Deviance or Uniqueness, Harmony or Conformity? A Cultural Analysis

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Uniqueness has positive connotations of freedom and independence in American culture, whereas conformity has positive connotations of connectedness and harmony in East Asian culture. The present research examined how these cultural values and individual preferences for uniqueness and conformity influence each other. In Studies 1 and 2, East Asian and European American preferences for uniqueness were measured using abstract figures. In Study 3, the choice of pens by East Asians and European Americans was examined as a function of whether the pen appeared unique. In Study 4, Korean and American magazine ads were analyzed with a focus on themes of conformity and uniqueness. In all studies, East Asians preferred targets that represented conformity, whereas European Americans preferred targets that represented uniqueness. The results highlight the relationship between individual preference and the adoption and perpetuation of cultural values.

If a person orders a decaffeinated cappuccino with nonfat milk in a café in San Francisco, he or she can feel good about having a preference that is not exactly regular. That person can feel right about being able to get the drink exactly the way he or she wants it and will be vindicated as the waiter brings the precise drink ordered without comment or question. In the United States, drinking a decaffeinated cappuccino with nonfat milk feels as good as drinking a regular cup of coffee, perhaps even better. The best taste is one's individualized taste, and being sure of one's own particular taste contributes to being an appropriate person in this cultural context.

If a person orders the same drink—a decaffeinated cappuccino with nonfat milk—in a café in Seoul, however, he or she may feel strange about being the only person who is getting this specialized beverage. That person will face others who are likely to be forming the impression that he or she is a person who does not get along with the group very well, and, moreover, that person will have to confront a waiter who may be annoyed at the request. Eventually, the person may even be humbled by the verdict that the café cannot make this idiosyncratic drink just for her. In this Korean cultural context, it does not feel right or good to drink a cup of decaffeinated cappuccino with nonfat milk. In Korea, the normal, regular, and traditional are usually the best tastes for the individual, and a particular taste that differs from the "right" taste is typically taken to be bad taste.

During the past decade it has become possible to order espresso or cappuccino in almost any urban capital in the world. This increasingly commonplace behavior is similar everywhere in that it results in a person obtaining a hot, bitter liquid. Yet, ordering a coffee does much more than satisfy thirst or taste. It is also an act of meaning (Bruner, 1990), and this same act has different meanings and brings different consequences, depending on the cultural context in which the act takes place.[1] Acting involves representing stimuli and responding to them, but, more broadly, it also involves the encounter of a "meaning-making subject and a culturally conventionalized object-world" (Shore, 1991, p. 10). The psychological experience associated with ordering a coffee depends on the cultural context; the nature of this experience is shaped and maintained by the specific nature of people's relationships with others in their relevant communities. In turn, people acting in concert with one another continually generate, foster, and transform these particular cultural contexts. People and their contexts cannot be separated from one another. Rather, both the person and the context exist only with the other in a process of mutual constitution (Bruner, 1990; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997; Shweder, 1995; Shweder & Sullivan, 1990).

In the present research, we use the general idea of the mutual constitution of person and cultural context to understand how values, meanings, practices, and individual psychological tendencies like preferences influence each other within the specific domain of perceptions of uniqueness and conformity. We examine

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[1] In this article, we will use the term *act* or *action* instead of *behavior* because action implies intentionality, unlike behavior (Bruner, 1990).

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this mutual influence at varying levels of analysis, from individual perception to social interaction to public messages. More specifically, we examine how the collective understandings of the very act of following norms and individual preferences for conformity and uniqueness make each other up in mainstream American and East Asian cultural contexts. We suggest that depending on the cultural context, "uniqueness" can be "deviance" and "conformity" can be "harmony."

Deviance in East Asia is Uniqueness in the United States

According to *Random House Webster's College Dictionary* (1992), the word *uniqueness* means the only one of a given kind, and the word *conformity* means an action in accord with prevailing social standards, attitudes, practices, and the like. The acts of rejecting or following norms do not carry any inherent valence; it is the cultural context that provides the connotation and determines whether an act will be understood and experienced as good or bad (Bruner, 1990). In a cultural context other than the mainstream American one, uniqueness and conformity may well hold connotations opposite to those in the American cultural context.

East Asian cultural contexts emphasize harmony and individual responsibility to groups (Fiske et al., 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1991b; Markus et al., 1997; Smith & Bond, 1993; Triandis, 1995). In these contexts, people are taught to be true to their traditions and to be responsive to standards of proper behavior without emphasizing a private self that is separate from the social context (Fiske et al., 1998; Markus & Kitayama, 1994). In many East Asian cultural contexts, there is an abiding fear of being on one's own, of being separated or disconnected from the group; a desire for independence is cast as unnatural and immature (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). In many East Asian cultural contexts, following norms is a core cultural goal that fosters group harmony and follows the collectivistic cultural tradition (Hsu, 1948; Yang, 1981). Within this tradition, tight in-group solidarity is not possible unless members are willing to sacrifice their individual opinions when they are in conflict with the group, and an attempt to assert one's individuality is often considered a disruption to group solidarity. The willingness to integrate or to adjust one's self to group norms is indispensable to the progress of the group. In East Asian cultural contexts, from philosophy and ideology to the interpersonal interactions that make up daily life, the value of conformity is repeatedly emphasized. For example, the Korean word for conformity (순응) has a positive connotation, meaning maturity and inner strength. One of the most important virtues emphasized throughout Chinese history is the notion of centeredness and harmony (中和), which refers to keeping balance and harmony within the group (Uno, 1991). Keeping balance and harmony among extremes without being skewed or biased has been respected as one of the highest virtues in Chinese culture since the Yao and Shun era (2357–2205 BC), and it was also considered to be a very important virtue by Confucius (Uno, 1991).

One of the most important goals of East Asian parenting and education is to make children obedient to elders, tradition, and social norms (Chao, 1994; Crystal, 1994; Langfeldt, 1992; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992; Stropes-Roe & Cochrane, 1990; White & LeVine, 1986). It is crucial for many East Asians to do what they are supposed to do at any given age and to fulfill their social duty; East Asians experience life satisfaction because they are doing what they should be doing according to social norms (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). Therefore, most people in East Asian cultural contexts actively and openly follow norms and are not shamed or bothered by this fact. It is not that they conform because they experience social pressure to conform but that they actively like to conform in the sense of being connected to others, and being connected to others has positive behavioral consequences in this context. For example, research has shown that East Asian children, in comparison with European American children, were more motivated to work longer on a puzzle when the puzzle was selected by their in-group members than when the puzzle was chosen by themselves (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Indeed, being in tune with group norms is a duty and a moral obligation of the responsible and mature person (Lebra, 1992; Markus, Kitayama, & Heiman, 1996; Rohlen, 1991). For East Asians, following norms validates the self as a good person. Therefore, people follow the norm to follow norms.

In contrast, the most important American cultural values include freedom and individual rights (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Spindler & Spindler, 1990), as highlighted by the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. *Freedom* is defined in America as being able to choose for oneself (Wierzbicka, 1997). People repeatedly hear messages that they are responsible for their own fate. They should follow their own conscience, be true to themselves, and make their own choices. In the individualist cultural context of America, it is believed that attitudes, feelings, and behaviors should be determined by the self without being controlled by any external cause (Markus et al., 1997). Popular American movies often show the struggle and victory of an individual against powerful institutions and absurd convention (e.g., *Good Will Hunting, Dead Poets' Society, The Truman Show*). Conformity—typically cast as giving in to collective pressure—is considered an undesirable tendency that directly violates core cultural ideals and threatens the self as a worthy individual, whereas uniqueness symbolizes the assertion of individuality and self-worth in the face of the collective.

For the most part, in American social psychological research reflecting the general American cultural ideals, the negative aspects of conformity are emphasized. The notion of conformity as a willing change of the individual to accommodate the group is virtually nonexistent in the American literature. If it occurs at all, it is cast somewhat perjoratively as passive coping or secondary control (e.g., Heckausen & Shulz, 1995; Scheier & Carver, 1987). Although the tendency to create and conform to norms is acknowledged to be a part of "human nature" and even as an absolutely necessary integrative mechanism in maintaining society (e.g., Sherif, 1936), especially in attitude formation and socialization, the discussion of conformity and group influence in American social psychology is generally based on the assumption that group behavior compromises individual behavior (Sampson, 1988). Groups are most often discussed in terms of pressure, coercion, regression, irrationality, and their power to deindividuate and distort reality (e.g., Asch, 1952; Festinger, 1950; Janis, 1972; Schachter, 1951; Zimbardo, 1969). Moreover, social psychology has emphasized the individual's desire to differentiate oneself from others (see Snyder & Fromkin, 1980, for a review), although the idea that the preferred level of uniqueness is tied to the specific

nature of the social context has been recognized (e.g., Brewer, 1991).

