Transitory Determinants of Values and Decisions: The Utility (or Non-utility) of Individualism-Collectivism in Understanding Cultural Differences

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TRANSITORY DETERMINANTS OF VALUES AND DECISIONS: THE UTILITY (OR NONUTILITY) OF INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM IN UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

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The determinants and effects of cultural differences in the values described by individualism-collectivism were examined in a series of four experiments. Confirmatory factor analyses of a traditional measure of this construct yielded five independent factors rather than a bipolar structure. Moreover, differences between Hong Kong Chinese and European Americans in the values defined by these factors did not consistently coincide with traditional assumptions about the collectivistic vs. individualistic orientations. Observed differences in values were often increased when situational primes were used to activate (1) concepts associated with a participant’s own culture and (2) thoughts reflecting a self-orientation (i.e., self- vs. group-focus) that is typical in this culture. Although the values we identified were helpful in clarifying the structure of the individualism-collectivism construct, they did not account for cultural differences in participants’ tendency to compromise in a behavioral decision task. We conclude that a conceptualization of individualism vs. collectivism in terms of the tendency to focus on oneself as an individual vs. part of a group may be useful. However, global measures of this construct that do not take into account the situational specificity of norms and values which reflect these tendencies may be misleading, and may be of limited utility in predicting cultural differences in decision making and other behaviors.

Socially learned norms and values provide standards that people often use both to evaluate others’ behavior and to guide their own judgments and behavioral decisions. For this reason, a conceptualization of the

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norms and values that pervade different societies can potentially help to predict differences in the social and nonsocial behaviors that predominate in these societies and to understand why these differences occur. Cross-cultural research is stimulated in part by the recognition of this possibility.

Culture-related norms and values can vary along a number of dimensions (Chinese Cultural Connection, 1987; Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Schwartz, 1994; Triandis, 1972, 1989, 1995; see also Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999; Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998; Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 1999; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Differences between Western (e.g., North American and Western European) and East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) cultures have most frequently been conceptualized in terms of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1989, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Individualism, which focuses attention on oneself as an independent being, is assumed to produce an emphasis on individual freedom and independence, personal goals rather than the interests of a group as a whole, and competitiveness (cf. Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988; Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985). In contrast, collectivism, which focuses on one's membership in a larger group or collective, is presumably characterized by a subordination of personal goals to those of one's in-group, a motivation to maintain harmony among group members, a reliance on others for help and advice, and a high degree of social responsibility and sharing.

As these descriptions indicate, however, the two constructs are multifaceted. In fact, Ho and Chiu (1994) have identified no less than 18 different dimensions that could compose a more general construct of individualism-collectivism (e.g., uniqueness vs. uniformity, self-reliance vs. conformity, economic independence vs. interdependence, religious heterogeneity vs. homogeneity, etc.). Not surprisingly, measures of individualism and collectivism often differ substantially in the specific attitudes and values to which they ostensibly pertain (cf. Triandis, 1991; see also Rhee, Uleman, & Lee, 1996). Nevertheless, such measures are all implicitly assumed to reflect a single underlying construct.

The failure to distinguish between the various manifestations of individualism and collectivism can create considerable confusion. Differences in individualism and collectivism are frequently offered as explanations of cultural variations in judgments and behavior (cf. Hermans & Kempen, 1999). Unless the various components of individualism versus collectivism are highly intercorrelated, the utility of inferring these orientations from a single measure that pools over these components may be limited. In fact, there is little empirical evidence that cultural differences in people's behavior in specific situations can be pre-
dicted from measures of individualism and collectivism per se (but see Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989).

In this article, we present evidence that the various norms and values assessed by traditional measures of individualism and collectivism are independent, and examine both cultural and situational factors that influence responses to these measures. We then describe the combined effects of situational and cultural factors on behavior in a specific situation in which cultural differences have been identified in the past: specifically, the tendency to compromise in a multi-attribute decision situation (Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2000). As our data show, commonly used indices of individualism and collectivism are of little value in accounting for this behavior.

Much of our discussion is based on two considerations. First, the criteria on which people base their behavioral decisions are frequently domain- and situation-specific. As Mischel’s (1999; Mischel & Shoda, 1998) conception of personality attests, an individual’s behavior often can be quite consistent within a particular social context and yet can vary substantially from one context to another. (For example, a man might be consistently sympathetic and supportive in his interactions with co-workers, but be typically self-centered and insensitive in his relations with his wife and children.) Analogously, the cultural norms and values that underlie behavior also could be specific to certain types of social situations. To this extent, global indices of individualism and collectivism may not predict this situation-specific behavior.

Second, the norms and values that underlie individuals’ judgments and behavioral decisions are not always restricted to those that generally characterize the culture to which they belong. As Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991; see also Hong, Morris, Chiu & Benet-Martinez, 2000) point out, the social knowledge that people typically acquire (either through direct experience or from the media) often includes both collectivistic and individualistic concepts. Moreover, the particular subset of this knowledge that individuals bring to bear on a given judgment or decision can depend in part on its relative accessibility in memory at the time. (For theoretical analyses and empirical evidence concerning the effect of situationally-induced differences in knowledge accessibility on judgments and behavior, see Bargh, 1997; Higgins, 1996; and Wyer & Srull, 1989.) The norms and values that pervade a given culture may be “chronically” accessible to its members as a result of the high frequency with which members of this culture have been exposed to them. (For discussions of the determinants and effects of chronically accessible concepts and knowledge, see Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Bargh, Lombardi, & Higgins, 1988; and Higgins, 1996). However, transitory
situational factors can influence the accessibility of previously acquired concepts and knowledge as well. These possibilities are exemplified in Figure 1. This figure shows the possible causal relations among one’s cultural background; two sets of situational factors that exist at the time a judgment or decision is made; and two clusters of norms, values, and motives that have implications for the judgment or behavioral decision. In the absence of situational influences, the particular subset of behavior-relevant cognitions (norms, values, and motives) that are activated and applied is determined largely by culture-related factors that have led these cognitions to become chronically accessible. However, features of the situational context in which the judgment or decision is made, or other recent experiences, can also influence the accessibility of these (and other) sets of cognitions. The effects of knowledge activated by these situational factors could either add to or diminish the effects of chronically accessible cognitions on behavior (Hong, et al., 2000; Oishi, Wyer, & Colcombe, 2000).

