The Effects of Group Membership on the Avoidance of Negative Outcomes: Implications for Social and Consumer Decisions

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The Effect of Group Membership Salience on the Avoidance of Negative Outcomes: Implications for Social and Consumer Decisions

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Calling consumers’ attention to their cultural identity can make them aware of their membership in a group and, therefore, can induce a group mind-set. This mind-set, in turn, leads them to make decisions that minimize the risk of negative outcomes to both themselves and others. The effects of this mind-set generalize over both group and individual choice situations. These possibilities were confirmed in a series of six experiments. Results showed that making people feel part of an ad hoc group increased not only their use of equality as a basis for allocating resources to themselves and others, but also their tendency to compromise in individual consumer choice situations. Moreover, calling Asian and Western participants’ attention to their cultural identity also induced feelings of being part of a group and, as a result, had analogous effects on decisions in both group and consumer choice situations.

Research and theory on consumer behavior must take into account the way in which individuals’ cultural backgrounds influence their judgments and decisions. An understanding of this influence, however, is complicated by a number of factors. For one thing, cultural differences in behavior may only be apparent when the culture-related norms and values that bear on a decision to engage in this behavior are accessible in memory at the time the decision is made (Aaker and Lee 2001; Briley, Morris, and Simonson 2000; see also Briley and Wyer 2001; Hong et al. 2000). This culture-related knowledge is most likely to have an influence when people are not clearly aware of the factors that have led it to come to mind. In fact, calling people’s cultural identity to their attention could have effects that override the influence of culture-related norms and values. Moreover, these effects may be similar across individuals regardless of the specific culture that they represent.

The present research examined this possibility. Specifically, we hypothesized that calling individuals’ attention to their national or cultural identity (like making them aware of their membership in a more circumscribed group) can stimulate them to adopt a group mind-set. This mind-set, in turn, may induce a prevention focus (Higgins 1997, 1998), that is, a disposition to minimize the negative consequences of decisions with little consideration given to possible benefits. This motivational disposition contrasts with a promotion focus (i.e., a disposition to emphasize the potential benefits of a decision rather than its costs). Prevention and promotion goals are conceptualized by Higgins and his colleagues as “representational structures that guide the system in its pursuit of a reference or end state” (Markman and Brendl 2000, p. 98). These goal orientations, once activated, can generalize over situations and decision domains (Liberman et al. 1999). That is, they may influence not only behavior in interpersonal situations but also individual consumer decisions in which others are not involved.

An understanding of the influence of a prevention focus is of general importance in analyzing the effects of advertisements and other marketing communications. These communications often activate concepts associated with interpersonal relations and social affiliation. If these communications induce a prevention focus, they could influence purchase decisions for reasons other than those that marketers assume. Therefore, the impact of a group mind-set on decision processes, and the extent to which people’s

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awareness of their cultural identity induces this mind-set, are well worth investigating.

**EFFECTS OF GROUP MIND-SET ON JUDGMENTS AND DECISIONS**

Effects of Group Membership on Concern with Negative Outcomes

People who become aware of their membership in a group are likely to feel a sense of responsibility to its members (both themselves and others). In principle, these feelings could be manifested in behavior that either enhances the group and its members or prevents them from encountering adversity. However, people are often more concerned about negative consequences of their behavioral decisions than about positive consequences (loss aversion; Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler 1991), and this bias is likely to be magnified when decisions affect other persons as well as themselves. This is because negative outcomes of group-relevant decisions (e.g., failure, disgrace and embarrassment) can erode group cohesiveness. Furthermore, decisions that have more unfavorable consequences for some members than others could create conflict and disharmony. For these reasons, feelings of group membership are likely to induce a prevention focus of the sort noted earlier. More specifically, these feelings may increase cautiousness and cause a stronger tendency to avoid making decisions that could have negative consequences for oneself and other members.

Aaker and Lee (2001) confirmed the assumption that people are more concerned about the negative consequences of behavior when they think of themselves as members of a group. Participants imagined themselves as the protagonist in an advertising scenario about the finals of a tennis tournament. The scenario referred to the protagonist as either an individual or a member of a team and was worded in a way that emphasized either the desirability of winning or the undesirability of losing. Later, some participants recalled aspects of the scenarios they had read, whereas others estimated their liking for the tennis racquet that was ostensibly being advertised. When participants had been induced to think of themselves as individuals, they recalled relatively more aspects of the story, and evaluated the product more favorably, when the story emphasized winning. When participants had been stimulated to think of themselves as members of a team, however, they retained more information and made more favorable product evaluations when the story focused on the possibility of losing. This suggests that stimulating people to think of themselves as part of a group heightens their relative concern about negative consequences of behavior.