For Americans, in many social situations conformity to group norms is associated with relinquishing one's autonomy, not being in control, and being pushed around. People in America often hear the message that they should not conform but should go their own way, chart their own course, and march to the beat of a different drummer. Consequently, people follow the norm not to follow norms.

Although conformity, as a direct manifestation of certain cultural ideals, has been of interest to researchers in relation to cultures for a long time (e.g., Berry, 1967; Milgram, 1961), the research has been focused on a specific aspect of conformity, Asch's (1952, 1956) line judgment task. Within this paradigm, results generally support the lay perception of the cultural difference in conformity, as East Asians exhibit a stronger tendency to conform than Americans do (Huang & Harris, 1973; Meade & Barnard, 1973). However, as reviewed in Bond and Smith (1996), there are studies that both support and contradict this finding.

These cultural attitudes of conformity and uniqueness are indirectly seen in studies on cultural differences in self-perception as well. Whereas Americans tend to show illusions of specialness and seek out their sources of uniqueness, East Asians tend to show illusions of ordinariness and see themselves as similar to others (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991a). How the culture evaluates individual deviation from norms determines the individuals' view on what it means to be different from others, and, in turn, these views shape individual self-perception. East Asians think of themselves as similar to others, because they participate in contexts where being like others is considered desirable and positive, and Americans think of themselves as unique, because they engage in contexts in which being different than others is considered desirable and positive.

Overview

In the present set of studies we use the case of cultural attitudes toward conformity and uniqueness to illustrate the process of mutual constitution, looking specifically at the relationship between cultural values and individual preference. We sampled a few social events to examine how the core cultural ideas and values about independence in American cultural context and interdependence in East Asian cultural context are expressed and fostered in everyday public messages, social interactions, and individual preferences.

The results of a few studies on cultural variation in values using multimethod probes (e.g., Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990) suggest that more implicit measures may be a better gauge of cultural values than more explicit self-report value surveys. When cultural values are measured by explicit methods, participants often give responses that are contrary to those predicted; for example, participants from more collectivistic cultures endorsed more individualistic values than did participants from more individualistic cultures (Peng et al., 1997; Triandis et al., 1990). However, when cultural values are measured by implicit methods, participants are more likely to give the responses consistent with the theorized cultural values. Peng et al. (1997) explained that this divergence between measures is because participants' reports about values can be affected by factors such as cultural differences in the meaning of particular value terms as well as the possibility that some value judgments are based on social comparison or deprivation rather than on any "direct reading" of personal preferences.

Moreover, in our studies, we sought to demonstrate that the East Asian tendency to conform is not just individual compliance in the face of group pressure, as many American demonstrations of conformity are commonly understood. Thus, we designed seemingly trivial tasks in which the normative response was not immediately obvious and explicit social pressure was absent.

In Studies 1 and 2, we created a set of abstract targets that appeared to be either different from or the same as others and had Americans and East Asians (Chinese Americans in Study 1 and Koreans in Study 2) make preference judgments between the two kinds of figures. In Study 3, we created a social episode in which individuals had to make a choice between a target that was just like other targets and a target that was different from other targets and then examined the choices made by the American and East Asian (Korean and Chinese) participants. In Study 4, to illustrate the role of institutions in reflecting and fostering core cultural values and ideas, we compared messages that appeared in American and Korean magazine advertisements, examining them for themes of conformity and uniqueness. In all four studies, we anticipated that consistent with the values and practices of the respective cultures, East Asians would show a preference for conformity and Americans would show a preference for uniqueness.

Study 1

Study 1 was designed to measure individual preferences toward conformity and uniqueness on an abstract level. Our goal was to test the idea that East Asian and American individual preferences indeed diverge because of the differing cultural ideas in East Asia and America on conformity and uniqueness. In this study, we created a novel task unfamiliar to people from both cultures so that the task would hold similar meanings across the two cultures. Abstract figures were presented as stimuli to Chinese American and European American high school students. The figures were presented as groups of subfigures, of which one or more deviated from the rest, and liking for the subfigures, including both unique figures and nonunique figures, was measured.

In Study 1, it was hypothesized that American and East Asian cultural differences in ideas about conformity and uniqueness would be expressed in preference judgments on the abstract figures, showing that participants from an American cultural context would like unique figures more than participants from an East Asian cultural context would.

Method

Participants. Fifty-two European American and 31 Chinese American students from a high school near Palo Alto, California, filled out a questionnaire. We categorized participants as either European American or Chinese American on the basis of information beyond self-identified ethnicity. Participants who indicated that they were European Americans, with both parents born in the United States, and who spoke English in their homes were categorized as European Americans, and participants who indicated that they were Asian Americans, with both parents born in China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong), and who spoke any dialect of Chinese in their homes were categorized as Chinese Americans. Fifty of the 52

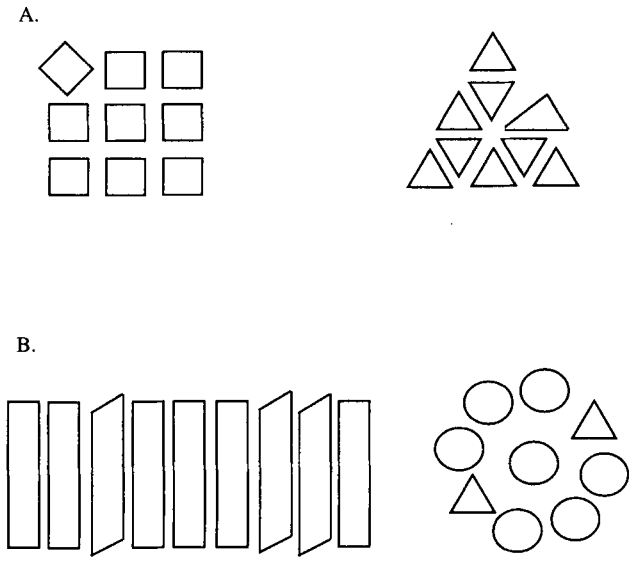

Figure 1. Examples of the abstract figures. A: Figures with unique subfigure. B: Figures with plural minority subfigures.

European Americans were born in the United States, and the mean age at which the Chinese Americans came to the United States was 5.00 years (SD = 5.79). There were 27 boys (16 European Americans and 11 Chinese Americans) and 56 girls (36 European Americans and 20 Chinese Americans), and the mean age for participants was 16.50 years (16.83 years for European Americans and 16.23 years for Chinese Americans).

Materials. The questionnaire contained 35 abstract figures composed of 9 subfigures (see Figure 1). Participants were instructed to rank each of the 9 subfigures within each figure in the order of their preference by numbering them from 1 (*favorite*) to 9 (*least favorite*), and an example was given. In the questionnaire, two types of figures were created. Among the 35 figures, there were 20 figures with 8 identical subfigures and 1 subfigure that differed from the rest in terms of shape, direction, or position (see Figure 1A); the singular minority subfigures are referred to as the *unique* subfigure. Characteristics of subfigures (e.g., shape, direction, and position) were counterbalanced in those 20 figures to ensure that participants' preferences were due to their preference for uniqueness or conformity, not their preferences for any other particular characteristics of the subfigures. The other 15 figures followed the same basic pattern, but each of these had 2, 3, or 4 subfigures that differed from the rest rather than just one different subfigure (Figure 1B); these minority subfigures are referred to as the *plural minority* subfigures. The rest of the subfigures are referred to as the *majority* subfigures. The order of figures was counterbalanced in two forms.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants indicated their gender, age, ethnicity, language spoken at home, age at which they immigrated to the United States (if applicable), and place of parents' birth.

Procedure. Questionnaires were distributed by teachers who were unaware of the purpose or hypothesis of the study and completed in classes of approximately 30 students. It took about 20 min for participants to complete the questionnaires.

