

Who Is This “We”? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations

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Cross-cultural perspectives have brought renewed interest in the social aspects of the self and the extent to which individuals define themselves in terms of their relationships to others and to social groups. This article provides a conceptual review of research and theory of the social self, arguing that the personal, relational, and collective levels of self-definition represent distinct forms of self-representation with different origins, sources of self-worth, and social motivations. A set of 3 experiments illustrates how priming of the interpersonal or collective “we” can alter spontaneous judgments of similarity and self-descriptions.

Until recently, social psychological theories of the self focused on the individuated self-concept—the person’s sense of unique identity differentiated from others. Cross-cultural perspectives, however, have brought a renewed interest in the social aspects of the self and the extent to which individuals define themselves in terms of their relationships to others and to social groups (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). Central to this new perspective is the idea that connectedness and belonging are not merely affiliations or alliances between the self and others but entail fundamental differences in the way the self is construed (Brewer, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994; Trafimow, Triandis, & Goto, 1991; Triandis, 1989; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994).

Some of these theories of the social self focus on cross-cultural differences in whether the self is typically construed as individuated or interpersonal. However, all recognize that these different self-construals may also coexist within the same individual, available to be activated at different times or in different contexts. Furthermore, in several theories, achieving an extended sense of self has the status of a fundamental human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Brewer, 1991). In other words, individuals seek to define themselves in terms of their immersion in relationships with others and with larger collectives and derive much of their self-evaluation from such social identities (Breckler & Greenwald, 1986; Greenwald & Breckler, 1985). The motivational properties of collective identities are systematically documented in Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) comprehensive review of the evidence in support of a fundamental “need to belong” as an innate feature of human nature.

All of the theories mentioned above draw some kind of distinction between the individuated or *personal* self (those aspects of the self-concept that differentiate the self from all others) and a relational or *social* self (those aspects of the self-concept that

reflect assimilation to others or significant social groups). However, implicit in a comparison across these different theories is a further distinction between two levels of social selves—those that derive from interpersonal relationships and interdependence with specific others and those that derive from membership in larger, more impersonal collectives or social categories.

Both interpersonal and collective identities are social extensions of the self but differ in whether the social connections are personalized bonds of attachment or impersonal bonds derived from common identification with some symbolic group or social category. Prototypic interpersonal identities are those derived from intimate dyadic relationships such as parent–child, lovers, and friendships, but they also include identities derived from membership in small, face-to-face groups that are essentially networks of such dyadic relationships. Collective social identities, on the other hand, do not require personal relationships among group members. As Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987) put it, social identity entails a *depersonalized* sense of self, “a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person” (p. 50). Consistent with this view, Prentice, Miller, and Lightdale (1994) distinguished between group identities that are based on *common bonds* (attachment to other group members) and those based on *common identity* (collective identities).

The distinction between interpersonal and collective identities is not simply a matter of the difference between attachments that are based on affect and attachments that are cognitively based. Both levels involve affective and cognitive categorization processes. The difference is a matter of level of inclusiveness. Some social identities can be construed either as interpersonal relationships or as collective identities. Many social roles and professions, for instance, can be experienced in terms of specific role relationships (e.g., parent–child, doctor–patient) or in terms of membership in a general social category (e.g., parents, medical professionals). Consistent with this reasoning, Millward (1995) recently demonstrated a distinction between nurses who construed their career identity in terms of communal–interpersonal relationships with patients and those whose representation of *nurse* was construed in terms of professional intergroup distinctions.

Some other theorists have also made explicit the distinction

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between interpersonal and collective selves. Triandis (1989) and Greenwald and Breckler (1985; Breckler & Greenwald, 1986), for instance, distinguished among "private," "public," and "collective" facets of the self. The *public self* represents those aspects of the self-concept most sensitive to the evaluation of significant others and consists of cognitions about the self that reflect interactions and relationships with those others. The *collective self*, on the other hand, reflects internalizations of the norms and characteristics of important reference groups and consists of cognitions about the self that are consistent with that group identification.

Recent evolutionary models of human social behavior also call attention to functional distinctions between social attachments at different levels of organization. Caporael (1995; Brewer & Caporael, 1995), for instance, has developed a hierarchical model of group structure as a comprehensive theory of social coordination. According to this model, four fundamental configurations—*dyads* (two-person relationships), *teams* (small face-to-face social and working groups), *bands* (small, interacting communities), and *tribes* (macro-bands characterized by shared identity and communication but without continual face-to-face interaction)—have been "repeatedly assembled" throughout human evolutionary history. Each level represents different forms of functional interdependence and different types of coordination, with associated differences in construals of self and others. These configurations also are represented ontogenetically. Bugental's (1995) review of the literature on social development suggests that the development of attachment relationships and group-oriented relationships represent functionally distinct domains of social competence.

Levels of Self Representation

Table 1 presents one attempt to characterize systematically the differences among the three levels of self-construal that are represented in the current literature on the social self. At the individual level, the *personal self* is the differentiated, individualized self-concept most characteristic of studies of the self in Western psychology (e.g., Pelham, 1993). At the interpersonal level, the *relational self* is the self-concept derived from connections and role relationships with significant others. This corresponds most closely to the interdependent self as defined by Markus and Kitayama (1991) in their analysis of the difference between American and Japanese self-construals. Finally, at the group level is the *collective self*, which corresponds to the concept of social identity as represented in social identity theory and self-categorization theory (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Turner et al., 1987).

