

# Self-Verification Motives at the Collective Level of Self-Definition

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Three studies examined self-verification motives in relation to collective aspects of the self. Several moderators of collective self-verification were also examined—namely, the certainty with which collective self-views are held, the nature of one's ties to a source of self-verification, the salience of the collective self, and the importance of group identification. Evidence for collective self-verification emerged across all studies, particularly when collective self-views were held with high certainty (Studies 1 and 2), perceivers were somehow tied to the source of self-verification (Study 1), the collective self was salient (Study 2), and group identification was important (Study 3). To the authors' knowledge, these studies are the first to examine self-verification at the collective level of self-definition. The parallel and distinct ways in which self-verification processes may operate at different levels of self-definition are discussed.

Who am I? In response to this question, research has shown that people refer not only to who they are as individuals (e.g., "I am clumsy"), but also to who they are in relation to other individuals (e.g., "I am a mother") and to social groups (e.g., "I am a Democrat"; see, e.g., Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Although cultural and other factors may influence the relative emphasis of these different self-aspects (e.g., Cousins, 1989; Rhee, Uleman, Lee, & Roman, 1995), it is widely believed that there are multiple possible levels of self-definition. Moreover, recent years have witnessed a rise in efforts to integrate work on different levels of self-definition into a single framework or to extend concepts formulated at one level to other ones (for a review, see Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). For instance, Brewer and Gardner (1996) offered a single theoretical framework encompassing three levels of self-definition: personal self, relational self, and collective self. As another example, the relational-self idea that people incorporate significant others into the self (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) has been extended to the collective level in research showing that people incorporate in-group members into the self (Smith & Henry, 1996). A final example is work on collective self-esteem in which processes examined with regard to personal or individual self-esteem have been applied to the collective self (Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990).

Joining this trend, the present research attempts to integrate theorizing and research on different levels of self-definition in a

new domain. Specifically, our goal was to examine whether and in what ways self-verification motives (Swann, 1990), which have been examined only with respect to individual self-views, extend to collective self-views, guiding evaluation of the self as a member of a group or collective.

## Self and Motivation

An assumption shared by many social-psychological theories of the self is that people are driven to achieve and maintain a high level of self-esteem. As a group, they are often referred to as *self-enhancement theories*, because they assume in one way or another that people strive to enhance their self-views (for a review, see Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Examples include self-affirmation theory, which argues that when people experience a threat to their self-worth, they compensate for this blow by affirming aspects of the self that are unrelated to the threat domain (Steele, 1988). The self-evaluation maintenance model similarly assumes self-enhancement motives, focusing on domains in which another person outperforms the self (Tesser, 1988). If the domain is relevant to one's self-definition, being outperformed constitutes a threat to the self. To minimize this threat, people distance themselves from the outperforming other or devalue the performance domain, but if the domain is irrelevant, people enhance their self-views by "basking in reflected glory." Indeed, some researchers contend that self-enhancement needs may fuel the construction of positive illusions about the self—that is, exaggeratedly favorable views of one's abilities, social skills, and so forth (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

*Self-assessment* is another possible self-evaluative motive (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Sedikides, 1993; Trope, 1986). It refers to people's desire for accurate self-evaluations and, accordingly, for objective, diagnostic information about the self. The driving force behind this motive is a desire to reduce uncertainty about the self

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(e.g., Sedikides & Strube, 1995). For example, Trope's (1986) self-assessment model of achievement behavior posits that uncertainty about one's abilities in an achievement domain should be associated with a bias in favor of achievement tasks that are high rather than low in their diagnostic value. Of course, self-assessment is central to Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory, which argues that when there are no objective, nonsocial standards of evaluation, people evaluate themselves through comparison with similar others, because comparisons with people who differ considerably from the self do not provide an adequate basis for accurate self-evaluations.

*Self-verification* motives are distinct from both self-enhancement and self-assessment objectives.<sup>1</sup> Rather than seeking flattering or accurate appraisals of the self, self-verification motives refer to one's desire to be known—that is, to receive evaluations from others that are consistent with one's existing self-views, regardless of whether they are favorable or unfavorable (e.g., Swann, Pelham, & Krull, 1989) or objectively accurate (e.g., Swann, Rentrow, & Guinn, 2003). According to self-verification theory, people seek self-verification out of epistemic and pragmatic desires to maximize prediction and control (Swann, 1990). From an epistemic perspective, self-verification efforts reflect the need to know that one's beliefs about the self are sensible and that one possesses a reasonable degree of self-understanding. Pragmatically speaking, it is argued that social interactions proceed more easily, free of misunderstandings and conflict, to the extent that interaction partners hold expectations that match up with one another's self-views. In other words, when others are seen as having appropriate expectations for the self, this provides confidence that interactions with them will go smoothly. In support of these assumptions about why people self-verify, Swann, Stein-Seroussi, and Giesler (1992) found that among the top reasons participants gave for choosing a self-verifying over a nonverifying interaction partner were ones reflecting epistemic concerns (e.g., "I chose him because he seems to be more accurate about what I think about myself and I'd feel more at ease with someone who can judge me for what I am") and pragmatic concerns (e.g., "Seeing as he knows what he's dealing with we might get along better").

Although both self-assessment and self-verification motives are, in some sense, driven by a need for accuracy, the epistemic and pragmatic concerns that underlie self-verification are distinguishable from the concerns about objective accuracy that underlie self-assessment (Swann et al., 1992). As Swann et al. (2003) articulated, when self-views are held with high certainty, people are unlikely to seek the kind of objective, diagnostic information that satisfies self-assessment needs, because such highly certain self-views are viewed as a "proxy for truth" (p. 375); however, when the certainty of self-views is low, self-assessment tendencies should be more pressing. To put it more broadly, the two motives are distinguishable especially under circumstances where a particular variable activates one motive and not the other or affects the motives in opposing directions. Certainty is an example of the latter: When certainty is low, self-assessment concerns should be heightened, whereas when certainty is high, self-verification motives should prevail (e.g., Sedikides, 1993).

Evidence for self-verification has taken a variety of forms. Beyond numerous studies showing that people prefer interaction partners who agree with them about their self-views (e.g., Swann

& Pelham, 2002; Swann et al., 1989), there is evidence that people attend more carefully to information that confirms their self-views, which results in corresponding biases in memory for this information (e.g., Swann & Read, 1981). People may also interpret self-confirmatory and self-disconfirmatory information in a biased fashion—for instance, by judging the former as more valid (Swann, Griffin, Predmore, & Gaines, 1987). Importantly, the self-verification literature includes evidence that people who hold negative self-views seek self-verification, just as do people who view themselves favorably (e.g., Swann et al., 1989). Such data represent especially compelling support for the claim that self-verification motives may at times override self-enhancing tendencies to seek flattering appraisals of the self. Overall, there is considerable evidence that self-verification motives may guide self-evaluation.

### Moderators of Self-Verification Strivings

At the same time, various moderators of self-verification processes have been identified. For example, research has suggested that self-enhancement tends to occur more when cognitive capacity is limited, whereas self-verification occurs when cognitive capacity is greater and one is allowed to introspect (e.g., Hixon & Swann, 1993). Other work has suggested that self-verification efforts are stronger when people have just received feedback suggesting that an evaluator holds a view of them that is discrepant from their own (e.g., Swann & Read, 1981).

As noted, and particularly relevant to the present research, earlier research has also shown that people are more likely to seek verification of self-views held with high certainty (e.g., Swann, Pelham, & Chidester, 1988; see also Pelham & Swann, 1994). The impact of certainty on self-verification makes sense from both epistemic and pragmatic standpoints. Self-views held with high certainty are especially near and dear to people's self-understanding; thus, when they are not verified, one's sense of knowing the self is especially undermined, and the potential for interpersonal misunderstandings and conflicts is greater. In short, the more certain of and bound to a self-view one is, the stronger the desire to have others verify it.

Also relevant to the current studies is research showing that the nature of one's ties to a source of self-verification moderates self-verification. For example, Swann, De La Ronde, and Hixon (1994) compared self-verification processes among dating versus marital partners. They reasoned that because dating relationships tend to be highly evaluative, with dating partners still assessing each other's suitability as mates, concerns about evaluation and acceptance are very salient. Hence, dating partners are likely to seek self-enhancement from one another. In contrast, marital relationships are more established, involving a degree of commitment that renders concerns about acceptance less salient. Like

<sup>1</sup> We do not mean to imply that self-enhancement, self-assessment, and self-verification are the only three self-evaluative motives; other motives certainly exist and may operate under particular circumstances (e.g., self-improvement). However, we chose to highlight self-enhancement and self-assessment in addition to self-verification because the former has been contrasted with self-verification in the literature on self-evaluation (e.g., Swann et al., 1989) and because the latter shares some surface similarities with self-verification, making it important to draw clear distinctions.

being bound to a highly certain self-view, being bound to a source of self-verification, such as a spouse, should heighten self-verification motives because the epistemic and pragmatic costs of failing to be verified are greater. That is, it is more undermining to one's sense of prediction and control when a spouse fails to verify one's self-views than when a dating partner fails to do so. Indeed, Swann et al. (1994) showed that marital partners were most intimate when their spouses gave them verifying evaluations, whereas intimacy in dating couples was greatest when partners evaluated each other favorably.

Along conceptually similar lines, Hixon and Swann (1993) showed that people tend to choose self-verifying over self-enhancing partners when they perceive the epistemic and pragmatic consequences of choosing an interaction partner to be substantial, whereas they prefer self-enhancing partners when they see minimal consequences. Finally, related findings can be found in research on the *Michelangelo phenomenon*, which refers to a partner's affirmation of one's ideal self-views (Drigotas, Rusbult, Wieselquist, & Whitton, 1999). Although this work focused on the degree to which partners affirm each other's ideal self-views, whereas self-verification work focuses on validation of actual self-views, some evidence was found suggesting that having the perception that a romantic partner verifies one's actual self-views is associated with greater couple well-being, independent of the role that partner affirmation of ideal self-views has in enhancing well-being.

#### Extending Self-Verification Theory to the Collective Level of Self-Definition

To date, research on self-verification theory has focused on the personal or individual level of self-definition, that is, people's views of themselves as separate entities, independent from others. Yet it is widely believed that self-views include more than beliefs and feelings about who one is as an individual. In particular, various theories emphasize people's social identities or the *collective level of self-definition*, which refers to those aspects of the self that are associated with who one is as a member of a social group or collective (e.g., Crocker & Luhtanen, 1990; Tajfel, 1982; Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). From the perspective of these theories, the collective self is every bit as real, important, and authentic as the individual self (e.g., Turner et al., 1994; Turner & Onorato, 1999). The collective self simply designates a different, more inclusive level of self-definition (e.g., Brewer, 1991).