The construct of individualism-collectivism is discussed in the next section of this article, and we provide further evidence that the construct has several components that vary independently of one another. In subsequent sections, we show that the values reported by representatives of Western and East Asian cultures do not consistently differ in the manner implied by the assumption that these values define a coherent construct of individualism-collectivism that generalizes over situations. Moreover, this is true even when people’s cultural identity is made salient to them. Finally, we consider the impact of both cultural differences in norms and values and situational factors on a particular type of behavioral decision that has been previously demonstrated to vary with individuals’ cultural background: the tendency to compromise in multi-attribute decision situations (Briley, et al., 2000). Compromise behavior (see Simonson, 1989) is obviously only one of many that might be influenced by these factors. However, it serves to raise questions concerning the utility of a global value-based conception of individualism-collectivism in explaining cultural differences in situation-specific behavior.

1. This figure does not preclude direct influences of situational factors and cultural orientation on behavior that are not mediated by norms, values, or motives, as indicated by dashed pathways. These influences, which might occur spontaneously with a minimum of conscious cognitive deliberation (cf. Bargh, 1997), could constitute cognitive “productions” (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1984, 1990) that are acquired through social learning and are automatically activated when the situational features to which they have been conditioned exist. Although these possibilities are also of importance to consider, they are not germane to the concerns of this article and, therefore, will not be discussed in detail.
FIGURE 1. Possible causal relations among a person’s cultural background, two sets of situational factors that exist at the time a judgment or decision is made, and two sets of norms, values, and motives that have implications for this judgment or decision.

THE DIMENSIONALITY OF CULTURE

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

To reiterate, individualism may be conceptualized very generally as a tendency to think of oneself as a unique individual and to define oneself independently of others. Correspondingly, collectivism is characterized by a disposition to think of oneself as part of a group, and to define one’s own attributes and behavior in relation to those of other group members. To this extent, the distinction between individualistic and collectivist orientations is very similar to the difference between independent and interdependent self-conceptions postulated by Markus and Kitayama (1991). Self-definition, in our view, is fundamental in distinguishing between individualistic and collectivistic behaviors. Consistent with Markus and Kitayama’s thinking, collectivists are expected to rely on those around them for feedback and information relevant to their actions and behaviors, whereas individualists are less likely to seek and consider these sorts of gauges.
Note that this definition of individualism vs. collectivism does not have direct implications for the norms and values that govern behavior in specific situations. Whether the norms and values that people espouse are reflections of this orientation is a theoretical and empirical question and is not a matter of definition. This view contrasts with assumptions that underlie many measures of individualism and collectivism in which these constructs are inferred directly from the attitudes and values that individuals report (e.g., Rhee, et al., 1996; Triandis, 1991; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). In fact, the norms and values that result from collectivist and individualist orientations are likely to be situation specific. In some cases, for example, a collectivist orientation could be reflected in a tendency to seek group goals and to subordinate one’s personal interests to those of others. In other cases, it could be manifested in a tendency to use other group members as standards of comparison in evaluating oneself, and a desire to demonstrate proficiency in skills and abilities that facilitate the attainment of goals that the group considers to be important. This desire, which taken out of context might be interpreted as individualistic, is likely to be manifested in different situations than the tendency to subordinate one’s own interests to others’. Thus, the two motives are not necessarily incompatible.

The norms and values that influence behavior also may be specific to the person or group toward which the behavior is directed. Rhee et al. (1996) found that the Koreans are more collectivistic than European Americans in their self-reported behavior toward family members, but were less collectivistic than European Americans in their behavior toward non-members. These results suggest that Asians make finer distinctions between in-group and out-group members than Americans do (Bond, 1988; Gudykunst, Yoon & Nishida, 1987; Iwata, 1992; Triandis, 1972), and that the norms and values that govern their behavior are relatively more group-specific.

These observations concern situational differences in the applicability of the norms and values that result from individualist and collectivist orientations. However, situational differences can exist in the accessibility of these norms and values in memory and the likelihood that they are actually retrieved and used as a basis for judgments and decisions in the situations to which they are relevant. As we noted earlier, the values that pervade a given society are not the only ones to which members of the society have been exposed. Moreover, individual members do not always conform to the norms and behaviors that are prescribed by the society as a whole. A predominately Catholic society, for example, might promote certain values and norms (e.g., that birth control is immoral and should not be practiced) that its individual members do not adopt. These members may only endorse these values when their identity as Catholics is salient to them (Kelley, 1955).
In the present context, these considerations imply that when members of a given culture have been exposed to both individualist and collectivist norms and values, their use of a given norm as a basis for making a judgment or behavior can depend on how easily it comes to mind at the time. Cultural factors could determine the frequency with which these cognitions have been applied in the past and, therefore, could influence their chronic accessibility in memory. However, situational factors can influence their accessibility as well. The effects of these situational factors on the activation and application of norms and values could often override more general cultural influences.

The first two experiments described in this article bear on this possibility. Experiment 1 confirms the multidimensionality of the norms and values that are typically assumed to reflect differences in individualism and collectivism. Experiment 2 shows that the activation of concepts that are associated with individualistic and collectivistic orientations have little influence on the specific values that are assumed to exemplify them. Experiments 3 and 4 use priming methodology (e.g., Higgins, 1996; Srull & Wyer, 1979) to manipulate experimentally the accessibility of concepts associated with participants’ cultural identity and their tendency to think of themselves in ways that are characteristic of the culture to which they belong. These latter studies generally confirm the assumptions underlying the interpretation of Experiment 1, and determine the extent to which the effects of situation-specific factors can increase or override the influence of chronically accessible constructs.

COMPONENTS OF INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM (EXPERIMENT 1)

A series of studies by Triandis and Gelfand (1998) is particularly relevant to the research to be reported. An analysis of a modified version of the Individualism-Collectivism scale developed by Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, and Gelfand (1995) yielded four varimax-rotated factors. The authors interpreted these factors as reflecting values along two different dimensions: individualism-collectivism and horizontal-vertical. The latter dimension presumably reflects the extent of respondents’ concern with status differences within the groups to which they belong. Similar factors emerged in separate analyses of respondents from both the United States and Korea.

Triandis and Gelfand’s (1998) interpretation of these factors as reflecting combinations of values along two bipolar dimensions may be somewhat misleading. Specifically, the varimax rotation procedure used in their analyses forces all of the factors extracted to be orthogonal. To this extent, it seems more appropriate to treat the factors identified by
Triandis and Gelfand as four distinct constructs that vary independently of one another rather than as bipolar opposites.