These different aspects of the self refer to different levels of inclusiveness of the conceptualization of the self—the shift from "I" to "we" as the locus of self-definition. This shift in inclusiveness of self-representations is postulated to be associated with corresponding transformations of the bases for content of the self-concept, the frame of reference for evaluations of self-worth, and the nature of social motivation.

The Extended Self-Concept

The idea of the socially extended self goes beyond perceived similarity and other relational connections between self and others. An extended self means that the boundaries of the self are redrawn, and the content of the self-concept is focused on those characteristics that make one a "good" representative of the group or of the relationship. As Brewer (1991) put it, when collective identities are activated, the most salient features of the self-concept become those that are shared with other members of the in-group. The idea that close relationships involve a blurring of the boundaries between the self and a partner also is represented by Aron and Aron's (1986) self-expansion model of motivation and cognition in close relationships. Operationally, this concept is captured in the Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992), which has recently been extended to collective identities (Tropp & Wright, 1995).

Support for the idea that salient interpersonal relationships are incorporated into the self-concept was obtained in a series of studies by Aron, Aron, Tudor, and Nelson (1991) on the parallels between cognitive effects of self-referencing and referencing to close relationship partners. The method and results of Aron et al.'s Experiment 3 are particularly relevant. In this study, married graduate students completed a questionnaire in which they rated themselves and their spouses on a set of 90 diverse traits. The ratings were used to identify aspects of each individual's self-concept for which self-ratings matched ratings of their partner and those for which self-ratings and partner ratings were mismatched. Later, the same individuals made yes-no self-descriptiveness judgments on the same 90 traits on a computer with reaction times recorded. Mean reaction times for matching traits were significantly faster than those for mismatched traits, suggesting that shared characteristics were more salient or accessible aspects of the self-concept.

Smith and Henry (1996) adapted Aron et al.'s (1991) method to assess the influence of salient in-group characteristics on judgments of the self. College student participants were asked to describe themselves and then each of two groups (an in-group based on college major or fraternity, and a corresponding out-group) on the 90 traits used by Aron et al. The research-

Table 1
Levels of Representation of the Self

Level of analysis	Self-concept	Basis of self-evaluation	Frame of reference	Basic social motivation
Individual	Personal	Traits	Interpersonal comparison	Self-interest
Interpersonal	Relational	Roles	Reflection	Other's benefit
Group	Collective	Group prototype	Intergroup comparison	Collective welfare

ers, having made these group identities salient, then had respondents make yes–no judgments of these same traits on a computer. Analyses of response time data essentially replicated Aron et al.'s earlier findings for spouses. Response times were facilitated for self-descriptive traits that matched those of the relevant in-group and were slower for mismatching traits. For both levels of identity, then, there is evidence that identification with others enhances the accessibility of shared characteristics in the working self-concept.

Self-Concept and Social Comparison

Most theories of personal self-esteem assume that global self-worth at the individual level is derived from self-evaluation of personal traits and characteristics based on interpersonal comparisons to relevant others (Pelham, 1995; Pelham & Swann, 1989; Suls & Wills, 1991). By contrast, the interdependent or relational self-concept is defined in terms of relationships with others in specific contexts, and self-worth is derived from appropriate role behavior (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Stryker, 1991). (In Table 1, we refer to this process as *reflection*, in the sense that the self is derived from the responses and satisfaction of the other person in the relationship.) Finally, the collective self-concept is determined by assimilation to the prototypic representation of the in-group, with self-worth derived from the status of the in-group in intergroup comparisons (Turner et al., 1987).

Evidence for changes in the bases of self-worth at different levels of self-construal come from efforts to measure global self-esteem separately at the personal and collective levels (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). In general, self-esteem at the two levels are positively correlated, but only moderately so (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992).

It should be noted here that in-group membership plays different roles in the formation and maintenance of the self-concept at different levels. On the one hand, in-groups provide the frame of reference for self-evaluation at the individual level and for selection of significant others at the interpersonal level. Shared in-group membership is one important basis for determining relevant sources of social comparison. For instance, defining ourselves as social psychologists means that we are more likely to assess our academic qualifications and research abilities in comparison to other social psychologists than to other types of behavioral or social scientists. Furthermore, confirmation of our self-assessment from other in-group members is related to the certainty with which we make trait attributions to ourselves (Pelham & Swann, 1994).

The other role that in-groups play in defining the individual's self-concept derives from comparisons between characteristics shared by in-group members in comparison to relevant out-groups. This is the essence of social identity. When we think of ourselves as social psychologists in this sense, we are most likely to attribute traits and characteristics to ourselves that we share with other social psychologists and that make us distinct from other social and behavioral scientists. The focus on intragroup differences versus intragroup similarities (and intergroup differences) serves as a main indicator of people's relative em-

phasis on their personal or collective selves (McFarland & Buehler, 1995; Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995).

