

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# When “who we are” and “who I desire to be” appear disconnected: Introducing collective/personal self-discrepancies and investigating their relations with minority students’ psychological health

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## Abstract

According to Self-Discrepancy Theory research, perceiving mismatches between personal aspects of the self-concept is associated with negative psychological consequences, including depression and anxiety. However, the impact of perceiving mismatches between collective and personal self-aspects is still unknown. In a first step to address this gap, we introduce collective/personal self-discrepancies—perceived mismatches between a desired self-aspect and a collective identity. For cultural minority group members ( $n = 147$ ), collective/personal self-discrepancies were associated with more severe anxiety and depression symptoms. Bootstrapping analyses suggest that these relations are mediated by self-discrepancies experienced at the personal level, but only for group members presenting average or high levels of ethnic identification. This study reaffirms the importance of collective identities, especially as potential antecedents of personal aspects of the self-concept. The findings are further discussed in terms of their significance for cultural minority group members, who often highly identify with their minority groups.

Whether by comparing our body against the one we wish we had, by judging ourselves for not working as hard as we think we should, or by contrasting our personal characteristics with those we think we need to possess, we are all confronted with mismatches between the person we desire to be and the person we actually are. Although small mismatches between who we desire to be and who we are occur often, large mismatches have more complex consequences. Few theories have examined the outcomes of perceiving mismatches between desired selves and actual selves as extensively as Self-Discrepancy Theory, which associates these mismatches with depression and anxiety (Higgins, 1987, 1999).

The fact that some people perceive mismatches between their desired and actual selves might appear to be a psychological phenomenon contained within the individual, because people’s sense of personal identity is built on “perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about [themselves]” (Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 7). However, the impact of group-based factors on the perceptions that individuals have of themselves tends to be underestimated (Abrams & Hogg, 2001). Every individual belongs to social groups that play a central role in the way they define themselves (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), and group norms often guide how

people behave and who they desire to be (Tajfel, 1982; White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade & McKimmie, 2009).

When a social group makes up a core component of how people define themselves as individuals, people may be prone to compare their group identity to the person they desire to be. Guided by this theorizing, we introduce mismatches between collective aspects of the actual self and desired personal selves, which we label “collective/personal self-discrepancies.” By integrating the literature from Self-Discrepancy Theory with the literature inspired by Social Identity Theory on the influence of collective identities, we introduce the premises of our research on collective/personal self-discrepancies and explore their potential effects in a study on the psychological health of cultural minority group members.

## Self-Discrepancy Theory

Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987) focuses on the implications of distinct forms of self-concept mismatches. Specifically, actual/ideal self-discrepancies capture mismatches between the characteristics that individuals dream to have and the ones they believe they actually possess. Perceiving a large actual/ideal self-discrepancy signifies that someone believes they have not obtained the positive outcomes that they were

hoping for and, as such, should lead to low energy and negative emotions (Higgins, 1987). Picture a law student who dreams of being as eloquent as great litigators and as sharp as higher court judges, and who believes that lawyers cannot properly defend clients if they are not combative in presenting their arguments to opposing parties. If this student perceives large actual/ideal self-discrepancies, for example, because she is not as eloquent as she aspires to be, she might feel sad, disappointed with herself, and even depressed.

Conversely, actual/ought self-discrepancies describe mismatches between the characteristics individuals perceive they feel obligated to have and the ones that they perceive they actually possess. Someone who perceives large actual/ought self-discrepancies is someone who faces the consequences of having failed to meet important standards and duties and, as such, who is likely to experience stress and fear (Higgins, 1987). For instance, if the aforementioned law student perceives that she is not combative enough to practice law—that is, if she perceives large actual/ought self-discrepancies—she might fear that she will never be able to secure a position as a lawyer and experience high degrees of stress and anxiety.

Several empirical studies support the idea that actual/ideal self-discrepancies uniquely predict depression and dejection-related emotions and that actual/ought self-discrepancies uniquely predict anxiety- and agitation-related emotions (e.g., Strauman, Vookles, Berenstein, Chaiken, & Higgins, 1991). During the pretest session of a study by Strauman and Higgins (1987), participants were asked to describe ideal or ought attributes and to indicate how much they possessed each attribute. Students who had reported large actual/ideal self-discrepancies during the pretest felt more dejected, but not more agitated, when presented with attributes of their ideal self 4 weeks later. In contrast, students who had reported large actual/ought self-discrepancies during the pretest felt more agitated, but not more dejected, when presented with attributes of their ought self 4 weeks later.

In line with these results, large actual/ideal self-discrepancies have been linked with dejection-related emotions (Higgins, Shah, & Friedman, 1997), depression symptoms (Higgins, Klein, & Strauman, 1985), loss of sexual interest or pleasure (Tangney, Niedenthal, Covert, & Barlow, 1998), and even levels of hopelessness and suicidal ideations (Cornette, Strauman, Abramson, & Busch, 2009; Orbach, Mikulincer, Stein, & Cohen, 1998), whereas large actual/ought self-discrepancies have been associated with more agitation-related emotions (Higgins, Bond, Klein, & Strauman, 1986), higher anxiety (Scott & O'Hara, 1993; Strauman, 1989), and higher social phobia (Weilage & Hope, 1999). Although some studies examining the distinct predictive value of actual/ideal and actual/ought self-discrepancies have yielded less straightforward results (Boldero & Francis, 2000; McDaniel & Grice, 2008; Phillips & Silvia, 2010; Tangney *et al.*, 1998), there is no debate about the fact

that perceiving large self-discrepancies is associated with poor psychological health and more negative emotional consequences overall.