To confirm this conclusion, we collected two sets of data. First, we administered the Individualism-Collectivism scale they employed (Triandis, 1995) to a sample of 120 college students from Illinois and 278 from Hong Kong. The scale was presented in English to both sets of participants with instructions to respond to items along a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

An exploratory factor analysis of these data yielded five varimax-rotated factors, all of which had Eigen values greater than 1.0. These factors, which in combination accounted for 37.5% of the variance, were characterized by the sets of items shown in Table 1. The first three factors correspond closely to those assumed by Triandis and Gelfand (1998) to reflect horizontal individualism, horizontal collectivism, and vertical collectivism, respectively. A scrutiny of the items composing the factors, however, suggests that they are more clearly interpretable as indices of the values attached to individuality and uniqueness, emotional connectedness and sharing, and self-sacrifice motivation, respectively. The remaining two factors (which in Triandis and Gelfand’s study combined to form a single index of vertical individualism) reflect the values attached to not being outperformed by others in achievement situations that are not necessarily competitive, and defeating others in direct competition (i.e., winning) with little or no specific concern for the skill or ability that underlies this success.

Although these factors correspond fairly well to those identified by Triandis and Gelfand (1998), it seemed desirable to confirm their validity and reliability on the basis of an independent sample. To this end, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis of responses from 176 Hong Kong and 124 Southern California university students in which we specified a priori the items defining each of the five constructs. This analysis, which was conducted using AMOS structural equation modeling software, included the various paths reflecting the interrelations among the five constructs. Because the \( \chi^2 \) statistic becomes inflated for large sample sizes, the fit of the model was inferred from the ratio of its \( \chi^2 \) (277) to its degrees of freedom (125). This ratio, 2.2:1, is well within Wheaton et al.’s (1977) suggested guideline for acceptable fit of 5:1 as well as Carmines and McIver’s (1981) more stringent criterion (3:1).

The path model that emerged from this analysis is shown in Figure 2. The coefficients of all paths from latent constructs to observed variables were significant (\( p < .05 \)) and in the expected direction. Six of the ten correlations among the five constructs are not significantly different from zero. To provide a further test of construct independence, we compared the fit of the above model to a version that excluded the paths between them, thus imposing an assumption of independence. If this assumption is
valid, the fit of the full model should not be substantially better than that of the independence-imposed model. This was in fact the case. The difference in the AIC (Akaike information criterion; Akaike, 1987) index of the two models (404.9 vs. 460.4 for the full model and independence-imposed model, respectively) was not significant $\chi^2(125) = 55.8, p > .20$.

These analyses indicate that the five constructs defined by items in the individualism-collectivism scale employed by Triandis and Gelfand are independent of one another rather than being opposite ends of bipolar continua. This means that cultural differences are best conceptualized in terms of each of these constructs separately rather than a generalized individualism-collectivism dimension.

TABLE 1. Items Loading on Factors Emerging from Exploratory Factor Analysis of the Individualism-Collectivism Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individuality</strong></td>
<td>I1. I enjoy being unique and different from others in many ways (.539)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I2. I often do “my own thing” (.562)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I3. I am a unique individual (.660)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Connectedness, Sharing</strong></td>
<td>E1. To me, pleasure is spending time with others (.655)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E2. It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group (.611)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E3. The well-being of my co-workers is important to me (.568)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E4. If a co-worker gets a prize, I would feel proud (.449)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>E5. I feel good when I cooperate with others (.574)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Sacrifice</strong></td>
<td>S1. I would do what would please my family, even if I detested that activity (.733)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S2. We should keep our aging parents with us at home (.551)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S3. I would sacrifice an activity that I enjoy very much if my family did not approve (.725)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S4. Before taking a major trip, I consult with most members of my family (.462)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Being Outperformed by Others</strong></td>
<td>O1. It annoys me when other people perform better than I do (.825)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O2. It is important to me that I do my job better than others (.447)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O3. When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused (.760)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winning</strong></td>
<td>W1. Winning is everything (.562)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W2. I enjoy working in situations involving competition with others (.739)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W3. Some people emphasize winning; I am not one of them (-.577)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Factor loadings are given in parentheses. Only items loading greater than .40 are shown. Source: Triandis & Gelfand (1998).
FIGURE 2. Results of confirmatory factor analysis: Figures in bold are significantly different from zero at $p < .05$; EMOTION = emotional connectedness and sharing, OUTPERFORM = not being outperformed by others, INDIVIDUAL = individuality, WINNING = winning, SACRIFICE = self-sacrifice. See Table 1 for item descriptions.

DIRECT EFFECTS OF PRIMING INDIVIDUALISTIC AND COLLECTIVIST CONCEPTS (EXPERIMENT 2)

The low correlations among the components of individualism and collectivism suggest that these components are more highly interrelated in the minds of cross-cultural theorists and researchers than they are in the minds of the individuals being investigated. More direct evidence bearing on this possibility was obtained in Experiment 2. If the various components of collectivism and individualism are interrelated in people’s minds, activating these general constructs in memory should increase the accessibility of values that are associated with them. This increased accessibility should be reflected in the individual’s responses to items that reflect these values. If the general components of individualism and
collectivism are unrelated in the conceptual systems that people have formed, however, this may not be the case.

We examined the effect of activating general concepts associated with individualism and collectivism using a sample of 38 Hong Kong college students as participants. (These participants were particularly desirable, as they presumably had been exposed frequently to both collectivist and individualist norms and values and, therefore, were likely to have concepts associated with both orientations stored in memory.) The procedure we used to "prime" these concepts was similar to that employed by Srull and Wyer (1979). Specifically, we told participants that we were interested in how people form meaningful English sentences. Under this pretext, they were given 35 sets of four randomly arranged words. They were told that the words in each set could be used to form two different three-word sentences and that they should underline the three words that composed the first sentence that came to mind.

The sentences formed from 22 of the sets had no implications for either individualism or collectivism. However, the remaining 13 items were constructed on the basis of Triandis' (1989, 1995) conception of individualism and collectivism. In the individualism-priming condition, the sentences that could be constructed conveyed independence, distinctiveness, competitiveness, and personal goal seeking (e.g., "distinct am I different," "am competitive I independent," "it's money my own," "he free is she"). In the collectivism-priming condition, the sentences constructed from the items conveyed group harmony, cooperativeness and sharing, and group orientation (e.g., "similar alike all we're," "join team group the," "visit please us join," "share wealth money the," "are cooperative we agreeable"). Participants were asked to complete the form as quickly as possible without making mistakes. After completing the form and two unrelated tasks, participants in both priming conditions were administered the Individualism-Collectivism scale used in Experiment 1 (Triandis, 1995). A third group of (control) participants completed the scale without having first been exposed to the priming task. Each participant's responses to the items defining each factor (see Table 1) were averaged to provide a single score for the value being assessed.