The distinction between interpersonal comparison and intergroup comparison as determinants of self-evaluations was demonstrated in a recent experiment by Brewer and Weber (1994). In this experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of two artificial social categories. Social identification with in-group assignment was manipulated indirectly by varying the salience and distinctiveness of the in-group category. After being assigned to a category, participants viewed a videotaped interview with another research participant that provided exposure to an upward or downward social comparison target. In the upward social comparison conditions, the individual on the videotape was exceptionally high in academic achievement and intellectual ability; in the downward social comparison conditions, the same individual played the role of a poor student with relatively low academic accomplishment. Furthermore, the individual on the video was identified either as a member of the viewer's own social category (in-group) or as a member of the contrasting category (out-group).

The predicted outcomes of the experiment were based on the assumption that participants who had been assigned to the nondistinctive social category would be oriented toward intragroup, interpersonal social comparison and would evaluate their own academic abilities in contrast to those of another in-group member but would be unaffected by comparison information about an out-group member. Members of the distinctive social category, on the other hand, were expected to be oriented toward intergroup social comparison and would evaluate their own academic abilities by assimilating to another in-group member but exhibiting contrast to an out-group member.

Participants' self-evaluations of academic aptitude following exposure to the videotapes corresponded exactly to predictions. Participants in the nondistinctive in-group condition had significantly lower self-ratings following exposure to an upward comparison target than to a downward comparison target when the person on the videotape was an in-group member, but self-evaluations were not differentially affected by exposure to upward or downward out-group comparison targets. In contrast, participants in the distinctive in-group condition were more positive in their self-evaluations following exposure to the upward comparison in-group member and more negative following exposure to the downward comparison in-group member. However, exposure to an out-group comparison target had the opposite effect—lowering self-evaluations when the target was high in ability and raising them when the target was low in academic ability. Thus, exposure to the same social comparison information had very different effects on self-evaluations, depending on the individual's relationship to the in-group and focus on personal versus social identity.

Social Motivation

Another important transformation associated with different levels of self-construal is a change in the basic goals of social interaction. There is a fundamental difference between social motives derived from personal self-interest and those derived from concern for the interests of others (McClintock, 1972). As Brewer (1991) postulated, "when the definition of self changes,

the meaning of self-interest and self-serving motivations also changes accordingly" (p. 476).

Both Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Baumeister and Leary (1995) stressed that interdependent relationships are characterized by mutual concern for the interests and outcomes of the other. Batson (1994) defined this concern as the basis of altruistic motivation, which he stressed is not to be confused with self-sacrifice (which concerns costs to self) but as the motivation to benefit the other. At the collective level, group welfare becomes an end in itself. Experimental research on social dilemmas has demonstrated the powerful effect of group identification on participants' willingness to restrict individual gain to preserve a collective good (Brewer & Kramer, 1986; Caporael, Dawes, Orbell, & van de Kragt, 1989; Kramer & Brewer, 1984). Identification with in-groups can elicit cooperative behavior even in the absence of interpersonal communication among group members. Within the in-group category, individuals develop a cooperative orientation toward shared problems.

Consequences of Shifts in Levels of Identity

Shift From Personal to Collective Self

The consequences of shifting from personal identity to social identity in levels of self-categorization have been a continuing focus of research derived from social identity theory (Turner, 1982). Although Deaux (1992, 1993) has argued that social identities are integrated into personal identities, there is evidence of discontinuities between self-descriptions and social behavior associated with the two levels of construal (Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

As the results of Smith and Henry's (1996) experiment demonstrate, when a particular social identity is made salient, individuals are likely to think of themselves as having characteristics that are representative of that social category. Social identity, in other words, leads to *self-stereotyping* (Simon & Hamilton, 1994). This effect was demonstrated in an experiment by Hogg and Turner (1987) that involved gender identity. In this study, male and female college students participated in a discussion under one of two conditions. In the personal identity condition, the discussion was between two people of the same sex, and the two discussants held different positions on the issue under consideration. In the social identity condition, the discussion group consisted of four people—two men and two women—and the sexes differed on the issue. The latter arrangement was intended to make categorization by sex particularly salient in the setting and to increase the probability that participants would think of themselves in terms of their gender identity. Following the social interaction, participants in the social identity condition characterized themselves as more typical of their sex and attributed more masculine or feminine traits to themselves than those in the personal identity condition.

Consistent with this perspective, other experimental research has demonstrated that retrieval cues designed to activate the "private" self-representation increase generation of self-cognitions that are quite different from the self-cognitions retrieved when the "collective" self-aspect is activated (Trafimow et al., 1991). These results led Trafimow and colleagues to speculate that private and collective self-concepts are stored in separate locations in memory.

Shift From Personal to Relational Self

Many of the cognitive, emotional, and motivational consequences associated with the cross-cultural differences in self-construal reviewed by Markus and Kitayama (1991) would be expected to hold for shifts in levels of self-representation within the same individual. Indeed, Cheek (1989) argued that personal and social (relational) identities are enduring properties of the self-concept, representing separate sources of individual differences in self-definition. Also, Cousins (1989) demonstrated that both American and Japanese participants produced different types of self-descriptors in response to the Twenty Statements Test (Hartley, 1970) when the instructions were altered from the generic ("I am . . .") prompt to prompts situated in specific interpersonal contexts.