Aaker and Lee’s findings provide the basis for the following postulate:

**P1:** Feelings of membership in a group increase one’s concern with the negative consequences of one’s behavior.

Effects of a Prevention Focus on Judgments and Decisions

To reiterate, a prevention focus is conceptualized by Higgins (1997, 1998) as a general motivational disposition that mediates judgments and decisions in both interpersonal situations (e.g., Higgins et al. 1994) and individual choice tasks (e.g., Crowe and Higgins 1997; Roney, Higgins, and Shah 1995). Its effects, which may be either chronic or situationally induced, can be conceptualized in terms suggested by Anderson (1983). In particular, a concern with negative outcomes could activate a set of behavioral decision strategies (e.g., cognitive “productions”) that are employed with minimal cognitive mediation under conditions in which they are applicable. Productions theoretically have the form of “If {X}, then {Y}” rules, where {X} is a set of situational and internally generated features and {Y} is a sequence of behaviors that are spontaneously activated when the eliciting conditions are met. The conditions that elicit a production can include both internally generated motivational concepts (e.g., “avoid negative outcomes”) and aspects of the specific situation in which one finds oneself, and the two sets of features in combination may be both necessary and sufficient to activate the production. Thus, the same motivational concept, in combination with different sets of situational features, could activate quite different behavioral sequences, depending on the situation at hand.

Two sets of studies, each in a different content domain, provide compelling examples of this difference. First, college-age participants in a study by Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996, experiment 2) performed a sentence-construction task that unobtrusively activated concepts associated with the elderly. These participants walked more slowly to the elevator after leaving the experiment than participants who had not performed this task. In a different situation, furthermore, subliminally priming similar elderly related concepts led participants to perform less well on a memory task. As a second example, Bargh et al. (1996, experiment 3) found that subliminally exposing Caucasian participants to faces of African-Americans while performing a boring task led them to manifest more nonverbal expressions of hostility and irritation when they were asked to repeat the task later in the study. However, an identical procedure led participants in a different situation to perform less well on a mathematics test (Colcombe and Wyer 2001). Thus, activating a concept of African-Americans (who are stereotyped as both hostile and aggressive and as unmotivated to do well in academic situations) had quite different effects, depending on the situation at hand.1

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1In some situations, a prevention focus might also activate a general semantic concept (e.g., “negative consequences are bad and should be avoided”) that, once activated, is later used to interpret other situations to which it is applicable. The processes that underlie these effects and their generalizability over situations may be similar to those that more generally govern the effects of priming semantic concepts in one situation on judgments and behavior in other, quite-unrelated situations (for alternative theoretical formulations of these processes and summaries of results bearing on them, see Bargh 1994; Higgins 1996; Wyer and Srull 1989).
The aforementioned studies do not bear directly on the generalizability of the disposition to avoid negative outcomes. However, Liberman et al. (1999) found evidence that this is the case. In their study, some participants were asked to write about their hopes for the future, while others wrote about their concerns. On the basis of theory and research by Higgins et al. (1994), the authors assumed that writing about hopes would activate a concern with positive outcomes (a promotion focus), whereas writing about concerns would stimulate them to think about avoiding negative outcomes (a prevention focus). Subsequently, participants completed a supposedly unrelated task in which they were asked to imagine that they had received a $5 mug (pen) as a gift and could exchange it for a pen (mug) of similar value. The authors predicted that the prevention focus induced by writing about concerns would increase participants’ sensitivity to losses and, consequently, deter them from giving up their gift. The results confirmed this prediction. Forty-four percent of participants who wrote about their goals exchanged their gift, whereas only 19% of those who wrote about concerns were willing to do so. The generalizability of a prevention focus over decision situations demonstrated by Liberman et al. is consistent with other conceptualizations of decision making, which also assume that people often acquire general guidelines that they apply to decisions in a variety of different domains (Briley et al. 2000; Shafir, Simonson, and Tversky 1993). These considerations justify a second postulate:

**P2:** Once a prevention focus (i.e., a disposition to avoid the risk of negative consequences) is activated in one situation, its effects will generalize to other group and individual choice situations that are unrelated to the one in which the focus was induced.