So far, the literature stemming from Self-Discrepancy Theory has focused exclusively on discrepancies between personal aspects of the self-concept. However, a few studies do associate self-discrepancies with group experiences (e.g., Bond, 2015; Sekerdej & Roccas, 2016). For instance, Bizman and Yinon found that Israelis who perceive a large discrepancy between whom they believe Israelis are, and whom they believe Israelis should be, report lower collective self-esteem and higher agitation-related emotions when thinking about Israelis (Bizman & Yinon, 2004; Bizman, Yinon, & Krotman, 2001). Moreover, self-discrepancies pertaining to group experiences are associated with the discrimination and stress experienced by people of East Indian descent who live in Canada (Clément, Noels, & Deneault, 2001). However, no one has examined the *interplay* between personal and collective self-aspects in the context of self-concept mismatches. As suggested by the literature stemming from Social Identity Theory, this interplay might be critical in identifying potential antecedents of self-discrepancies.

### The Interplay between the Personal Self-Concept and Collective Identities

Belonging to social groups appears to shape personal components of the self-concept. Using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) as an umbrella framework, mechanisms through which collective identities influence personal self-concept components have been identified. Notably, Self-Categorization Theory posits that conformity to in-group norms occurs partly because once people have categorized themselves as members of a group, they generally tend to adopt behaviors, traits, and attitudes that are typical of their group (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). For instance, people tend to internalize the traits of salient in-groups (Sinclair, Hardin, & Lowery, 2006), to the point that it is easier to recognize that an in-group trait is (vs. is not) also a personal trait (Smith & Henry, 1996) and that a personal trait is (vs. is not) also an in-group trait (Smith, Coats, & Walling, 1999).

Although self-stereotyping is related to identification, they are distinct constructs (Kashima, Kashima, & Hardie, 2000). Identification appears to moderate self-stereotyping tendencies (Hogg & Turner, 1987): when people highly identify with a group, they tend to view the group norms as a template to be followed (Terry & Hogg, 1996). Notably, Spears, Doosje, and Ellemers (1997) found that people who identify highly with a group tend to internalize the characteristics they believe are typical of their group more strongly than people who identify with their group to a lesser extent. They further found that people who highly identify with their group self-stereotype even more strongly when under group threat, a finding that has been replicated in other studies (e.g., Verkuyten & Nekuee, 1999).

Related research further suggests that group members reward displays of typical in-group behaviors and characteristics in other group members (Marques, Abrams, Paez, & Martinez-Taboada, 1998). When in-group members deviate from the average behavior of their group, they are viewed more positively if they deviate in a way that is pronorm rather than shying away from the norm (Abrams, Marques, Bown, & Henson, 2000). People also prefer group leaders who are prototypical of the groups they belong to (Hais, Hogg, & Duck, 1997; Platow, Knippenberg, Haslam, Knippenberg, & Spears, 2006).

Finally, research on self-verification theory suggests that people seek out situations that validate their views of themselves (Kwang & Swann, 2010; Swann & Read, 1981). In the context of group prototypicality, research suggests that people seek others who will validate how prototypical they perceive themselves to be (Gómez, Jetten, & Swann, 2014). They will even prefer interacting with someone who validates a negative aspect of their in-group rather than someone who does not (Chen, Chen, & Shaw, 2004). These findings suggest that people tend to seek out situations that reinforce their opinions of their group, as well situations that reinforce how similar to their group they believe they are.

Thus, it is clear that many in-group traits are internalized such that they become personal traits (Ashmore *et al.*, 2004), although the extent to and the situations in which people strive to be similar to their group and internalize these traits vary (Gómez *et al.*, 2014). These findings further suggest that group members are rewarded and encouraged to display behaviors that are aligned with their group and that they prefer situations that validate their impressions about how prototypical they are. Moreover, these findings suggest that people who highly identify with their group will strive more strongly for prototypicality. Together, these findings suggest that if someone sees a group as central to how they define themselves, they are likely to integrate prototypical aspects of that group into their personal self-concept. Further, other in-group members will reward people when they display prototypical traits, behaviors, or attitudes, and people will seek out situations that validate their views about how similar they are to their group.

Although many of these studies have been conducted in lab settings, one could imagine that, over time, there should be a strong relation between group characteristics and personal characteristics for people who highly identify with their group. With similar theorizing in mind, Taylor (2002) proposes that self-aspects encompassed in collective identities represent one of the bases from which personal self-aspects are derived. For these reasons, Taylor argues that one cannot build a personal identity without having a clear sense of one's collective identity. This psychological primacy of collective identities might explain the association between self-esteem experienced at the individual level and collective self-esteem derived

from meaningful social groups (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). It would also explain why personal self-aspects are likely to be unclear when aspects of collective identities are unclear (Usborne & Taylor, 2010, 2012).