Shift From Relational to Collective Self

Less research has been devoted to direct comparisons between interpersonal and collective levels of self-categorization and associated behaviors. One exception is Hogg's (1992, 1993) work on the distinction between interpersonal liking and social identity as sources of attraction to others.

In the research literature on interpersonal attraction, liking between two individuals is strongly related to the similarity between them (Byrne, 1971). People are likely to become friends or lovers to the extent that they perceive that they are similar to each other in preferences, attitudes, and values. At this interpersonal level, attraction seems to be a function of the two individuals' personal traits and the degree of match between their individual identities. On the other hand, research on social categorization and in-group preference suggests that positive evaluations and liking for other individuals can be induced simply by the knowledge that they share a common group identity. In-group members tend to be liked more than out-group members even when we know nothing about their personal characteristics. In general, we tend to assume that fellow in-group members are similar to each other, but in this case liking and similarity seem to be a consequence of group formation rather than its cause (Hogg & Turner, 1985). As a consequence, in-group favoritism can occur in the absence of interpersonal attraction or its antecedents.

To represent the idea that liking is sometimes based on group membership alone, Hogg (1992, 1993; Hogg & Hardie, 1991) has drawn a distinction between idiosyncratic *personal attraction* and depersonalized *social attraction*. Personal attraction is based on personal identities of the individuals involved, and similarity of personal interests, attitudes, and values is the primary basis for this form of liking. Social attraction, on the other hand, is based on preferential liking for in-group over out-group members. To the extent that a particular group member exemplifies the characteristics that are distinctive or important to that group, that individual will be socially attractive to other in-group members, regardless of interpersonal similarity.

Because these two forms of attraction have different origins, it is possible to display preference for an in-group member we don't like very much and to discriminate against a member of an out-group even if we like that individual personally. Because of this distinction in sources of attraction, it is possible for groups to

work together as cohesive units even when members do not like each other interpersonally, a phenomenon that has been demonstrated in laboratory groups (Hogg & Turner, 1985) and in real-life groups such as sports teams (e.g., Lenk, 1969).

Research by Prentice et al. (1994) also has verified the distinction between group identification that is based on direct attachments to the social category and identification based on interpersonal attachments among group members. In studies of various campus groups, they found that members of groups based on a common identity were more attached to the group than to fellow group members, whereas members of groups based on interpersonal bonds were more attached to members of the group overall and showed a stronger relationship between identification with the group and evaluation of individual group members.

Collective Self-Representations: Some Preliminary Studies

The idea of the "social self" as represented by the interpersonal and collective self-concepts is that of a more inclusive self-representation in which relations and similarities to others become central. This is symbolically represented by the shift from *I* to *we* as a term of self-reference (Taylor & Dube, 1986). Experiments by Perdue, Dovidio, Gurtman, and Tyler (1990) have demonstrated that the pronouns *we* and *us* carry positive emotional significance that is activated automatically and unconsciously. We suggest further that the concept *we* primes social representations of the self that are more inclusive than that of the personal self-concept. In a preliminary investigation of the implications of different levels of the social self-concept, we conducted a set of three experiments to explore the effects of priming various *we* schemas on individual judgments and self-descriptions.

Experiment 1

The initial experiments were premised on the idea that social identities should lower the threshold for perceived similarity between the self and others and direct attention toward judgments of agreement rather than disagreement (Turner et al., 1994). We reasoned that this change of threshold should affect the interpretation and acceptance of ambiguous attitude statements—statements that could be viewed as either supportive of or opposed to a particular attitude position. Whereas neutral and ambiguous statements are often contrasted away from the perceiver's own attitude (Eiser & van der Pligt, 1984), when a social self-concept has been activated such statements should be more likely to be assimilated and perceived as similar to the perceiver's own position.

To test this idea, we used a standard priming task to activate the concepts *we* or *they* and then tested respondents' judgments of similarity/dissimilarity for ambiguous attitude statements. The experimental design consisted of five different priming conditions. In one condition *we-us* pronouns were activated, and in the contrasting condition *they-them* pronouns were activated, and these were both compared with a condition in which the neutral pronoun *it* was activated. For further comparison purposes, two additional priming conditions were included in

which either positive or negative adjectives were used in the priming materials. These adjective conditions served as a control for the effects of positive and negative affective priming, respectively.

Method

Participants. One hundred male and female introductory psychology students participated in the experiment for partial course credit. Twenty participants were randomly assigned to each of the five experimental conditions.

Procedure. In the priming task, participants read a descriptive paragraph (a story about a trip to the city) with instructions to circle all the pronouns that appeared in the text, as part of a proofreading and word search task. In the three pronoun priming conditions the paragraph contained 19 pronouns, but the text was varied so that the same materials were presented with almost all of the pronouns referring to *we* or *us*, or to *they* or *them*, or to *it*. Participants in the adjective priming conditions proofread a different paragraph (describing residents of a city) with the instructions to circle all of the adjectives in the text. The text was varied so that the 19 adjectives were either predominantly positive concepts (e.g., *lucky*, *humorous*) or predominantly negative (e.g., *dissatisfied*, *gossipy*).