The priming procedure presumably increased the accessibility in memory of concepts associated with individualism and collectivism. If these concepts are associated with the values assessed by the Individualism-Collectivism scale, they should influence the values that participants report when completing such instruments. In fact, this was not the case. Neither priming individualism nor priming collectivism influenced the specific values that participants reported relative to control (no-priming) conditions ($p > .10$). Although these null results might be
attributed to the failure of the priming procedures we used to activate the concepts to which they theoretically pertain, this seems unlikely in light of other results to be reported presently (see also Oishi et al., 2000). It seems more probable that the priming procedures brought to mind a number of unrelated concepts that, when activated in combination, did not have a consistent influence on any of the five values we assessed. To this extent, the null results of this experiment are consistent with the conclusion that rather than working in concert, the various norms and values that are assumed to reflect individualistic and collectivistic orientations are likely to be conceptually distinct in the minds of the individuals who have these orientations.

CULTURAL AND SITUATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN NORMS AND VALUES

Although the attributes that are typically assumed to convey individualistic and collectivistic orientations may vary independently over individuals within a society, a particular culture might nevertheless be characterized by a configuration of attributes that consistently reflects these orientations. This was not true of the two cultural groups investigated in Experiment 1. The mean values reported by both United States and Hong Kong Chinese participants are shown in Table 2. U.S. participants attached significantly greater value to individuality, and significantly less importance to both emotional connectedness and self-sacrifice, than Hong Kong participants did. However, they did not significantly differ from Hong Kong participants in the value they attached to winning, and they attached significantly less importance than Hong Kong participants to not being outperformed in achievement situations.

To the extent competitiveness and the pursuit of personal achievement are characteristic of an individualistic orientation (Triandis et al., 1988; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), these aggregated data do not reveal a consistent cross-cultural difference of the sort that is often assumed to

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**TABLE 2. Mean Values Reported by U.S. and Hong Kong Participants in the Absence of Situation-Specific Cultural Priming—Experiment 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>U.S. Participants</th>
<th>Hong Kong Participants</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuality</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>0.41*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional connectedness</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>-0.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-sacrifice</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>-0.12*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being outperformed</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>-0.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winning</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*F(1, 396) > 3.88, p < .05
exist between Western and Asian cultures although not being outperformed was of greater concern to Hong Kong Chinese than to American participants, this characteristic was conceptualized by Triandis and Gelfand as “vertical individualism”). On the other hand, these data might be consistent with a more global conceptualization of these cultures as varying in terms of the relative emphasis placed on self as an independent being versus self as part of a group. That is, East Asians may be more inclined than Americans to define themselves with reference to others and, therefore, to use other persons as comparative standards in evaluating their own skills and abilities. We elaborate further on this possibility after additional data are reported.

EFFECTS OF CULTURAL SALIENCE ON SELF-REPORTED NORMS AND VALUES (EXPERIMENT 3)

As Trafimow et al. (1991) suggest, most people have been exposed to concepts associated with both individualism and collectivism regardless of their cultural background. Therefore, the particular subset of norms and values to which members of a given culture are most frequently exposed may not be applied unless concepts with which they are associated are accessible in memory at the time. If this is so, exposing individuals to stimuli that make them conscious of their cultural identity might increase the accessibility of culture-related values and, the likelihood of expressing these values. Increasing the salience of one’s cultural identity could also increase the motivation to report values that are considered socially desirable in the culture one represents. For either or both reasons, participants’ responses under conditions in which their culture identity is salient seems likely to provide a further indication of the norms and values that pervade the cultures they represent.

Method. To activate concepts associated with Western and Eastern cultures, we used a procedure similar to that employed by Hong et al. (2000). Thirty-five U.S. university students and 41 Hong Kong Chinese university students participated. They were introduced to the experiment with the explanation that several unrelated studies were being conducted. The first study was described as a test of general knowledge. Participants were told that we were interested in how well individuals can identify certain important persons, objects, or events and can estimate the time period with which they are primarily associated. On this pretense, participants were given 6 pictures or drawings. In the American priming condition, the pictures portrayed an American flag, a 1920s dance scene, a Dixieland band, Marilyn Monroe, Superman, and Abraham Lincoln. In the Chinese priming condition, they portrayed a Chinese dragon, the Great Wall, a girl playing a traditional Chinese musical instrument, two persons writing
ideographs, an actor from a Chinese opera, and the monkey in a famous Chinese novel ("Journey to the West"). Participants in each condition were asked to identify the picture’s referent and to indicate the approximate time period in which it was created. After performing this task and two unrelated ones, participants completed the Individualism-Collectivism scale (Triandis, 1995), responding to each item along a scale from -3 (strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree).

Results. Table 3 shows the values reported by both U.S. and Hong Kong participants as a function of whether the priming stimuli to which they were exposed were associated with their own culture or a different one. Pooled over priming conditions, the cultural differences in values observed in the present study were virtually identical to those identified in Experiment 1. That is, U.S. participants attached more importance than Hong Kong Chinese to individuality ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.25$), but less importance to emotional connectedness ($M_{\text{diff}} = -0.10$), self-sacrifice ($M_{\text{diff}} = -0.12$), and not being outperformed ($M_{\text{diff}} = -0.74$). In addition, they attached less importance to winning than Hong Kong Chinese did ($M_{\text{diff}} = -0.60$). As Table 3 shows, however, these differences were primarily restricted to conditions in which participants’ were primed with symbols that exemplified the culture to which they belonged rather than symbols of a different culture.

The effects of priming on cultural differences in achievement-related values are particularly striking. When their own culture was primed, Hong Kong participants attached substantially greater importance than U.S. participants both to winning and to not being outperformed by others in noncompetitive achievement situations. These differences disappeared, when participants were exposed to symbols of a culture other than their own. The interactive effects of cultural background and priming were significant in analyses of values associated with both not being outperformed ($F[1,72] = 9.08, p < .01$) and winning ($F[1,72] = 4.14, p < .05$).

Our interpretation of these results rests partly on the assumption that making salient one’s own cultural identity increases the tendency to espouse values that are common in that culture. Consequently, bringing to subjects’ minds concepts associated with a different culture could decrease this tendency. The lack of a control group in this experiment prevents these directional effects from being evaluated directly. To gain some insight into these possibilities, we compared the values reported by participants under the two priming conditions of this experiment with those reported in Experiment 1 by participants who were not exposed to priming. Because the response scales employed in the two studies differed, the values reported by participants in each experiment were converted to standard scores. The interpretation of between-experiment differences in
theses scores must be treated with some caution. However, the data suggest that exposing U.S. participants to symbols of their own culture decreased the value they attached both to not being outperformed and to winning relative to participants in Experiment 1 (mean difference in standard scores = -0.54 and -0.79, respectively), whereas exposing Hong Kong participants to symbols of their own culture increased these values (mean difference = 0.46 and 0.40, respectively). In contrast, the effects of exposing participants to symbols of the opposite culture were negligible. Between-experiment comparisons of other values were more difficult to interpret; however, the effects of concept activation on achievement-related values provide qualified support for our interpretation.