If the collective self, like the individual self, is simply one of multiple possible levels of self-definition, this raises the key question guiding the present research: If at times people strive to verify their individual self-views, are they also at times motivated to verify their collective self-views?<sup>2</sup> At first glance, the answer to this question might seem to be an obvious yes. Why wouldn't self-verification motives extend to the collective level of self-definition? Yet the literature on collective or social identities suggests several reasons why this might not be the case. For example, at the heart of both social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (e.g., Turner et al., 1994) is the assumption that people are motivated to enhance their social identities. Countless studies are guided by this assumption in making predictions about, for instance, in-group and out-group

evaluations or intergroup conflict. Against this backdrop, our proposition that at times people strive to verify rather than invariably enhance their collective self-views may not seem obvious.

On a different note, some researchers have recently contended that the individual self has motivational primacy (e.g., Gaertner, Sedikides, Vevea, & Iuzzini, 2002) and have offered as evidence that people respond more intensely to a threat to the individual self than to the collective self, implying that threats to the collective self do not motivate self-regulatory responses (Gaertner, Sedikides, & Graetz, 1999). One might infer from this research that collective self-views are simply not important enough to one's overall sense of self to elicit verification efforts—why bother to verify self-views that carry relatively little motivational weight?

We believe that our collective self-verification hypothesis flows naturally from a multiple-levels-of-self-definition perspective but that it is still important to empirically document self-verification processes at the collective level. Moreover, we maintain that making predictions for collective self-verification processes by drawing on what is known about such processes at the individual level is needed before exploring aspects of these processes that might be unique to one level of self-definition. Finally, we believe it is important to study collective self-verification processes in their own right in light of research suggesting that collective self-views in and of themselves may influence psychological well-being. For example, research has documented associations between different facets of collective self-esteem and outcomes such as life satisfaction, hopelessness, and depression (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). If self-verification occurs at the collective level, as we propose, this may shed light on the processes that contribute to the maintenance of negative collective self-views and, in turn, poorer well-being.

On a broader level, research examining collective self-verification can contribute to efforts to bridge the literatures on different levels of self-definition. A particularly relevant example of such efforts is research that has extended self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987)—a theory focused on discrepancies between individual self-views—to discrepancies between group-based aspects of the self (Bizman, Yinon, & Krotman, 2001). Another example is recent work extending appraisal theories of emotions, which have thus far been considered only with respect to the individual experience of emotion, to the realm of intergroup emotions in which emotional experiences stem from group-based self-definition and perceptions (Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000).

Although we know of no research that has examined verification of collective self-views from the standpoint of self-verification theory (although for related theoretical ideas, see Swann, Polzer,

<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that in a recent theoretical piece in which Swann, Polzer, Seyle, and Ko (in press) independently proposed the notion that self-verification motives may extend to self-views associated with group memberships, the terms *personal* and *social* in describing self-views were used to refer to what we refer to as *individual* and *collective* self-views, respectively. In our view, the two sets of terms refer to conceptually similar constructs; however, we prefer our terms because of their fit with those used in recent theoretical frameworks espousing multiple levels of self-definition (e.g., Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). Also, the term *collective* strikes us as more specific or restricted in meaning than the term *social*. For example, the latter may refer to self-views associated with not only group memberships, but also other social entities (e.g., significant others).

Seyle, & Ko, in press), readers might compare our perspective with others that bear some similarities. In particular, Hogg and colleagues have argued that people identify with groups, and exhibit the responses associated with group identification (e.g., in-group favoritism), as a means of reducing subjective uncertainty—that is, uncertainty about the world and one's place in it (e.g., Hogg & Mullin, 1999). Such uncertainty is aversive because it undermines one's sense of prediction and control. Because concerns about prediction and control are central to both self-verification theory and Hogg's formulation of group identification, and the latter addresses the collective level of self-definition, a reader might wonder if our collective self-verification thesis can simply be derived from Hogg's theory. Despite some similarities, our collective self-verification thesis is in fact quite distinct in that Hogg's perspective would predict that uncertainty should elicit stronger collective self-verification, whereas ours predicts that greater certainty is linked to stronger collective self-verification efforts.

More relevant to our thesis is research on system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), which examines why and how the status quo is justified and maintained. A key finding in this research is that members of low-status groups rate their own group less favorably than high-status groups on status-relevant attributes (e.g., Jost & Burgess, 2000). Such out-group favoritism is seen as one way in which the status quo is maintained. This central finding fits a collective self-verification interpretation to the extent that one assumes that status-relevant attributes are included in the collective self-views of low-status group members and that the responses of these individuals reflect an attempt to obtain verification of these self-views.

Yet it is important to note that even if both of those assumptions were viable, system justification and self-verification theories diverge in several critical respects. First and foremost, system-justifying efforts are aimed at defending the "ideological integrity of existing social systems" (Jost & Burgess, 2000, p. 294), whereas (collective) self-verification efforts are aimed at addressing the individual's epistemic need to know who he or she is (as a group member) and pragmatic need for others with whom he or she interacts to hold appropriate expectations about him or her (as a group member). Thus, system justification theory focuses on broad, ideological beliefs about society and accordingly expects individual differences in similarly broad, societal-level beliefs (e.g., belief in a just world) to moderate system-justification tendencies. In contrast, self-verification theory focuses on an individual's beliefs about the self and accordingly expects variations in the nature of these self beliefs (e.g., certainty) to moderate self-verification tendencies. Also, it has been argued that one cognitive reason why people engage in system justification is to reduce uncertainty and achieve cognitive closure (e.g., Jost, 2001). Thus, the need for certainty and closure elicits system justification efforts. In contrast, in line with existing theorizing on self-verification, we would predict that it is precisely when an individual's collective self-views are held with high certainty that he or she engages in collective self-verification. So although certainty is an aim of system justification efforts, it is an antecedent of self-verification strivings.

The two theories are further distinguished by the explicit position taken by system justification theorists that low-status individuals seek to satisfy the aforementioned goals even though doing so is detrimental to themselves and to their groups (Jost & Banaji,

1994). Although self-verification might have some unfavorable implications, as when it serves to reinforce low self-esteem individuals' negative self-regard (De La Ronde & Swann, 1993), it is also thought to serve more positive, constructive purposes, such as to minimize misunderstandings and conflict between relationship partners. In short, there is no assumption that self-verification is exclusively harmful in the way that system justification is thought to hurt the interests of low-status groups.

Critical differences are also apparent when considering other theory-relevant variables. Specifically, perceptions of the legitimacy of the current social arrangement are a key element of system justification theory; low-status group members do not show system-justifying tendencies when the system is perceived as illegitimate and unstable. As noted, the status relevance of attributes is also a key element in that people rate high-status groups higher than low-status groups on status-relevant attributes but rate low-status groups higher on status-irrelevant attributes. Neither legitimacy nor status relevance plays a role in self-verification theory, nor in our proposed extension of this theory to collective self-views. In other words, from a self-verification perspective, there is no reason to expect that self-verification tendencies would vary as a function of, for example, the perceived legitimacy of the broader social system. On the flip side, variables such as the nature of one's ties to a source of self-verification are central to making self-verification predictions but irrelevant from a system-justification perspective.

Finally, we argue that people may strive to verify collective self-views, particularly those of which they are certain, regardless of their system-justifying implications. Said differently, the self-views that would be endorsed to serve system-justifying motives (e.g., those reflecting status-relevant attributes) do not necessarily overlap with those that people strive to verify. Moreover, we see no reason why the operation of system-justifying motives precludes that of self-verification ones, or any other motive for that matter (e.g., self-enhancement); different motives may operate or predominate under different circumstances. Jost, Pelham, and Carvalho (2002) similarly noted that their argument for a system-justification motive need not imply a rejection of other motives, such as group enhancement. Overall, we believe adopting a self-verification framework allows us to make predictions about when and how people seek and obtain validation of their collective self-views that are distinct from those that system justification theory (or, to our knowledge, any other existing theory) would make. People may strive to verify their collective self-views as a means of achieving a sense that they are known by others—regardless of whether or not doing so also serves system-justifying purposes.

In the present research, three studies were conducted to examine whether and in what ways self-verification motives operate at the collective level of self-definition. Studies 1 and 2 examined the moderating role of the certainty with which collective self-views are held. Certainty is an especially critical moderator to examine given that it distinguishes self-verification from both self-assessment and uncertainty reduction motives. Drawing on self-verification findings at the individual level of self-definition, we hypothesized that self-verification effects would be especially likely to occur for collective self-views held with high certainty. Study 1 also examined the moderating role of the nature of one's ties to a source of collective self-verification. Unique to self-

verification processes at the collective level of self-definition, this moderator was operationalized in terms of whether the source was or was not an in-group member. Reasoning that one is likely to feel more bound to an in-group source of self-verification, it was predicted that collective self-verification effects would be stronger with an in-group versus non-in-group member.

In addition to examining the moderating role of the certainty with which collective self-views are held, Study 2 assessed collective self-verification in a context in which either the individual or collective self is made salient, with the hypothesis that evidence for collective self-verification should be particularly likely to emerge in contexts in which the collective self is operative. Finally, unlike Studies 1 and 2, which relied on hypothetical collective self-views, Study 3 examined collective self-verification processes with respect to collective self-views associated with an actual group identity (i.e., gender). Study 3 also extended the first two studies by examining the role of group identification, with the hypothesis that collective self-verification processes should be more apparent among highly identified individuals.

### Study 1

In this first study, participants read a vignette that asked them to imagine that they were a member of a fictional social group and that they held a negative view of themselves as a group member. Thus, all participants were induced to hold a negative, collective self-view. We focused on negative self-views so that we could readily distinguish self-verification from self-enhancement responses. We did not rely on an actual social group (e.g., racial or religious group) in this initial study so as to minimize the influence of preexisting group beliefs or stereotypes. This decision was also guided by the widely documented finding in the social identity literature that the mere categorization of the self as a member of a group is sufficient to instigate group-level processes—even if the basis of the categorization is trivial, as is the case in studies using the minimal-group paradigm. Of course, one might argue that self-categorization into a hypothetical or minimal group does not necessarily imply being wedded enough to the corresponding group identity to measure the kinds of processes examined in the present research. Yet studies have shown that participants in minimal-group situations are wedded enough to their in-group to act in ways that benefit this group, even at times to the detriment of their personal self-interest.