After completing this word search task, participants were escorted to another room to take part in an ostensibly different experiment involving judgments of attitude statements. They were presented on a computer monitor with a series of 16 attitude statements on various issues and were asked to judge, as quickly as possible, whether the statements were similar or dissimilar to their own views by pressing a number key on the keyboard, ranging from 1 (*very dissimilar*) to 4 (*very similar*). Eight of the items were selected to be unambiguously pro or con in regard to the attitude issue, and the other eight were ambiguous in their implications (e.g., "Abortion should be available to victims of rape"). The unambiguous and ambiguous items were intermixed in random order.

At the conclusion of both tasks, participants were probed for suspicion (none reported seeing any connection between the two experimental tasks), debriefed, and dismissed with thanks.

Results

Preliminary analyses of responses to the unambiguous attitude statements revealed no effects of experimental conditions on responses to these items. Judgments of similarity to these items were approximately normally distributed with a mean rating of 2.75 on the 4-point scale. Mean response time was 7.49 s for similarity judgments and 8.19 s for dissimilarity judgments, with no significant differences across priming conditions.

Similarity ratings and response latencies for ambiguous items served as the primary measure of threshold for judgments of agreement or similarity to the self. Of the items included in the judgment task, only those that met specific empirical criteria for ambiguity were used to test the primary hypothesis. Items selected for analysis were those that (a) evoked approximately half similar and half dissimilar judgments across all respondents in the experiment and (b) were responded to consistently (i.e., any one respondent judged each of the items to be similar or dissimilar). In Experiment 1, two of the ambiguous items¹ met

¹ The two statements were "The existence of famine and disease in the world causes doubt in some religious doctrines" and "Abortion could be made unnecessary with appropriate sex education." Most of the unselected items were so neutral in content that virtually all respondents judged them as similar.

these criteria. For each participant, ratings and response times were averaged across these two items as the primary dependent measures.

Similarity judgments. Results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that there were marginally significant differences in the mean similarity ratings for the ambiguous items across the five priming conditions, $F(4, 95) = 2.04, p < .10$. Both the *we* prime condition ($M = 3.30$) and the positive-adjective condition ($M = 3.35$) were significantly higher than the neutral (*it*) condition ($M = 2.90$), $t(95) = 1.79, p = .07$, and $t(95) = 2.02, p < .05$, respectively. Neither the *they* prime nor the negative-adjective prime conditions differed significantly from the neutral prime or from each other ($M_s = 2.95$ and 2.90 , respectively).

Excluding the neutral condition, results of a 2 (positive vs. negative valence) \times 2 (pronouns vs. adjectives) ANOVA indicated a main effect for valence, $F(1, 76) = 6.16, p = .01$, but no significant interaction between valence and word type. Both of the positively valenced primes increased judgments of similarity for ambiguous items compared to the negatively valenced primes, but *we* did not result in higher similarity judgments than did positive adjectives.

Response latencies. Intraindividual reaction times were standardized across all 16 attitude statements (Fazio, 1990), and the z scores for the 2 ambiguous items were averaged as the measure of response latency for each participant. Higher values on this measure represent longer times to make judgments relative to the individual's own mean response time.

Results of a 2 (positive or negative valence) \times 2 (pronoun or adjective) \times 2 (similar or dissimilar judgment) between-subjects ANOVA revealed a significant three-way Valence \times Word Type \times Judgment interaction, $F(1, 72) = 11.89, p = .001$ (see Table 2).² Analysis of the simple effects underlying this interaction revealed that only the pronoun primes affected response latencies. For the pronoun conditions there was a significant two-way interaction between the *we-they* effect and the type of judgment, $F(1, 36) = 9.76, p < .01$. Judgments of dissimilarity took significantly longer for those in the *we* prime condition than in the *they* prime condition, whereas similarity judgments were facilitated by the *we* prime. For the adjective priming conditions, however, there were no significant effects of positive or negative valence on either similarity or dissimilarity judgments, and there was no significant interaction effect.

Table 2
Response Latency as a Function of Valence of Prime, Word Type, and Judgment: Experiment 1

Prime	Judgment	
	Similar	Dissimilar
Pronoun		
We	.11	.41
They	.35	.05
Adjective		
Positive	.16	.09
Negative	-.09	.11

Discussion

Results from this first experiment confirmed the prediction regarding the priming effect of the *we* schema on similarity thresholds. It further demonstrated that the *we-they* effect is distinct from the effect of positive versus negative affect per se. Although both positive adjectives and *we* pronouns had parallel effects on the propensity to rate ambiguous attitude statements as similar to one's own, only the *we* prime facilitated similarity judgments and interfered with dissimilarity judgments as indicated by the reaction time data. It is this differential response time that indicates a change in threshold for judgments of similarity. Whereas participants made similarity judgments readily following the *we* prime, judgments of dissimilarity required more extensive processing to override an initial, opposing response tendency. In the adjective priming conditions both similarity and dissimilarity judgments of ambiguous items took about the same amount of time as responses to unambiguous items.