Summary. Activating concepts associated with one's own culture ap-

2. Because this procedure forces the mean score of participants in each experiment to equal zero, the scores within each experiment are not independent. This makes an interpretation of differences in the magnitude of standard scores across experiments somewhat equivocal. For example, a higher standard score for Hong Kong participants in one experiment than another could indicate either that these participants reported higher values in the first experiment than in the second or, alternatively, that U.S. participants reported lower values in the first case relative to the second.

---

**TABLE 3.** Mean Values Reported by U.S. and Hong Kong Participants Under Conditions in Which Symbols of their Own or a Different Culture were Primed—Experiment 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S. participants</th>
<th>Hong Kong participants</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individuality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture primed</td>
<td>1.51\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>1.08\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture primed</td>
<td>1.21\textsuperscript{ab}</td>
<td>1.15\textsuperscript{ab}</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional connectedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture primed</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture primed</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>-0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-sacrifice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture primed</td>
<td>0.27\textsuperscript{ab}</td>
<td>0.61\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture primed</td>
<td>0.16\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>0.10\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not being outperformed</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture primed</td>
<td>0.06\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>1.46\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>-1.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture primed</td>
<td>0.75\textsuperscript{ab}</td>
<td>0.85\textsuperscript{ab}</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture primed</td>
<td>-0.56\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>0.59\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture primed</td>
<td>0.32\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>0.38\textsuperscript{b}</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Cells with unlike superscripts differ at $p < .05$*
peared generally to increase the cultural differences that existed in the absence of priming (i.e., in Experiment 1). These effects were particularly pronounced in the case of values associated with achievement (i.e., not being outperformed by others, and defeating others in direct competition). Moreover, the latter effects appear opposite in direction to those that might be expected on the basis of the assumption that competitiveness is characteristic of individualism (Triandis et al., 1988; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). On the other hand, these results are consistent with the general hypothesis that Western individuals think of themselves independently of others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Consequently, they not only are less inclined to sacrifice their own goals for the benefit of others, but also are less concerned with how well they perform relative to others both in non-competitive situations and in direct competition.

ATTENTION TO SELF AS AN INDIVIDUAL VERSUS SELF AS PART OF A COLLECTIVE (EXPERIMENT 4)

Our interpretation of the results of Experiment 2 assumes that Western and East Asian cultures differ in the emphasis that is placed on oneself as an independent being rather than oneself in relation to others. In addition, members of both cultural groups are likely to have these different conceptions of self in memory (Trafimow et al., 1991), although the relative accessibility of the concepts may differ. If this is true, experimentally stimulating participants to think of themselves as an individual versus themselves as part of a group may influence the values they report independently of more chronic, cultural differences that exist.

Two earlier studies suggest this possibility. Trafimow et al. (1991) found that inducing participants to think of either differences or similarities between themselves and others influenced their tendencies to describe themselves in terms of individual attributes as opposed to groups to which they belonged or social roles they occupied, yet cultural differences in these self-descriptions also occurred. More recently, Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee (1999) showed that activating concepts associated with self as an individual (e.g., “I”) or as a group (“we”) influenced the general tendency of European Americans and Hong Kong Chinese to espouse values associated with individualism and collectivism; however, cultural differences were evident as well. Unfortunately, Gardner et al. (1999) did not distinguish between the various components of individualism and collectivism of the sort we identified in Experiment 1. The present experiment examined these differences.

Method. To stimulate participants to think of themselves as individuals or as part of a group, we employed a sentence-construction task similar to that employed by Srull and Wyer (1979,1980) and in Experiment 1.
Participants (33 U.S. college students and 29 Hong Kong Chinese students) were told that we were interested in how people form meaningful English sentences. Under this pretext, they were given a series of 35 items each consisting of four words in scrambled order. They were told that two different three-word sentences could be formed from the words in each set, and that they should underline the three words that composed the first sentence that came to mind.

The behavior and attributes described in the sentences that participants constructed had few if any implications for values associated with either individualism or collectivism. However, in individual-self conditions, the sentences constructed from 14 of the items (e.g., “bought I it them,” “read me speak to”) required the use of a first-person singular pronoun, whereas in collective-self conditions, the items (“bought we it them,” “read us speak to”) required the use of a first person-plural pronoun. Participants were told to complete the test as quickly as possible. After completing this and two unrelated tasks, they completed the Individualism-Collectivism scale.

**Results.** Table 4 shows the values reported by both U.S. and Hong Kong participants under each priming condition. Although priming “I” and “we” had little differential influence on the value attached to emotional connectedness, it had appreciable effects on other values. Priming and cultural background combined additively to influence the values that participants attached to individuality, self-sacrifice, and winning. Consequently, the effects of cultural differences in values were more pronounced when participants were stimulated to think of themselves in a way that corresponded to their cultural disposition than when they were not. This can be seen by comparing the values of U.S. participants who were primed to think of themselves as independent beings with the values of Hong Kong participants who were primed to think of themselves as part of a collective. (These values are shown in the upper left and lower right cells of each set of data in Table 4.) However, the difference in values reported under these two conditions was significant in the case of individuality (1.55 vs. 0.27), self-sacrifice (0.08 vs. 0.65) and winning (0.44 vs. -0.41); in each case, \( p < .05 \). When participants were primed to think of themselves in a way that contrasted with culturally conditioned dispositions, the corresponding differences in their values were negligible.