**Manifestations of Aversion to Negative Outcomes in Group and Individual Decisions**

In the present article, a prevention focus is assumed to be reflected in (a) a preference for equality in interpersonal choice situations, (b) a tendency to compromise in individual choice situations (cf. Briley et al. 2000), and (c) a tendency in multiple-choice situations to distribute choices over multiple alternatives rather than choosing a single alternative. The basis for these assumptions may require elaboration.

**Preference for Equality.** Suppose people are confronted with a decision that either (a) benefits one individual at the expense of another or (b) treats all parties equally. The first option could create friction among group members and give rise to resentment. In contrast, the second option is more likely to leave both parties reasonably satisfied and to minimize the social costs that might otherwise be incurred. Individuals who are motivated by a desire to minimize the negative consequences of their decision are likely to prefer the second, compromise alternative to the first. Work by Simonson and Tversky (1992; see also Tversky and Simonson 1993) supports this contention. They suggest that decision makers often seek compromise options because, due to loss aversion (Kahneman et al. 1991), they anticipate the regret they will feel if they choose an option that they later discover is not optimal. Regret anticipation, which reflects a concern about the potential negative consequences of the decision, leads individuals to view options in terms of the relative dissatisfaction each would make them feel. The selection of a compromise alternative is attractive because it reduces the maximum dissatisfaction one can incur. It follows that increasing one’s concern about negative outcomes will increase their tendency to prefer compromise solutions to decision problems. Note that this rationale applies to the other two tasks we examine in this article, discussed below, as they also can be framed as a decision between compromise and noncompromise alternatives.

**Compromise in Consumer Choice Situations.** Suppose consumers are confronted with a choice between (a) a product with a very favorable value along one attribute dimension and a very unfavorable value along a second dimension and (b) a product with moderate values along both dimensions. Assuming that all attribute dimensions are similar in importance, people who are guided by the positive consequences of their decision might generally prefer the first alternative, though those with a desire to minimize negative consequences of their choice should prefer the second, compromise option.

**Decisions in Multiple Choice Situations.** Suppose consumers are offered two equally attractive types of candy and can choose either (a) two candies of the same type or (b) one candy of each type. In such a situation, they may be uncertain of which candy they prefer. If consumers are motivated by the desire to maximize positive consequences of their choice and have a slight preference for one candy over the other, they should choose two candies of the preferred type. However, consumers with a disposition to avoid negative consequences of their decision should focus on what they stand to lose rather than what they might gain. Because the choice of two candies of the same type would incur a loss of the attractive features of the alternative (not chosen) candy, they are likely to compromise by choosing one candy of each type. (In addition, these participants might be concerned about postdecisional regret from a second source—their own preferences changing over time—and might distribute their choices over candy types for this reason as well.)

Other factors might also contribute to decisions in the situations just described. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that a general tendency to minimize the likelihood of negative consequences of one’s choice would be reflected in decisions in all three situations. On the basis of this assumption and postulates 1 and 2, we derived the following two hypotheses, which we evaluated in the first two experiments to be reported:

**H1:** Inducing feelings of group membership will increase preferences for equality in interpersonal situations.


**H2:** Inducing feelings of group membership will increase the tendency to distribute choices over alternatives in a multiple-choice situation in which only oneself is involved.

**EFFECTS OF CULTURAL SALIENCE ON JUDGMENTS AND DECISIONS**

Cultural differences in the norms, values, and standards of behavior that guide people’s judgments and decisions have often been conceptualized in terms of individualism and collectivism (Hofstede 1980; Triandis 1989). Individualism, which is common in Western cultures, is characterized by a tendency to view oneself as an independent being and to pursue personal goals without considering others’ interests. Collectivism, which is more typical of Asian societies, is often reflected in a disposition to think of oneself as a member of a group or collective and to evaluate one’s own attributes and behavioral outcomes in relation to others’. (For a similar distinction, see Markus and Kitayama 1991.)

When Asians and Westerners are not conscious of their cultural identity, the norms and values that predominate in their society may influence the decisions they make, and this influence may occur without awareness. (For discussions of the nonconscious influences of chronically accessible bodies of knowledge on judgments and behavior, see Bargh 1997, 2002; Higgins 1996.) Members of collectivist culture may be generally more prevention focused than members of individualistic societies (Lee, Aaker, and Gardner 2000) and consequently may be relatively more disposed to compromise in both interpersonal and individual choice situations. As Hong and Chiu (2001) point out, however, culture-specific norms and values are not the only criteria on which people base judgments and decisions and may not be applied if other relevant criteria are more salient. To this extent, calling people’s attention to their cultural or national origin may induce feelings of group identity that override other effects that culture-related knowledge might otherwise have. In this regard, Druckman (1994) notes that one’s cultural or national identity is often a central part of one’s self-definition, and awareness of this identity can induce feelings of allegiance to one’s country and a desire to promote or maintain its interests. Moreover, this may be true regardless of the individualistic or collectivist orientation of the country to which one belongs (Davis 1999).