It is also worth pointing out that our assumption that the processes associated with temporary, hypothetical group identities approximate those associated with chronic, real group identities maps onto the distinction between temporarily versus chronically activated constructs in the social cognition literature. In this literature, research has shown that the effects of temporarily activated constructs mimic the effects of chronically activated ones, despite their transient nature (for a review, see Higgins, 1996). Extending this line of reasoning, although the group used in this study was hypothetical and thus not a chronic aspect of the self, categorizing oneself as member of this group should still elicit effects, albeit temporary, that approximate those that result from categorizing oneself in a more long-standing group.

In the remainder of the vignette, we varied three factors. First, certainty was manipulated by asking participants to imagine that they held their collective self-view with high or low certainty.

Next, analogous to the distinction Swann et al. (1994) drew between marital versus dating partners in examining individual self-verification, we varied the in-group status of a potential interaction partner as a manipulation of the depth of one's ties to a source of self-verification (see also Hixon & Swann, 1993). Finally, we manipulated whether the partner did or did not verify participants' negative, collective self-view. The main dependent measure comprised several items tapping participants' desire to interact with this partner. As in past research on self-verification theory (e.g., Swann et al., 1989, 1992), evidence for self-verification would take the form of a greater desire to interact with a verifying than a nonverifying partner. Our main prediction was that a self-verification pattern should be particularly likely to emerge when participants held their collective self-view with high certainty and felt bound to the source of verification (i.e., the partner was an in-group member).

### Method

#### Participants

One hundred seven undergraduates (43 men, 64 women) from a large North American university participated in this study in partial fulfillment of a psychology course requirement. The study was run in small groups of no more than 4 participants.

#### Procedure

On their arrival, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 (high vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (in-group vs. non-in-group status)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification) between-subjects design. In all conditions, they were given a one-page vignette to read that asked them to imagine that they were a member of a group named "Sooka," which was described as one of various groups on a planet named "Wava." The vignette then indicated that they viewed Sookas, and themselves as members of this group, to be socially unskilled. To manipulate certainty, the vignette further indicated that participants either were or were not very certain of this collective self-view (high vs. low certainty). To manipulate the in-group status of a source of verification for this self-view, participants were asked to imagine meeting a same-sex, potential interaction partner named "Felli," who was described as being either a Sooka or not (in-group vs. non-in-group partner). Finally, this partner was described as either sharing or not sharing participants' negative view of the social skills of Sookas, thus providing or failing to provide verification of this collective self-view, respectively (verification vs. no verification). The partner's views referred to Sookas as a group rather than participants per se because it made more sense in the context of the situation set up in the vignette. More important, this manipulation is consistent with research indicating that when individuals view themselves as a member of a social group, they "tend to define and see themselves less as differing individual persons and more as the interchangeable representatives" of the group (Turner et al., 1994, p. 455). Along similar lines, other research has shown that being a member of a group involves including the in-group as part of the self—that is, taking on in-group characteristics as one's own (Smith & Henry, 1996). See the Appendix for an example of a vignette. After reading the vignette, participants were asked to respond to a series of dependent measures, after which they were debriefed, thanked, and excused.

#### Dependent Measures

*Manipulation checks.* To determine whether participants accurately perceived the in-group status of the interaction partner, they were asked to indicate whether Felli was or was not a Sooka. To assess the adequacy of

the certainty manipulation, participants rated how certain they were about their views of Sookas on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*). To assess whether all participants held a negative, collective self-view, they were asked to rate the favorability of their views of the social skills of Sookas and of themselves as members of this group on a 9-point Likert scale (-4 = *extremely unfavorable*, +4 = *extremely favorable*). Finally, participants rated the favorability of the partner's view of the social skills of Sookas on a 9-point Likert scale (-4 = *extremely unfavorable*, +4 = *extremely favorable*) to assess whether they properly perceived the partner's view as verifying or not verifying their own negative, collective self-view.

*Desire to interact with the partner.* As a measure of self-verification, we assessed participants' desire to interact with the partner. Specifically, we had them rate how much time they would spend with the partner and how much they would get along with the partner on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*) as well as how likely it was they would become friends on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all likely*, 7 = *very likely*). As noted, prior research has similarly operationalized self-verification in terms of the desire to interact with self-verifying others (e.g., Swann et al., 1992).

*Ancillary measures.* We expected the highest desire-to-interact ratings from high-certainty participants when the partner was an in-group member and verified participants' negative, collective self-view. However, one might argue that these participants would be especially likely to perceive an in-group member who views the group negatively as surprising or counternormative. In turn, they might infer that the partner must have particularly intuitive knowledge about the group. This raises the possibility of a self-assessment interpretation whereby individuals are especially drawn to diagnostic sources of information, although a self-assessment perspective would not predict a bias in favor of diagnostic information under high-certainty conditions. Alternatively, though, the partner might be seen as particularly perceptive, resulting in especially favorable impressions of him or her, which could then be what accounts for the predicted high desire-to-interact ratings. To address these possibilities, we had participants rate how unusual or surprising they found the partner's view of the social skills of Sookas to be and how perceptive they thought the partner was on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *a great deal*). They also indicated the favorability of their overall impression of the partner on a 9-point Likert scale (-4 = *very unfavorable*, 4 = *very favorable*). Finally, participants responded to an open-ended suspicion probe (i.e., "What do you think the researchers were trying to assess?").

## Results and Discussion

In response to the suspicion probe, no participants indicated any awareness of our interest in collective self-verification, much less the predicted moderating roles of certainty and in-group status.

### Manipulation Checks

*In-group status of the interaction partner.* Eight participants (8.1%) were excluded because they incorrectly perceived the in-group status of the potential interaction partner. These participants were distributed fairly evenly across conditions. All analyses reported below were conducted on the remaining sample ( $n = 99$ ).

*Certainty of collective self-view.* A 2 (low certainty vs. high certainty)  $\times$  2 (in-group vs. non-in-group status)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification) analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the certainty item yielded only an expected certainty effect, with participants in the high-certainty condition ( $M = 4.65$ ) reporting greater certainty in their negative, collective self-view than those in the low-certainty condition ( $M = 2.98$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 35.06$ ,  $p < .01$ .

*Favorability of collective self-view.* We expected all participants to indicate that they held a negative, collective self-view, as was described in the vignette. A one-sample  $t$  test of participants' favorability ratings confirmed that overall, participants held a negative, collective self-view ( $M = -1.68$ ),  $t(98) = -12.39$ ,  $p < .01$ . However, a 2 (high certainty vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (in-group vs. non-in-group status)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification) ANOVA of this item yielded a certainty effect with high-certainty participants rating their collective self-view more negatively ( $M = -2.25$ ) than low-certainty participants ( $M = -1.12$ ),  $F(1, 98) = 20.10$ ,  $p < .01$ . Though unexpected, separate one-sample  $t$  tests confirmed that both high-certainty participants,  $t(48) = 21.41$ ,  $p < .01$ , and low-certainty participants,  $t(49) = 17.26$ ,  $p < .01$ , reported collective self-views that were negative and significantly different from zero.

*Favorability of the partner's view of Sookas' social skills.* As expected, a 2 (high certainty vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (in-group vs. non-in-group status)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification) ANOVA of this item yielded only a verification effect, with participants in the verification condition ( $M = -1.54$ ) reporting that the partner's view of Sookas' social skills was unfavorable, verifying their own unfavorable collective self-view, and no-verification participants reporting that the partner held a nonverifying, favorable view of Sookas' social skills ( $M = 2.57$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 172.29$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### Desire to Interact With the Partner

We averaged the three items tapping participants' desire to interact with the partner to create a desire-to-interact index (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ), which served as our main dependent measure. A 2 (high certainty vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (in-group vs. non-in-group status)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification) ANOVA of this index yielded several effects. Participants in the in-group condition showed a stronger desire to interact with the partner ( $M = 4.69$ ) than those in the non-in-group condition ( $M = 3.83$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 17.40$ ,  $p < .01$ , and low-certainty participants showed a stronger desire to interact ( $M = 4.51$ ) than high-certainty participants ( $M = 4.01$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 5.56$ ,  $p < .05$ . Both of these effects, however, were qualified by higher order effects. Specifically, there was an In-Group Status  $\times$  Verification interaction,  $F(1, 91) = 11.55$ ,  $p < .01$ , indicating that in the in-group conditions, verification participants showed a stronger desire to interact with the partner ( $M = 5.15$ ) than no-verification participants ( $M = 4.24$ ), whereas in the non-in-group conditions, verification participants showed less desire to interact ( $M = 3.58$ ) than no-verification participants ( $M = 4.08$ ). Importantly, this two-way interaction was qualified by a significant three-way interaction,  $F(1, 91) = 6.07$ ,  $p < .05$  (see Figure 1 for means).

Focusing first on the in-group-partner conditions, high-certainty participants indicated a stronger desire to interact with the partner who verified their negative collective self-view ( $M = 5.33$ ) than the partner who did not verify ( $M = 3.83$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 13.10$ ,  $p < .01$ . Although low-certainty participants also tended to show a preference for a verifying in-group partner ( $M = 4.97$ ) over a nonverifying one ( $M = 4.64$ ), this difference was not significant,  $F(1, 91) < 1$ , *ns*. These results support our central hypothesis that collective self-verification tendencies occur particularly when one is highly certain of the relevant collective self-view and when the source of self-verification shares the relevant group membership.

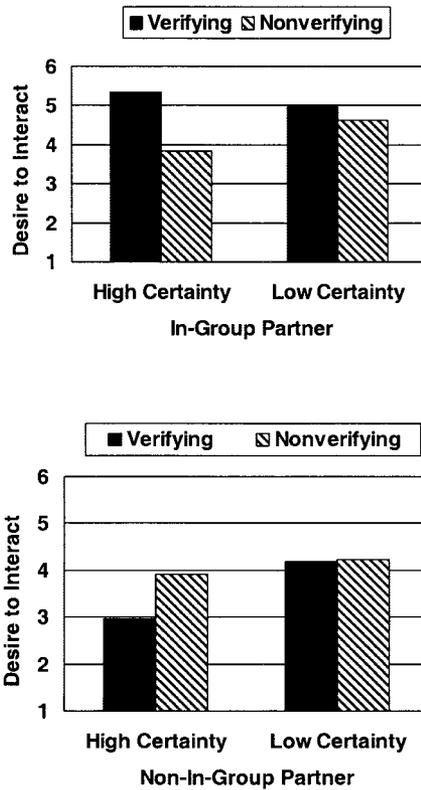


Figure 1. Study 1: Desire-to-interact ratings as a function of the certainty with which participants held their collective self-view, the in-group status of the partner, and whether or not the partner verified participants' collective self-view.