In short, cross-sectional and experimental evidence suggests that personal components of the self-concept are derived from collective identities. Somewhat similarly, it is reasonable to view collective identity content as an antecedent of personal self-concept content. Moreover, this relation should be moderated by identification, such that the more group members identify with their group, the more similar their group identity and their personal self-concept should be. These findings could have important consequences for members of cultural minority groups. Indeed, ethnic groups represent one of the five forms of social identities (Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Ethier, 1995), and members of cultural minority groups tend to give a central place to their minority identity (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992; Phinney, 1996; Yip, 2005). Thus, although ethnic identities are important for most people, they are particularly important and central for members of minority groups.

### Introducing Collective/Personal Self-Discrepancies

Building on Self-Discrepancy Theory and Social Identity Theory, we propose that the self-aspects involved in self-discrepancies can be derived from the collective level. Though we acknowledge that the ideal self, ought self, and actual self are all influenced by the collective level, resulting in many potential combinations of self-concept mismatches, this research will focus on collective/personal self-discrepancies: perceived mismatches between a personal aspect of the self-concept and a collective identity. Paralleling the distinctions introduced by Higgins (1987), we will examine collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies, that is, perceived mismatches between the person one aspires to be as an individual (ideal personal self) and this person's group (actual collective identity), and collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies, that is, the perceived mismatches between who a person believes they should be as an individual (ought personal self) and this person's group (actual collective identity). We will compare the potential effects of both types of collective/personal self-discrepancies to those of self-discrepancies introduced by Higgins (1987). For clarity purposes, we will label them personal/personal self-discrepancies when they represent mismatches between two personal self-aspects (rather than self-discrepancies), personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies (rather than actual/ideal self-discrepancies), and personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies (rather than actual/ought self-discrepancies) (see Table 1).

One of our propositions is that collective/personal self-discrepancies are antecedents of personal/personal

**Table 1** Conceptual distinctions between types of self-discrepancies

Distinctions introduced by Higgins (1987)	Distinctions introduced in the present research
<p><b>Personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancy</b>  <i>perceived mismatch between whom a person dreams of being as an individual and who this person is (usually labeled "actual/ideal self-discrepancies," but renamed here for clarity).</i></p> <p><b>Personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancy</b>  <i>perceived mismatch between whom a person ought to be as an individual and who this person is (usually labeled "actual/ought self-discrepancies," but renamed here for clarity).</i></p>	<p><b>Collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancy</b>  <i>perceived mismatch between whom a person dreams of being as an individual and the person's collective identity.</i></p> <p><b>Collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancy</b>  <i>perceived mismatch between whom a person ought to be as an individual and the person's collective identity.</i></p>

self-discrepancies. As suggested by Social Identity Theory, collective identities provide individuals with a template and set of standards that contribute to individuals defining themselves. Thus, people tend to internalize characteristics that are closely associated with their collective identities. Let us return to our law student, who considers her ethnic group to be a key component in defining herself. This young woman may perceive that she possesses many traits, skills, and habits that she associates with her cultural minority group. If she believes that the characteristics associated with her ought self, such as combativeness, do not overlap with the characteristics associated with her minority group, she is not likely to believe that she is a combative person. For these reasons, we anticipate that members of minority groups will be prone to perceiving large personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies if they perceive large collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies. Similarly, we anticipate that members of minority groups will be prone to perceiving large personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies if they perceive large collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies. Moreover, we expect the relation between collective actual/personal ideal and personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies to be stronger for group members who highly identify with their ethnic group.

Another premise of our research is that collective/personal self-discrepancies are associated with detrimental psychological health outcomes, just as mismatches between two personal self-aspects, and as mismatches between two collective self-aspects. Considering the distinctions proposed by Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1987), we will test for differentiated effects of collective actual/personal ideal and collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies. Specifically, we expect that large collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies will be associated with more severe depression symptoms and that large collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies will be associated with more severe anxiety symptoms. Moreover, if collective/personal self-discrepancies are antecedents of personal/personal self-discrepancies, as collective aspects of the self-concept are antecedent of personal aspects of the self-concept (Taylor, 2002), then collective/personal self-discrepancies

might also indirectly influence the outcomes of personal/personal self-discrepancies.

In other words, we hypothesize that large collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies are associated with large personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies, whereas large personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies are associated with more severe depression symptoms. We further hypothesize that large collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies are associated with large personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies, whereas large personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies are associated with more severe anxiety symptoms. Finally, we hypothesize that identification will moderate these effects, such that they will be more prominent for individuals who are high (vs. low) on ethnic group identification.

## Method

### Participants

We recruited 151 cultural minority students at a Canadian university. Four participants were removed from the original sample because they did not complete the study. The final sample is comprised of young adults; 109 identifying as female and 38 identifying as male ( $M = 20.33$  years old,  $SD = 1.74$  years old). Approximately half of the students were born in Canada (51.7%). The sample presented a high degree of cultural variability: 50 different ethnicities were listed when cultural minority students were asked about their background. About a third of the participants had East Asian origins (32.7%; e.g., Chinese and Vietnamese); approximately, a third had West or East European origins (28.6%; e.g., Italian and Ukrainian). Several other students had South Asian (14.3%; e.g., Indian and Sri Lankan) or Middle Eastern origins (8.2%; e.g., Israeli and Lebanese). Most of the other participants identified with underrepresented groups, such as Latin American, Caribbean, African, or Aboriginal ethnic groups (for more details, see Table 2).