To this extent, calling people’s attention to their cultural or national identity may make both Asians and Westerners conscious of their membership in a group and, therefore, may induce a prevention focus similar to that induced by membership in a more circumscribed group. Under these conditions, then, people are likely to minimize the negative consequences of their decisions in both interpersonal situations and individual choice situations. To formalize these predictions:

**H3:** Making participants aware of their cultural identity will increase their preference for equality in interpersonal situations.

**H4:** Making participants aware of their cultural identity will increase their preference for products that will decrease the risk of negative consequences in consumer choice situations.

Note that these effects differ from those one might predict on the basis of cultural differences in norms and values per se. As we noted earlier, Asians are generally inclined to think of themselves as part of a group, whereas Westerners are more disposed to think of themselves as individuals (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Triandis 1989). Thus, in the absence of factors that call attention to their cultural identity, Asians may be generally more sensitive to negative consequences of their behavior than Americans are. This difference was reported by Aaker and Lee (2001), who found that when participants’ cultural identity was not salient to them, Chinese were generally more likely than Americans to remember aspects of a scenario that focused on losing and were less likely than Americans to remember aspects of a scenario that emphasized winning. However, when people are consciously aware of their identity as members of the culture they represent, they might have similar concerns about negative consequences regardless of their culture.

**OVERVIEW**

The six experiments to be reported and their implications for the conceptualization we propose can be summarized with reference to figure 1. The solid lines in figure 1A show the hypothetical causal relations between feelings of group membership, the adoption of a prevention focus, and both preferences for equality (in interpersonal situations) and compromise-oriented alternatives (in individual judgment situations). Experiments 1 and 2 established the observed effects of inducing feelings of group membership on these preferences, as indicated by the dashed lines in the figure. However, Aaker and Lee’s (2001) findings establish the relation between feelings of group membership and a prevention focus, and experiment 3 establishes that a direct manipulation of emphasis on positive versus negative outcomes influences preferences in the two types of situations we examine in the first two experiments. Moreover, this experiment further shows that the effects of feelings of group membership on these preferences were eliminated when prevention focus was experimentally controlled.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 assume that making people aware of their cultural identity induces feelings of group membership. This assumption is confirmed in experiment 4 along with findings by Adaval (2001) and Gardner, Gabriel, and Lee (1999). If this assumption is valid, the effects of making salient participants’ cultural identity should be indicated by the solid paths in figure 1B. Experiments 5 and 6, which employed both European-American and Hong Kong Chinese participants, established the effects of making salient participants’ cultural identity on both preferences for equal-
ity and compromise choices in a product evaluation task, as indicated by dashed lines in the figure. However, experiment 6 confirmed that (a) making participants’ cultural identity salient induces a concern with negative consequences of their choices (e.g., a prevention focus), (b) a concern with negative consequences leads to a preference for compromise options, and (c) the effect on choice behavior of making cultural identity salient is mediated by thoughts about the negative consequences of decisions. These conclusions and their implications are discussed in the following sections.

**EXPERIMENT 1: EFFECTS OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP ON USE OF EQUALITY-ORIENTED DECISION PRINCIPLES**

Hypothesis 1 suggests that making people feel they belong to a group induces a disposition to avoid negative outcomes to both self and others and that this will be manifested in a preference for equality in interpersonal situations. Moreover, this disposition may generalize to situations other than that in which feelings of group membership were induced (postulate 2; see Higgins 1998; Liberman et al. 1999).

Experiment 1 evaluated this hypothesis. We experimentally manipulated participants’ feelings of group membership by giving them the expectation that they would perform an experimental task either as individuals or as part of a group. Then, after inducing this expectation, we examined their endorsement of proverbs that advocate equality or balance in group situations. Although this measure was not a direct index of decision making, other research provides evidence that people’s agreement with proverbs does in fact reflect the values they draw on to make behavioral decisions (Briley et al. 2000; Weber, Hsee, and Sokolowska 1998).