Although these results provide some evidence for a unique effect of the *we* prime on judgment thresholds, it is not clear from this first experiment whether the *we* schema primed by our word search task would correspond to the interpersonal or collective level of self-representation. The paragraph in which the critical pronouns were embedded was entitled "A Trip to the City" and contained a running narrative of scenes and events associated with a drive to and through a large city. In this context, it is very likely that the concept *we* was interpreted to refer to a small face-to-face group of friends or partners. Evidence for an expanded self-concept should be obtained for both forms of the social self, but it is unclear whether the results obtained from Experiment 1 reflect only the assumed similarity primed by reference to close, interpersonal relationships. For this reason, we conducted a second experiment to provide a conceptual replication of Experiment 1, in which the *we-they* pronouns were embedded in different social contexts.

Experiment 2

The procedures of the second experiment followed closely those of Experiment 1, except that the adjective conditions were dropped from the design. Two different versions of the pronoun word search paragraph were created. In one version, the pronouns were embedded in a story that implied a small group social context; in the other version the context involved a very large collective. We assumed that during the word search task, incidental learning of the story context would imbue the pronouns *we* or *they* with different group size connotations, corresponding to interpersonal and collective meanings, respectively.

Method

Participants. Sixty-one male and female introductory psychology students participated in this experiment in exchange for credit toward

² Mean reaction time in the neutral priming condition did not differ significantly from the *they* or negative-adjective conditions, so this control condition was omitted from further analyses.

course requirements. Participants were randomly assigned to one of five different priming conditions prior to the attitude judgment task.

Procedure. As in Experiment 1, participants first completed a word search task in which they were asked to locate and circle all of the pronouns in a story text. Two different context stories were used. One was the same "A Trip to the City" story used in Experiment 1 and constituted the small-group context. The second contained a narrative about attending and watching a football game at a large stadium—the large-group context. For each story, one version contained primarily *we* and *us* pronouns, and the other contained primarily *they* and *them* pronouns. A neutral control condition consisted of the *it* version of the small-group paragraph from Experiment 1. All five story paragraphs contained 19 pronouns.

After completing the word search task, participants moved to a different room and completed the attitude judgment task used in Experiment 1. At the completion of this task, participants were probed for suspicion about the purposes of the experiment (none reported seeing any connection between the two experimental tasks), debriefed, and dismissed with thanks.

Results

As in Experiment 1, there were no effects of the priming conditions on judgments of the eight unambiguous attitude statements. Applying the same criteria as in the first study, we selected two ambiguous items for analysis.³ Mean ratings and response latencies for these two items constituted the primary dependent variables.

Similarity ratings. Results of a one-way ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of priming on similarity judgments of the ambiguous attitude items, $F(4, 56) = 2.63, p < .05$. The two *we* prime conditions ($M = 2.83$) were significantly different from the neutral condition ($M = 2.29$) and from the *they* conditions ($M = 2.50$), $F(1, 42) = 4.02, p < .05$. However, the two (large vs. small) *we* primes did not differ significantly from each other. Similarity ratings for participants in the *they* prime conditions did not differ significantly from those of the control condition.

Response latencies. We computed response latencies as in Experiment 1 for reactions to the selected ambiguous attitude statements. Results for the *we–they* conditions are reported in Table 3. An ANOVA revealed a significant Pronoun \times Judgment interaction effect, $F(1, 38) = 5.176, p < .05$, which paralleled that obtained in Experiment 1. As in the first experiment, *we*-primed respondents were significantly faster in making similarity judgments and significantly slower than *they*-primed respondents in making dissimilarity judgments. The effect of the *we* prime was the same regardless of context group size. Response times for the small (interpersonal) *we* primes and the large (collective) *we* primes were not significantly different.

Table 3
Response Latencies as a Function of Prime and Judgment: Experiment 2

Pronoun prime	Judgment	
	Similar	Dissimilar
We	.17	.31
They	.29	.06

Discussion

Results from this second experiment replicated the differences between *we* and *they* prime effects on readiness to make similarity judgments and inhibition of dissimilarity judgments. This effect did not differ as a function of the incidental context in which the concept *we* was embedded. This was consistent with our expectation that any form of activation of a social self-concept would entail an expanded sense of self that would lower thresholds for agreement and assimilation.

Experiment 3

Although the small and large *we* concepts primed in Experiment 2 had similar effects on judgments of attitudes, we did assume that the two contexts activated somewhat different construals of the social self. The *we* concept associated with the small group should have primed access to the relational self-concept—those aspects of the self associated with close interpersonal relationships with significant others. The large-group *we* schema should have activated collective self-identities associated with membership in large social groups or categories. Our third experiment was designed to test this assumption directly by assessing the effects of *we–they* primes on the content of freely generated self-descriptions.

In the third experiment we used the same five priming conditions as in Experiment 2, but this time the second task consisted of completion of the Twenty Statement Test (TST; Hartley, 1970) as a method of generating spontaneous self-descriptions. When the TST is used with White college students in the United States, the preponderance of responses are trait terms or other personal attributes, in keeping with the individualistic construal of the self typical in this culture (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For instance, Cousins (1989) found that with nonconstrained instructions, 58% of responses generated by White college students were personal traits and attributes, and less than 10% of responses referred to social relations or social category memberships. Against this baseline, we were interested in whether priming different *we* concepts would increase the proportion of social self-descriptions on the TST.