Results

Preference scores. Recall that participants ranked each of the 9 subfigures within a figure from 1 to 9. In the analysis, scores were reversed so that larger numbers indicated greater liking, ranging from 1 (*least liking*) to 9 (*most liking*). For the 20 figures containing unique subfigures, we obtained a preference score for the unique subfigures by averaging the numbers written on each of the unique subfigures. The preference score for the plural minority subfigures was computed in the same way, but the score had to be rescaled. For the plural minority subfigures, the instructions did not allow participants to use the same number more than once. For example, even if a participant liked all 3 plural minority subfigures in a figure equally, the best rankings the participant could give to these three subfigures were 1, 2, and 3. Thus, in averaging these three numbers to yield the participant's preference score for these plural minority subfigures, the extremity of the score would be reduced. In the example where there are 3 plural minority subfigures in a figure, the range of possible scores is 2 to 8, not 1 to 9. Thus, preference scores for plural minority subfigures were rescaled to be on the 1-to-9 scale so that comparisons could be made between unique subfigures and minority subfigures.

Because participants could not repeat the same number for more than one subfigure, greater liking for certain subfigures automatically meant lesser liking for the rest of the subfigures. In other words, preference scores for the majority subfigures are inversely related to the preference scores for the minority subfigures. Thus, to avoid redundancy, we do not report preference scores for majority subfigures.

Cultural difference in preference. We hypothesized that European American participants would show a stronger preference for unique and plural minority subfigures than would Chinese American participants. This hypothesis was supported by the results. Participants' gender did not have any effect on the results.

We subjected the preference scores to a 2 (culture: European American vs. Chinese American) × 2 (subfigure ratio: unique subfigure vs. plural minority subfigure) analysis of variance (ANOVA), with subfigure ratio serving as a within-subjects variable. Overall, European Americans liked subfigures that were in the minority, including both unique and plural minority subfigures, more than Chinese Americans did, $F(1, 67) = 5.55$, $p < .05$. However, this main effect is qualified by a marginal Culture × Subfigure Ratio interaction, $F(1, 67) = 3.74$, $p < .06$ (see Figure 2). According to planned comparisons, liking differed only for the unique subfigures (European American M = 6.29, SD = 1.93;

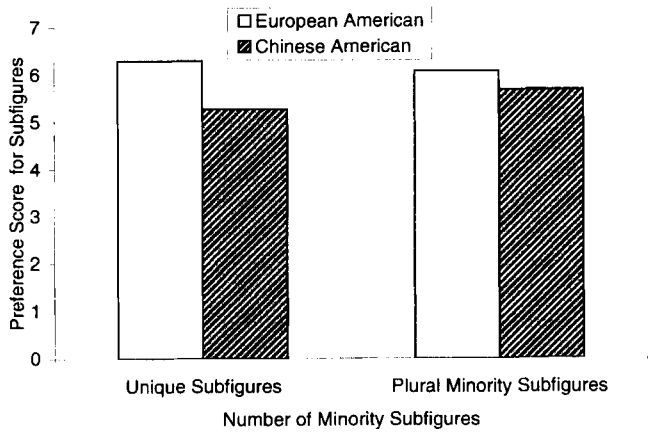

Figure 2. Mean preference score (ranging from 1, *least liking*, to 9, *most liking*) for unique subfigures and plural minority subfigures as a function of participants' culture (European American vs. Chinese American).

Chinese American $M = 5.27$, $SD = 2.06$), $t(77) = 2.24$, $p < .05$. When a figure had plural minority subfigures, European and Chinese Americans (Ms = 6.07 and 5.68, SDs = 1.19 and 1.38, respectively) did not differ in their preferences, $t(67) = 1.27$, *ns*.

Finally, we compared the means of each cultural group's liking for the unique subfigures with the midpoint (5) to test the null hypothesis that participants ranked the subfigures randomly. The analysis indicated that European Americans' liking of the unique subfigure was greater than the midpoint, $t(48) = 4.63$, $p < .01$, but Chinese Americans' liking did not differ from the midpoint, $t(31) = 0.72$, *ns*.

Discussion

The results show that European American participants liked the unique subfigures more than Chinese American participants did. More specifically, European American participants generally had a more positive view of the minority subfigures than did Chinese American participants, but the cultural difference was particularly pronounced with the subfigures that appeared unique. Moreover, the comparisons of group liking means for unique subfigures with the midpoint indicate that European American participants not only liked the unique subfigures more relative to Chinese American participants' liking but also preferred them to all other subfigures. This pattern is consistent with the American cultural emphasis on uniqueness.

Chinese American participants, however, were seemingly neutral toward unique subfigures. This may be because their dislike for uniqueness has been somewhat tempered, as they were mostly raised in the American cultural context. Yet, one might argue that this seemingly neutral attitude is a result of random responses driven by Chinese American participants' lack of preference rather than their liking, because individual preferences and choice are not emphasized to the same extent in East Asian cultural contexts (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

Thus, although the results from Study 1 provided support for the hypothesis, it seemed necessary to replicate the study with East Asians who live within an East Asian cultural context, where the attitudes toward uniqueness should be less ambivalent.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to replicate the results of Study 1 for three reasons. First, to capture a clearer preference pattern of each culture, it was necessary to collect data from participants who were enculturated within each cultural context. Second, we sought to generalize the results of Study 1 from Chinese and Asian Americans to the more broad category of East Asians. Third, we sought to ensure the reliability of the measure, as it is a novel measure designed specifically for this research.

Method

Participants. Thirty-eight European American students (17 men and 21 women) from Stanford University and 38 Korean students (14 men and 24 women) from Soongsil University in Seoul, South Korea, filled out the questionnaire. Both groups were recruited from psychology classes. The mean age for participants was 21.18 years ($SD = 2.60$) for Korean students and 19.08 years ($SD = 1.34$) for American students.[2]

Materials. The questionnaire was exactly the same as the questionnaire in Study 1, except it was shortened to 30 items. The new questionnaire contained 15 figures with unique subfigures and 15 figures with plural minority subfigures.

The instructions for completing the questionnaire were in English for American students and in Korean for Korean students. The instructions were written in English first and translated into Korean using the back-translation method.

Procedure. In Korea, questionnaires were administered in a class by the instructor, who was unaware of the purpose or hypothesis of the study. In the United States, questionnaires were administered to groups of 8 to 10 participants by an experimenter who was also unaware of the purpose or hypothesis of the study. It took about 15 min for participants to complete the study.

Results

Preference scores for unique subfigures were computed in the same manner as they were in Study 1. Preference scores for the plural minority subfigures were computed in the same way, and they were also rescaled to be on the 1-to-9 scale. Again, scores were reversed so larger numbers indicated greater liking and smaller numbers indicated less liking.

Again, as in Study 1, preference scores for majority subfigures are not reported to avoid redundancy, because the preference scores for the majority are inversely related to the preference scores for the minority subfigures. We again hypothesized that European American participants would like the unique subfigures more than Korean participants would, and the hypothesis was confirmed. Participants' gender did not have any effect on the results.

We subjected the preference scores to a 2 (culture: European American vs. Korean) × 2 (subfigure ratio: unique subfigure vs. plural minority subfigure) ANOVA, with subfigure ratio serving as a within-subjects variable. Overall, European Americans liked minority subfigures more than Koreans did, $F(1, 69) = 22.28$, $p < .01$. Again, there was a Culture × Subfigure Ratio interaction, $F(1, 69) = 4.32$, $p < .05$. However, unlike Study 1, there was a strong cultural difference for both unique and plural minority subfigures. Planned comparisons showed that liking for the unique subfigures differed between European Americans ($M = 5.88$, $SD = 2.11$) and Koreans ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.91$), $t(74) = 4.55$, $p < .01$. Liking for the plural minority subfigures also differed, although to a lesser degree, between European Americans and Koreans (Ms = 5.63 and 4.33, SDs = 1.51 and 1.46, respectively), $t(69) = 3.68$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 3).

Finally, when the means of liking were compared with the midpoint (5), the analyses showed that European Americans' liking for the unique subfigures was greater than the midpoint, $t(35) = 2.50$, $p < .02$, whereas Koreans' liking for the unique subfigures was less than the midpoint, $t(37) = 3.84$, $p < .01$.

Discussion

The results of this study support the hypothesis that European American and East Asian preference judgments are heavily influenced by their cultural perspectives toward conformity and uniqueness. Koreans not only liked the unique subfigures less than

[2] Covarying out age does not affect the results.

