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Research Training Group 2513 "Social Dynamics of the Self"
Description of project lines

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BIGSSS Research Training Group 2513 "Social Dynamics of the Self"

Research Program & Project Lines

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Research program of the Research Training Group "Social Dynamics of the Self"

"No topic is more interesting to people than people. For most people, moreover, the most interesting person is the self" (Baumeister, 1999, p.1). Not surprisingly then, few topics have engaged the attention of social sciences more thoroughly than the study of the self. Yet, already providing a satisfactory definition of the self has been proven fiendishly difficult and finding a way of sorting or grouping the masses of research on the self is an intimidating task (Baumeister, 1999). What is more, the different social sciences have traditionally focused on different aspects of the self. Since the early years of psychology and sociology, scholars have been intrigued by the duality of human existence. Humans are able to turn their "inquiring attention back toward its own source and seek the self" (Baumeister, 1999, p. 2), thereby becoming subject and object of mental processes at the same time. The *I* (Mead, 1934, Cooley, 1902), or self-as-knower (James, 1890), is synonymous with basic psychological processes such as perception, sensation, or thought, which are biologically rooted. At the same time, the self can become the object of thinking, often referred to as the *Me* or self-as-known. Although each of these classic authors referred to the **I-Me distinction** in different ways, they all converge in arguing that the self, although referring to each and every person's unique individuality, is **inherently social in nature** because the sense of self is developed in interaction with others and through a perspective-taking process ("looking-glass self", Cooley, 1902). Hence, the self is a psychological reality that is both biologically and socio-culturally rooted (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

In fact, Baumeister (1999) has identified three major aspects of human experience from the basis of selfhood. First, there is **reflexive consciousness** – our ability to think about ourselves (which is equivalent to the self-as-knower versus self-as-known distinction by James, 1890). Second, the self has an **executive function**. It allows us to become agents and make conscious choices for our actions. Third, the self is a member of groups and relationships. Hence, the third basic function of the self is to enable people to relate to others, thus becoming **interpersonal beings**. It is in particular these latter two functions that will be studied in the context of this RTG: How do individuals as conscious agents of their own lives manage to navigate through social and interpersonal contexts of various layers of abstraction?

The self develops and self-regulation occurs as individuals grow up in and actively navigate through various social contexts and attune themselves to these by asking such questions as "Who am I?", "What should I be doing?", and "How do I relate to others?" (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). These contexts range from proximal daily situations such as family life, school, workplace, etc., which are embedded in social networks to larger social systems (such as the educational, legal, or political systems). Individual behavior in these various contexts is informed by (frequently implicit) knowledge and beliefs about what is appropriate and what is perceived of as good and morally justifiable. These contexts are by no means fixed and static.

On the contrary, they are **in constant flux**. Moreover, these constantly changing ecological, historical, political, economic, and cultural conditions that people live in shape the cultural frames of moral ideas. Put differently, the sense of self emerges in, and is reflexive of, social contexts varying in layers of complexity from the specific current situation to society as a whole. To understand the self means that we must also understand the social roles we play in different social systems, taking into

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consideration that the self is always acting in social contexts in which other selves exist. Therefore, an interdisciplinary and comprehensive study of the self's social embeddedness requires the **simultaneous analysis of various social systems.** Using Bronfenbrenner's terms, these systems range in complexity from the micro-level (such as family, school, religious institutions, neighborhood), via the meso (i.e., interconnections between the microsystems), and exo (which involves links between a social setting in which the individual does not have an active role and the individual's immediate context) to the macrolevel (i.e., the culture in which the individual lives), all of which dynamically change over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

The mutual constitution of cultures and selves

The mutual constitution of culture and self is a topic of central importance across the social sciences, since the self and society cannot be understood independently of each other. Studying the social dynamics of the self therefore means addressing its mutual relationship with changing social systems. The self is not just a passive product of social constitution and socialization. We have already mentioned Baumeister's (1999) proposition that it is the "executive function" of the self, which "enables the self to make choices, initiate action, and exert control over self and world. Without this, the self might still be something that could be known, and could relate to other people - but it could not do anything" (p. 2). The executive function of the self is experienced as **personal agency** or self-regulation when engaging in voluntary action and exerting self-efficacy, for example, when making decisions or weighing options, when forcing oneself to do something or restraining an impulse, etc.. On the one hand, the experience of personal agency (in particular self-regulation and free will) has been considered to be evolutionary advantageous by many scholars and hence is often traced back to natural selection (for a recent overview see Baumeister & Monroe, 2014). At the same time, the subjective importance of personal agency varies between the members of different cultures (often called individualism versus collectivism), and between members of different social groups within a society (e.g., the different genders, members of different social classes or religions, etc.). What is more, according to Markus and Kitayama (2010), people are socio-culturally shaped *shapers* of their environments. This is to say that depending on their current construal of the self, people think, feel, and act differently, all of which has an impact on their proximal as well as their distal social context(s).