Before completing the study, participants read a consent form and were invited to ask questions about it to the researchers. The form notably informed them that all their identifiable information would be suppressed a month after closing the study, that they

**Table 2** Sample description

	Age	Gender	Generation status
	Mean (SD)	% of female	% born in Canada
West or East European ethnic groups ( <i>n</i> = 42)	20.55 (2.11)	71.4	52.4
Arab and Middle Eastern ethnic groups ( <i>n</i> = 12)	19.92 (2.35)	66.7	50.0
South Asians ethnic groups ( <i>n</i> = 21)	20.38 (1.75)	76.2	61.9
East Asians ethnic groups ( <i>n</i> = 48)	20.02 (1.25)	68.8	39.6
Underrepresented ethnic or racial groups ( <i>n</i> = 16)	20.69 (1.49)	93.8	56.3
South East Asian or Oceanian ethnic groups ( <i>n</i> = 3)	22.00 (1.73)	100.0	66.7
Religious minority groups ( <i>n</i> = 5)	20.00 (1.23)	80.0	100.0
Total sample ( <i>n</i> = 147)	20.33 (1.74)	74.1	51.7

would only be contacted again if their anxiety or depression scores signaled the presence of mild or severe symptoms, and that they could refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any point. After the study, all participants were compensated for their time.

### Measures

Consistent with previous research, participants completed a simplified version of the Selves Questionnaires (Higgins et al., 1985; Phillips & Silvia, 2005). Each student was asked to list five characteristics describing how they felt that they ought to be as students, as well as characteristics associated with how they would ideally like to be as a student. Participants indicated the extent to which these characteristics actually describe the members of their ethnic group, as well as the extent to which they describe themselves personally, on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*slightly*) to 4 (*extremely*).

Although they are labeled discrepancy scores for clarity and to be consistent with the theory, self-discrepancy scores were not arrived at by subtracting one score from another, or by contrasting two lists of self-concept attributes. Rather, we produced four scores by reversing and averaging (i) participants' ratings of how much they felt their group possessed their ought characteristic (collective actual/personal ought), (ii) participants' ratings of how much they felt that they personally possessed their ought characteristics (personal actual/personal ought), (iii) participants' ratings of how much they felt their group possessed their ideal characteristics (collective actual/personal ideal), and (iv) participants' ratings indicating they felt that they personally possessed their ideal characteristics (personal actual/personal ideal).

Therefore, higher "collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancy" scores indicate that participants did not believe that members of their cultural minority group generally possessed the traits, skills, and habits defining whom they feel they should be as students, whereas higher "personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancy" scores indicate that participants did not believe that they personally possessed the traits defining whom they feel they should be as students. Similarly, higher "collective actual/personal ideal self-

discrepancy" scores indicate that participants did not believe that members of their cultural minority group generally possessed the traits, skills, and habits defining whom they ideally wish to be as students; in contrast, higher "personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancy" scores indicate that participants did not believe that they personally possessed the traits defining whom they ideally wish to be as students.

Next, participants completed the 20-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (Eaton, Muntaner, Smith, Tien, & Ybarra, 2004; Radloff, 1977). This scale evaluates recent experiences of depression symptoms (e.g., I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends). Specifically, participants indicate how much they experienced each symptom during the past week on a scale ranging from 0 (*rarely or none of the time—less than 1 day*) to 3 (*most or all of the time—5 to 7 days*). A score was then computed for each participant by summing up his or her answers. A score equal or superior to 16 indicates that mild symptoms of depression might be experienced (Radloff, 1977; Roberts, Andrews, Lewinsohn, & Hops, 1990). Then, participants completed the 20-item Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger, 1985). On a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very much*), participants indicated how much they experienced each anxious symptom (e.g., I am presently worrying over possible misfortunes). Finally, participants completed the 4-item Identity Subscale of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (e.g., Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). On a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), they indicated the extent to which they identified with their group (e.g., In general, belonging to my ethnic group is an important part of my self-image). These scales presented satisfying reliability in this study according to their Cronbach alphas (which were, respectively, of  $\alpha = .88$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ , and  $\alpha = .87$ ).

## Results

### Descriptive Analyses

Before testing our hypotheses, we performed a series of preliminary analyses. The first question pertained to the magnitude of the self-concept mismatches: Were they all comparable in size, or were some self-discrepancies

larger than others? We performed a within-subject analysis of variance to answer this question. This analysis revealed no mean differences due to an interaction effect,  $F(1,146) = 1.180$ ,  $p = .279$ ,  $\eta^2 = .008$ , or due to a main effect emerging from the comparison of self-discrepancies involving ought selves and ideal selves,  $F(1,146) = .010$ ,  $p = .919$ ,  $\eta^2 < .000$ . However, this analysis of variance revealed a significant main effect indicating that personal/personal self-discrepancies ( $M = 2.350$ ,  $SD = .634$ ) tended to be larger than collective/personal self-discrepancies ( $M = 2.223$ ,  $SD = .596$ ),  $F(1,146) = 5.564$ ,  $p = .020$ ,  $\eta^2 = .037$ . We also observed that attributes listed as ought and ideal selves were relatively similar. Common examples of attributes and traits listed to describe ought selves include hard working, focused, determined, attentive, conscientious, and disciplined, whereas common examples of attributes and traits listed as ideal selves included organized, intelligent, studious, curious, smart, open-minded, and creative.