In the non-in-group partner conditions, high-certainty participants actually indicated a stronger desire to interact with a nonverifying partner ( $M = 3.92$ ) than a partner who verified their negative collective self-view ( $M = 2.97$ ),  $F(1, 91) = 4.99$ ,  $p < .05$ . One possible interpretation of this finding is that these participants were hoping to convert the favorable views of a non-in-group partner to be consistent with their own (negative) self-views. Another possibility, which tends to be more in line with existing research, is that self-enhancement motives were operating. That is, if non-in-group partners can be likened to dating partners, as we have proposed, the evidence suggests that biases in favor of nonverifying partners to whom one is not yet especially committed reflect self-enhancement strivings (e.g., Swann et al., 1994). Also, in research in which participants with negative self-views were asked to articulate their reasons for choosing verifying or nonverifying partners, the most common reason given by those who chose nonverifying partners was the positivity of the partners' views of them (Swann et al., 1992).

Low-certainty participants in the non-in-group partner conditions showed a similar degree of desire to interact with a partner who verified their collective self-view ( $M = 4.18$ ) and one who did not verify ( $M = 4.23$ ),  $F(1, 91) < 1$ , *ns*. This absence of a verification effect suggests that neither self-verification nor self-enhancement motives were operating among these participants.

### Ancillary Measures

To rule out any account of our findings based on the idea that participants in the in-group-partner, verifying condition were especially likely to be surprised by the partner's negative views about the social skills of Sookas, we reconducted our omnibus analysis using each of our ancillary measures as a covariate. Inclusion of these measures did not eliminate the critical three-way interaction, suggesting that it is unlikely that our predicted pattern of results was due to participants' surprise about the partner's views or, in turn, inferences about the intuitiveness or diagnosticity of the partner's views, perceptions of the partner's perceptiveness, or the favorability of their overall impression of the partner.<sup>3</sup>

### Summary

Study 1 yielded evidence for collective self-verification when the relevant collective self-view was held with high certainty and when the partner was an in-group member. Under these conditions, participants indicated a greater desire to interact with someone who verifies a negative collective self-view than with someone who does not, even though the latter offered favorable feedback about the collective self. Just as efforts to verify individual self-views are more likely when these self-views are held with high versus low certainty—because of the heightened epistemic and pragmatic costs associated with failing to verify highly certain self-views—collective self-verification was more likely in this study when participants held the relevant collective self-view with high compared with low certainty.

Importantly, the certainty effect emerged only when the partner was an in-group member, that is, someone to whom participants were somehow bound. The distinction between in-group and non-in-group members is analogous to Swann et al.'s (1994) distinction between marital and dating partners. Just as people are more likely to seek individual self-verification from relationship partners to whom they are bound (e.g., spouses), they should be more likely to seek collective self-verification from in-group members to whom they are more bound relative to non-in-group members. The epistemic and pragmatic costs of failing to receive self-verification from others are greater to the extent that one is tied to these others—whether it is by virtue of marriage, shared group membership, or some other basis (see also Hixon & Swann, 1993). Put another way, it is epistemically and pragmatically better that people with whom interactions are especially likely or frequent see us as we see ourselves, warts and all. Importantly, when the bond to the source of self-verification was weaker (i.e., non-in-group partner conditions), and thus the epistemic and pragmatic consequences of the interaction were less weighty, a different pattern emerged. Under these conditions, rather than preferring a partner who verifies a negative, collective self-view, participants showed either a preference for a self-enhancing partner or no particular preference at all. By examining the moderating role of in-group status, a variable uniquely relevant to the collective level of self-definition, this study revealed one way in which collective self-

<sup>3</sup> One participant was missing data on the perceptiveness and impression items and so was excluded in the relevant analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

verification processes are distinct from self-verification processes at the individual level.

## Study 2

Although Study 1 yielded data in line with our central proposition that self-verification motives operate at the collective level of self-definition, a reader might argue that it is possible that participants' responses reflected some version of individual-self processes rather than collective-self processes per se. Although Study 1's vignettes were purposely written to make the collective level of self-definition salient, thus helping to ensure that collective-self processes would be elicited, collective-self salience was not manipulated. Thus, in Study 2 we manipulated the salience of the collective self so as to obtain more unequivocal evidence that we were tapping self-verification processes at the collective level rather than at the individual or some other level.

More specifically, Study 2's participants read vignettes modeled in part on the ones used in Study 1. Thus, they imagined that they held a negative collective self-view, and the certainty of this self-view, as well as whether a potential interaction partner did or did not verify this self-view, were manipulated. Unlike Study 1, however, the partner was always described as an in-group member. Also, Study 2's vignettes included a manipulation of the context so as to render salient either the individual self or the collective self. Our main prediction was that a self-verification pattern—including the moderating role of certainty—should be particularly likely to emerge when the collective self is salient. Thus, Study 2's collective-self salience conditions should provide a conceptual replication of the results obtained in Study 1's in-group-partner conditions. Overall, such findings would provide more unequivocal evidence that the predicted self-verification pattern would, in fact, reflect collective-self processes.

## Method

### Participants

Two hundred eleven undergraduates (79 men, 132 women) from a large North American university participated in this study in partial fulfillment of a psychology course requirement. The study was run in small groups ranging in size from 4 to 8 participants.

### Procedure

On their arrival, participants were randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 (high vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification)  $\times$  2 (individual-self vs. collective-self salience) between-subjects design. As in Study 1, all participants read a vignette asking them to imagine that they were a member of a hypothetical social group and that they held a negative view of themselves as a group member. The certainty of the collective self-view (high vs. low certainty) and whether a potential interaction partner did or did not verify this self-view (verification vs. no verification) were varied in a manner identical to Study 1's manipulations of these variables. Across conditions, the potential interaction partner was described as a same-sex, in-group member.

Unlike in Study 1, the vignette also manipulated the context in which participants rated their desire to seek interactions with the verifying or nonverifying partner so that either the individual self or the collective self was made salient (individual-self vs. collective-self salient). Specifically, for the individual-self-salient condition, the vignette concluded with the following paragraph:

The two of you decide to go to the first Freshman Orientation event together. It is a workshop entitled "Navigating the First Year: How To Be Your Own Individual." At this workshop, you do various exercises that get you to think about the traits that make you unique and different from others on campus, and that are important in defining you as an individual.

Thus, individual-self-salient participants were induced to view themselves as individuals and to think about how they are unique and different from others. In contrast, participants in the collective-self-salient condition were led to view themselves as group members and to consider the ways in which their group is unique and different from other groups. Specifically, they read a vignette that concluded with the following:

The two of you decide to go to the first Freshman Orientation event together. It is a workshop entitled "Navigating the First Year: How To Be a Member of Your Group in a Multi-Group Environment." At this workshop, you do various exercises that get you to think about the traits that make your group, Sooka, unique and different from other groups on campus, and that are important in defining members of this group.

After reading the vignette, participants responded to a series of dependent measures and then were debriefed, thanked, and excused.

### Dependent Measures

*Manipulation checks.* The same four items used in Study 1 as manipulation checks were used in this study. These items assessed participants' perceptions of the in-group status of the interaction partner, the favorability and certainty of their negative, collective self-view, and perceptions of the partner as verifying or not verifying this self-view. To assess the salience of the individual self versus the collective self, we included two items about the workshop that was mentioned in the vignette as a means to manipulate salience (see the *Method* section above). Specifically, participants were asked to indicate the title of the workshop and to describe what they would be asked to do at the workshop.

*Ancillary measures.* As in Study 1, we included several ancillary measures to explore possible alternative accounts—namely, participants rated the unusualness of their partner's views, the perceptiveness of their partner, and the favorability of their overall impression of the partner. Participants also responded to the same open-ended suspicion probe used in the first study.

## Results and Discussion

As in the first study, no participants indicated any awareness of our interest in collective self-verification in their suspicion-probe responses.

### Manipulation Checks

*In-group status of the potential interaction partner.* Although the in-group status of the interaction partner was not manipulated in this study, we included an item to ensure that participants properly perceived the partner to be an in-group member. A higher percentage (13.7%) of participants incorrectly perceived the in-group status of the partner (i.e., indicated the partner was not a member of their group) in this study compared with Study 1 (8.1%). This may be due to the study sessions being considerably larger in this study, which may have increased distraction levels, as well as to the vignettes containing more information, which may have reduced attentiveness to each vignette detail. These participants were excluded from all analyses.

*Salience of the individual self versus the collective self.* As a measure of the salience of the individual versus collective self, participants' responses to the two workshop items were examined to see if they included direct or indirect references to the "individual" in the individual-self-salient condition (e.g., "being an individual"; "what makes you unique and different from others") or to the "group" in the collective-self-salient condition (e.g., "how to be a member of your group"; "determine characteristics of your group") in one or both of the items. Eight participants (3.8%) were excluded because they did not respond at all to the workshop items or because they made "individual" or "group" references that did not correspond to their assigned condition.<sup>4</sup> All analyses reported below were conducted excluding these participants, as well as 1 participant who received a vignette in which the gender of the interaction partner was not matched with his ( $n = 174$ ).

*Certainty of collective self-view.* A 2 (high vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification)  $\times$  2 (collective-self vs. individual-self salience) ANOVA of the certainty item yielded the expected certainty effect, with participants in the high-certainty condition ( $M = 4.87$ ) reporting greater certainty in their negative collective self-view than those in the low-certainty condition ( $M = 3.21$ ),  $F(1, 166) = 63.40$ ,  $p < .01$ . A considerably smaller verification effect was also found,  $F(1, 166) = 24.88$ ,  $p < .01$  (verification,  $M = 4.56$ ; no verification,  $M = 3.52$ ), as was a still smaller salience effect,  $F(1, 166) = 4.31$ ,  $p < .05$  (individual self,  $M = 3.82$ ; collective self,  $M = 4.26$ ). These main effects were unexpected but are not discussed further because they do not compromise the critical three-way interaction predicted in this study. Moreover, follow-up pairwise contrasts testing the certainty effect for every Verification  $\times$  Salience combination confirmed a significant difference in perceived certainty in the predicted direction ( $ps < .05$ ).