The individual construal of the self entails schemas or **patterns of past action**, but also present and **future behavior** that people will most likely engage in. For example, if a person's self-view includes high levels of politeness or generosity, this person is likely to provide spontaneous help to another person in need. Likewise, if a given individual's self-view strongly emphasizes personal agency, he or she is likely to succeed in actions that require overcoming obstacles or restraining from unwanted impulses. Whatever the person does, the outcome is likely to affect not only the self, but others in the immediate social context as well. Given that most of our actions have implications beyond the self, it makes sense to assume that the self is not only influenced by the social context, but also **yields social consequences**. Individual action affects other people in the immediate context and - aggregated across situations - can impact the more distal layers of social contexts ranging from social groups, over to networks, organizations, or institutions, even to cultural development. In sum, the

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self is both object and subject of social change; it is a socio-culturally shaped shaper of socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, the dynamics of self and culture need to be studied simultaneously.

Independence versus interdependence

What are core dimensions along which different cultures can be compared? What are central concepts regarding which they differ from one another? One of the most fundamental and central questions in this regard is the relationship between the individual as an independent entity and the social groups to which he or she belongs. Among others, this is reflected in the autonomy-embeddedness dimension that Schwartz (2006) has proposed, in Hofstede's (2001) individualism-collectivism dimension, as well as in the survival versus self-expression value dimension identified by Inglehart and Welzel (2005). Reviewing and reanalyzing the findings from these three major and important value survey projects, Inglehart and Oyserman (2004) concluded that they all "tap a common dimension of cross-cultural variation, reflecting the relative emphasis on human emancipation and choice" (p. 82) or - put differently - **personal agency**. Within societies, different social subsystems or contexts, e.g., the economic market and the family, also display different cultures according to the independence-interdependence dimension because of different rationales of social interaction and exchange. These cultural or societal differences form the socialization contexts in which the individual construal of the self develops and individuals act.

Accordingly, numerous studies have shown cultural variations in the understanding and conceptualization of the self. To conceptualize these differences, Markus and Kitayama (1991) have introduced the distinction between the **independent and interdependent construal of the self**. While the independent self is primarily defined by characteristics that distinguish the person from others, like traits, attitudes, or abilities, the interdependent self incorporates elements of the social world, such as close and stable relationships, contexts for behavior, important roles, and group memberships. Within the independent construal, the self is seen as clearly separate from others. Although these other people vary in how close they are to the self, the distinction between the self and others is always pronounced. Coinciding with this is the fact that attachment to one's ingroups is comparatively loose. While group-based social identities can be salient in a given context, it, generally speaking, is the internal repertoire of **autonomous features of the self** that is subjectively seen as most self-defining. People with independent self-construal tend to have many social identities, each of which does not figure very prominently in one's sense of the self—social identities between which the person can flexibly switch. A further important aspect of independent self-definitions is the fact that they are acquired by aggregating the self-descriptive features across the various contexts one encounters and are hence **abstract and context-free** in nature. For example, if one defines the self as being "honest" (an independent concept), it is implied that one frankly tells the truth in most if not all contexts wherever that is possible. In this view, one's personal degree of honesty is a feature of the self and less so of the context one happens to be in.

The interdependent self-construal stresses the exact opposite. According to this view, the self is fundamentally connected and inseparably linked to others. Interdependent self-aspects include one's **relationships to others** (such as "I am a loving father" or "I am a caring husband"). It is not possible to think about the self in interdependent terms, while not at the very same moment thinking about

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those relevant others. Put differently, the mental representation of the self and close others overlap. Coinciding with this view is the fact that **group-based social identities** are subjectively highly important. One cannot exist in interdependence with others while being disconnected from them. Therefore, social group membership tends to be highly selective, but also strongly binding and long lasting. Furthermore, because the self is defined by relationships to others who are encountered in specific social contexts only, interdependent self-aspects are more **concrete and context-related**. To use the abovementioned example once more: The interdependent self-definition "I am a caring husband" implies that one is a caring person in the context of one's marriage; it does however not imply that one is caring about all others in general.