Finally, as a preliminary step, we computed correlations (see Table 3). Personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies and personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies were highly correlated ( $r = .69$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and so were collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies and collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies ( $r = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As expected, the severity of anxiety symptoms was correlated with collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies ( $r = .26$ ,  $p = .002$ ) and personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The severity of depression symptoms was marginally correlated with collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $r = .14$ ,  $p = .086$ ) and significantly correlated with personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $r = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

### Data Analysis Strategy

Our first goal was to examine whether collective/personal self-discrepancies predict personal/personal self-discrepancies. We also wanted to test whether the strength of the connection between collective/personal self-discrepancies and personal/personal self-discrepancies is moderated by identification. Specifically, we expected that larger collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies are associated with larger personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies, that large collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies are associated with larger personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies, and that both of these relationships become stronger when ethnic identification is higher. To test these hypotheses, we computed two regression models using the PROCESS MACRO, Model 1, which allows testing for simple moderations.

Our second goal was to predict the severity of anxiety symptoms. We hypothesized that large collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies are

generally associated with more severe anxiety symptoms. We also expected support for the idea that this relation is explained by personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies—that is, that perceiving large collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies is associated with large personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies, which are themselves associated with more severe anxiety symptoms.

We expected that ethnic identification would moderate the extent to which collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies indirectly contribute to anxiety symptoms through personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies. Consistent with previous self-discrepancies research, we controlled for self-discrepancies pertaining to ideal selves. We also deemed it important to control for several variables.<sup>1</sup> Thus, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using the PROCESS MACRO Model 7, entering collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies as independent variable  $X$ , personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies as mediator  $M$ , anxiety symptoms as the dependent variable  $Y$ , ethnic identification as moderator  $W$ , as well as collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies and personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies as covariates.

Our third goal was to examine the roles of collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies, personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies, and identification in predicting the severity of depression symptoms. We hypothesized that large collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies are generally associated with more severe depression symptoms. We also expected support for the idea that this relation is explained by personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies—that is, that perceiving large collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies is associated with large personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies, which in turn are associated with more severe depression symptoms. Paralleling analyses pertaining to ought-related self-discrepancies, we expected that identification would be a moderator and controlled for self-discrepancies pertaining to ought selves. Therefore, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis using the PROCESS MACRO Model 7, entering collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies as independent variable  $X$ , personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies as mediator  $M$ , depression symptoms as the dependent variable  $Y$ , ethnic identification as moderator  $W$ , as well as collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies and personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies as covariates.

<sup>1</sup>At the suggestion of a reviewer and following a common practice in the literature on immigration, we also examined whether being a first- or a second-generation immigrant had an impact on our results. To examine this question, we added immigration generational status as a moderator in all our statistical models. There were no significant, marginally significant, or trending associations between immigration generational status and the other variables. We have thus reported analyses performed without immigration generational status.

**Table 3** Descriptive statistics and correlations

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies	2.21 (.61)	—					
2. Personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies	2.36 (.69)	.31***	—				
3. Collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies	2.24 (.58)	.64***	.24**	—			
4. Personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies	2.34 (.58)	.26**	.69***	.27***	—		
5. Ethnic identification (collective self-esteem subscale)	4.34 (1.49)	-.20*	-.14	-.19*	-.23**	—	
6. Anxiety symptoms	2.15 (.53)	.26**	.37***	.13	.35***	-.21*	—
7. Depression symptoms	15.95 (9.25)	.24**	.35***	.14	.32***	-.26**	.76***

\* $p < .05$ ,\*\* $p < .01$ ,\*\*\* $p < .001$ , two-tailed.

### Collective/Personal and Personal/Personal Self-Discrepancies

We hypothesized that collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies would predict personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies and that collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies would predict personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies. Moreover, we expected these relations to be moderated by identification. That is, the more strongly minority students identify with their ethnic group, the more closely their collective/personal self-discrepancies should be associated with their personal/personal self-discrepancies.

Personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies were significantly predicted by collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .295$ ,  $p < .001$ ), were not predicted by identification ( $\beta = -.087$ ,  $p = .281$ ), and were marginally predicted by the interaction of collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies and identification ( $\beta = .123$ ,  $p = .079$ ). Decomposing the interaction revealed a marginal moderating role of identification, as higher levels of ethnic identification were associated with a marginally stronger connection between collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies and personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies. Specifically, when identification is low, the connection between collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies is small (at  $-1SD$ :  $\beta = .172$ ,  $p = .109$ ,  $d = .35$ ), it is medium for average levels of ethnic identification (at  $0SD$ :  $\beta = .295$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .62$ ), and large for high levels of ethnic identification (at  $+1SD$ :  $\beta = .418$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .92$ ).

Collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .237$ ,  $p = .003$ ) and identification ( $\beta = -.205$ ,  $p = .011$ ) both predicted personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies on their own. Their interaction also did ( $\beta = .158$ ,  $p = .026$ ), thus revealing the moderating role of identification for the relationship between collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies and personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies. Indeed, the relation between collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies and personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies is small when ethnic identification is low (at  $-1SD$ :  $\beta = .080$ ,  $p = .452$ ,

$d = .16$ ), medium when ethnic identification is average (at the mean:  $\beta = .237$ ,  $p = .003$ ,  $d = .49$ ), and large when ethnic identification is high (at  $+1SD$ :  $\beta = .395$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = .86$ ). In sum, and in line with our hypotheses, these results suggest that mismatches experienced between an ought or an ideal self and an ethnic identity are internalized for people who highly identify with their ethnic group.

### The Severity of Anxiety Symptoms

In line with our hypotheses, the severity of anxiety symptoms was significantly predicted by collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .259$ ,  $p = .002$ ). However, when considering personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .321$ ,  $p < .001$ ), collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies only marginally predicted the severity of anxiety symptoms ( $\beta = .158$ ,  $p = .051$ ). Neither collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $\beta = -.103$ ,  $p = .305$ ) nor personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .180$ ,  $p = .092$ ) were significant predictors of the severity of anxiety symptoms. The results were otherwise very similar when controlling for ideal self-discrepancies. For this reason, we have removed collective actual/personal ideal and personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies from regression results reported below.

Examining indirect effects allowed for a clarification of the meaning of the resulting moderated mediation: Collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies are indirectly associated with the severity of anxiety symptoms when ethnic identification is average or high, but not when identification is low. Indeed, when estimating the size of indirect effects and their 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals with a 5000 samples bootstrapping procedure, we found that the mean estimate for the standardized indirect effect of collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies is of .055 [-.006, .173] when identification is low, .095 [.040, .187] when identification is average, and .134 [.062, .235] when identification is high.

These results indicate that perceiving large collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies is closely associated with the severity of anxiety symptoms. For minority students who present an average or a high

level of ethnic identification, this relation appears to be explained by personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies. For them, perceiving a large mismatch between their ethnic group and a personal desired self (in the form of collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies) tends to be associated with perceiving large personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies, which in turn is associated with more severe anxiety symptoms.

### The Severity of Depression Symptoms

The severity of depression symptoms marginally predicted collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .142, p = .086$ ). When considering personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .303, p < .001$ ), collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies were no longer associated with the severity of depression symptoms ( $\beta = .061, p = .460$ ). It was no longer the case when controlling for ought self-discrepancies; however, neither collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $\beta = -.060, p = .553$ ) nor personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .145, p = .182$ ) predicted the severity of depression symptoms when controlling for collective actual/personal ought and personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies. For this reason, we also examined whether ought self-discrepancies predicted the severity of depression symptoms.

The severity of depression symptoms was significantly predicted by collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .242, p = .003$ ). However, when considering personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies ( $\beta = .306, p < .001$ ), collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies only marginally predicted the severity of anxiety symptoms ( $\beta = .147, p = .073$ ). Examining the indirect effects allowed for a clarification of the meaning of the resulting moderated mediation: Collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies are indirectly associated with the severity of depression symptoms when ethnic identification is average or high, but not when identification is low. Indeed, when estimating the size of the indirect effects and their 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals with a 5000 samples bootstrapping procedure, the mean estimate for the standardized indirect effect of collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies is of .053 [−.008, .177] when identification is low, .090 [.033, .186] when identification is average, and .128 [.053, .226] when identification is high.

Therefore, in a very similar pattern as the one found in relation to the severity of anxiety symptoms, the severity of depression symptoms was closely associated with perceiving large collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies, not large collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies. For minority students with an average or a high level of ethnic identification, this relation appears to be explained by personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies, not personal

actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies. For them, perceiving large collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies tends to be associated with perceiving large personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies, which in turn is associated with more severe depression symptoms.

### Discussion

Whether they take the form of identity conflicts, lack of self-concept coherence, or self-discrepancies, mismatches between components of the self-concept have raised attention in the literature. The literature clearly indicates that negative consequences are associated with large mismatches between personal self-aspects, such as ideal selves and actual selves, as well as from large mismatches between components of a collective identity. Could similar outcomes also follow from contrasting a personal with a collective aspect of the self-concept? This question prompted us to introduce a new form of mismatch between collective identities and personal desired self to Self-Discrepancy Theory, collective/personal self-discrepancies. As a first step, we sought to explore the potential role of these collective/personal self-discrepancies for the psychological health of minority group members.

Our findings reveal that collective/personal self-discrepancies are associated with the psychological health of cultural minority group members. For minority students who have an average or high level of ethnic identification, larger collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies were associated with more severe depression and anxiety symptoms, and these relations appear to be mediated by personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies. Larger collective actual/personal ideal and personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies were also associated with more severe depression symptoms, but these relations disappeared when taking into account collective actual/personal ought and personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies. Thus, in this study, poor psychological health is associated with perceived mismatches between the traits, skills, or habits describing who minority group members desire to be and the traits, skills, or habits describing their ethnic group.