**Method**

Forty-six Chinese undergraduates at a Hong Kong university participated in the study for HK$100 (US$12.82).
Subjects were told that the experiment was intended to test the thinking skills of college students and that to do this, they would be performing a 22-item anagram task. They were randomly assigned to either a group- or individual-focus condition. Those in group-focus conditions were told they would be performing the task in groups and, on this pretense, were assigned seats at different five-person tables. To encourage cohesiveness, the participants at each table decided on a group name that they would use to identify themselves on their answer sheets. In contrast, participants in individual-focus conditions were told they would be performing the task individually and were seated at single-person desks separated by partitions.

After being given these instructions, participants in both conditions were told that before performing the anagram task, they would be asked to complete some other, unrelated questionnaires as part of a different experiment. They were informed that in the first task, they would be asked to read 32 proverbs from different countries and to indicate the extent to which they endorsed them. Five of these proverbs emphasized the importance of balance and equity in social relations: (a) “a single hand cannot clap” (implying that action requires a collective effort), (b) “it takes two to make a quarrel” (both people who quarrel share responsibility for it), (c) “when the shoulder pole is not secure at both ends, the load will slip off” (people working together must be responsible for their part), (d) “the pole is easy to carry if the load is balanced” (balancing the work over individuals makes a task easier), and (e) “rivers have two banks and every issue has two sides” (there are two sides to every controversy).

Participants read each proverb and then indicated (a) how much they liked the idea of the proverb, (b) how much they would rely on the proverb as a guide in making decisions, and (c) the extent to which they would draw on the proverb as a basis for giving advice. These judgments, each reported along a scale from 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much), were averaged for each proverb. A homogeneity analysis of responses to the five proverbs assumed to reflect the value attached to equality and balance yielded a coefficient alpha of .82. Responses to the five proverbs were then averaged to yield a single index of each participant’s endorsement of the equality-related proverbs.

Results

As we expected, participants endorsed equality-related proverbs more strongly when they had been led to believe they were participating in groups ($M = 5.60$) than when they believed they were taking part as individuals ($M = 5.07$, $F(1, 44) = 4.41$, $p < .05$). Thus, these results support hypothesis 1, that people who are induced to feel part of a group take on a group mind-set and, therefore, are likely to favor equality in interpersonal relations. (An alternative interpretation of these results will be evaluated presently.)

EXPERIMENT 2: EFFECTS OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP ON CONSUMER DECISION MAKING

The prevention focus that is stimulated by consciousness of one’s group membership should generalize to consumer decision situations in which only one’s own outcomes are affected. Thus, according to hypothesis 2, the equality-related decision strategy that was prompted by feelings of group membership is applied in individual decision situations as well. The next experiment explored this possibility. As in experiment 1, some participants believed they were participating in the experiment as part of a group, whereas others believed they were participating as individuals. Later, on leaving the experiment, they were given an opportunity to choose two candies to take home with them in return for participating. Two types of candy were available. Therefore, participants could choose two candies of the same type or, alternatively, one of each type. For reasons outlined earlier, we assumed that participants who were motivated by a desire to minimize the negative consequences of their choice would be more inclined to choose one candy of each type. According to hypothesis 2, this tendency should be greater among participants who had participated in the experiment as part of a group than among those who had participated as individuals.

Method

Forty-three Hong Kong undergraduate students were paid HK$100 (US$12.82) to participate. As in experiment 1, they were assigned randomly to either an individual-focus or group-focus condition and told that they would be completing an anagram task to test their thinking skills. The same manipulations used in experiment 1 were applied in the present study. In addition, to encourage cohesiveness in the group-focus condition, participants were told that the group’s performance on the anagram task would be evaluated as a whole. In both conditions participants were instructed to work individually and not talk to one another while performing the task.

Participants were then given five minutes to complete a 22-item anagram task. When time was up, they were told that the experiment was over. However, they were told that in addition to the money they were being paid for participating, they could have two pieces of candy. Two types of candy that are popular among students and for which they have similar preferences (Nestle’s Crunch and Cadbury Timeout)\(^2\) were placed in separate bowls on a table near the exit. Each participant was paid individually and, after receiving payment, left the room, taking two pieces of candy on the way out. Participants’ candy selections were observed through a one-way mirror, and the nature of each partici-
pant's choice (two candies of the same kind, or one of each kind) was recorded.

Results and Discussion

As predicted, participants were more likely to choose one candy of each brand when they had participated in a group (.73) than when they had participated individually (.45; \( \chi^2(1) = 3.74, p < .05 \)). This difference is particularly noteworthy in light of the fact that participants believed that the experiment was over at the time they made their choices and had no reason to believe that these choices were being monitored. These results therefore support our contention that people with a group mind-set are more likely to seek balance and compromise in their choices than are those with an individual mind-set.