The combined effects of transitory, situationally-induced dispositions to think of oneself as an independent being and chronic, culturally-conditioned dispositions to do so is consistent with previous evidence that both cultural and situational factors contribute to self-perceptions (Trafimow et al., 1991) and to the values with which they are associated (Gardner et al., 1999). It should be noted, that cultural differences in the value attached to winning observed in this study were opposite to those obtained in Ex-
TABLE 4. Mean Values as a Function of Cultural Background and Priming of Personal Pronouns—Experiment 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>U.S. participants</th>
<th>Hong Kong participants</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Individuality</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I” priming</td>
<td>1.55(^a)</td>
<td>1.04(^a)</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We” priming</td>
<td>1.44(^a)</td>
<td>0.27(^b)</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional connectedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I” priming</td>
<td>1.42</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We” priming</td>
<td>1.35</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>-0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self sacrifice</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I” priming</td>
<td>0.08(^a)</td>
<td>0.45(^ab)</td>
<td>-0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We” priming</td>
<td>0.42(^ab)</td>
<td>0.65(^b)</td>
<td>-0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not being outperformed by others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I” priming</td>
<td>0.27(^a)</td>
<td>0.94(^b)</td>
<td>-0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We” priming</td>
<td>0.91(^b)</td>
<td>0.36(^a)</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Winning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I” priming</td>
<td>0.44(^a)</td>
<td>0.23(^a)</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“We” priming</td>
<td>0.18(^ab)</td>
<td>-0.41(^b)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Cells with unlike superscripts differ at \(p < .05\)

Experiment 2. Moreover, culturally conditioned and situational factors had interactive effects on the value attached to not being outperformed (\(F(1,58) = 5.38, p < .02\)). Specifically, Hong Kong participants attached greater importance to not being outperformed by others when they had been primed to think of themselves as independent individuals. American participants, attached greater importance to not being outperformed when they had been primed to think of themselves as part of a group. Put another way, both groups of participants attached less importance to not being outperformed when they had been primed to think of themselves in a way that coincided with their cultural disposition (\(M = 0.31\)) than when they were not (\(M = 0.93\)).^3^
The latter effect is difficult to explain. Perhaps concepts activated by the priming manipulations have different implications in the two cultures being compared. When Hong Kong Chinese are exposed to primes that prompt a group rather than individual orientation, they may think more about the desirability of maintaining harmonious relations with group members. These thoughts could increase their desire to avoid appearing different from (e.g., better than) others. When Americans think about themselves as part of a group, however, they may be inclined to evaluate themselves in relation to other group members without thinking about group harmony and cohesiveness, and thus may increase their concern about being outperformed by others. In contrast, Americans who think of themselves as independent may attach less importance to their performance in relation to others, and so they may be less concerned about being outperformed. Unfortunately, this interpretation does not account for the different effects of cultural background on the value attached to winning in the two experiments. This inconsistency will be reconsidered presently.

THE EFFECTS OF CULTURAL VALUES ON DECISION MAKING

PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Research has identified differences between European Americans and Asians in a number of quite different judgments and decision behaviors, including the effect of free choice on the intrinsic attractiveness of behaviors (Sethi & Lepper, 1996), multi-attribute choice (Briley et al., 2000; Chu, Spires, & Sueyoshi, 1999), probabilistic thinking (Whitcomb, Onkal, Curley, & Benson, 1995; Wright & Phillips, 1980; Yates et al., 1989, Yates & Lee, 1996; Yates, Lee, & Shinotsuka, 1996; Yates, Lee, & Bush, 1997; Yates, Lee, Shinotsuka, Patalano, & Sleck, 1998), risk attitude (Hsee & Weber, 1999; Weber & Hsee, 1998, 2000; Weber, Hsee, & Sokolowska, 1998), assessments of fairness (Bian & Keller, 1999, 2000; Buchan, Johnson & Croson, 1997), decision strategies (Pollock & Chen, 1986; Yates & Lee, 1996), and prediction of future events (Oishi et al., 2000). Culture-specific behaviors can sometimes reflect socially conditioned responses to configurations of stimuli that occur with little thought about the specific factors that elicit them (Bargh, 1994, 1997). Other behavior is likely the result of conscious deliberation, mediated by norms and values that have implications for its appropriateness or desirability. Given the widespread assumption that individualism and collectivism are distinguishing features of different cultures, one might expect these constructs to be important predictors of cultural differences in judgments and behavioral decisions. As noted earlier, however, evidence that such
differences can be accounted for by general measures of these constructs is very limited.

Research performed in our own laboratory raises further questions concerning the utility of these constructs. This research was stimulated by results obtained by Briley et al. (2000). In Briley et al.’s studies, European American and Asian (either Hong Kong Chinese, Japanese, or Asian Americans) university students were told that the experimenters were interested in the reasons that guide preferences for choice alternatives. On this pretense, participants were presented with several shopping scenarios in which they chose from among three products. In each scenario, the three alternatives were described along two attribute dimensions. The attribute levels were arranged such that participants were faced with a decision among two extreme options (i.e., options that were high on one dimension and low on the other) and a compromise alternative (i.e., an option that had moderate values along both dimensions). In one scenario, for example, participants were asked to choose one of three 35 mm cameras that were described as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability rating of expert panel</th>
<th>Maximum autofocus range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>typical range</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option A</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option B</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option C</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Briley et al. found that when participants were not asked to justify their choices, European Americans and Asians showed similar tendencies to compromise. When participants were asked to provide a reason for their selection before reporting it, however, Asians were significantly more likely to choose the compromise alternative than Americans were. These findings suggest that situational factors are an important consideration in understanding the influence of culture on decisions.

The fact that cultural differences in choice behavior only occurred when participants gave reasons for their choices suggests that the process of generating reasons activated culture-related knowledge structures that influenced the decisions that participants made. We examined this possibility further in two of the experiments described earlier. In Experiment 3, we administered a choice task similar to that employed by Briley et al. to U.S. and Hong Kong participants who had been primed with either American or Chinese cultural symbols. In Experiment 4, we obtained similar data from participants who had been primed to think of themselves as either independent individuals or as part of a collective. In both experiments, the task (which consisted of six sets of choice alterna-
EFFECTS OF PRIMING ON CHOICE BEHAVIOR

Cultural Symbols (Experiment 3). The top half of Table 5 shows the mean percentage of compromise choices as a function of cultural group and priming conditions. Exposing participants to symbols of their own culture generally increased their tendency to compromise relative to conditions in which symbols of a different culture were primed (62% vs. 51%). This was true for both U.S. and Hong Kong participants. The significance of this pattern was confirmed statistically by a logistic regression analysis of the proportion of compromise choices as a function of priming condition (American or Chinese icons), cultural group (United States or Hong Kong), and the interaction of these two variables. (The product category in which choices were made was used as an additional dummy variable in the analysis.) The interaction of sample and condition was significant (Wald $\chi^2 = 5.2$, $p < .05$).