*Favorability of collective self-view.* A one-sample  $t$  test of participants' favorability ratings confirmed that overall, participants held a negative, collective self-view ( $M = -1.57$ ),  $t(173) = -12.6$ ,  $p < .01$ . However, a 2 (high vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification)  $\times$  2 (collective-self vs. individual-self salience) ANOVA of this item yielded a three-way interaction,  $F(1, 166) = 4.02$ ,  $p = .05$  ( $M$ s ranged from  $-0.95$  to  $-2.26$ ). Despite this, separate one-sample  $t$  tests confirmed that participants' collective self-views were negative and significantly different from zero ( $ps < .001$ ) in all conditions, with the one exception being the high-certainty, no-verification, individual-self-salient condition ( $M = -.95$ ) in which the  $t$  test was nonetheless marginally significant,  $t(18) = -2.02$ ,  $p = .058$ . These unexpected variations in favorability ratings were, however, still taken into account in analyses on the main dependent variable (see below).

*Favorability of the partner's view of Sookas' social skills.* As expected, a 2 (high vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification)  $\times$  2 (collective-self vs. individual-self salience) ANOVA of this item yielded only a verification effect, with participants in the verification condition ( $M = -1.41$ ) reporting that the partner's view of the social skills of Sookas was unfavorable, verifying their own unfavorable collective self-view, and no-verification participants reporting that the partner held a non-verifying, favorable view ( $M = 2.97$ ),  $F(1, 166) = 315.31$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### *Desire to Interact With the Partner*

As in Study 1, we averaged the three items tapping participants' desire to interact with the partner to create a desire-to-interact index (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .89$ ), which served as our main dependent measure. A 2 (high vs. low certainty)  $\times$  2 (verification vs. no verification)  $\times$  2 (collective-self vs. individual-self salience) ANOVA of this index yielded several effects. Participants in the verification condition showed a stronger desire to interact with the partner ( $M = 4.75$ ) than those in the no-verification condition ( $M = 3.77$ ),  $F(1, 166) = 30.73$ ,  $p < .01$ . A Certainty  $\times$  Salience effect also emerged,  $F(1, 166) = 3.81$ ,  $p = .05$ . However, both of these effects were qualified by a marginally significant three-way interaction,  $F(1, 166) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .087$  (see Figure 2 for means).

Although the predicted three-way interaction was marginal, we conducted separate Certainty  $\times$  Verification contrasts for each salience condition to test our a priori hypotheses. For the conditions in which the individual self was made salient, this interaction contrast was not significant ( $t < 1$ ); instead, participants indicated a greater desire to interact with a verifying partner over a nonverifying partner across certainty conditions (high certainty,  $M$ s = 4.86 vs. 4.14; low certainty,  $M$ s = 4.79 vs. 3.79). Thus, regardless of certainty in collective self-views, participants in the individual-self-salient condition appear to show a self-verification pattern. We discuss this finding below.

In contrast, when the collective self was made salient, evidence for the predicted moderating role of certainty in collective self-verification was found. Specifically, the Certainty  $\times$  Verification contrast was significant,  $t(166) = 1.94$ ,  $p = .05$ , with high-certainty participants' desire-to-interact ratings discriminating more sharply between a verifying partner ( $M = 4.68$ ) and a nonverifying partner ( $M = 3.11$ ) as compared with low-certainty participants' ratings (verifying partner,  $M = 4.69$ ; nonverifying partner,  $M = 4.06$ ).

Although all participants reported a negative collective self-view, as described in the vignette, because of the unexpected three-way interaction on participants' ratings of the favorability of their collective self-views, we reconducted the omnibus analysis for desire-to-interact ratings using participants' favorability ratings as a covariate. The results from this analysis were essentially the same as the original results, with the adjusted means revealing a similar pattern in both the individual-self-salient and collective-self-salient conditions.

### *Ancillary Measures*

To rule out any account of our findings based on the idea that participants in the verifying condition were especially likely to be surprised by the in-group partner's negative views about the social skills of Sookas, we reconducted our omnibus analysis using each

<sup>4</sup> Seven participants were retained in all analyses even though they did not make either "individual" or "group" references because their responses to the salience manipulation checks suggested that they simply misunderstood what the manipulation checks were asking for, not that they failed to attend to the manipulation. For example, they responded by describing the instructions for the vignette in general (e.g., "imagine you are the main character in the scenario"). Because the salience manipulation was effective for the vast majority of participants, we reasoned that it was likely that the manipulation was noted by these participants as well.

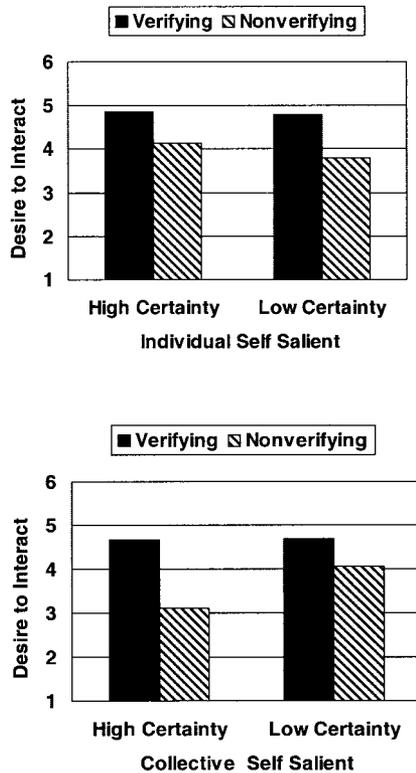


Figure 2. Study 2: Desire-to-interact ratings as a function of the certainty with which participants held their collective self-view, whether or not the partner verified participants' collective self-view, and whether the individual or collective self was salient.

of our ancillary measures as a covariate. As in Study 1, inclusion of these measures did not substantially alter the predicted three-way interaction pattern, rendering it unlikely that this pattern was due to participants' surprise about the partner's views, their perceptions of the perceptiveness of the partner, or the favorability of their overall impression of the partner.<sup>5</sup>

### Summary

Unlike Study 1, Study 2 included a manipulation whereby either the individual self or the collective self was made salient. The central prediction was that a pattern reflecting verification of the collective self—including the moderating role of certainty—should emerge particularly when the collective self is salient. Support for this prediction would bolster our interpretation of the self-verification pattern as reflecting collective-self processes rather than processes at the individual or some other level of self-definition. The results provide clear support for this prediction. Only when the collective self was made salient did high-certainty participants discriminate more in favor of a verifying over a nonverifying partner as compared with their low-certainty counterparts. The Certainty  $\times$  Verification pattern that emerged in the collective-self-salient conditions can be seen as a conceptual replication of the moderating role of certainty found in Study 1 when the source of collective self-verification was an in-group member (as was the case across all conditions in this study).

The same interaction pattern was not seen among individual-self-salient participants who instead preferred the verifying over the nonverifying partner—regardless of certainty. It is perhaps unsurprising that a general self-verification pattern emerged even in the individual-self-salient conditions, given that the partner was an in-group member, someone to whom participants were bound by virtue of a shared group membership. As shown in Study 1, and consistent with the literature on individual self-verification, the nature of one's ties to a source of self-verification may moderate self-verification such that efforts to self-verify are more likely when one is somehow bound to the source (e.g., Swann et al., 1994). Thus, despite the salience of the individual self, it is likely that the in-group status of the partner contributed to the general self-verification pattern seen in the individual-self-salient conditions. Also a possible contributor is the fact that the partner's view of participants' collective self was among the limited pieces of information available about the partner, rendering it a salient basis for participants to rate their desire to interact with the partner. Nonetheless, what is most critical is that as predicted, the certainty with which the relevant, collective self-view was held served as a moderator of self-verification processes only when the collective self was made salient.

### Study 3

Having documented collective self-verification patterns under the predicted conditions in both Studies 1 and 2 with respect to temporary, hypothetical, collective self-views, Study 3 sought to document collective self-verification processes with respect to actual collective self-views. Beyond simply providing an important conceptual replication, this study extended the first two studies by examining the role of the importance of the relevant group identity in collective self-verification processes. Group identification is important to study not only because the desire to verify collective self-views is likely to vary depending on the importance of the corresponding identity to one's overall sense of self, but also because it is a variable that is uniquely relevant to collective self-views and for which there is no obvious individual-self analogue.<sup>6</sup> It thus represents one of potentially numerous ways in which individual and collective self-verification processes may be distinct.

In this study, high- and low-gender-identified women were preselected on the basis of their responses to several gender-identification items administered at the beginning of the semester. The procedures used to obtain a measure of collective self-verification were adapted from those used in recent research on

<sup>5</sup> Two participants were missing data on the surprise item, and 1 participant was missing on the perceptiveness item; these participants were excluded in the relevant ANCOVA.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth pointing out that research on individual self-verification has examined the moderating role of the importance of specific self-views (e.g., one's intelligence; Swann & Pelham, 2002), but here we are referring to the importance of one's overall collective or group identity (e.g., being a woman) rather than the importance of specific self-views associated with the identity (e.g., nurturing). Theoretically, whether or not one's group identity is important to the self is distinct from how important particular collective self-views are; for example, a highly identified woman can hold both important and unimportant self-views associated with her gender identity.

individual self-verification (Swann, Bosson, & Pelham, 2002). In that research, participants were asked to rate themselves on a series of attributes as well as to rate how they desired others to view them on the same attributes. High- and low-gender-identified participants in the present study were asked to make a similar set of self and desired attribute ratings but in a context in which their gender group (i.e., women) membership was made highly salient. Self-verification was indexed in terms of the degree of correspondence between self and desired ratings, with closer correspondence indicating greater self-verification—that is, a stronger desire to be seen by others as a group member (i.e., a woman) in the same way one sees the self as a group member (i.e., a woman). Thus, this study examined our central collective self-verification hypothesis using a different measure of self-verification than the one used in the first two studies, providing a test of the generalizability of our findings across measures.

We reasoned that highly gender-identified women should exhibit stronger collective self-verification tendencies than their less identified counterparts because the epistemic and pragmatic costs of failing to receive verification should be greater to the extent that one is bound to the relevant collective identity—that is, the identity is a central, important aspect of the self. Importantly, high- and low-gender-identified participants were also asked to rate the centrality of each of the attributes to describing their gender group so that attributes high and low in centrality could be identified. We reasoned that in general, the desire to verify collective self-views should be apparent mainly for attributes that are central to defining the relevant group identity. Thus, the overriding prediction for this study was that highly identified women should show stronger collective self-verification tendencies than those who are less identified and that this would be particularly evident for attributes that are very central in defining their gender group.