One of the central goals of this RTG will be to **utilize** the distinction between independence and interdependence of the self **when studying societal change**. Take as an example the fact that many of the migrants coming to Europe come from more interdependent societies (i.e., North African or Middle Eastern countries) and should hence hold more interdependent construals of the self. In fact, these countries are often referred to as **honor cultures**, in comparison to the Northern European, so-called **dignity cultures** (e.g., Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016). Honor cultures are based on the idea that a person's worth is founded on his reputation. Therefore, people in honor cultures are concerned with the maintenance of a good reputation in general, and family reputation, social interdependence, and masculine and feminine honor codes in particular. Dignity cultures are characterized by the conviction that all individuals have an inner, inalienable worth. As compared to the more independent concept of dignity, honor is thus more interdependent in nature.

However, these findings should not be mistaken to suggest that all people in any given culture share the same construal of the self. Several researchers have linked individual's self-construal to **gender roles**, arguing that men experience contexts that foster the independent self-construal more often than women do (e.g., Cross & Madson, 1997). Stephens, Markus, and Fryberg (2012) have identified **social class** differences in models of agency, with working-class contexts reflecting a stronger emphasis on interdependence than middle-class contexts. These findings are valuable initial steps towards transcending the traditional East-West opposition when studying the social dynamics of the self in a more comprehensive way.

In sum, dissertation projects carried in the context of the RTG SELF will address the following general and overarching questions: What are the processes that are involved in the **ongoing cycle of mutual constitution** of cultures and selves? How do cultures affect the individual construal of the self, how does the self-construal affect thinking, well-being, and acting, and what are the consequences for social interaction or even social systems at large? How is the executive function of the self, i.e., agency, associated with the socio-cultural conditions of individuals' self-construal and self-maintenance in modern societies? What does this imply for future developments in these societies and differing cultures? Therefore, one of the central goals of this RTG is to bring together social scientists from **various disciplinary backgrounds** (i.e., social, developmental and health psychology, sociology, political science, and computational social science) to study these research questions. The specific research questions addressed by the dissertation projects will be generated in a bottom-up fashion by the dissertation researchers along seven project lines. We advise potential applicants to carefully read the descriptions of these project lines.

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Project Line 1: Cultures of Honor

Many migrants who are currently entering Europe come from so-called **honor cultures**, which are often distinguished from the North Western European dignity cultures. Both concepts, honor and dignity, refer to the worth of a person, yet with quite different connotations and psychological consequences (Rodriguez Mosequera, Manstead, & Fischer, 2002). Whereas dignity is an independent concept in the sense that each individual possesses it as an internal, dispositional feature, the notion of **honor is interdependent in nature**. The current universalistic notion of dignity calls for respect of an autonomous will, rejects humiliating constraints on freedom, and refers to rights rather than duties (Misztal, 2012). Honor often refers to a whole collective, such as the family, and is dependent on each individual family member's behavior. Furthermore, honor is based on the reputation that one has in the eyes of others. Hence, honor exists only in interdependence with them. One crucial psychological consequence of these differences is that honor as compared to dignity is a much more **vulnerable basis of self-worth**. A person can lose her honor if her social reputation is threatened. This is less so the case with dignity. Therefore, potential honor threats induce very strong emotional and behavioral reactions (Uskul et al., 2014) aimed at protecting one's social image.

Research has revealed that four domains or honor codes can be distinguished: morality-based, family-based, feminine, and masculine honor (Rodriguez Mosquera, 2016). The latter two are particularly relevant in the context of migration to Europe. Men are expected to protect masculine honor, which is based on being tough, strong, and being the provider and protector of the family. Feminine honor, which is based on modesty and (sexual) restraint, is expected of women. Obviously these conceptions are at least partially incompatible with the idea of gender equality, and hence both intra as well as interpersonal conflicts are likely to occur when people migrate (Vandello & Cohen, 2003).