Concepts of Self as an Individual versus Part of a Group (Experiment 4). The effects on choice behavior of priming different self-orientations are shown in the bottom half of Table 5. A logistic regression analysis similar to that performed on the choice data in Experiment 2 indicated that Hong Kong participants were generally more likely to compromise (55%) than Americans were (49%); (Wald $\chi^2 = 4.99$, $p < .05$), consistent with findings reported by Briley et al. (2000). Further, the interaction of culture and priming conditions was also significant (Wald $\chi^2 = 4.62$, $p < .05$), indicating that this cultural difference depended on the self-orientation that was primed. Specifically, participants were more likely to compromise when they were primed to think of themselves in a way that was normative in the culture they represented (57%) than when they...
were not (46%). Results for both the Hong Kong and U.S. samples followed this pattern.

Relation of Choice Behavior to Values. The self-orientation priming manipulation influenced choice behavior and the importance of not being outperformed (Table 4) similarly. That is, when participants were primed to think of themselves in a way that was consistent with the norms of the culture to which they belonged (cf. Markus & Kitayama, 1991), they both decreased the importance they attached to not being outperformed and increased their tendency to compromise. However, this similarity may not reflect a causal relation between the importance attached to not being outperformed and the tendency to compromise. Rather, a third variable that is activated by thoughts about oneself may be exerting an independent influence on both.

To determine whether the values assessed by the Individualism-Collectivism scale can explain the patterns of choices, a mediation analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986) was performed using the data from both the cultural symbols and the self-concepts study. We tested seven constructs arising from Triandis’ (1995) topology (individualism, collectivism, vertical individualism, vertical collectivism, horizontal individualism, horizontal collectivism, and general index of individualism-collectivism\(^4\)) and the five factors from our more refined framework (emotional connectedness, self-sacrifice, winning, not being outperformed, and individuality). Each of the above variables was tested in a separate model that included a priming manipulation variable. None of these variables significantly mediated the relationship between culture and compromise choices.

This raises the question, “what values and motives do underlie cultural differences in compromise behavior?” One possibility is suggested by evidence that East Asians tend to focus on the avoidance of negative outcomes, whereas North Americans are relatively more inclined to pursue positive outcomes (Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, in press). In the choice task constructed by Briley et al. (2000), negative outcomes can be minimized by choosing the compromise alternative, whereas the likelihood of a very favorable outcome can be maximized by choosing an extreme alternative. Thus, if East Asians and Americans differ in the emphasis they place on positive and negative outcomes in the manner suggested by Lee et al. (in press), this could account for the general cultural difference in compromise choices observed by Briley et al. This cannot explain the data obtained in the present research, however. Perhaps

\(^4\) A single index of individualism-collectivism, based on the set of items composing the Individualism-Collectivism scale, was generated for each subject by subtracting the individualism score from the collectivism score.
making salient one’s cultural identity, or activating concepts of self that are consistent with tendencies that predominate in one’s cultural milieu, increases both American and Hong Kong participants’ consciousness of themselves as potential objects of evaluation. To this extent, it could increase cautiousness about making choices that might be interpreted as risky or irrational and, therefore, could induce a tendency to compromise over and above that observed by Briley et al. This post hoc interpretation is admittedly rather speculative, and should be treated as very tentative pending a more direct confirmation of its validity.

DISCUSSION

Attempts to identify general cultural differences in norms and values are presumably stimulated in part by the assumption that these differences can potentially account for cultural variation in both judgments and behaviors. Although this assumption might be valid, global measures of individualism-collectivism do not appear useful either in describing the norms and values that are applied in a given situational context or in identifying the antecedents of the behavior that occurs in this context. Our research permits several general conclusions to be drawn and suggests avenues for further exploration.

THE CONSTRUCTS OF INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

In this article, we have conceptualized individualism and collectivism very broadly in terms of the disposition to think of oneself as a unique individual or as part of a group, respectively. These different orientations, which are similar to Markus and Kitayama’s (1991) distinction between independent and interdependent selves, do not in themselves imply differences in specific values, norms, or behavior. In fact, the manifestation of these orientations in the norms and values that people apply may be situation specific and, as such, may not be captured by measures of individualism and collectivism of the sort we employed (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998).

In fact, the norms and values that are typically assumed to reflect individualism and collectivism are likely to vary independently both within and across cultures, and consequently are likely to have different determinants and effects. The Individualism-Collectivism scale we employed in the present research is only one of many that have been used to infer differences in individualism and collectivism (for other measures, see Rhee et al., 1996; Triandis, 1991, 1995); however, even this single scale appears to consist of at least five independent values.

Furthermore, the values reported by representatives of Western and Asian cultures do not consistently differ in the way that is often assumed
to reflect individualism and collectivism (cf. Hofstede, 1980; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). As might be expected, Hong Kong Chinese attached relatively less value than Americans to individuality and uniqueness, and attached relatively more value to sacrificing one’s own goals for the benefit of others. At the same time, they also attached more importance to not being outperformed by others than Americans did. Moreover, calling participants’ attention to their cultural identity not only increased the magnitude of this latter difference, but also led Hong Kong Chinese to attach relatively more value to winning than U.S. participants did. (Note that not being outperformed and winning compose the factor that Triandis and Gelfand (1998) interpreted as “vertical individualism.”) Thus, these results appear to contradict the assumption that East Asians conform to collectivist values as they are traditionally conceptualized.

A global conceptualization of individualism and collectivism that takes into account situation-specific differences might accommodate these results. As we suggested earlier, individualistic and collectivist orientations may differ in terms of the relative tendencies to think of oneself as an independent individual or as a member of a group. The specific values that derive from these orientations may vary over situations. Thus, a collectivist orientation may be reflected in a willingness to sacrifice one’s personal goals to benefit others under conditions in which these motives are in conflict. At the same time, it might be reflected in a tendency to use others as a standard of comparison in evaluating one’s own skills and abilities, and a desire to avoid being inferior to others along dimensions that are considered desirable in the society to which one belongs.

In this regard, Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama (1999; see also Heine & Lehman, 1997) note that whereas European Americans are motivated by a desire for self-enhancement, Asians are more inclined to be motivated by a desire for self-improvement. Perhaps the importance that Asians attach to not being outperformed does not reflect a desire to be superior to others per se. Rather, Asians use others’ performance to determine whether they have done as well as they could or whether they can potentially increase their ability to contribute effectively to the attainment of goals that are considered important in the group or society to which they belong. In contrast, members of Western cultures are less inclined to use others as a comparative standard, and may disparage others’ success in achievement situations in order to maintain a positive self-image (cf. Oishi et al., 2000).