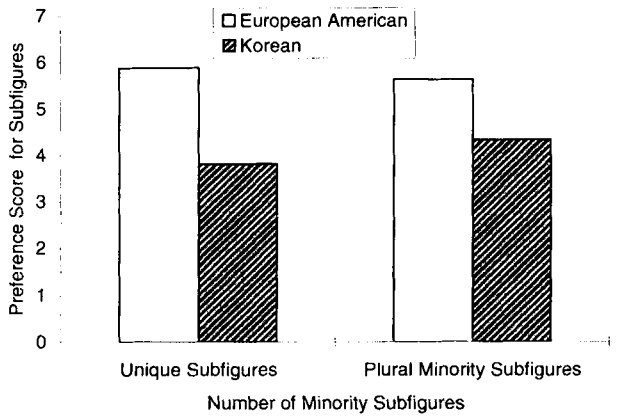

Figure 3. Mean preference score (ranging from 1, *least liking*, to 9, *most liking*) for unique subfigures and plural minority subfigures as a function of participants' culture (European American vs. Korean).

European Americans did, but they also preferred the majority subfigures to the unique subfigures, whereas European Americans preferred the unique subfigures to the majority subfigures. As in Study 1, the cultural difference was more pronounced when a subfigure appeared to be unique than when it appeared to be one part of a plural minority. It appears that for Americans, unique subfigures symbolize the ultimate specialness of individuality, whereas for Koreans, unique subfigures symbolize the disturbance of harmony.

The participants' preference pattern was indeed consistent with the cultural values, even though there was no visible pressure and no obvious consequence of their judgments. Thus, we can assume that participants' judgments reflected their genuine preferences rather than their submission to social pressure. Although the cultural attitudes toward conformity and uniqueness are formed in relation to social events, they influence judgments even on abstract targets with no obvious social context. Cultural values are appropriated by individuals as their own ideas and preferences, and these ideas and preferences influence the perception even of simple abstract figures.

Given that individual preferences are heavily influenced by cultural values, the next question to ask is how these preferences are manifested through overt actions. Study 3 is designed to address the question.

Study 3

In Study 3, we designed a social episode to test how preferences for conformity and uniqueness are manifested through individual action: choice, the very action that expresses preference. Choice is a useful act to study across cultures. Situations in which individuals get to choose between two kinds of objects occur commonly in both American and East Asian cultures, and no one is confused about the meaning of the act.

In this study, participants were asked to choose one pen from a group of five pens. The purpose was to test how the appearance of an object—whether it appeared as part of a minority or majority in relation to other objects—would affect the pattern of choices by people from American or East Asian cultural contexts. It was hypothesized that cultural differences in individual preferences tested in Study 1 and 2 would be expressed through choice: Americans would choose objects that are different from others, whereas East Asians would choose objects that are the same as others. Moreover, we manipulated the ratio of the minority and majority objects. We predicted that regardless of the ratio, people's choice would be determined by the labels that an object acquires: either uncommon or common.

Method

Participants. Participants were recruited at the San Francisco International Airport, in the cafeteria, at the gates, and in the waiting areas. On the basis of demographic information gathered, participants who indicated that they were European Americans, were born in the United States, were U.S. citizens, and spoke English at home were categorized as Americans, and participants who indicated that they were Asians, were born in China (including Taiwan and Hong Kong) or in Korea, were citizens of China or Korea, and spoke any dialect of Chinese or Korean at home were categorized as East Asians. Twenty-seven participants were European Americans (15 men and 12 women, mean age = 34.68 years) and 29 participants were East Asians (17 men and 12 women, mean age = 30.32 years). The East Asian group included 13 Chinese and 16 Koreans.

Materials. This study measured participants' choice patterns using pens as target objects to choose. The pens were Nocks Ball pens manufactured by the Sakura company in Japan, which were sold in the United States for 85¢ each. These pens were sold in five different barrel colors, but they had the same design and the same quality, and all had black ink. In the present study, we selected orange and light green pens to be used as stimuli.[3]

Procedure. First, a research assistant who was unaware of the hypothesis approached a person without a companion and asked the person to fill out a short questionnaire, which served as a filler activity, and told the person that he or she would receive a pen as a gift.[4] If the person agreed, the research assistant handed the person a questionnaire. After the participant returned the completed questionnaire, a gift pen was offered in the following manner. Pens were always presented in a group of five, and, among the five, there was at least one pen with a different color from the rest. The research assistant kept equally large numbers of pens of both colors in one bag and randomly picked up five pens from the bag without looking, to make the situation look as natural as possible. When the research assistant happened to pick five pens of the same color, he or she was instructed to drop one and get a pen with the other color.[5] Otherwise, the research assistant presented what he or she had picked up randomly to participants. Because there were five pens being presented, including two different colors inevitably created an imbalance in numbers between colors and yielded two experimental conditions: a one–four condition and a two–three condition. When a participant made a choice, the experimenter recorded the condition and the choice.

Results

We hypothesized that the presentation of the pens would affect participants' choices and that the cultural difference in attitudes toward uniqueness and conformity between Americans and East

[3] These colors were chosen on the basis of pretest results in which both colors were rated equally preferable.

[4] The questionnaire was a short version (eight items) of the questionnaire in Studies 1 and 2.

[5] To avoid this situation, we kept a large number of pens of each color in the bags, and this situation almost never happened.

Asians would be expressed in their choices. A 2 (culture: East Asian vs. European American) × 2 (condition: one–four vs. two–three) × 2 (choice: uncommon color vs. common color) mixed loglinear test was used in the analysis. The gender of the participants from either culture had no effect on the results. As hypothesized, there was a significant Culture × Choice interaction. Whether a pen was the more common or more uncommon color had a clear influence on participants' preferences for pens; across both pen proportion conditions, Americans (74%) chose the pen of the more uncommon color more often than did East Asians (24%), $\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 15.19, p < .01$ (see Figure 4).[6]

More specifically, in the one–four condition, in which one pen among the five pens presented had a different color, Americans picked the unique color over the common color more frequently (77% for the unique color), whereas East Asians picked the unique color over the common color less frequently (31% for the unique color), $\chi^2(1, N = 29) = 5.99, p < .05$. In the two–three condition, Americans picked the more uncommon color to a greater extent (71% for the more uncommon color), and East Asians picked the more uncommon color to a lesser extent (15% for the more uncommon color), $\chi^2(1, N = 27) = 8.57, p < .01$ (see Figure 4).

The loglinear test revealed neither a three-way interaction, $\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 0.24$, *ns*, nor a Condition × Choice interaction, $\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 0.88$, *ns*. Thus, the responses of East Asians and Americans were not affected by whether the pens were offered in a one–four or two–three presentation. It seems that once the color of a pen was represented as more uncommon or more common, the proportions of each color did not affect participants' response.

Also, a 2 (culture: East Asian vs. European American) × 2 (color: orange vs. light green) × 2 (choice: uncommon color vs. common color) mixed loglinear test was conducted to examine the possible effect of color. There was no three-way interaction, $\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 0.02$, *ns*, and no two-way interaction that involved color: For Color × Culture, $\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 0.10$, *ns*, and for Color × Choice, $\chi^2(1, N = 56) = 0.38$, *ns*. Thus, the actual color of the pens did not have any effect on participants' responses.[7]

The results show that what each culture values was consistent with what individuals picked. Study 3 supports the idea that cultural preference for conformity or uniqueness and individual choices for those qualities are interconnected; people seemed to genuinely like what their culture values. However, several alternative explanations besides the cultural preference explanation can be given for the results.

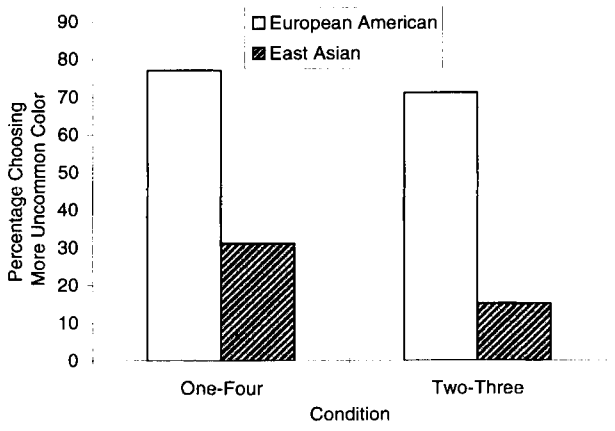

Figure 4. Percentage of participants choosing a more uncommon color as a function of participants' culture and condition.

First, East Asians might have chosen the more common color more frequently not because they preferred the more common color but because they did not have a strong preference. If they did not care, they would have picked pens randomly rather than choosing. If this was the case, they would more likely pick a pen of the more common color than a pen of the more uncommon color, because by definition there is a higher probability of picking a pen of a more common color than of a more uncommon color. However, the number of more uncommon-colored pens presented did not affect the choice pattern of either East Asians or Americans, as shown by the lack of a three-way interaction involving culture, condition, and choice. Thus, the possibility that East Asians made random choices seems less likely than the cultural preference explanation.