## Method

### Participants

Ninety-seven women from a large North American university participated in this study in partial fulfillment of a psychology course requirement. These women were preselected to be high or low in gender identity on the basis of their responses to items completed at least 1 month prior to their participation in the study. A female experimenter ran the study in small groups of no more than 4 participants.

### Prescreening Questionnaire

Participants were preselected on the basis of their responses to two items embedded in a large battery of questionnaires administered at the beginning of the semester in which the study was conducted. These two items were taken from the Identity subscale of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES; i.e., "Overall, my membership in the group has very little to do with how I feel about myself," and "In general, belonging to the group is an important part of my self-image"), which assesses the importance of social group memberships to one's self-concept. In the present study, these items were tailored to refer to respondents' gender group membership so that they could be used to recruit some participants for whom gender group membership was very important to their identity (high identity), as well as some for whom this group membership was relatively unimportant (low identity). Participants responded to each item on a 7-point Likert scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Their responses were averaged to create composite scores for

gender identity, with higher scores indicating higher gender identification. High-identity women were recruited from the top third of the distribution of scores, whereas low-identity women were recruited from the bottom third. The means for the top and bottom thirds were 4.32 and 1.59, respectively, for the first semester in which this study was conducted and 4.06 and 1.93, respectively, for the second semester.<sup>7</sup> Study sessions included a mix of high- and low-identity women, and the experimenter was blind to participants' level of gender identity.

### Procedure

On their arrival, participants completed a consent form and were told that the study involved filling out a series of questionnaires examining "how people view different aspects of themselves and how they want to be viewed by others." Participants first completed the full, 16-item CSES (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). They were told that this scale is generally used to measure people's views of their social group memberships and that today they should respond to the scale with respect to their gender group membership. Participants rated how much they agreed or disagreed with each of the 16 items on a 7-point Likert scale ( $-3 =$  *strongly disagree*,  $+3 =$  *strongly agree*). The purpose of administering the CSES, a subset of which was used to preselect high- and low-gender-identity participants, was to ensure that gender identity was salient for all participants regardless of the importance of this identity to them. In other words, we had participants complete this scale with respect to their gender identity to ensure that the collective level of self-definition would be primarily operative in the context of this study and, more specifically, to ensure that participants' subsequent ratings would be made with reference to their views of themselves as women. Conceptually similar procedures have been used in other research to make salient a particular collective identity and to elicit responses associated with it (e.g., Cheryan & Bodenhausen, 2000).

Participants were then presented with a questionnaire that comprised four lists of the same 27 attributes and were asked to make a different kind of rating for each list. On the basis of consensus agreement between Serena Chen and Karen Y. Chen, approximately even numbers of attributes fell into one of four categories: positive and central to describing women (e.g., nurturing, affectionate), negative and central (e.g., vulnerable, melodramatic), positive and not central to describing women (e.g., funny, intelligent), and negative and not central (e.g., lazy, sarcastic). The aim was to include a broad enough range of attributes so that all participants would be able to identify some positive and negative traits that were and were not highly central to describing their gender identity (see below).

For one of the first two lists, participants were asked to rate their standing on each of the attributes (self ratings) using 19-point percentile scales (5% = *way below average*, 95% = *way above average*), whereas for the other list they were asked to rate how they would ideally like to be viewed by a same-sex peer (desired ratings) using the same 19-point scales. Thus, all participants indicated how they desired to be viewed by an in-group member; the nature of the bond to a potential source of self-verification was thereby held constant, as in Study 2. The order of self ratings and desired ratings was counterbalanced. As indicated, these ratings were adapted from Swann et al.'s (2002) research, except the ratings in the present study were made with respect to collective self-views (i.e., gender-relevant self-views).

For the third list, participants rated how central or typical they viewed each attribute to be in describing their gender group on a 9-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all central*, 9 = *very central*). They then indicated the 5 attributes out of the 27 attributes that were the most central to describing their gender group, as well as the 5 least-central attributes. This allowed us

<sup>7</sup> Because of human subject policies at the university where this study was conducted, direct access to the prescreening scores of students who actually participated in our study was not possible.

to compare the degree of collective self-verification seen for attributes idiographically identified as high versus low in centrality. Finally, participants rated the favorability of the 27 attributes using a 9-point Likert scale ( $-4 = \text{very unfavorable}$ ,  $+4 = \text{very favorable}$ ).

After completing the attribute ratings, participants responded to several demographic items and the same suspicion-probe item used in the previous two studies. They were then debriefed, thanked, and excused.

### *Results and Discussion*

Eight participants were excluded because they were missing substantial data ( $n = 5$ ) or reported substantial confusion about the instructions ( $n = 3$ ), and four were excluded because they indicated learning English at 12 years old or later and thus potentially had difficulty understanding the instructions. Again, no one expressed any suspicion or awareness of our interest in collective self-verification, but 1 participant was excluded because she mistakenly believed that she was being observed through a one-way mirror. All analyses reported below were conducted on the remaining sample of 40 high-identity women and 44 low-identity women.

#### *Attribute Centrality*

To ensure that the five attributes participants nominated as being most central to describing their gender group and the five attributes they nominated as least central did in fact differ in centrality, we averaged the centrality ratings participants made for each set of attributes. This averaging was done on an idiographic basis, because these sets were unique to each participant. We then subjected the two averages to a 2 (high vs. low gender identity)  $\times$  2 (most vs. least attribute centrality) mixed ANOVA with attribute centrality as the within-subjects factor. As expected, this analysis produced a main effect for centrality, with the average centrality rating given for the attributes nominated as most central being significantly higher ( $M = 8.14$ ) than the average rating given for the least-central attributes ( $M = 2.88$ ),  $F(1, 82) = 1465.92$ ,  $p < .01$ . No other effects were significant, indicating that high- and low-identity women did not differ in their centrality ratings.

It is also worth noting that the attributes that high- and low-identity women most frequently identified as the five most central in describing their gender group were entirely overlapping (e.g., nurturing, emotional). For the five least-central attributes, the attributes high-identity women most frequently nominated overlapped entirely with those that low-identity women identified (e.g., messy, lazy), but "sarcastic" was most frequently identified as one of the least-central attributes among low- but not high-identity women. Overall, however, the sets of most- and least-central attributes were quite similar for high- and low-identity women.

#### *Degree of Correspondence Between Self and Desired Ratings*

Our central prediction was that high-identity women's self ratings and desired ratings would correspond more closely than low-identity women's ratings, particularly for the attributes participants identified as very central in defining their gender group. To create an index of the degree of correspondence between self ratings and desired ratings on highly central attributes, desired ratings for each of participants' five most-central attributes were subtracted from the corresponding self rating. Similar self-minus-

desired scores were calculated from the self ratings and desired ratings for the five attributes participants deemed as the least central to defining women. The smaller the magnitude of these scores, the greater the correspondence between self ratings and desired ratings.

Before examining the magnitude of these scores as a measure of collective self-verification, we had to take into account the different meanings associated with positive and negative scores. Positive self-minus-desired scores indicate that participants wanted a same-sex peer to view them lower in standing than they viewed themselves, whereas negative self-minus-desired scores indicate participants wanted the in-group member to view them higher in standing relative to their self-views. Importantly, however, the meaning of positive and negative scores differs depending on the favorability of the attribute in question. Specifically, positive self-minus-desired scores for unfavorable attributes are self-enhancing in that they reflect participants rating themselves higher than they desire a same-sex peer to see them—that is, they want the in-group member to see them as lower on these unfavorable characteristics relative to how they actually see themselves. Negative self-minus-desired scores on favorable attributes are also self-enhancing in that they reflect participants wanting an in-group member to see them as higher in standing than they see themselves on these favorable attributes.

To ensure that positive and negative scores always carried the same meaning, the scores were recoded so that positive scores reflected a self-enhancement bias whereas negative scores reflected the opposite tendency. To do this recoding, we referred to the favorability ratings participants made for the 27-attribute list. For example, if the self-minus-desired score for a participant's most-central attribute (e.g., emotional) was negative in sign and they had rated the attribute as favorable (i.e., above the scale midpoint), the score's sign was reversed. On the other hand, if the self-minus-desired score for this attribute had been positive, the sign would have been left untouched. Scores for attributes that participants rated as neutral (i.e., neither favorable nor unfavorable) were excluded from subsequent calculations ( $< 10\%$  of the attributes) to enable uniform interpretation of the scores. Of course, the recoding was done on an idiographic basis because each participant had a unique set of 5 most-central and 5 least-central attributes and also had a unique set of favorability ratings.

The recoded self-minus-desired scores for participants' five most-central attributes were averaged into a composite index as were the recoded scores for participants' five least-central attributes.<sup>8</sup> These composite measures were then subjected to a 2 (high vs. low gender identity)  $\times$  2 (most vs. least attribute centrality) mixed ANOVA with attribute centrality constituting the within-subject factor.<sup>9</sup> This analysis yielded an attribute centrality main effect,  $F(1, 82) = 40.87$ ,  $p < .01$ , which was qualified by the predicted two-way interaction,  $F(1, 82) = 7.53$ ,  $p < .01$ . Inspec-

<sup>8</sup> Scores that were 2.5 or more standard deviations above the mean score for that attribute (e.g., second-most-central attribute) were deleted ( $< 3\%$  of the scores).

<sup>9</sup> Preliminary analyses with order of self and desired ratings included as a factor indicated that order did not influence any of the results; thus, this variable was not included in subsequent analyses and is not discussed further.

tion of the means reveals a pattern largely in line with our predictions (see Figure 3). Specifically, the difference between the self ratings and desired ratings of high-identity women was much smaller for attributes that were highly central in defining their gender group ( $M = 2.28$ ) relative to the difference in ratings for much less central attributes ( $M = 15.42$ ). Moreover, on average, the correspondence between these women's self ratings and desired ratings for highly central attributes was nearly perfect—less than half of a point (i.e.,  $< 5\%$ ) on the 19-point percentile rating scale. In contrast, for attributes that were not at all central to defining their gender group, these women exhibited a strong, self-enhancing desire to be seen more favorably than they saw themselves. We return to this interesting finding below.