**CHRONIC VERSUS SITUATIONAL INFLUENCES ON CULTURE-RELATED VALUES**

Norms and values may often be chronically accessible in memory as a result of frequent exposure to circumstances in which they have been ap-
plied (Bargh et al., 1986, 1988; Higgins, 1996). Cognitions associated with other competing values are also likely to exist and, if easily accessible, to potentially influence the values that people report. Thus, cultural differences in values may not be detected if transitory situational factors activate values that are inconsistent with cultural inclinations.

This possibility was evident in the research reported in this article. That is, cultural differences in values were pronounced when situational primes engendered general concepts associated with participants’ own culture, or induced them to think about themselves in a way that coincided with culture-related dispositions. These differences were often decreased or eliminated when situational factors activated concepts associated with a different culture than the participants’ own, or disposed them to think of themselves in ways that conflicted with cultural norms. In short, individuals’ cultural backgrounds appear to influence the values they espouse; however, this influence can often be overridden by situational factors that make other, competing values more accessible.

Priming general concepts associated with one’s culture and priming dispositions to think of oneself in a way that coincided with cultural dispositions often had similar effects on the values that participants reported. There were two striking exceptions, both of which involved achievement-relevant values. First, exposing Hong Kong Chinese to symbols of their own culture increased the importance they attached to not being outperformed by others, whereas stimulating them to think of themselves as part of a group decreased the importance they attached to not being outperformed. As noted earlier, activating concepts associated with Chinese culture may lead Hong Kong students to think about improving their skills in ways that will benefit society as a whole and may stimulate them to use others’ performance as a comparative standard in determining whether they can improve themselves (Heine & Lehman, 1997; Heine et al., 1999). Priming “we” might stimulate them to think of themselves as part of a smaller group rather than a member of society as a whole, and might activate concepts associated with social harmony and, therefore, might decrease the motivation to compete or to stand out by excelling in achievement activities. (This tendency could also account for the lower value that Hong Kong participants attached to winning under these conditions; see Table 4.)

The effects of priming on the value attached to winning also require attention. When participants’ cultural identities were made salient to them, Americans attached less importance to winning than Hong Kong participants did (-0.56 vs. 0.59; see Table 3). When they were stimulated to think of themselves in a way that was presumably predominant in their own culture, Americans attached more importance to winning than Hong Kong participants did (0.44 vs. -0.41; see Table 4). The effects of cultural priming on the importance of winning, which parallel its ef-
fects on the importance of not being outperformed, may be mediated by self-evaluation concerns of the sort discussed earlier. That is, culture-consistent priming may decrease Americans’ tendency to define themselves and their performance in relation to others and thus may reduce their concern about being outperformed. Furthermore, stimulating Americans to think of themselves as individual’s rather than as part of a group may have a similar effect. At the same time, these thoughts appear to increase the value that Americans attach to defeating others in direct competition, independently of these self-evaluation concerns.

Caution should be taken in overgeneralizing our specific findings to Western and Asian cultures in general. As others (e.g., Markus, Mullally, & Kitayama, 1997) point out, important differences are likely to exist between the norms and values that predominate in different East Asian societies (e.g., Japan, Korea, Mainland China, Hong Kong, etc.). The configurations of values that typify these cultures may differ as much from one another as they do from Western cultures. Nevertheless, the present data raise questions concerning the meaningfulness of characterizing Western and Asian cultures in terms of differences in responses on a general measure individualism-collectivism scale rather than more specific sets of norms and values whose determinants and consequences can be more easily understood.

THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL VALUES ON BEHAVIOR

In the decision task constructed by Briley et al. (2000), participants chose either a product that had both highly desirable and highly undesirable attributes or one that was moderately desirable along all attribute dimensions. Although Asians and European Americans generally have similar inclinations to select the latter, compromise alternative, differences emerge under certain conditions. For example, cultural differences were not evident unless participants were asked to give reasons for their choices (Briley et al., 2000). Moreover, Asians were less disposed to compromise when concepts associated with Western culture were primed, or when they were stimulated to think of themselves as individuals rather than as part of a group (see Table 5). More generally, people appear more likely to compromise when their own cultural identity is salient to them, or when they are disposed to think of themselves in a way that is normative in their own culture. This suggests that making one’s cultural identity salient increases cautiousness and, increases the desire to avoid alternatives with potentially undesirable features.

Neither general differences in individualism-collectivism nor differences in the specific values that are associated with this general construct
were particularly helpful in accounting for cultural variation in compromise behavior. Other dispositions that appear to distinguish Asian and Western cultures may be more useful. As noted earlier, differences in the choice behavior identified by Briley et al. (2000) may be traceable to more general differences in the relative emphasis placed on avoiding negative outcomes and attaining positive ones (Lee et al., in press). (The evidence that Hong Kong Chinese attach more importance than Americans to not being outperformed by others could be another manifestation of this general cultural difference.)

Both Americans and Chinese compromised more when they were stimulated to think about their own culture than when they were not. In fact, Americans compromised as much as Chinese did when concepts associated with their own culture were primed. The need for cautiousness that appears to arise when one’s cultural identity is made salient may override the underlying cultural tendencies found by Briley et al. (2000). Moreover, although bringing concepts associated with one’s own culture to mind may increase cultural differences in values (see Table 3), it may generally decrease risk-taking under conditions in which people are required to justify their behavior to others. This choice result may be driven by a different mechanism than that which explains the results for the values studies. In addition to affecting the accessibility of culture-related concepts in subjects’ memories, reminding individuals of their cultural identities can influence their motivations (Briley & Wyer, 2001).

As we noted at the outset, the norms and values that underlie many cultural differences in behavior may be situation specific. If this is so, the search for general norms and values that account for cultural differences in decision behaviors may not prove fruitful. Cultural differences in decisionmaking may often reflect socially learned response patterns that, once acquired, are performed with a minimum of mediating cognitive activity (see Footnote 1). If the influence of cultural norms and values on decision behaviors occurs due to an automatic process such as this rather than through conscious deliberation, individuals may not accurately report the values that guide their decisions.

An understanding of the general norms and values that distinguish different cultures might of course be of considerable interest in many contexts. If one’s objective is to explain cultural differences in decisionmaking, however, it may be more desirable to put the cart before the horse. That is, identifying general cultural differences in norms and values and then searching for behaviors that they predict could be a vacuous pursuit. It may be more fruitful to begin by conceptualizing on a priori theoretical grounds the specific cognitions and motives that are likely to underlie the behavior of the sort one wishes to investigate, and then determine the extent to which cultural differences in these factors
account for the behavioral decisions that are typically observed. This approach could ultimately help us to understand cultural differences in norms and values more generally.

REFERENCES