Accordingly, understanding such conflicts is crucial to promoting gender equality. Do such conflicts initiate **changes in honor codes** and what are the underlying dynamics? What psychological consequences do these changes have, for instance, for individuals' **subjective well-being**? To be more specific, it has been shown that one's social image contributes strongly to one's general life satisfaction in honor cultures (Rodriguez Mosquera & Imada, 2013). Is this subject to change in the process of acculturation to a dignity culture (e.g., Germany)? Do migrant women who emancipate themselves from the restraints of female honor codes gain in subjective well-being—or do they instead suffer from the conflicts that these changes bring about? Are in particular female honor codes of pudeur and decorum the harder to change, the more strongly they are justified by religious beliefs? Moreover, if the importance of honor codes decreases over time, **which concepts replace them**? Can weakening honor codes be smoothly replaced by dignity in the host country? If dignity is realized in the economic sphere through the demand for living wages and equal opportunity (Hodson, 1996), how do difficulties in the socio-economic integration of immigrants affect integration into a dignity culture? Are there educational or social class differences in the trajectories of these changes? What role does religion play in this regard? Are honor codes more resistant to change if they are justified by religious convictions? Are the emotional consequences of honor threats intensified the more strongly they are grounded in religiosity? Understanding these processes is obviously of great societal relevance.

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Possible **dissertation projects on cultures of honor:**

- Does the relationship between honor, social image, and well-being decline as a function of acculturation: Declining honor—increasing well-being?

- Honor through Islam? – Do religious justifications of honor codes intensify their psychological consequences?

Potential supervisors:

Ulrich Kühnen, Sonja Drobnič, Klaus Boehnke, Mandy Boehnke

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Project Line 2: Intergenerational Identity Development

Migration studies under the rubric 'social dynamics of the self' encompass elements of cross-cultural psychology (as in the work of Berry, 1997), of the sociology of generations (as found in the seminal work of Eisenstadt, 1956) and of Bourdieu's work on habitus. Moreover, approaches from opinion dynamics (Flache & Macy, 2011; Lahav & Courtemanche, 2012) shed light on actual and possible swings in public belief systems. **Identity development** among migrants is core to analyzing the social dynamics of the self. Young people, in particular, are confronted with a multifaceted process of identity formation. Migrants (both voluntary and involuntary) have to juggle prior experience in their country of upbringing and the requirements of the social context in the receiving country, not

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forgetting the hardship of migration or flight itself. Often times, they have to do this in presence of their parents, who migrated with them. Parents are then in a way representatives of the old habitus. However, parents at the same time have to acquire new roles themselves, which, to some degree, make them dependents of their children: It is the younger generation that adjusts more rapidly to the new environment, whereas the parent generation often needs more help, including help from their adolescent children (Nauck, 1988; Sime & Fox, 2015). Studying the **identity formation of migrants and their families** means studying social dynamics of the self in a catalyzer, so-to-speak. Not only are there the dynamics of intra-individual development and the dynamics of person-environment interaction, but there are also the dynamics of relocation, i.e., of a social-context change.

Another take at the topic would be addressing **intergenerational differences in family and gender role attitudes** related to migration status and connecting this to the question of social cohesion of the host country. While it is obvious that shared values and at the same time an increasing acceptance of diversity is needed to allow for social solidarity, one important question is how different self-construals (interdependent vs. independent self) are reflected in different values and attitudes not only but also along the lines of migrants and the autochthonous population. The ultimate question then being how these differences can be bridged.

Emerging from this is a focus on the emergence of **hybrid cultural identities**. This can be explored through the formalization of individual processes of identification in an agent-based model where several individuals are assigned heterogeneous demographic characteristics and in particular traits that characterize their cultural background, e.g., nationality or birthplaces of self and parents. The central question is under what conditions cultural/national identities evolve in an exclusive and clearly separated, or hybrid and mixed way. This could be studied for the case of Turkish migrants in Germany. A conceptually related question is if a European identity in individuals evolves at the cost of national identities. Underlying is the question if there is a tendency that local identification tends to concentrate on one local level – regional, national or European – or to what degree it is maintained flexible. The agent-based models will be informed on the micro-level by research results about the psychological mechanisms of identification. On the macro-level, models will be matched against representative survey data on identity. Three members of the application group could supervise migration-related dissertation projects on such issues as value preferences, value change, political orientations, lifestyles, or interpersonal communication.

Possible **dissertation projects on intergenerational identity development**:

- Do *their* children become as *we* are? Migration and the intergenerational transmission of lifestyles.

- Intergenerational transmission of family values in the context of migration. How do German core values change due to migration?