EXPERIMENT 3: EFFECTS OF REWARD AND PUNISHMENT INCENTIVES ON DECISIONS

The results of the first two experiments are consistent with hypotheses 1 and 2. To establish the validity of the assumptions underlying these hypotheses, however, we must show that (a) a more direct manipulation of participants' concern with positive versus negative outcomes will affect participants' preferences for equality and choice behavior in the same way that feelings of group membership affect them and (b) the effects of feelings of group membership are eliminated when concern with these alternative outcomes is experimentally controlled. Experiment 3 attained these objectives.

The procedure we employed in this study was similar to that used in experiment 2. That is, participants were told they would perform an anagram task either as individuals or as members of a group. However, some participants were led to believe they would receive a reward for doing well, whereas others were told they would be penalized for doing poorly. In anticipation of performing the task, participants completed the proverb-evaluation questionnaire administered in experiment 1 and then, on completing the anagram task and leaving the experiment, were given an opportunity to choose candies under conditions used in experiment 2.

We expected that participants would be more likely to endorse proverbs that advocated equality and more likely to diversify their candy choices when penalties for poor performance rather than rewards for good performance were emphasized. Moreover, we expected that a direct manipulation of the importance of positive versus negative outcomes would decrease or eliminate the less direct effects of group membership salience on participants' judgments and decisions.

Method

Ninety-three Hong Kong undergraduates, who participated for course credit, were told they would perform a 22-item anagram task under either individual- or group-focus conditions identical to those employed in experiment 2. In addition, we induced a concern with either positive or negative outcomes using a procedure similar to that employed by Roney et al. (1995). In reward conditions, participants were informed that the individual/group completing the most anagrams would receive HK$100/$500 (US$12.82/$64.10). In punishment conditions, they were told that individuals/groups would receive candy for participating, except those that completed significantly fewer anagrams than average.

After receiving these instructions, however, participants were told that before performing the anagram task, we wanted them to complete an unrelated questionnaire as a part of a different experiment. On this pretense, they were administered the same 32-item proverb endorsement questionnaire used in experiment 1. Then, they completed the anagram task. Participants under reward conditions were then told that they would be notified later if they had won, and those in punishment conditions were told they had done well enough to receive candy. Then, all participants were dismissed, making candy selections as they left according to procedures described in experiment 2.

Results and Discussion

Participants' evaluations of equality-oriented proverbs and their likelihood of choosing variety in their candy selections are shown in table 1 as a function of outcome focus (reward vs. punishment) and group versus individual task conditions. Each set of data is discussed in turn.
EFFECT OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP SALIENCE

Proverb Endorsement. We expected that participants would evaluate proverbs that endorsed equality more positively under punishment conditions than under reward conditions. Moreover, we speculated that this direct manipulation of outcome focus would override the effects of inducing a group mind-set on these evaluations. This was in fact the case. Participants judged equality-oriented proverbs more useful as decision guides under punishment conditions ($M = 5.55$) than under reward conditions ($M = 5.07$; $F(1,89) = 4.84, p < .05$). However, the effect of group (vs. individual) focus was not evident ($F < 1$); participants’ evaluations of equality-oriented proverbs were virtually identical regardless of whether they participated as a group or as individuals ($5.33$ vs. $5.28$). The interaction of group/individual focus and outcome focus also did not approach significance ($F < 1$).

Candy Preferences. Participants were more likely to choose different types of candy in punishment conditions ($71$) than in reward conditions ($43$). In contrast, the proportions of individuals who chose variety in group- and individual-focus conditions were virtually identical ($57$ vs. $53$, respectively). These conclusions are confirmed by a logistic regression analysis, which indicated that the effect of outcome focus was quite reliable ($\chi^2 = 6.50, p < .01$), whereas the main effect of group versus individual focus did not even approach significance ($\chi^2 < 1$). Interestingly, the interaction term was significant ($\chi^2 = 7.46, p < .01$), reflecting the relatively high tendency of subjects in the group-focus/punishment conditions to choose candies of different brands ($81$; see table 1).