Turning to the results seen for low-identity women, although they patterned similarly to those seen for high-identity women, the difference in the degree of correspondence between self and desired ratings for attributes high in centrality ( $M = 5.37$ ) compared with those low in centrality ( $M = 10.62$ ) was far less pronounced, as would be expected given the relatively low importance of gender identity to these women. Instead, for both sets of attributes, these women showed a clear tendency to self-enhance. Moreover, whereas high-identity women's desired ratings for highly central attributes tended to fall within the same percentile rank as their own ratings on these attributes, low-identity women's desired ratings for these attributes tended to exceed their own ratings by, on average, greater than one percentile rank (i.e., greater than 5%) in a self-enhancing direction.

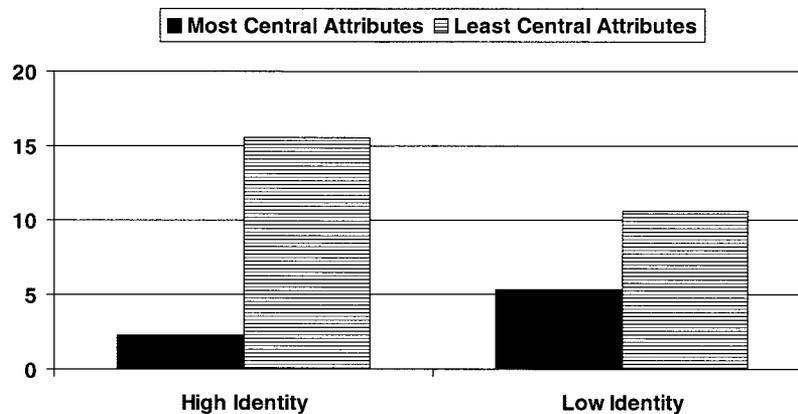
In line with predictions, a between-subjects comparison of high- versus low-identity women for highly central attributes ( $M_s = 2.28$  vs.  $5.37$ , respectively) was marginally significant,  $F(1, 82) = 3.03$ ,  $p = .086$ . Interestingly, a comparison between high- versus low-identity women for least-central attributes ( $M_s = 15.95$  vs.  $10.35$ ) was also marginal,  $F(1, 82) = 2.97$ ,  $p = .089$ , indicating that although all participants showed a stronger tendency to self-enhance on attributes low versus high in centrality, high-identity women tended to show an even stronger tendency to self-enhance on low-centrality attributes than did low-identity women. This interesting pattern may suggest that high-identity women experienced a need to offset their self-verification strivings with self-

enhancement ones. That is, because they exhibited fairly strong self-verification tendencies on the attributes that were most critical to defining their salient gender identity—on average expressing a desire to be seen almost identically as they saw themselves—they sought nonverifying, self-enhancing appraisals on attributes that are not central to defining themselves as women. In comparison, low-identity women who exhibited considerably weaker self-verification tendencies for highly central attributes may have experienced less of a need to balance desires to be known and to be seen favorably. Overall, the results provide support for the key prediction that high-identity women would be especially likely to exhibit self-verification tendencies for attributes that are central to defining the social group on which this identity is based.

#### *Favorability of Most- and Least-Central Attributes*

A reader might be concerned that some characteristic(s) of the particular attributes that participants identified as being most and least central to defining women might somehow account for our findings. As reported above, high- and low-identity women did not differ substantially in the attributes they nominated as being most and least central to defining women or in the centrality ratings they gave for these attributes. Thus, the significantly different patterns seen for most- versus least-central attributes among high- versus low-identity women cannot be simply explained by differences in the particular attributes that were nominated.

On another note, a 2 (high vs. low gender identity)  $\times$  2 (most vs. least attribute favorability) mixed ANOVA, with the second factor referring to the average favorability rating participants gave to their most- and least-central attributes, revealed that the attributes nominated as being most central were, on average, more favorable ( $M = 1.82$ ) than those nominated as being least central ( $M = -1.56$ ),  $F(1, 82) = 229.41$ ,  $p < .01$ . Presumably, this reflects at least in part the fact that views about women as a group are generally favorable. This finding does not, however, compromise interpretation of the predicted interaction, because it held equally among high- and low-identity women ( $F < 1.4$ ). Also, it is more important to consider how participants rated their percentile standing on attributes high versus low in centrality. On average, partic-



*Figure 3.* Study 3: Scores reflecting self ratings minus desired ratings as a function of gender identification and attribute centrality. Lower scores correspond to greater match between self and desired ratings, whereas higher scores correspond to self-enhancement tendencies.

participants gave themselves a higher percentile rating for their most-central attributes ( $M = 68.79$ ) compared with their least-central ones ( $M = 45.46$ ). But because most-central attributes were mildly favorable and least-central ones were somewhat unfavorable, both averaged percentile ratings indicate that participants' self ratings tended to be on the favorable side. That is, participants tended to rate themselves above the 50% midpoint for favorable (i.e., most central) attributes and below this midpoint for unfavorable (i.e., least central) attributes. Thus, it was not the case that participants' ratings of their standing on most- and least-central attributes differed substantially in terms of the favorability of their implications for the self. Moreover, high- and low-identity women did not differ significantly on these ratings, because there was no interaction with gender identity in the above analysis. Finally, it is unlikely that ceiling or floor effects were at play, because the average percentile ratings for most- and least-central attributes were not extreme.

However, the fact that participants showed a general tendency to rate themselves in an arguably favorable manner (i.e., somewhat above average on favorable attributes and below average on unfavorable attributes) raises the question of whether the degree of correspondence between participants' self and desired ratings can actually be taken as a measure of self-verification. That is, perhaps close correspondence in these ratings reflects self-enhancement, albeit a relatively weak form of it. We believe this alternative account for our findings falls short for several reasons. First, it is questionable whether indicating that one's standing is, for example, 65% for a favorable attribute on a scale ranging from 5% to 95% reflects a truly favorable self-view. In our college-age population, scoring 65% is hardly seen as favorable. It may be worth pointing out here that whereas the present study and other self-verification research relied on participants' ratings of their standing on particular attributes, self-enhancement researchers often use rating scales that instead ask respondents to indicate the degree to which an attribute describes them. The latter ratings seem to connote favorable or unfavorable self-views quite clearly, whereas ratings of one's standing seem to do so less, because there is more of a sense of possible movement in self-views (i.e., improving or falling in one's standing).

Second, regardless of how favorable or not participants' self ratings were, there is no theoretical reason why self-verification should not occur for favorable as well as unfavorable self-views, collective or otherwise. Of course, it is harder to rule out self-enhancement when the self-views in question are favorable. In the present case, however, it would be difficult to explain why high-identity women would rein in their "self-enhancement" tendencies for most-central attributes—to a point of almost perfect correspondence between self ratings and desired ratings—yet let loose with regard to these tendencies for least-central attributes, without invoking a self-verification explanation. Indeed, it seems the most plausible self-enhancement account would predict that self-enhancement tendencies would be stronger for most- versus least-central attributes, not considerably weaker. Why else would self-enhancement be weaker especially among high-identity women for most-central compared with least-central attributes—unless there were a desire to be known with respect to attributes that are critical in defining one's salient and important gender identity?

Still, we also tried to address this issue empirically by examining the correlation between participants' self ratings and recoded

self-minus-desired scores (with positive numbers reflecting self-enhancement), focusing on most-central attributes.<sup>10</sup> If, in fact, self-enhancement were driving high-identity women's ratings for most-central attributes, one might predict that higher self ratings would be associated with greater correspondence between self ratings and desired ratings (i.e., smaller self-minus-desired scores). That is, these participants should want others to see them as they see themselves particularly when they rate themselves favorably. This pattern should not emerge if self-verification is at work. The correlation between self ratings and self-minus-desired ratings for most-central attributes was small and only marginally significant for high-identity women ( $r = -.28, p = .08$ ), whereas for low-identity women it was significant and considerably larger ( $r = -.48, p < .01$ ). Thus, relative to the results for low-identity women's most-central attributes, which clearly fit a self-enhancement perspective, the results for high-identity women's most-central attributes are more consistent with a self-verification interpretation. Finally, we suggest that the results from this study need to be considered in the context of the other studies that yielded conceptually similar findings based on a clearly negative collective self-view.

Overall, this study produced further evidence for the operation of self-verification motives at the collective level of self-definition. Importantly, this evidence emerged with respect to collective self-views associated with an actual collective identity rather than a temporary or hypothetical one. Moreover, this study demonstrated the important and unique role of group identification in collective self-verification processes. Whereas high-identity women distinguished sharply between attributes most and least central to defining women, exhibiting close correspondence between their self ratings and desired ratings for the former and not the latter, low-identity women tended to distinguish less between most- and least-central attributes, instead exhibiting clear self-enhancement tendencies across the board.

## General Discussion

Whereas past research on self-verification processes has focused on one's individual self-views, the present studies examined self-verification motives at the collective level of self-definition. Three studies yielded data indicating that people strive to verify views of themselves as members of a group or collective. Importantly, these studies also documented the role of several key moderators of collective self-verification—namely, the certainty with which collective self-views are held, the nature of one's bond to the source of self-verification, the salience of the collective self, and the importance of the relevant group identity to one's overall sense of self.

In Study 1, participants indicated a greater desire to interact with a partner who verified a negative, collective self-view relative to a nonverifying partner—particularly when the self-view was held with high certainty and the partner was an in-group member. Thus, collective self-verification tendencies were especially likely to emerge when one was bound to a collective self-view (i.e., holds it with certainty) and to the source of self-verification. Certainty was an especially critical moderating variable to examine in light

<sup>10</sup> We thank a reviewer for suggesting this analysis.

of its ability to distinguish self-verification motives from self-assessment and uncertainty reduction motives; whereas self-verification tendencies should be stronger with greater certainty, self-assessment and uncertainty reduction tendencies should be weaker. The evidence for the moderating role of certainty in Study 1 parallels existing evidence for the role of certainty in individual self-verification; regardless of whether the degree of certainty pertains to individual or collective self-views, the desire to be seen as one sees the self should be stronger to the degree that one is sure about a self-view. Although the evidence for the moderating role of the nature of one's ties to the source of collective self-verification parallels prior evidence for the moderating role of relationship status (e.g., dating vs. married) in individual self-verification (e.g., Swann et al., 1994; see also Hixon & Swann, 1993), the present findings are unique in that the moderator was operationalized in terms of the in-group status of the source, a variable that is distinctly relevant to the collective level of self-definition.

Study 2 was designed to obtain still clearer evidence for collective self-verification by assessing it as a function of not only the certainty with which the relevant collective self-views are held but also the salience of the collective self. Consistent with predictions, the critical Certainty  $\times$  Verification pattern was seen only among participants for whom the collective self (vs. individual self) had been made salient. Thus, under conditions where the collective level of self-definition was especially predominant, we once again produced evidence for collective self-verification and the moderating role of certainty.