Method

Participants. One hundred and forty-six male and female introductory psychology students participated in the experiment in exchange for credit toward course requirements. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the five priming conditions, with proportionally more distributed between the two *we* prime conditions ($N = 75$) than across the other three conditions ($N = 51$).

Procedure. The initial priming task was the same word search task used in Experiment 2, with the same five versions of the story (*we–small*

³ The two statements were "The existence of famine and disease in the world causes doubt in some religious doctrines" (same as Experiment 1) and "Churches that are beautiful and emphasize the aesthetic side of life are most interesting." We also conducted analyses using the same two items as had been used in Study 1 (dropping a few participants in order to meet the consistency criterion), and results for the reaction time measure were essentially the same as that reported here for the selected items.

group, *we*-large group, *they*-small group, *they*-large group, *it*-small group). After finishing the word search, participants went on to a separate task in which they were given the TST, completing 20 sentence stems beginning with "I am . . ." After completing both tasks, participants responded to a brief questionnaire that included a manipulation check item on how many people they believed were being referred to in the paragraph they read.

At the completion of the experimental session, the experimenter probed for suspiciousness concerning the priming task and its possible influence on the self-description task. No participant guessed the experimental hypothesis or connected the priming with the TST in any way. Participants were then debriefed, thanked, and released.

Results

Manipulation check. Results of an ANOVA of the size estimates revealed only the expected main effect of the small-versus large-group versions of the priming paragraphs. Perceptions of the size of the group described in the stadium scenario paragraphs ($M = 7,332.37$) were significantly larger than were estimates of the size of the group described in the city visit scenario ($M = 10.64$), $F(1, 94) = 5.21, p < .05$. This difference was not affected by whether the paragraph contained *we* or *they* pronouns. Although most estimates of group size for the small-group condition were larger than a dyad, they were clearly within the range of an interacting, face-to-face social group. All of the estimates for the large-group condition were beyond this range.

Self-descriptions. Responses to the "I am" completions were coded by two independent raters who were blind to priming condition. Self-definitions were coded, on the basis of a modification of Hartley's (1970) coding scheme, into three categories. A *personal* self-description was one that contained reference to individual physical qualities, traits, attitudes, or activities (e.g., "I am very athletic"). *Interpersonal* self-descriptions were those that referred to a specific relationship (e.g., "I am happily married"). *Collective* self-definitions were those that implied membership in a social category (e.g., "I am a Black woman"). Interrater reliability of codings was .92. (Any disagreements in coding of the same item were reconciled before data analysis.) The proportion of interpersonal descriptions and the proportion of collective descriptions in each participant's protocol were the primary dependent measures of the study.

The initial analysis was a one-way ANOVA of the three levels of priming: the *we* prime (combining the two group size versions), the *they* prime, and the *it* prime. The results of this analysis revealed a marginally significant main effect of the primed pronoun for proportion of interpersonal self-descriptions, $F(4, 121) = 2.37, p = .06$, and a significant main effect for proportion of collective self-descriptions, $F(4, 121) = 6.25, p < .001$. (See Table 4 for mean values.)

The number of interpersonal descriptions was significantly greater in the *we* conditions than in the neutral condition, $t(121) = 2.51, p = .01$, and marginally different from the *they* conditions, $t(121) = 1.72, p < .10$. The *they* conditions were not significantly different from the neutral condition in production of interpersonal self-references, $t(121) = 1.07, p > .25$.

The *we* conditions did differ significantly from both the *they* and the neutral conditions in the proportion of collective self-descriptions, $t(121) = 3.13, p < .01$, and $t(121) = 2.68, p =$

Table 4
Proportion of Social Self-Descriptions as a Function of Type of Prime: Experiment 3

Type of prime	Descriptive code	
	Interpersonal	Collective
We	.07	.18
They	.05	.09
It	.02	.09

.01, respectively. Again, the *they* conditions did not differ significantly from the neutral priming group on this self-description measure, $t(121) = 0.24, p > .50$.

To assess the effects of priming context, we subjected the data from the four versions of the paragraphs in the *we* and *they* conditions to a 2 (pronoun) \times 2 (group size) ANOVA. Means for these interactions are presented in Table 5. For the interpersonal self-descriptions there was a marginally significant main effect of pronoun, $F(1, 105) = 2.88, p < .10$, but no significant effect of context or a Context \times Pronoun interaction. For the proportion of collective self-descriptions, however, the main effect of pronoun was qualified by a marginally significant interaction between pronoun and context group size, $F(1, 105) = 3.47, p < .10$. For the *we* paragraphs, the difference between the small- and large-group contexts was significant, $t(105) = 3.98, p < .01$, but the effect of group size was not significant for the *they* conditions.

Discussion

The overall production of social self-descriptions was greatly enhanced by the *we* prime, compared to the baseline proportions found in the *they* and *it* conditions. Furthermore, the results from the TST provide partial support for the hypothesized difference between interpersonal and collective *we* schemas, at least with respect to collective self-descriptions.