These results indicate that providing explicit incentives that lead persons to focus on positive versus negative outcomes influences candy choice variety in the way we would expect and, moreover, overrides the less direct effect of a group versus individual mind-set that is apparent in the absence of these incentives. A comparison of the data obtained in experiment 3 with those of experiments 1 and 2 (see table 1) indicates that the mean preference for equality-oriented proverbs under reward conditions of experiment 3 is virtually identical to that observed in individual-focus conditions of experiment 1 ($5.07$ in both cases), whereas the mean preference for these proverbs under punishment conditions is very similar to that obtained in group-focus conditions of the first experiment ($5.55$ vs. $5.60$, respectively). Correspondingly, the proportion of participants who chose two candies in punishment conditions of the present study (.71) is very similar to the proportion who did so in group-focus conditions of experiment 2 (.73), and the proportion who chose two candies under reward conditions (.43) is similar to the proportion who did so under individual-focus conditions of the earlier experiment (.45). Thus in the earlier experiment where explicit incentives were absent, participants under group conditions behaved as if they had a punishment focus, whereas those under individual conditions behaved as if they had been given a reward focus. However, explicit incentives to focus on reward or punishment decreased or eliminated any effects that a group or individual focus might otherwise have had.

An alternative interpretation of the results of experiment 1 should be noted in this regard. That is, group membership might induce a more general equality norm that influences the endorsement of proverbs independently of a concern about negative outcomes per se. That is, the effects of group versus individual focus in experiment 1 and the effects of punishment versus reward in the present study could conceivably be due to different factors. However, note that group versus individual focus was manipulated in the present study as well as in the first experiment. If group focus induces an equality norm that influences proverb endorsement independently of its impact on concern with negative outcomes, it should have had an effect in the present study over and above the effects of reward versus punishment. There was obviously no evidence of this; judgments were virtually identical in group- versus individual-focus conditions regardless of whether reward or punishment was emphasized. Thus, any effect of group focus on preference for equality was apparently induced by a concern about negative outcomes, and this effect was eliminated when this concern was induced more directly.

It is of course conceivable that participants based their preferences on reward and punishment considerations in experiment 3, where these outcomes were called to their attention, but on a more general equality norm in experiment 1, when group membership was relatively more prominent. This interpretation, however, assumes that group membership does not in itself increase attention to negative consequences, and Aaker and Lee’s (2001) findings argue against this assumption. Finally, the assumption that the effect of group membership is mediated by its impact on the salience of a more general equality norm could not easily account for its effects on candy selections. In combination, therefore, experiments 1–3 provide good support for both hypotheses 1 and 2 and the assumptions underlying them.

EXPERIMENT 4: EFFECTS OF CULTURAL AWARENESS ON CONSCIOUSNESS OF GROUP MEMBERSHIP

According to hypotheses 3 and 4, making persons aware of their cultural identity should have effects similar to the effects of group membership observed in experiments 1 and 2. These hypotheses, however, are based on the assumption that calling people’s attention to their cultural identity would induce feelings of belonging to a group and, therefore, a concern with the consequences of one’s behavior in group situations. This assumption is consistent with findings by Druckman (1994) and Davis (1999), as noted earlier. It is nevertheless desirable to confirm the assumption using the
same procedure to be used for testing hypotheses 3 and 4 (in experiments 5 and 6) for inducing awareness of cultural identity.

Our hypotheses assume that thoughts about group membership are activated spontaneously by awareness of cultural identity, in the absence of situational demands. We therefore evaluated this assumption in a way that did not require asking participants explicitly for their thoughts about their cultural identity or, for that matter, about group membership more generally. The procedure we used was suggested by studies conducted by Gardner et al. (1999) and Adaval (2001). In these studies, participants were exposed to either first person singular pronouns (I, me, mine) or first person plural pronouns (we, us, our) in the course of performing an ostensibly irrelevant reading task. Gardner et al. (1999) found that participants in the second condition were more likely to describe themselves on the basis of their group memberships and roles (e.g., “I am a sister in Kappa Kappa Gamma” [p. 322]) and endorse group-oriented values (e.g., belongingness, family security, national security).

In Adaval’s study, participants performed a sentence construction task that required the use of either first person singular or first person plural pronouns. After doing so, they were exposed to one of two ads for Pepsi-Cola. The ads, which showed cartoon pictures of different individuals (a teenager, a baseball player, a policeman, etc.), were identical except for the banner head. In some cases, the banner read “Stand out from the crowd!” and in other cases, it read “Don’t stand out from the crowd!” Participants were asked to read the ad and to report their liking for it along a scale from −3 to +3. Participants who had been primed to use first person singular pronouns reported liking the first (“Stand out . . .”) ad more than the second (“Don’t stand out . . .”) ad (1.56 vs. 0.70), whereas participants who had been primed with first person plural pronouns liked the second ad more than the first (1.27 vs. 0.60). This study, in combination with Gardner et al.’s (1999), suggests that persons who use the first person plural are more inclined to think of themselves as part of a group and to value group membership more than those who use the first person singular. The present study was based on this assumption.