- Modeling emergence and stability of cultural identities in diverse societies: Are there cross-cultural differences?

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Potential supervisors:

Klaus Boehnke, Mandy Boehnke, Jan Lorenz, Johannes Huinink

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Project Line 3: Self-Efficacy and Health/Well-Being

It is reasonable to conceive migration as a highly stressful experience. Furthermore, self-construal has been shown to be a crucial factor in shaping how people deal with this stress (Kühnen & Haberstroh, 2013). Given that stress in general is one of most detrimental factors for **health and subjective well-being**, dissertation projects that could be conducted within the RTG may address various aspects of the self, self-regulation and external influences on health behavior change.

As health-promoting behavior change does not only come about by the individual alone but rather in interaction with other people, not only individuals but also dyads, groups and organizations should be studied, as previous research suggests (e.g., Hirata et al., 2015; Nigg, Lippke & Maddock, 2009; Whittal & Lippke, 2016; Whittal et al., 2017). Such dissertation projects should subscribe to an approach based in health and developmental psychology that has its roots in **Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory**. Bandura (2000) proposed that self-efficacy is key for behavior initiation and maintenance. While **self-efficacy** is especially central for goal setting, enactment and attainment, it is also a reliable target in treatments (e.g., Lippke, 2017). Bandura's theory outlined in greater detail which sources impact self-efficacy expectations, and thereby specified in more detail what Baumeister (1999) called the executive function of the self.

Accordingly, dissertation projects can address various aspects of the self, **self-regulation and health behavior change**, e.g., well-being and behavior change in face of migration and globalization. For instance: How do individuals subjectively construe the stress they experience as migrants—as a threat or as a challenge? How do they deal with this stress: Do they use their relationships as coping

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resources or do they actually avoid doing so and how does this relate to interdependence/independence of the individual? Does migration impair the sense of self-efficacy, how can this sense be reestablished and what role does culture (collectivism/ individualism) play in this? In sum, the dynamics of self-efficacy changes (in the context of migration) are of much more interest than comprehensive descriptions of states of the self. This requires research methods not only using large-scale multivariate analyses but also interventional designs to actually try to help people overcoming inner temptations and external barriers, thus (re-)gaining agency for coping functionally with stress. In order to test such treatments randomized control trials of case-controlled studies will be conducted.

***Possible* dissertation projects on self-efficacy and health/well-being:**

- Does self-regulation in terms of health behavior and subjective well-being differ across cultures and time in the migration process?

- Perceived stress of migrating individuals: Are there buffering effects of lifestyle, social support, and environmental factors?

- Do interventions addressing self-efficacy and social support help migrants to cope with stress?

Potential supervisors:

Sonia Lippke, Sonja Drobnič, Mandy Boehnke, Ulrich Kühnen, Franziska Deutsch

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Project Line 4: Family Roles and Work-Life Balance

A crucial factor for gender equality, health and subjective well-being is how well people manage to balance and integrate **work and family domains** in their lives. Work and family are interdependent domains or roles with "permeable" and increasingly blurred boundaries (Olson-Buchanan & Boswell, 2006). Balancing and integrating work and family domains has been studied predominantly as an issue of personal agency in the context of given resources and demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Tan et al., 2018). It has been shown that the experience of work-family conflict is context dependent and that societal context, public policies, norms and values are intersecting with organizational cultures and daily practices, indicating a high degree of interdependence of the self (Drobnič & Guillén, 2011; Ruppanner & Huffman, 2014). A number of scholars, however, argue that individuals' strategies in terms of role integration vs. segmentation, personal qualities and enactment of identities (independent self) adjudicate upon how successfully employees manage and negotiate conflicting work and family activities in order to attain work-life balance and subjective well-being (Ramarajan & Reid, 2013; Thatcher & Zhu, 2006). Furthermore, role salience also seems to have an effect on work-family interface and well-being (Noor, 2004).

However, the impact of broader societal contexts on the emergence and on **differential salience of family- and work-roles** has been largely unexplored empirically in intercultural contexts. The salience of the role as a mother, father, spouse, or employee might change through direct interaction (role sending and role receiving) in the family or work life, but also through other social interactions, the impact of social policy or cultural conventions (Zschucke et al., 2016). In a dynamic perspective over time, there is likely to be an interrelation and a mutual impact between the salience of role identification and work-family conflict. A crucial underlying determinant for individual changes in role salience through interaction is the degree of interdependent or independent self-construal of the individual. Projects in this research area aim at linking various theoretical approaches (e.g., CCAM, Lippke, 2014) at different levels across disciplines (sociology, psychology, gerontology, management studies), and at contributing to fully integrative and comprehensive theoretical accounts that can guide work-family research.