Second, perhaps East Asians were likely to choose the pen with the more common color because they did not want to leave the next person with no choice, a consideration for the other that is expected in many East Asian cultural contexts. Although this might explain some of the East Asian tendency to choose the most common color, this cannot explain all the results. If this was the case, we should expect East Asians to choose the more uncommon color less frequently when there is only one pen with different color left than when there are two pens with the more uncommon color in which the concern is much less relevant. However, this was not the case. Regardless of number of pens of the more uncommon color, East Asians chose the more common color. Moreover, the way research assistants picked the five pens from a large bag indirectly indicated to participants that there were many more pens left. Thus, this explanation seems less compelling than the cultural preference explanation.

Third, perhaps participants saw the fewer number of a certain color and thought that the color was more popular and all gone. Thus, by choosing a more uncommon color, participants meant to choose a more popular color, and by choosing a more common color, they meant to choose a less popular color. Again, though, this explanation does not seem compelling given the absence of difference across the one–four condition and the two–three condition, and in the procedural details it was made clear that there were many more pens of unknown colors left. Given the evidence, it seems that the best explanation is that these choices reflect participants' preference patterns that are shaped by their cultural values.

[6] At first, Koreans and Chinese were compared with each other, and, because there were no significant differences between these groups, they were combined into one group, East Asians, and compared with Americans.

[7] However, when we informally asked a few participants for the reason they chose a particular pen after they made their choice, they reported that they chose it because they liked the color. This discrepancy suggests that participants were not necessarily aware of the reason why a certain color appeared more attractive. This is consistent with well-known findings that people are not necessarily aware of the existence of the stimulus that influenced their responses (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977).

Discussion

The results demonstrate that whether a pen's color appeared to be more common or more uncommon had an impact on which color was desirable to participants. The values represented in the pattern of choices participants made in Study 3 was highly consistent with the values represented in the pattern of preferences participants showed in Studies 1 and 2. Both the pens participants chose and the figures participants preferred accorded with their cultural values. The individual choices reflect the core cultural values about conformity and uniqueness. The Americans chose the unique pen whereas the East Asians avoided the deviant pen. People build their preferences on the basis of the meaning with which the target objects are associated rather than the specific properties of the object per se (e.g., Hunt, 1955; Irwin & Gebhard, 1946; Rozin & Zellner, 1985; Zajonc, 1968). Americans who chose a more uncommon pen color and East Asians who avoided a more uncommon pen color made the choice not because they liked the color of the particular pen but because the color stood out among the group.

One's actions are expressions of cultural values through psychological processes and, at the same time, constituents of the social episodes in which one's psychological processes are shaped and cultural values are reproduced. By making a culturally appropriate choice, one accepts the culture's values as one's own and supports the maintenance of the culture's values and its institutions. By choosing a product associated with uniqueness, one supports the cultural emphasis on uniqueness. Individual thoughts and preferences become social and consequential through actions that are overt and observable. Thus, actions are the way by which cultural values are communicated to individuals and, at the same time, the way by which individuals play the role of cultural participants (Bruner, 1990; Much & Harré, 1994). If one observed an American choosing the unique pen, the American's choice most likely appears to be an expression of individual preference that is influenced by cultural values. However, if one observes 75% of Americans making the same choice, one can also understand that the preference for uniqueness is the norm, the social representation (Moscovici, 1984). Thus, the actions people engage in and the values behind the behaviors are constantly reproducing small particles of culture when they are shared by a critical mass. Without individuals who share the values and act according to the values, cultural ideas and institutions cannot be sustained.

The next question that follows from this analysis is how these cultural values captured at individual and interpersonal levels are represented at the collective level. On the basis of the findings from Studies 1, 2, and 3 demonstrating that East Asians and Americans have different preferences for conformity and uniqueness and that these ideas are shared and expressed by a majority of East Asians and Americans, the next step is to examine whether the individual preferences and actions are consistent with a collective representation, that is, the media.

Study 4

In Study 4, we analyzed one example of the public and collective representation of cultural values: themes in magazine advertisements from the United States and Korea. There are several reasons for studying themes in advertisements. First, the analysis of the messages that are generated spontaneously in natural contexts demonstrates that the preference patterns are not artificial responses to research tasks (Morris & Peng, 1994). Second, the messages in mass media in general are good examples of social representations of certain beliefs. The messages most clearly accentuate the social aspect of the representations, because by nature the messages are shared by and impact society as a whole. Third, advertising constitutes a large part of people's lives in both cultures, as individuals are exposed to advertisements nearly all the time. The average American adult is exposed to about 3,000 advertisements a day (Kakutani, 1997), and the average Korean adult is probably also exposed to a similarly large number. Thus, the purpose and the meaning of advertising are well understood and accepted as common cultural practices in both American and Korean cultures. Fourth, ads are a direct reflection of what the culture values and emphasizes (Caillat & Mueller, 1996; Gregory & Munch, 1997; Han & Shavitt, 1994). Advertisers design their advertisements to be an effective means of manipulating people's preferences and judgments; advertisers must be keen on what certain people like and what certain people do not like (Glenn, Witmeyer, & Stevenson, 1977). Any competent advertiser tries to reflect their potential consumers' preferences and, at the same time, aims at influencing their preferences. Thus, advertisements are one bridge between collective values and individual preferences, the two main foci of this research.

In this present study, we compared American and Korean magazine advertisements to specifically examine how the themes of conformity and uniqueness are used. Previously, researchers conducting a cross-cultural comparison of magazine advertisements found that Korean advertisements commonly use collectivistic appeals emphasizing relationships with others, whereas American advertisements commonly use individualistic appeals emphasizing the individual (Han & Shavitt, 1994). Thus, we hypothesized that Korean magazine advertisements would use appeals focusing on conformity, whereas American magazine advertisements would use appeals focusing on uniqueness.

Method

Materials. We coded magazine advertisements from popular Korean and American magazines that are nationally circulated in each country. Four categories of magazines from each country were selected (business, social commentary, women's, and pop culture/youth) to cover a wide range of advertisements targeted to different audience groups, and one magazine from each category was collected (see Table 1). These magazines and magazine categories were selected to maximize cross-cultural comparability of target audience, themes, and purpose of the magazines.[8] All the magazines were issued in April 1997. Every ad in each magazine that was at least one full page long was included in the analysis. This selection yielded 157 Korean advertisements and 136 American advertisements (see Table 1).

[8] One unexpected finding from the study was that matching magazine categories across cultures is not very simple. Magazine categories are organized in quite different ways in Korea and the United States. For example, Korean magazines are easier to categorize according to types of readers, whereas American magazines are easier to categorize according to magazine topics.

Table 1
Categories and Titles of Magazines With the Number of Ads Sampled From Each Magazine

Category	Country	Title	No. of ads used in study
Business	United States	*Money*	32
	Korea	주간매경 (Business Weekly)	25
Social commentary	United States	*New York Times Magazine*	31
	Korea	샘이 깊은 물 (Deep Fountain)	23
Women's	United States	*Cosmopolitan*	51
	Korea	*Working Woman*	68
Pop culture/youth	United States	*Rolling Stone*	22
	Korea	*Junior*	41

Procedure. On the basis of an analysis of a large number of Korean and American magazine advertisements over a multimonth period (Kim, Muramoto, & Markus, 1998), we constructed a coding scheme to cover various forms of appeals in advertisements that related to conformity or uniqueness. Coders made binary ratings (yes or no) indicating whether each ad possessed certain characteristics in the message and in the image. These characteristics were then grouped into seven themes. Three of the themes formed the conformity category: respect for collective values and beliefs, harmony with group norms, and following a trend. Four of the themes formed the uniqueness category: rebelling against collective values and beliefs, freedom, choice, and individual uniqueness (see Table 2 for descriptions of categories and examples). Every coder received the same written detailed coding instructions to ensure consistent coding across cultures.

Two Korean and two American graduate students at Stanford University coded the advertisements. Every coder was born and raised in his or her country of origin. Coders coded advertisements from their own culture only. Research (Han & Shavitt, 1994; Kim et al., 1998) has suggested that people from different cultural backgrounds perceive even the same ads in quite different ways. Because advertisements are developed within a specific cultural context, they can be most fully understood by its members, who have been enculturated in that context. Thus, we chose to have coders from each cultural context code only the ads from their own culture.

Among the two coders from each culture, one Korean was unaware of the hypothesis and one American was unaware of the hypothesis. Thus, when there was any disagreement between the two coders within a culture, we adopted the coding by the coder who was unaware of the hypothesis.