Moreover, collective actual/personal ought self-discrepancies appeared closely associated with anxiety and depression symptoms, even when accounting for the influence of self-discrepancies between personal self-aspects. Collective actual/personal ought and collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies were also predictors of personal actual/personal ought and personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies, and more strongly so for minority students who highly identify with their ethnic group. In this sense, this study suggests that collective/personal self-discrepancies are a distinct concept, that they could be antecedents of personal/personal self-discrepancies, and that they



predict poor psychological health. Despite stemming from a cross-sectional design, our findings reaffirm the importance of collective identities in self-concept processes.

### The Relation between Personal and Collective Self-Aspects

Large self-discrepancies involving two personal self-aspects can originate from individual tendencies to underestimate oneself or to fantasize about unattainable dreams. However, self-discrepancies experienced at the personal level might also originate from group experiences rather than experiences occurring solely at the personal level. Our findings reveal a relation between collective/personal and personal/personal self-discrepancies and provide partial support for the hypothesis that personal/personal self-discrepancies mediate the relations between collective/personal self-discrepancies and psychological health symptoms. When viewed from the perspective of the literature from Social Identity Theory, especially collective identity primacy research (Taylor, 2002), these findings are consistent with the idea that collective identities are antecedents of personal identities. These findings also suggest that issues involving collective identities have repercussions at the personal level, and speak to one possible origin of mismatches experienced at the personal level.

These results are particularly interesting in light of Self-Verification Theory (Kwang & Swann, 2010; Swann & Read, 1981). Indeed, work on Self-Verification Theory indicates that people would rather interact with someone who validates a negative aspect of their in-group than with someone who does not (Chen *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, if minority group members are convinced that there is a mismatch between an aspiration they have for themselves and their cultural minority group, they might prefer interactions with people who reinforce the idea that there is a mismatch. Considering that negative stereotypes are more likely to be attributed to low status groups, especially pertaining to their competence (Biernat & Dovidio, 2000; Caprariello, Cuddy, & Fiske, 2009; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and that they are more likely to be underrepresented in high achievement domains, findings from the self-verification literature hint at a mechanism through which large self-concept mismatches at the collective level will be reinforced. Indeed, if minority group members feel that they might be negatively stereotyped or not welcomed in a certain domain and, thus, perceive a mismatch between their group and this domain, they might avoid situations that challenge their perceptions regarding this mismatch.

Furthermore, these results contribute to discussions on the interaction between collective and personal components of the self-concept. Work reviewed earlier stressed that collective identities might in part shape personal components of the self-concept. Despite the

tendency for group influence to be underestimated (Abrams & Hogg, 2001), Hogg (2003) proposes that people's sense of individuality emerges from the unique combination of belonging simultaneously to different social groups and deriving different self-aspects from each of these groups. The extent to which groups shape people's sense of individuality is still the object of debate, but our results provide additional evidence that personal and collective components of the self-concept are closely connected. Our findings reinforce the idea that the influence of collective identities is underestimated and reaffirm the need to further explore the connection between the collective and the personal.

### Potential Effects of Actual/Ought and Actual/Ideal Self-Discrepancies

Consistent with previous studies examining self-discrepancies (Boldero & Francis, 2000; Higgins *et al.*, 1985; Phillips & Silvia, 2005), personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies and personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies were highly correlated. Moreover, as Self-Discrepancy Theory would have predicted, our findings indicate that poor psychological health is associated with large self-discrepancies, whether they involve only personal self-aspects or also include collective self-aspects. Mismatches between an ought self and an actual self, whether a personal actual self or a collective actual self, predicted the severity of depression and anxiety symptoms. These results make sense in light of Higgins' (1999) comments on the effects of different self-discrepancies. He proposed that distinct effects most clearly appear in studies focusing on people reporting very large self-discrepancies or presenting very severe psychological symptoms, or in studies designed to make only one form of self-discrepancies salient at any given time.

Although they are not perfectly consistent with predictions of Self-Discrepancy Theory, our results are similar to several studies that found personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies to predict anxiety and depression symptoms more consistently and more strongly than personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies (Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999; Cornette *et al.*, 2009; McDaniel & Grice, 2008; Phillips & Silvia, 2005; Tangney *et al.*, 1998). For instance, Phillips and Silvia (2010) found that actual/ought self-discrepancies predict both anxiety and depression symptoms, whereas actual/ideal self-discrepancies only predict depression symptoms. When discussing these findings, Higgins (1999) noted that distinct effects for actual/ideal and actual/ought self-discrepancies were more likely to occur when comparing people who reported large self-discrepancies, or when making only one of the two kinds of self-discrepancies salient.

Moreover, the findings of Boldero and Francis (2000) suggest a possible explanation for those results. In a series of studies, they found that less distinct effects of actual/ideal and actual/ought self-discrepancies can

occur when one form of mismatch is perceived as less relevant. If students who perceive that they are far from the ideal student they aspire to be (i.e., those who perceive large personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies) somewhat disengaged from their goal of being an ideal student, they might still feel pressured to meet the standards of their ought selves. In this situation, personal actual/personal ought self-discrepancies would be more relevant than personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies with regard to the emotional outcomes of minority students, at least until these students reengaged with a new ideal self.