The data with respect to interpersonal self-construals are weak. Relational self-descriptions were relatively infrequent in all conditions and did not differ as a function of the group size implied in the priming condition. The failure to find clear evidence of activation of a distinctive interpersonal self-representation may reflect a failure of the priming condition or insensitivity of the measure. There is no doubt that the group envisioned in the trip-to-the-city scenario was smaller than that in the football stadium story, as revealed by results from the manipulation check. Nonetheless, a mean estimate of more than 10 does not connote an intimate group of close relationships. For at least some of the participants in the small-*we* condition, the context may not have activated the interpersonal meaning of *we*. Furthermore, the TST format (with the "I am . . ." stem) may be particularly unsuited to prompting relational terms.

Collective self-identifications, on the other hand, were clearly greater in the *we*-primed conditions, and this effect was particularly pronounced for the large-*we* context, for which social category memberships appeared in respondents' spontaneous self-descriptions to a degree not typically found in studies with American college students. Thus, this study produced initial ev-

Table 5
*Proportion of Social Self-Description as a Function of Pronoun
 and Prime Context: Experiment 3*

Size of group	Pronoun	
	We	They
Interpersonal descriptions		
Small	.07	.03
Large	.07	.06
Collective descriptions		
Small	.12	.09
Large	.24	.10

idence that priming terms associated with collective identities affect the accessibility of different levels of self-representations. Admittedly, these studies are preliminary, and further research will be needed to determine whether the interpersonal and collective levels of self-construal can be operationally distinguished.

General Discussion

The idea that different levels of inclusiveness define conceptually distinct construals of the self raises a number of interesting questions that are just beginning to be addressed in research on self-representations. One such question is the nature of the interrelationships among these different self systems. Turner and his colleagues (Turner et al., 1987, 1994) have contended that there is a functional antagonism between self-categorizations at different levels of inclusiveness. Taken to the extreme this would imply that social identities at different levels of organization are essentially independent and may include not only different but possibly incompatible representations of the self. At the other extreme, Deaux (1992, 1993) has argued that social identities are integrated into the personal self-concept. In between these two extremes is the idea that the different self systems interact as complementary components of an overall self-concept and self-esteem.

A second important question is what determines which level of self-representation is activated at any particular time. Self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1994) emphasizes that self-categorizing at different levels is inherently variable and highly dependent on contextual shifts in frames of reference. Other perspectives suggest that one level of self-construal is stable and dominant over others as a function of cultural values and belief systems and socialization (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Trafimow et al., 1991; Triandis, 1989). Yet a third perspective emphasizes the role of situated goals and motives, including needs for security and self-enhancement (Cialdini et al., 1976; Simon et al., 1995).

The Dynamic Self-Concept

One source of variation in self-representations within individuals is a widely recognized tension or opposition between

needs and motives that promote individuation and differentiation of the self from others, and those that promote assimilation and unit formation. These opposing processes appear to play out at each level of self-categorization. At the level of the personal self, individuals seek similarity with significant others but at the same time strive for a sense of uniqueness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). The relational self often is characterized in terms of the tension between intimacy and separation from others, particularly in psychoanalytic theories of social development (e.g., Sullivan, 1953). Finally, Brewer's (1991, 1993) theory of optimal distinctiveness holds that collective identities are constrained by the necessity of satisfying simultaneously individual needs for inclusion and distinctiveness.

At each level of self-representation, these opposing forces of assimilation and differentiation create a dynamic equilibrium that fluctuates with changes in the distance between the self and others. A similar dynamic may account for the shift between levels of self-categorization. When needs for intimacy at the interpersonal level are not being met, collective identities may become more important; prolonged periods of immersion in a depersonalized collective may enhance the importance of recognition of the personal, individuated self, and so forth.

Self-Representations and Perception of Others

Shifts in the level of self-categorization also have implications for how other people and groups are perceived. When the personal self is salient, self-schematic traits are chronically accessible as dimensions of evaluation of other individuals (Higgins, King, & Marvin, 1982; Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985). Trait dimensions may be less important, however, when others are evaluated from the perspective of the relational self or collective identities.

When collective identities are salient, in-group-out-group categorizations become the most important basis for evaluating others. (Much anecdotal evidence documents the dramatic changes in affect and behavior that occur when an interpersonal relationship is redefined in terms of in-group-out-group distinctions.) Derogation of out-groups is related to collective self-esteem but not to personal self-esteem (Long, Spears, & Manstead, 1994; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). A program of research by Jarymowicz (1990, 1991) has demonstrated interesting relationships between activation of the *we* schema and processing of social information. As distinctions between the self and the in-group are diminished, individuals are more likely to respond to others in terms of simplified social categorizations and discriminate more strongly between similar and dissimilar others. These studies complement our own findings that activation of collective identities lowers the threshold for perceived similarity of ambiguous information but suggest that it would also increase reactivity to unambiguously dissimilar information.

The apparent relationship between self-construals and perception of others suggests yet another extension of collective identity theory. Changes in levels of self-categorization reflect not only differences in views of the self but also different *worldviews*. Our programs of research on the social self should be expanded to better understand how changes in self-definition are associated with significant changes in salient values, beliefs,

and cognitive representations of the social world. If we acknowledge that different levels of identity represent different perspectives for interpreting social reality, collective identity theory becomes a comprehensive theory for understanding variability within as well as between individuals.

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