Results

Coder reliability. We analyzed the intercoder reliability between same-culture coders. The percentage of agreement was high for both Korean advertisements (94.51%) and American advertisements (94.00%). Also, as assessed using Cohen's coefficient of

Table 2
Coding Categories

General theme	Specific characteristics	Examples
	Conformity	
Respect for collective values and beliefs	Emphasizing tradition	"Our ginseng drink is produced according to the methods of 500-year-old tradition."
	Emphasizing and relying on traditional social roles	"Bring a fresh breeze to your wife at home."
Harmony with group norms	Promoting group well-being	"Our company is working toward building a harmonious society."
	Emphasizing group norms	"Seven out of 10 people are using this product."
Following a trend	Mentioning a trend	"Trend forecast for spring: Pastel colors!"
	Mentioning a style of celebrity	
	Uniqueness	
Rebelling against collective values and beliefs	Rejecting tradition	"Ditch the Joneses."
	Rejecting social roles	"Princess dream, pony dream. Ready for a kick-butt dream?"
Choice	Emphasizing choices	"Choose your own view."
		"Possibilities are endless."
Freedom	Emphasizing freedom	"Freedom of vodka."
		"Inspiration doesn't keep office hours."
Individual uniqueness	Focusing on being different from others	"Individualize!"
	Emphasizing individual uniqueness	"The Internet isn't for everybody. But then again, you are not everybody."

concordance, both Korean (κ = .83) and American (κ = .82) codings were reliable.

Advertisement distribution. Selecting every advertisement yielded an uneven number of ads from each magazine (e.g., there were 34 ads for the magazine *Junior,* 68 for the magazine *Cosmopolitan*). To ensure an even representation of advertisements from each magazine, we weighted samples to match the magazine with the smallest number of ads (i.e., *Rolling Stone,* with 22 ads). Thus, we analyzed the data as if both American and Korean samples each included 88 advertisements (22 each for the four categories).[9]

Cultural differences found in advertisements. In our analysis we found the themes used in advertisements from both countries to be consistent with their respective cultural values; Korean advertisements emphasized conformity themes whereas American advertisements emphasized uniqueness themes.

In analyses, we created two general themes: *conformity,* which consisted of respect for collective values and beliefs, harmony with group norms, and following a trend, and *uniqueness,* which consisted of rebelling against collective values and beliefs, freedom, choice, and individual uniqueness. The general themes were rated on a binary scale (yes or no) as to whether each ad displayed any of the specific themes. For example, any ad that had at least one of the specific themes that promoted conformity would be rated "yes," meaning that the ad used one of the conformity themes.

We subjected the coded data to a 2 (culture: American vs. Korean) × 2 (theme: conformity vs. uniqueness) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), with theme serving as a within-culture variable. There was no main effect of culture, indicating that the coding scheme did not favor one cultural scheme over the other, $F(1, 174) = 1.10$, *ns.* Overall, conformity themes were more commonly used than uniqueness themes, $F(1, 174) = 5.96$, $p < .05$. The main effect of themes was qualified by the predicted Culture × Theme interaction, $F(1, 174) = 65.99$, $p < .01$. Conformity themes were used in 95% of Korean advertisements and in 65% of American advertisements examined, whereas the uniqueness themes were used in 89% of American advertisements but in only 49% of Korean advertisements (see Figure 5). Planned comparisons between the two cultures revealed that conformity themes were used more frequently in Korean advertisements than in American advertisements, $t(174) = 5.49$, $p < .01$, and uniqueness themes were used more frequently in American advertisements than in Korean advertisements, $t(174) = 6.31$, $p < .01$. Also, within-culture comparisons showed that American advertisements used uniqueness themes more than conformity themes, $t(87) = 4.01$, $p < .01$, and Korean advertisements used conformity themes more than uniqueness themes, $t(87) = 7.48$, $p < .01$.

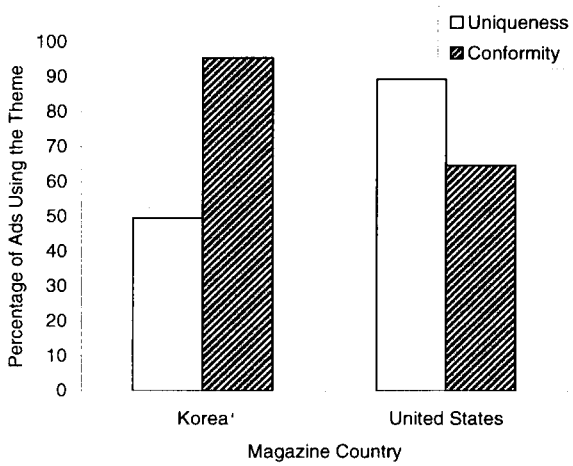

Figure 5. Percentage of advertisements using conformity and uniqueness themes as a function of culture.

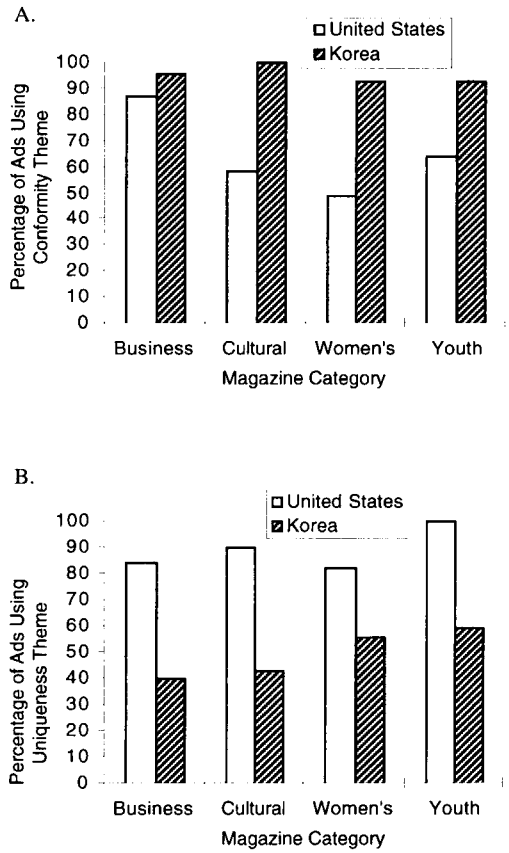

Figure 6. Percentage of advertisements using conformity and uniqueness themes as a function of culture and magazine category.

Then, we examined the effect of magazine categories, because business, social commentary, women's, and pop culture/youth magazines target very different audiences with very different values, possibly including values on conformity and uniqueness. The MANOVA with Magazine Category × Culture × Theme revealed no three-way interaction effect, $F(3, 168) = 0.73$, *ns.* There was a marginal Magazine Category × Theme interaction, $F(3, 168) = 2.62$, $p < .06$ (see Figure 6), indicating that advertisements in different categories of magazines tend to rely on the conformity and uniqueness themes to a different degree. However, across magazine categories, the cultural differences in using conformity and uniqueness themes existed consistently.

[9] Statistical significance does not change with the unweighted data.

Discussion

The conformity themes that appeared in Korean advertisements are very consistent with general Korean cultural values that emphasize group harmony and norms over individuality and also with the preferences of Koreans for conformity shown in Studies 2 and 3, even in rapidly changing urban areas. The uniqueness themes that were favored in American advertisements are highly consistent with American cultural ideas that value individual rights and individuality over the collective and also with preferences of Americans for uniqueness shown in Studies 1, 2, and 3. The cultural tendencies were consistent regardless of the gender and age of the target audience populations.

To make the product look as attractive as possible to potential consumers, advertisers can use various techniques and methods, from association with positive images to rational persuasion. Whatever specific technique or appeal they adopt, advertisers rely on values and images considered within the culture to be good and attractive (Caillat & Mueller, 1996; Gregory & Munch, 1997; Javalgi, Cutler, & Malhotra, 1995; Zhang & Gelb, 1996).

Once the cultural themes are represented in the advertisements, they become an important part of the sociocultural environment in which members of the culture learn and affirm the sociocultural values and ideas. Because advertisements, in particular, are supposed to create positive images and represent something attractive and desirable, people easily learn what is attractive and good from advertisements. Moreover, the images in advertisements, which appear so disconnected from the people who made them, become the objective standard of goodness and beauty to the audience at both individual and collective levels (Berger & Luckmann, 1966); the messages in American advertisements convince Americans that being unique is the right way to be, and the messages in Korean advertisements convince Koreans that being like others is the right way to be, and thus, perpetuate these cultural values. The point of mutual constitution is that the cultural values create, construct, and constitute individual psychological tendencies that reinforce the institutional construction. The consistency we found among cultural values, individual perceptions, social interaction, and the themes commonly used in Korean and American advertisements within the Korean and American cultures is achieved through the collective influence of institutions and individual practices of the values.