Dissertation topics in this research area also challenge methodological approaches in the work-life research field. Existing qualitative studies often do not reach the institutional level and are rarely

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comparative. Quantitative measures are only indirect measures of agency and survey data often lack the required information. A novel framework could be implemented in an **agent-based model**, where individuals forming a society would be assigned heterogeneous characteristics, matching demographic data with regard to, e.g., gender and age. The model could show how small individual differences in the individual modes of adjusting role salience can lead to substantial differences on the macro-level, and identify driving forces behind differences in role salience among population groups.

Possible **dissertation projects on family roles and work-life balance**:

- Do blurred boundaries between work and private life matter? Role identification and perceptions of work-family conflict in transition.

- How do differences in work and family role salience emerge in social interaction and work-family conflict?

- Self-regulation in terms of work/non-work balance: Are individuals and groups affected differently across countries and under new social policies?

Potential supervisors:

Sonja Drobnič, Sonia Lippke, Jan Lorenz, Simone Scherger

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Project Line 5: Social Participation and (Early) Retirement

This project line focuses on the dynamic relationship between **employment, social participation and (early) retirement**, and on how individual agency, interdependence, independence, and self-efficacy affect the multi-dimensional transition to retirement occurring in contexts of multiple constraints. Both life course sociology and life span (health) psychology acknowledge retirement as a crucial transition in individual life courses. This applies to both the 'normal' employment exit around regular pension age and early retirement related to disability, which is often involuntarily permanent (Lippke et al., 2018). The complex transition to retirement, however, not only consists of the exit from paid employment or one's main career, but also includes the beginning or extension of other forms of social participation. Examples are family-related work (provision of long-term care, caring for grandchildren), physical activity (Cihlar & Lippke, 2018), voluntary engagement or new paid jobs, often part-time (Scherger & Vogel, 2018; Mergenthaler et al., 2018). For many women, pension age is a less relevant reference point because of the relative discontinuity of their careers and the importance of unpaid family obligations (e.g., Hokema & Scherger, 2016). As numerous other social policy-related transitions, the transition process to retirement is characterized by scope for individual agency, but also by social constraints shaped by context. Job loss, declining health, declining income, or declining health of significant others, are only the most important constraining circumstances. Faced with such constraints, individual selfregulation and self-efficacy are consequential for both social inequalities (objective and perceived) and well-being.

Projects in this area aim for the investigation of **perceived self-efficacy and agency**, not only with regard to paid employment, but also to **other forms of social participation**. Projects will also consider the potentially compensating or cumulative logic that different forms of work and social participation can have in the transition process to retirement. Potentially involuntary job loss leading to full retirement, e.g., and the related consequences for perceived self-efficacy and agency may be **compensated by taking up voluntary engagement** (Lengfeld & Ordemann, 2016). Previous research, however, shows that individuals with low social participation while working (i.e., few activities in addition to work) have a high likelihood to not compensate the decline in paid work, but to just

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participate to an even lesser degree when entering the retirement phase (Cihlar & Lippke, 2017). Dissertation projects will build on the assumption that these implications vary by gender roles and interdependence-independence as well as social context (household, income, class, or also country) and that different kinds of work and social participation go together with different opportunities to experience agency and self-efficacy. For example, compared to paid work and the provision of long-term care, volunteering rarely seems to be connected to decreases in well-being for older people, probably because it is based on (perceived) individual choice among independent individuals (Matthews & Nazroo 2015). However, is this also the case for individuals whose self-construal is more interdependent?

Early retirement related to incapacity and disability is an important special case of the theme in this research area. **Early disability retirement** implies a loss of agency in one important realm of social participation, namely paid employment, and has long-term implications for perceived self-efficacy. Looking at the dynamics of self-efficacy and potentially compensating influences in other areas of social participation (such as voluntary engagement) would add to our understanding of why disability retirement most often leads to permanent exit from the labor market, and which favorable circumstances in terms of social participation may help to buck this trend.

