation of self versus God among devout Christians (Gebauer, Gregg, & Sedikides, 2013). Consistent with the pancultural primacy of the individual self, participants from all cultures regarded the self more favorably than they regarded a close other, a member of an ingroup, their most favorite person, or God.

And yet there is a seeming discrepancy between the findings of Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al. (2012) and the findings of Gebauer, Görtz, et al. (2012) as far as *explicit* measures are concerned. In the former research, participants claimed a preference for the individual self over a close other,

whereas in the latter research they claimed a preference for a close other over the self. How can this discrepancy be reconciled? The key lies in methodological (and conceptual) differences. In Gaertner et al., participants reported on preferences between *attributes* within the self (e.g., those that render them unique vs. those that they share with a close other). These studies always concerned specific (shared vs. unshared) attributes within the self. However, in Gebauer, G6rritz, et al., participants reported on preferences between the self and a separate other person. These studies forced a direct comparison between self and other. It is for this reason that participants provided a socially adaptive response (e.g., rating the close other as more preferable than the self) explicitly while expressing their true colors (i.e., rating the self as more preferable than the close other) implicitly.

Having said that, we hasten to add that we do not necessarily advocate a strict and inflexible hierarchy within the self-system. Although we did not obtain gender differences in our research (for a minor exception not involving the individual self, see Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Studies 3 and 4), studies on the relational and collective self have done so. For example, primed relational context increased the proportion of relational and collective self-descriptions among Asians and women, whereas primed collective context increased the proportion of such description among Australians (Kashima, Hardie, Wakimoto, & Kashima, 2011). Also, relative self-primacy may be, in part, developmentally contextualized. Participants at several stages in adolescence provided self-descriptions when either the individual self or the relational/collective selves were primed. The results showed fluctuations in the prominence of the selves. The individual and collective selves gained in prominence (especially in later adolescence), whereas the relational self became less prominent. Yet the individual self became more socially oriented through adolescence, whereas the relational self shifted orientation in early adolescence from family context to peers (Tantia, Stukas, Halloran, & Foddy, 2008).

The Tantia et al. (2008) findings call for research that moves away from the homogenous sampling of college-age participants. Such participants are in a life stage that is marked by preoccupation with achievement and getting ahead (Gebauer, Wagner, Sedikides, & Neberich, *in press*), thus plausibly elevating the motivational significance of the individual self. In addition, college students are in a transitory stage that involves frequent relocations and alterations of social networks. Residential mobility may similarly elevate the motivational significance of the individual self (Oishi, 2010). Sampling persons in a life stage that involves a more sustained other-focus (e.g., after

retirement, early parenthood) or greater residential stability (e.g., middle age) may reveal elevated motivational significance of the relational self. Critically, such a changing pattern of individual versus relational selves across life stages would be consistent with the contextual-primacy hypothesis.

5.5. Broader issues

5.5.1 *Implications of our findings for collectivism*

Research on culture has grappled with conceptual and operational definitions of collectivism (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). The three-tiered motivational hierarchy model has implications for the understanding of collectivism. A vexing issue involves the nature of the collective to which collectivism refers (Brewer & Chen, 2007). The pattern of relational-self over collective-self primacy that we found in the Chinese samples (Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2012, Studies 3 and 4) implies that East-Asian collectivism is mostly orchestrated in reference to networks of close relationships rather than impersonal social groups. Interestingly, we found the same pattern in the corresponding Western samples. This suggests that the firmer motivational pull of the relational than collective self is a fundamental element of the motivational structure of the human self-concept and has less to do with cultural influences.

An arguably more contentious implication of the three-tiered motivational hierarchy model follows from pancultural individual-self primacy. Scholars are in agreement that norms prescribing social harmony and modesty exert a key role in the transmission and maintenance of collectivism. Debatable, however, is the nature of the motivation that guides behavioral acts of collectivism (i.e., benefiting others or the ingroup; Batson & Collins, 2011). Behavior may be driven by an other-serving motive to benefit the ingroup (Dawes, van de Kragt, & Orbell, 1990) or close others. Alternatively, behavior may be driven by egoistic motivation through which others benefit out of a concern for one's own welfare. Egoism, however, may seem disconnected from typical conceptions of collectivism. Nevertheless, this oddity becomes plausible considering the centrality of obligations to collectivistic culture (Triandis, 1995). Obligations reflect behaviors that one "should" or "ought" to do, and not necessarily behaviors that one wants to do. Subverting a "want" for a "should" appears on the surface to be other-serving, but it may as well be guided by egoistic concerns of avoiding sanctions from others or one's self (Cai et al., 2011). Along these lines, an account of collectivism entails the calculation of long-term costs and benefits

for the individual self (Yamaguchi, 1994). Pancultural evidence for the motivational primacy of the individual self implies that this type of self guides social behavior influentially in Eastern culture (as well as Western culture).

5.5.2 On the origin of the three-tiered hierarchy

Our findings, along with findings of other researchers (e.g., del Prado et al., 2007; Yamaguchi et al., 2007), point to the cultural stability of the hierarchy. Assuming that future evidence involving additional methods, populations, and life stages replicates this pattern, it is worth speculating about the origins of the three-tier hierarchy. Does it have evolutionary underpinnings (Schmitt & Pilcher, 2004)?