This interpretation is consistent with the idea that minority students who perceive large collective actual/personal ideal or personal actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies tend to disengage from their academic goals. Although the relation between self-discrepancies and motivation is understudied, a few studies found that large actual/ideal self-discrepancies are associated with lower academic outcomes (Cantor, Norem, Niedenthal, Langston, & Brower, 1987; Ferguson, Hafen, & Laursen, 2010). Moreover, group membership is associated with motivation in many ways (Cohen & Garcia, 2008; Master & Walton, 2013; Oyserman, 2007; Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Notably, congruence between the values associated with a group and a goal would be connected with motivational outcomes (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006). Thus, future studies could examine whether perceiving large collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies is associated with minority students' academic engagement.

### Future Avenues for Collective/Personal Self-Discrepancies Research

Many questions remain regarding collective/personal self-discrepancies, including identifying the type of people for whom and the type of situations in which collective/personal self-discrepancies are most relevant. For instance, taking a developmental perspective, one could expect collective/personal self-discrepancies to be relevant for adolescents and adults. Although children and even babies have a sense of who they are, the self-concept develops more intensely during adolescence (Sebastian, Burnett, & Blakemore, 2008). Self-discrepancies at the personal level play a meaningful role for adolescents (e.g., Bond, 2015; Moretti & Higgins, 1999), because they are associated with adolescents' diffused identities (Makros & McCabe, 2001), depressive symptoms (Hankin, Roberts, & Gotlib, 1997; Papadakis, Prince, Jones, & Strauman, 2006), pathological online gaming (Li, Liao, & Khoo, 2011), and disordered eating (Harrison & Hefner, 2006).

Could age moderate experiences of collective/personal self-discrepancies? Whereas some self-concept components such as self-esteem vary throughout the lifespan (Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005), others do not seem to vary much, such as self-acceptance (e.g., Ryff, 1989). Yet research suggests that the

abstract thinking skills that develop during adolescence allow adolescents to form, compare, and contrast different aspects of their self-concept but that adolescents usually do not have the tools to resolve self-concept contradictions until the end of adolescence (Harter, 1999). Consistent with this research, self-concept conflicts peak during adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Harter & Monsour, 1992), whereas coherent and meaningful views of the self-concept tend to emerge later (McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). Thus, one could expect self-discrepancies to play an important role during adolescence, at a time when resolving contradictions between different self-concept components appears perhaps as more difficult than it does later in life.

The relations between collective/personal self-discrepancies and psychological symptoms could also be moderated by cultural factors. For instance, research on independent and interdependent cultures suggests the possibility that independent traits are more valued in Western cultures, whereas interdependent traits are more valued in Eastern cultures (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). Moreover, whereas European American students tend to overestimate the extent to which they possess agency-related traits, Asian students tend to overestimate the extent to which they possess communion-related traits (Chui & Hong, 2007). These findings suggest that the content of ideal and ought selves could vary to reflect cultural values and that people might overestimate the extent to which they possess highly valued ethnic traits. One could wonder whether people overestimate as much whether they possess traits that they do not believe typical of their ethnic group, which might result in perceiving large collective/personal self-discrepancies.

Moreover, emotions are not expressed in the same manner across cultures (van Hemert, Poortinga, & van de Vijver, 2007). For instance, happiness is more prevalent in certain regions of the world than others (Diener & Diener, 2009; Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999). Psychology research is just starting to examine how symptoms associated with psychopathologies sometimes vary across different cultures (e.g., Ryder, Ban, & Chentsova-Dutton, 2011; Ryder & Chentsova-Dutton, 2015). Although the meaning of these findings for our understanding self-discrepancies is still unclear, future research on collective/personal self-discrepancies could gain from building on latest advancements in clinical cross-cultural psychology.

### Conclusion

This study introduces collective/personal self-discrepancies as a construct distinct from, and which could be a source of, self-discrepancies at the personal level. It takes a novel approach by examining self-concept mismatches that occur at the interplay between personal and the collective levels, rather than mismatches occurring solely at the individual level or solely at the collective level. This study presents several

limitations; for instance, it should be noted that the sample was imbalanced in terms of gender; however, no gender effects emerged in our analyses, suggesting that our results may generalize regardless of gender. Yet our findings reaffirm the necessity of examining the connection between group and individual factors as opposed to limiting one's level of analysis to either solely collective or personal effects.

Our findings also reaffirm the necessity to look closely at mismatches involving collective self-aspects. The connection between collective and personal aspects of the self is especially relevant for members of cultural minority groups, who sometimes struggle to reconcile the different components of their self-concept and who give a central place to their collective identities. Although more research is needed to firmly establish our understanding of these mismatches, this study hints that collective actual/personal ought and collective actual/personal ideal self-discrepancies play a key role for minority group members—and that they possibly also play for anyone whose collective identity is central. In this sense, examining collective/personal self-discrepancies may become critical in future studies attempting to understand the experience of minority group members, which will become critical in our increasingly diverse societies.

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