The questions investigated in this project line lend themselves in particular to re-analyses of longitudinal quantitative data sets (e.g., TOP[1] and SPE-III[2]), but qualitative approaches studying the subjective (retro or prospective) views on the transition to retirement, perceived constraints and self-efficacy are also suitable to gain in-depth insights of individual perceptions, perceived agency, and the resulting actions. A further fruitful approach to the projects in this line is to conduct experimental field research in the form of randomized control trials which support individuals in increasing their social participation and agency.

Possible **dissertation projects on social participation and (early) retirement:**

- How do social constraints, varying by context and gender roles, interdependence/independence, affect (perceived) self-efficacy in the transition to retirement?

- How are constraints of agency/self-efficacy negotiated and dealt with?

- How is the self regulated, when faced with early (disability) retirement?

Potential supervisors:

Simone Scherger, Sonia Lippke, Johannes Huinink

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[1] Transitions and Old Age Potential (https://www.bib.bund.de/DE/Forschung/Surveys/TOP/transitionsand-old-age-potential.html)
[2] Drittes Sozialmedizinisches Panel für Erwerbspersonen (https://www.zbv.uniluebeck.de/forschung/rehabilitative-versorgungsforschung/sektion-rehabilitation-und-arbeit/spe-iii-drittessozialmedizinisches-panel-fuer-erwerbspersonen.html)

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Project Line 6: Individualization and Social Morality

Dissertation projects in this project line will investigate the relationship between **self, social morality, and solidarity** in advanced welfare societies. As Music (2014) put it: "The values of the society we live in, and the kind of social messages we receive, have a profound impact on how self-reliant and selfish, or kind and altruistic, we are" (p. 169). This is not only true for our culture as a whole, but also for different subsystems of the society (welfare system, economy, politics, family), which activate different aspects of the self. Likewise, societal change alters the balance between different aspects of the self. According to sociological research, current social change in many Western welfare societies coincides with an **increasing relevance of independence**, individual autonomy, and competition in social interaction systems. In many conservative and social-democratic welfare systems, **social policy regulations are increasingly individualized** and privatized, while the related discourse stresses individual autonomy and responsibility (e.g., Bothfeld & Betzelt, 2011; Macnicol, 2015). These developments bring about increasing inequality.

Psychological research, in turn, has shown that higher economic inequality leads to an independent self-construal, whereas lower economic inequality leads to an interdependent selfconstrual (Sánchez-Rodríguez, Willis, & Rodríguez-Bailón, 2019). Based on the mutual constitution of culture and self, we propose that social relationships in many parts of the society are increasingly dominated by the logic of economic rationality ("**economization**") as well as individual accountability, the dictum of self-optimization and pursued individual uniqueness (dimension of "**individualization**", Scherger, 2010), with self-construal being one of the crucial mediators. Evidence from previous studies suggests that such a development can foster strategic rationality, moral decay, and antisocial

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behavior in social interaction or against third parties (Herrmann, Thöni, & Gächter, 2008; Falk & Szech, 2013; Falk & Tirole, 2016; Wang, Zhong, & Murnighan, 2014; Music, 2014; Utz 2004). However, these effects strongly depend on the very institutional conditions in social systems, such as markets, as well as on personal contexts of individuals. In any case, interdependence as being manifested in social solidarity, personal as well as institutionalized commitment could lose ground. Rational reasoning in terms of individual performance and success may even affect intimate and parent-child relationships (Wimbauer, 2012). At the same time, increasing economization and individualization may contribute to the **emergence of (especially right-wing) social movements**, which seemingly oppose economization and individualization by propagating a strong we-group with pronounced interdependent ties. These groups may be attractive to those who, faced with increasing requirements to act independently and rationally, feel overwhelmed and at the risk of failing (Rippl & Seipel, 2018).

More specifically—given that the development of the self is the basis of individual agency (I) as well as the capability to cooperate in social interaction systems by following social rules (Me) —one may ask questions like the following ones: What does the "economization" of social interaction imply for individual development as well as for welfare societies as a whole in the future? Do the moral bases of Western welfare societies crumble? Which socio-cultural and institutional settings in social interaction systems can foster the relevance of social morality and norms of cooperation in individuals' behavior?

In order to answer such questions, dissertation projects could follow a **threefold research strategy**. First, self-perception and individual decision-making under different institutional settings (e.g., market and non-market conditions) can be investigated through an online-survey applying a vignette design. Second, experiments can be conducted to study public-good cooperation in social interaction systems. For this purpose, different stimuli connected to independence and interdependence frames (priming) could be given, while accounting for heterogeneity in individual traits. Third, the relationships between features of, or changes in, different welfare systems (or other subsystems) and the discussed dimensions of the self could be studied based on suitable (secondary) survey data.