General Discussion

Summary

How does a person decide and know what coffee to order or what color pen to pick? Is it a matter of individual preference, is it based on some inherent quality of the object, or is it something else all together? Our research suggests that the formation of even the most simple and mundane preference is heavily influenced by culture. In Studies 1, 2, and 3, we examined the effect of cultural norms in settings where there was no external pressure to behave in culturally appropriate ways. In Study 4, we examined public messages found in mass media from two different cultures, in which the collective understanding of what is right and what is wrong was clearly made salient. The results from these studies demonstrate that collective values and preferences are indeed consistently reflected in public messages and that regardless of what the targets are, the meaning given to a target by culture is a more important predictor of attitudes and behavior than the nature or characteristics of the target per se (e.g., the color of the pen or the shape of the figure).

These findings are consistent with previous findings on cultural differences in practices related to attitudes toward norms. East Asians were more willing to conform to the norm than European Americans were, whether the task was a relatively insignificant one, as in the present research, or a more consequential one, as implied in previous research on life satisfaction (Suh et al., 1998), child-rearing practices (Chao, 1994), and motivation (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999).

In East Asian culture, where people learn to place collective well-being before individual rights and the basic units of society are groups, not individuals, it is not at all surprising to see people reinforcing the norm to follow norms that are essential for group cohesion and discouraging deviation that could undermine the authority of the group. In American culture, where people are taught to respect individual rights before the collective and the basic units of society are individuals, we see the glorification of individual freedom to reject norms and an aversion to conformity.

Cultural Preference and Cultural Differences in Cognition

The same pattern of these cultural differences in social prescriptions can be seen in cultural differences in cognitive processes. East Asians tend to think in holistic ways, whereas American and Europeans tend to think in analytic ways (Fiske et al., 1998). When asked to respond to Rorschach cards, Chinese Americans gave "whole-card" responses, in which all aspects of the card are the basis of the response (Abel & Hsu, 1949), more often than did European Americans. Also, Chinese children used a more relational–contextual style in object grouping than did American children (Chiu, 1972), and East Asians showed superior abilities to detect covariation among events compared with Westerners (Peng & Nisbett, 1998).

This difference in cognitive process style may help explain the difference in the preferences found in the present studies. In Studies 1 and 2, when East Asians saw a figure composed of subfigures, they were more likely to see the whole figure as a basic unit than they were to see each subfigure as an independent basic unit. This type of categorization leads them to see the unique subfigure as a small component that disrupts the structure of the basic unit that is otherwise neatly organized. However, when faced with the same figure, Americans were more likely to see the subfigures as independent basic units, and this categorization made them pay less attention to how the unique subfigure disrupted the structure of the larger unit and pay more attention to the unique subfigure, leading them to favor it over the less noticeable subfigures.

Similarly, in Study 3, East Asians may have perceived the unique color of the pen as a disruption to the unity of the set of pens, and this perception affected their aesthetic judgment so that the unique color did not look as attractive or desirable as the common color. However, Americans perhaps paid more attention to the individual pens than to the commonality of the set, and thus they perceived the unique pen as more attractive. These cultural preferences recognized and shared by most members of the culture

provide the underlying assumptions for messages found in magazine advertisements, as in Study 4.

Mutual Constitution of Cultural Values and Individual Preference

The consistencies in preference for uniqueness and conformity found at individual perception, during social interaction, and in media products help to address the question of the theory of mutual constitution (Kitayama et al., 1997): How are the cultural values conveyed to individuals, and how do individuals simultaneously appropriate and perpetuate these values?

The idea that psychological experience is closely tied to the nature of the social world is a basic social psychological insight (Asch, 1987; Fiske et al., 1998; Lewin, 1935; Mead, 1934), yet when one compares behavior across cultural contexts, no matter how mundane or simple the behavior, the links between the psychological and the attendant social relationships stand out in high relief. To understand a given behavior and to know its meaning is to know "what meanings or conceptions of things have been stored up (e.g., in texts and narratives) and institutionalized (e.g., in practices and everyday discourse in various regions of the world)" (Shweder & Sullivan, 1990, p. 402). In ordering coffee, one engages and participates in what Moscovici (1984) calls social representation—acting through and within an intricate network of values, ideas, and practices. In the United States, this social representation includes an understanding of the importance of having preference, making choices, being different, and expressing oneself through one's choices. Ordering coffee in Korea engages a different type of social representation, one evoking the importance of connectedness to a larger social unit and of the validation of social relationships by confirming shared expectations and norms.

As people engage in their various cultural worlds, they enact or practice certain values and ideas about what is right and what is good; this often begins outside of awareness, as soon as people enter into daily social interaction (Durkheim, 1924/1953; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940/1965; Markus et al., 1997; Taylor, 1989). Core cultural assumptions and understandings that are held by a critical mass and given expression and form in numerous recurrent social practices and institutions, such as the media, become the basis of truth and social reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Searle, 1995). Although the realities based on these core cultural assumptions can be as different as the cultural assumptions themselves, all the realities are alike in that people in a cultural context build their worlds with one set of understandings and not others. Cultural assumptions guide not only beliefs and values but the whole way of being a person, including the person's fundamental psychological processes, such as liking a certain abstract figure and choosing a certain object. Although people are often not aware of the origins of their beliefs (e.g., Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) and feelings (e.g., Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980), cultural understandings, collective ideas, public meanings, and social representations largely contour the individual's experience of the world (Farr, 1998; Flick, 1998; Moscovici, 1984; Shore, 1996). At the same time, the preferences and actions of each member of the culture together constitute part of the collective and public representations that embody and foster these cultural ideas.

In the present four studies we have demonstrated that American and East Asian cultural values are promoted and reflected throughout these cultures through the sampling of a few events: basic individual perceptions and preferences, individual choices of objects, and messages used in magazine advertisements. These events represent different aspects of the dynamic of mutual constitution, from the collective to the most individual appropriation and support of certain values (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 outlines some features of the dynamic process through which the cultural and the psychological make each other up. A comprehensive understanding of a particular psychological tendency, such as the preference for majority or minority subfigures revealed in Studies 1 and 2, requires some analysis of the collective reality of which that tendency is a constituent part. The collective reality that grounds and affords this psychological tendency includes socioculturally and historically rooted ideas and values, institutions, and social practices, which reflect and promote these ideas and values, and also a web of everyday social interactions in local worlds, which represent and promote these ideas.

While recognizing that cultures are anything but coherent or seamless wholes, in many cultural contexts one may identify a set of ideas and values that is foundational (Shore, 1996) and that is expressed pervasively in many aspects of social life. These ideas and values are reflected and fostered in religion, philosophy, and origin myths. They are conveyed to individuals through a set of socioculturally and historically rooted processes and practices, which include institutions like educational and legal systems, language practices, and media products based on these cultural values, as exemplified in Study 4. Through participation in socioculturally specific processes and practices, individuals come to have an understanding and a feeling of what is good and what is right, and these ideas and feelings permeate every aspect of their lives. Individuals who share similar beliefs interact in social episodes in local worlds. These social interactions, as shown in Study 3, along with cultural institutions shape the individual's psychological experience. Thus, what is culturally desirable appears desirable in the eyes of individuals, and what is culturally meaningful becomes meaningful to these individuals. As a consequence, the cultural values are internalized and represented in individual psychological tendencies as shown in Studies 1 and 2, and they are used by individuals to guide their actions and preferences.