All three selves share in the likelihood of successful transmission of genes. Group life, for example, aids in survival of individuals and their offspring (Brewer & Caporael, 2006). Similarly, the dyad or parental unit is decisive in the transmission of genes (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992). Hominid ancestors, however, obviously could not transmit genes unless they reached puberty. Arguably, they spent the first part of their life preoccupied with individual survival. Treading this speculative line, it is possible that the pattern of self-primacy (i.e., individual self, followed by relational self, and then by collective self) is a footprint of natural selection. According to this line, the individual self had a strong survival value and promoted reproduction, which was closely facilitated by dyadic relationships featuring prominently within the backdrop of a larger social grouping (Sedikides & Skowronski, 2003; Sedikides, Skowronski, & Dunbar, 2006). As Leary (2005) put it, “A person who is just like everyone else in the group is essentially redundant and expendable. . .” (p. 104). It is possible that humans cherish the part of the self-system (i.e., individual self) that makes them less redundant, thus affording the effective contribution of their unique share to the relational or societal domain.

5.5.3 Does the hierarchy reflect poorly on the human condition?

Readers might be predisposed to discard the possibility that the individual self is motivationally primary, given that such a statement may reflect poorly on the human condition. David Carrier discussed such a human-idealization bias in response to critics of his empirically supported hypothesis that bipedalism evolved by strengthening a capacity to kill and compete: “Among academics there often is resistance to the reality that humans are a violent species. It’s an intrinsic desire to have us be more peaceful than we are”

(Siegel, 2011). We concur with the view that moralistic reasoning is an invalid means of assessing hypotheses within the scientific method.

We would also argue, however, that other patterns of motivational primacy are not ideal, desirable, or inherently good either. Let us consider the case of collective-self primacy. Would a collective orientation rid the world of social ills, with individuals striving for the welfare of the group? This is not likely: Social graces crumble and conflict proliferates at the boundary of intergroup contact (Brewer, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wildschut, Pinter, Vevea, Insko, & Schopler, 2003). Let us also consider the case of relational-self primacy. Would such an orientation create a better tomorrow? Not likely: Interpersonal connection promotes dehumanization and harsh treatment of socially distant others (Waytz & Epley, 2012), while close relationships are not free of violence either (McHugh & Frieze, 2006). In fact, in some ways, individual-self primacy might be considered a virtue: Not following a group trajectory and checking behavior against whether it is “good for me” might promote social harmony by enabling people to speak up, protest, and sway others from harmful deeds (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Chang, 2008; Gaertner, Sedikides, Luke, et al., 2008; Gaertner, Sedikides, & O’Mara, 2008).



6. IN CLOSING

The individual, relational, and collective selves are fundamental elements of identity, as they contribute pivotally to human experience. The balance of concerns (e.g., growth, goal pursuit, exploration) associated with the individual and relational self is critical for wellness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kumashiro et al., 2008), as is the balanced satisfaction of the needs of the individual self, relational self, and collective self (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2007; Sedikides & Brewer, 2001a). Yet, at times of an antagonistic relation between the selves, this balance is disrupted in favor of the individual self. In support of a three-tier hierarchy, our competitive testing (involving cross-cultural and multimethod empirical efforts) revealed that the motivational structure of the self-system is arrayed hierarchically: The status of the individual self is higher than that of the relational and (especially) the collective self. The individual self forms the motivational core of the self-system. The three-tiered motivational hierarchy reflects a fundamental structural pattern of the human self—a pattern whose sketches were drawn by evolutionary forces. The individual self may exert a regulating, stabilizing influence on the other two selves. Although there are many theoretical and

empirical nuances to be addressed (Bodenhausen, 2010; Cai et al., in press), an implication of the findings is that the individual self should play a prominent role in building theories about the relational or collective self.



APPENDIX. DEFINITIONS OF THE SELVES PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDIES OF GAERTNER, SEDIKIDES, LUKE, ET AL. (2012)

Studies 1 and 4

Individual self

The *individual self* is a form of self that differentiates a person from others in terms of unique traits, experiences, and characteristics. It is the self that is separate and independent from other persons.

Relational self

The *relational self* is a form of self that is derived from close relationships (e.g., friendship, romantic relationship, parent–child relationship) and represents aspects of self that are shared with relationship partners and define a person’s role or position within important relationships. It is the self that is based on attachment to important relationship partners.

Collective self

The *collective self* is a form of self that is derived from membership in important groups and represents aspects of self that are shared with group members and differentiates members from nonmembers. It is the self that is based on identification with important groups.

Study 2

Individual self

Being a unique individual is an important part of life. Indeed, you are a unique individual with your own background, personality traits, skills, abilities, interests, and hobbies. Please take a few minutes and describe what makes you unique.

Relational self

Being part of interpersonal relationships is an important part of life. Indeed, you belong to many important interpersonal relationships, such as those with family members, friends, and romantic interests. Write the initials of the person with whom you share *the relationship that is most important to you*. Please

take a few minutes and describe that most important relationship and explain what you share in common with the member of that relationship.

Collective self

Being a member of social groups is an important part of life. Indeed, you belong to many social groups. Write the name of the *social group to which you belong that is most important to you*. Please take a few minutes and describe that most important group and explain what you share in common with the members of that group.

Study 3

Individual self

Unique individual. This self-description consists of personality traits (characteristics) that make you totally unique and distinct from any other person.

Relational self

Partner in a close relationship (e.g., friendship, romantic relationship, parent–child relationship). This self-description consists of personality traits (characteristics) that you have in common with this close relationship partner and only with this partner. That is, these are personality traits (characteristics) you share with your partner and nobody else.

Collective self

Member of a group (e.g., work-related group, hobby-related group, university). This self-description consists of personality traits (characteristics) that you have in common with this group and only with this group. That is, these are personality traits (characteristics) you share with the group to which you belong and with none of the many other groups to which you do not belong.

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