Possible **dissertation projects on individualization and social morality:**

- Does fostering interdependence also foster pro-sociality? Investigating socio-cultural and institutional factors.

- What effects do institutional and discursive economization as well as individualization (e.g., in the area of welfare, or other areas) have on the independence-interdependence dimension of the self? Tracing changes and (or) comparing societies.

Potential supervisors:

Simone Scherger, Franziska Deutsch, Johannes Huinink, Ulrich Kühnen

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Project Line 7: Collective Identities in Transition

Dissertation projects in this project line will investigate the consequences of migration for **collective identities**. Growing economic, socio-cultural and political globalization pressures on European countries and their citizens have been leading to the polarization of citizens into groups of winners and losers who support antagonistic positions towards the opening up of national borders and on a variety of globalization issues (Kriesi et al., 2008). Not only self-interest, but also identities stand at the core of this societal conflict in Europe (Teney et al., 2014). **Growing denationalization** is indeed leading to a shift in the salience of collective identities, which, in turn, further polarize citizens. On the one hand, identification with existing constitutive communities, such as national identities,

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becomes more salient among the segment of the population that sees the opening of national borders as a threat to their life chances, as they consider their social status and security protected by the nation state and are attached to the exclusionary norms and political institutions of their national community. On the other hand, denationalization has led to the emergence of **supranational identities** endorsed by some social groups. As compared to supranational identities, identification with one's existing communities and national identities can be considered to be more interdependent in nature, in that social ties are at least subjectively closer and more exclusive. What is the impact of this societal polarization along a national-supranational identification dimension on **social cohesion**?

Potential dissertation projects would investigate the effects of this shift in collective identification and its resulting societal polarization on social cohesion. One possible operationalization of social cohesion has been offered by the **Bertelsmann Social Cohesion Radar** (PI Klaus Boehnke), which assesses three main domains: social relations; connectedness, and focus on the common good (Dragolov et al., 2015). The empirical part of these projects would be based on secondary international survey data such as, e.g., Eurobarometer data to assess the polarization of the European population along this national-supranational identification dimension and its impact on social cohesion. Since Wave 8, the core module of the ESS also encompasses one item each on national vs. supra-national attachment (How emotionally attached to [country] are you? How emotionally attached to Europe are you?), included after a multi-year initiative of Boehnke et al. (2016). The dissertation projects will also benefit from the first results of DFG funded Open Research Area (ORA) project "Towards realistic computational models of social influence" which Klaus Boehnke and Jan Lorenz which started in 2019 together with partners in the Netherlands, France and the United Kingdom. Their part is to analyse polarization on many dimensions based on data from the European Social Survey and use it to refine agent-based models of social influence. Furthermore, survey experiments would be conducted to provide a more nuanced assessment of the link between this polarization and the various dimensions of social cohesion.

Changing degrees of denationalization and rising societal polarization have furthermore given rise to alienation from the democratic political system and loss of trust accordingly. The gap between formal democratic institutions and people's personal experience seems to widen; populist movements and political parties have been gaining momentum and are mobilizing significant parts of the electorate along the identity divide (Goodhart, 2017). Dissertation projects addressing this **democratic disconnect** might link political culture research with concepts from political psychology, aiming to better understand how growing societal polarization affects the subjective dimension of politics – the psychological manifestation of a political system – and its interplay with society and the political system. One goal of this RTG is to study how processes on the individual level construct, shape and change social structure on the macro level. To do so, agent-based models could be derived by taking psychological mechanisms of self-construal and by implementing them in a multi-agent simulation. The macroscopic social structure which these models bring about could then be compared to real-world data from social surveys.

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Possible **dissertation projects on collective identities in transition:**

- What impact do national vs. supranational identifications have on social relations (intactness of social networks, general trust, acceptance of diversity) in Europe?
- How does supranational identification affect connectedness with social entities (place identification, trust in institutions, perceived social justice) in Europe?
- National-supranational identification and its impact on people's focus on the common good (solidarity and helpfulness, acceptance of basic rules, political and civil society participation) in Europe

Potential supervisors:

Franziska Deutsch, Klaus Boehnke, Jan Lorenz, Mandy Boehnke

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