Individuals represent and express their beliefs and values in their preferences, their actions, and their ways of being. A teacher or an employer who believes that having and expressing one's own point of view is important will "naturally" prefer and reward people who have their own point of view over people who do not and will encourage students and employees to develop and assert their own point of view, as participants "naturally" chose or avoided the pen with the uncommon color. Such preferences and actions are reflections of the values one adopted from the culture, but, at the same time, they constitute part of the social reality for oneself and others. Social reality, then, is made up of numerous actions of participating individuals. At the individual level, one's actions do not seem to affect culture. However, when a critical mass of individuals are committed to similar values and act in concert in similar situations, the individuals will, as a collective, maintain or transform the culture. Thus, even in the small choices and the mundane social encounters of everyday acts, a person represents and communicates his or her values and through his or her actions participates as a coproducer of culture. If most people

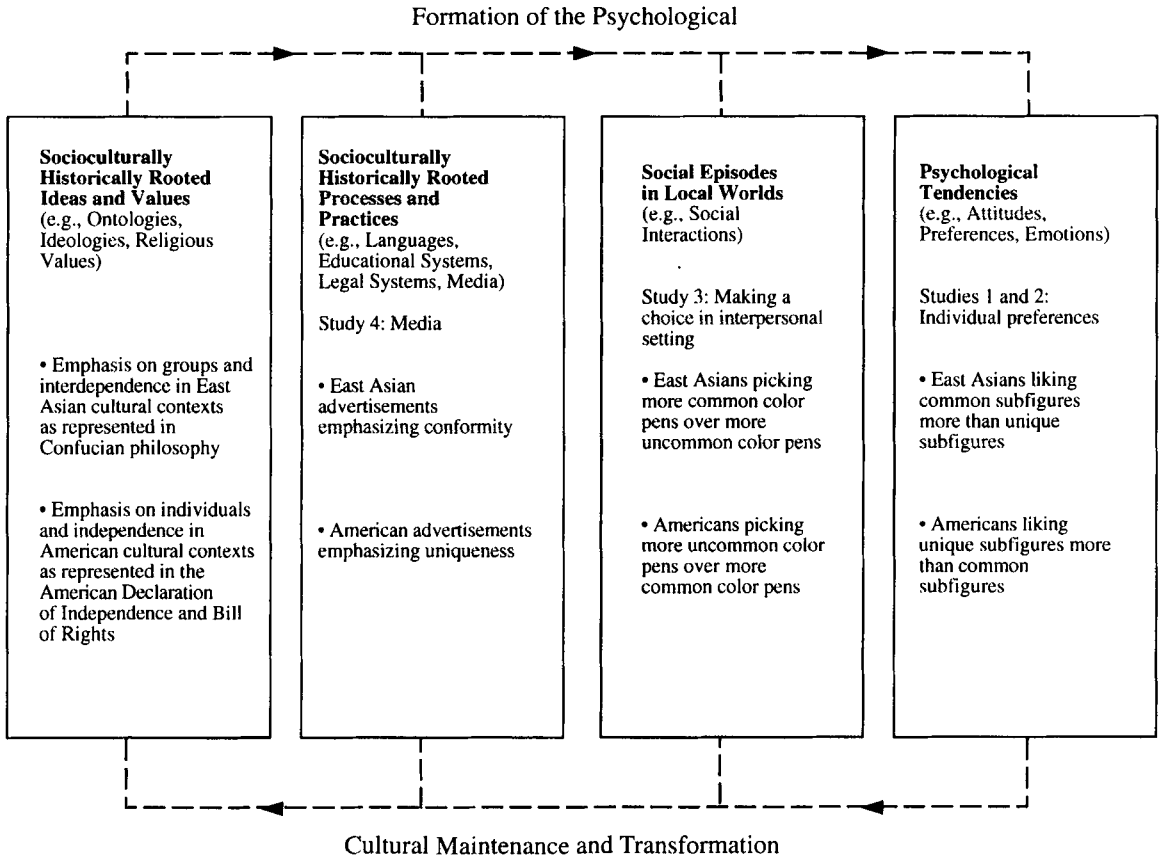

Figure 7. The dynamic process of the mutual constitution of culture and the psyche.

in a cultural context believe being unique is good, choose unique objects, and show strong preferences for uniqueness, the idea of uniqueness being positive will be maintained and fostered. The collective and the individual continue to create, construct, and reinforce one another.

Within a given reality, whatever the culture says is right and good becomes what people like, as this research suggests. When a culture says being different is good, then people in the culture like being different from others. When a culture says being like others is good, then people in the culture like being similar to others. In the process of appropriating the cultural beliefs about right and wrong, individuals also develop appropriate preferences that accompany that knowledge. It is not just a matter of right and wrong but also a matter of like and dislike. The collective constructs not only values but also liking and disliking.

Culture and Preference, Affect and Emotion

Taken together, these studies underscore the interdependence between culture and preference. Affect, as reflected in preference, is usually experienced as an authentic, private, and personal event, rather than a sociocultural and historical product. Yet, classic sociological theories (Durkheim, 1897/1958; Radcliffe-Brown, 1940/1965) as well as more recent theorizing (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1994; Russell, 1991; Wierzbicka, 1984) on the links between culture and emotion suggest that among the most significant cultural meanings and practices that distinguish cultural contexts are ideas about what to feel and how to feel with respect to certain events. What feels good is not just an individual reaction; it reflects the incorporation of a complex of culturally specific ideas and values about what is good.

To feel good about one's choice in East Asia, one has to have the sense that the preference expressed is agreed on and approved of by others. Also, when trying to conform to the norm, one is also following the norm of following the norm. However, to feel good about one's choice in the United States, one has to have the sense that the choice has expressed a particular or individualized preference, even though in this seemingly personalized choice, one is also following the norm of not following the norm. Although people are alike in being normatively guided in their actions, it matters that in the course of their actions, Americans feel they are charting their own courses, marching to the beat of a different drummer, or boldly going where no one has gone before.

Once a person comes to understand that conformity is desirable, then the person will continue to try to be like others, not because he or she consciously thinks about the cultural values, but because being like others will feel good. No manifestation of culture is more real to a person than the anxiety (often experienced in East Asian cultural contexts) or the excitement (often experienced in American cultural contexts) of standing out among others, and

nothing is better than these feelings in reinforcing and perpetuating the cultural values.

Conclusion

The goal of the present research was not just to show that East Asians prefer conformity more than European Americans do nor to argue that cultures are integrated systems or coherent wholes. Cultural phenomena are complex, subtle, and replete with inconsistencies and contradictions among ideologies, institutions, practices, and a wide spectrum of ideas about what is right and what is wrong in any given situation. Although many East Asians chose the more common pen in our study, some East Asians dye their hair purple in an apparent effort to stand out. Similarly, although many European Americans prefered the unique subfigure in our study, some European Americans join cults, where they apparently relinquish their individuality by shaving their heads and wearing identical shoes. Cultures are configured by ongoing individual actions and by the immediate contingencies of specific sociohistorical circumstances. The existence of culturally incongruent behaviors and attitudes suggests that cultures can be best conceptualized as constantly changing, open systems of attitudes, norms, behaviors, artifacts, and institutions that people reinforce but also continually modify or even challenge through diverse means of participation and engagement.

There are, however, a few core ideas and themes that consistently connect different parts of a given cultural context and that are implicitly and explicitly shared by the majority of participants in a culture. The purpose of the present research was to show that each culture has its own ideologies, institutions, and informal practices that are interconnected and mutually constituting and that any given response, no matter how seemingly trivial or inconsequential, reflects engagement with some set of cultural ideas and practices and needs to be understood in this cultural framework.

In the present set of studies, we examined how values for uniqueness or conformity are manifest in mundane actions that are similar to those composing the small moments of everyday life, and in so doing, we have tried to illustrate the process of culture and psyche making each other up. We found cultural divergence in values, beliefs, and affect: Where Americans preferred uniqueness, East Asians preferred conformity, and these preferences were associated with divergent individual actions. Importantly, we also found cultural convergence in the mutual constitution of culture and psyche: In both American and East Asian cultural contexts, individual preferences were in accord with cultural norms, a fact that would go unnoticed without an explicit cultural comparison. We view the present findings as a still photograph of evidence supporting the idea of the mutual constitution of culture and psyche; a future goal is to provide motion picture evidence of the dynamic process of mutual influence as it unfolds in other domains.

The present research provides empirical support for the idea that social realities are collectively constructed by people who participate in the same contexts and share certain beliefs and assumptions and that these realities are similarly real and genuine to the actors. The norm to conform is just as real as the norm to be unique. As long as there are these norms, being different from the norm or conforming to the norm is likely to be labeled and culturally marked in different ways. Thus, both uniqueness and deviance are the right names for being different, and both conformity and harmony are the right names for being similar.

Ordering a cup of coffee is a social act saturated with culture-specific meanings. Liking and ordering a cup of decaffeinated cappuccino with nonfat milk is a result of being in a cultural context where individuality is valued and the communication of one's individuality is required. By choosing this type of coffee, individuals who like the drink succeed in reproducing, in some small part, the cultural context that values this individuality. A cup of decaffeinated cappuccino with nonfat milk can never be just a cup of decaffeinated cappuccino with nonfat milk—it is also an instance of deviance or uniqueness.

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