Study 3 represents an important replication and extension of the first two studies in several respects. First, we obtained evidence for collective self-verification in relation to collective self-views associated with an actual group identity (i.e., gender) held by participants. Second, the measure of self-verification that was used differed from the one used in Studies 1 and 2, suggesting the generalizability of our results. Finally, Study 3 documented the moderating role of the importance of the relevant group identity, a variable uniquely relevant to self-verification at the collective level of self-definition. Low-identity women clearly indicated wanting others to see them (as women) more favorably than they saw themselves (as women) for attributes they indicated as being most central to defining women as well as those they deemed least central. This general self-enhancing pattern was unsurprising in light of the low importance of gender identity to these women; that is, these women should not be terribly invested in having their gender identities self-verified, leaving no obvious reason why they would not show some degree of self-enhancement across the board. In contrast, high-identity women distinguished sharply between attributes deemed most versus least central to defining women; whereas self ratings and desired ratings corresponded nearly perfectly for most-central attributes, they departed greatly from one another for least-central attributes in a self-enhancing direction. Thus, as predicted, when it came to attributes that are highly defining of an important group identity, evidence for collective self-verification emerged. This makes sense, because the epistemic and pragmatic costs of failing to receive verification of defining aspects of an important collective identity should be especially high.

To our knowledge, the present studies are the first to explicitly examine self-verification processes in relation to the collective

level of self-definition. In the current literature on the self, although labels, definitions, and emphases may vary, three different levels of self-definition have been most often identified: individual self, relational self, and collective self (e.g., Sedikides & Brewer, 2001). The *individual self* refers to the person one is as an entity separate or independent from others; this is the level that is implicitly or explicitly assumed in much of the Western psychological literature on the self. In comparison, the relational and collective selves refer to levels of self-definition that involve one's connection to others. The *relational self* refers to the person one is in relation to significant others, whereas the *collective self* refers to the person one is as a member of a group or collective. Although past research has examined self-verification processes between marital and dating partners (Swann et al., 1994), college roommates (e.g., McNulty & Swann, 1994), and even members of a small group (Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000), in all of these cases the self-views in question reflected the individual level of self-definition. In contrast, the present research focused explicitly on assessing whether and under what circumstances self-verification motives apply to people's views of themselves not as individuals but as members of a group or collective.

Why is it important to examine self-verification motives in relation to the collective self? Two of the most prominent theories concerned with people's views of themselves as group members are social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and self-categorization theory (e.g., Turner et al., 1994; Turner & Onorato, 1999). A core assumption of both is that people are motivated to hold and maintain positive social or collective identities. Thus, as in many individual-self theories, a prevailing assumption in the collective-self literature is that self-enhancement is a primary motive (cf. Hogg & Mullin, 1999). There is abundant support for this assumption, such as in the large body of evidence for the in-group favoritism effect, whereby people discriminate in favor of in-groups over out-groups, presumably as a means of maintaining or bolstering the positivity of their identities as group members (e.g., Oakes & Turner, 1980). Yet when one views the collective self as just one of multiple, possible levels of self-definition, an important question to ask is whether motives other than self-enhancement—such as self-verification—might apply to the collective self, just as they have been shown to apply to the individual self. The present studies represent a first step in answering this question.

On another level, examining self processes at multiple levels of self-definition is important given the large body of evidence demonstrating malleability in self-definition (e.g., Andersen & Chen, 2002; Banaji & Prentice, 1994; Linville & Carlston, 1994; Markus & Wurf, 1987; McGuire, McGuire, & Cheever, 1986; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Simon, 1999; Turner et al., 1994). For instance, the term *working self-concept* (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987) refers explicitly to the idea that the self-concept changes depending on the subset of self-knowledge that is in working memory in a given context. Thus, the professional self might dominate at work, whereas the parent self is most salient at home (see also Linville & Carlston, 1994). As another example, Andersen and Chen (2002) argued that malleability in the self stems in large part from the significant others in one's life; when with a significant other or someone who reminds one of a significant other, the self shifts toward the person one is in relation to the other. Finally, at the crux of self-categorization theory is the idea that self-categorization is

context dependent; context-derived shifts in, for example, perceptions of one's similarities and differences to others, the meaning of social comparisons, or the relative status of one's in-group play a role in determining the level of self-definition that is most salient, whether it be the individual self, the collective self, or some intermediary level of self-definition. If shifts in self-definition are as basic to everyday life as the above examples suggest, it becomes critical to examine not only whether but also in what manner and with what consequences a given self process operates at different levels of self-definition. As indicated at the outset, an increasing number of researchers have in fact begun to study the applicability of self processes so far examined at only one level of self-definition at other levels (e.g., Bizman et al., 2001; Mackie et al., 2000; Smith & Henry, 1996). The current set of studies fits squarely with this emerging trend.

Of course, there are limitations to the present research as well as many important and intriguing questions that need to be addressed. Regarding limitations, among the most pressing tasks for future research is to assess collective self-verification using a richer and broader range of measures of the phenomenon. Although two different measures of collective self-verification were used in the foundational studies reported here, neither tapped people's actual efforts to obtain verification of their collective self-views directly. Thus, for example, future research might examine preferences for self-verifying over self-enhancing (with regard to collective self-views) partners in an anticipated-interaction situation. It will also be important to examine the degree to which people's collective self-verification efforts succeed or fail and the consequences of success and failure on outcomes such as the strength of one's group identification.

On a different level, the current results suggest both points of convergence and divergence in self-verification processes at different levels of self-definition. As noted, the evidence seen in Studies 1 and 2 for the moderating role of the certainty with which self-views are held in collective self-verification parallels the role of certainty seen in self-verification processes at the individual level. Although being bound to a source of self-verification appears to similarly heighten self-verification tendencies at the individual and collective levels, the basis of the bonds that matter in individual versus collective self-verification may differ in ways that influence the antecedents and consequences of self-verification strivings. For instance, if a shared group membership with a source of self-evaluation is enough of a bond to instigate collective self-verification strivings, as Study 1's results suggest, it may be that self-verification motives are elicited more often in relation to collective aspects of the self than individual-self aspects, because they may not be linked to a specific relationship partner; indeed, collective self-verification may not even require knowing the source on an individual basis. Put another way, the pool of possible sources of self-verification may be greater and the sources more interchangeable at the collective compared with the individual level of self-definition. Future research is needed to explore these possibilities.

A related point of divergence in self-verification processes at different levels of self-definition is captured in the phrase *vicarious self-verification*—the notion that self-verification motives may be satisfied when others who share your self-views obtain self-verifying evaluations. As discussed, categorizing or seeing the self as a member of a group (i.e., when the collective self is salient)

causes self- and in-group views to merge to some extent, such that the self comes to be characterized in part by attributes associated with the in-group (e.g., Smith & Henry, 1996; Turner et al., 1994). Given the overlap between one's own collective self-views and those of fellow in-group members, when an in-group member receives verification of these self-views, this may lessen efforts to seek collective self-verification on one's own behalf because one has been vicariously self-verified. This kind of process is not likely to operate at the individual level because, by definition, individual self-views pertain uniquely to the individual, rendering satisfaction of one's own self-verification needs from others' receipt of self-verifying evaluations unlikely.

Studies 1 and 2 already hint at vicarious collective self-verification in that verification was operationalized by manipulating the partner's view of the social skills of Sookas as a group rather than the partner's view of the participant as a group member. Thus, participants took verifying or nonverifying feedback directed at their group to be verifying or not of the collective self-views they shared with their group. However, additional research is needed to directly test the hypothesis that when an in-group member is verified at the collective level, this diminishes one's own collective self-verification needs and efforts. Indeed, when the collective self is not particularly salient, it might be argued that observing an in-group member receive self-verifying feedback may actually serve to increase the salience of one's collective self and, accordingly, heighten rather than lessen collective self-verification efforts on one's own behalf.

The evidence obtained in Study 3 for the role of group identification in collective self-verification reveals another way in which self-verification processes at the collective level are distinct from such processes at the individual level. Outside of cross-cultural work on the self (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991), examination of variations in the importance of one's individual self to one's overall sense of self is quite uncommon. Instead, the individual level of self-definition is implicitly or explicitly assumed to be fairly important to all; some even argue that it is universally the motivationally primary level of self-definition (e.g., Gaertner et al., 1999). In contrast, variations in the importance of one's group memberships are widely recognized (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Spears, Doosje, & Ellemers, 1997), as is potential change in level of group identification (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In Study 3, collective self-verification tendencies were exhibited only among highly identified women. Future research is needed, however, to explore a wider range of the possible implications of variations in group identification for the nature of collective self-verification processes. To speculate, inconsistent success at or repeated failures to obtain collective self-verification may be associated with eventual disidentification with the relevant group.

To conclude, three studies examined self-verification motives at the collective level of self-definition and demonstrated that just as individuals strive to verify their individual self-views under certain circumstances, they may also seek verification of their collective self-views. Such findings are important in light of the pervasiveness of self-enhancement assumptions in the collective-self literature; they clearly suggest the need to consider multiple possible motives in the study of self-evaluation at the collective level of self-definition. Although our data document some basic parallels between individual and collective self-verification processes, they also begin to reveal some unique elements. Overall, the research

presented here contributes to the broader effort to bring together separate bodies of theorizing and research on different levels of self-definition with the ultimate aim of obtaining a more comprehensive and unified understanding of the self.

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## Appendix

### Example of a Vignette Used in Study 1 (Male Participant, High Certainty, In-Group and Verifying Partner)

Imagine you live on a planet named Wava. Wava is inhabited by various different groups. You are a member of the Sooka group. Like on any other planet, on the planet Wava different groups tend to be associated with different characteristics. For example, you view Sookas, including yourself as a Sooka, as being somewhat socially unskilled, often ill at ease and anxious in social situations. Over the years, you have thought a lot about who you are as a member of the group Sookas, and you feel very certain about your views on what Sookas are like. For instance, whenever you are at a party with people from various groups, as a Sooka you always see yourself as being a bit uncomfortable and awkward.

A few weeks ago, you started college and moved into the dorms. You

just learned that your college has a Freshman Orientation program, which pairs each student up with another student, so that students can go to orientation meetings, workshops, and social events with a “buddy” for the first several weeks of college. Felli is also a freshman. He is a Sooka. You’ve only spoken to Felli a few times, so you don’t know too much about him, although you get the sense that Felli also views Sookas as being somewhat socially unskilled.

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