After first exposing participants to either symbols of their own culture or symbols of a different culture, we asked them to perform a sentence construction task in which they could choose either a first person singular or first person plural pronoun to form the sentences they were given. We expected that participants would be more inclined to use the first person plural pronoun in the first case than the second. If this occurs, and if the use of the first person plural pronoun reflects a tendency to think of oneself as members of a group (Gardner et al. 1999), it would support the assumption that exposure to symbols of one’s own culture induces feelings of group membership.

Method

Design and Participants. Forty-five United States and 35 Hong Kong Chinese college students participated for course credit. Before performing the sentence-contruction task, participants were exposed to pictures depicting either American or Chinese cultural icons. Thus, the design was a 2 (cultural icon exposure: American or Chinese) by 2 (participant sample: Chinese or European-American) factorial.

Exposure to Cultural Icons. To increase participants’ awareness of their national identity, we used a procedure similar to that employed successfully by Hong et al. (2000). Specifically, participants were told that we were interested in assessing the general knowledge of college students and that as a part of this investigation we wanted to determine individuals’ abilities to identify important persons, objects, or events and the time period with which they are primarily associated. On this pretense, participants were given six pictures or drawings. In the American icon exposure condition, the pictures portrayed an American flag, a “roaring ’20s” dance scene, a Dixieland band, Marilyn Monroe, Superman, and Abraham Lincoln. In the Chinese icon exposure 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 a character 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 period of time in which the referent first existed (or, if fictitious, the time it was first created).

Assessment of Group Orientation. To assess their disposition to think of themselves as individuals or as members of a group, we asked participants to complete a 32-item sentence-contruction questionnaire. Each item consisted of five randomly ordered words, and participants were told to underline four of the words that could be used to construct a meaningful sentence. Two sentences could be formed from each set. In 16 of the items, one possible sentence required use of a first-person plural pronoun (e.g., we, us, ours, etc.), and the other required use of a first-person singular pronoun (e.g., I, me, mine, etc.), for example, to go work we I.

We used the proportion of these items in which participants selected the first person plural pronoun to construct a sentence as an index of their group versus individual focus.

Results and Discussion

The proportion of items in which participants used a plural first-person pronoun to construct a sentence was computed for each participant and analyzed as a function of participants’ country of origin (Hong Kong vs. United States) and cultural exposure condition (same vs. different culture). The influence of exposure condition was significant ($F(1, 70) = 9.12, p < .01$) and attributable to the fact that participants selected a greater percentage of first-person plural pronouns when they had been exposed to symbols of
their own culture ($M = .32$) than when they had been exposed to symbols of a different culture ($M = .23$). Moreover, this was true for both Chinese participants (.35 vs. .25, $F(1, 70) = 6.07, p < .025$) and Americans (.30 vs. .22, $F(1, 70) = 5.28, p < .05$). Neither cultural sample ($F(1, 70) = 1.68, p = .20$) nor its interaction with icon exposure condition ($F < 1$) reached significance.

This experiment indicated that exposing participants to symbols of their own culture increased their tendency to use first person plural pronouns and that this was true for both Chinese and Americans. If this is so, and if the aforementioned findings by Gardner et al. (1999) and Adaval (2001) are valid, it follows that exposure to symbols of one’s own culture should increase feelings of membership in a group. To this extent, it should induce a prevention focus and, therefore, have effects analogous to those observed when participants are conscious of belonging to a more circumscribed group. Experiments 5 and 6 confirmed this proposition.

**EXPERIMENT 5: EFFECTS OF CULTURAL AWARENESS ON PREFERENCES FOR EQUALITY**

Experiment 1 supported the hypothesis that inducing participants to think of themselves as members of a group increases the value they attach to equality, as reflected in the endorsement of proverbs that emphasize the desirability of this state of affairs. It further confirmed the implications of postulate 2, that feelings of belonging to a group give rise to a mind-set that generalizes over groups and situations. If this is so, and if consciousness of one’s national identity increases the tendency to think of oneself as part of a group, it should induce a preference for equality similar to that induced by feelings of group membership in experiment 1.

To examine this possibility, we constructed a resource-allocation situation in which participants’ preferences for equality could be more directly evaluated. Both United States and Hong Kong Chinese college students participated. After making their national identity salient to them in the manner employed in experiment 3, we asked representatives of both cultures to imagine that they were responsible for allocating monetary rewards to themselves and a coworker and to indicate their preferences for alternative allocation schemes. These alternatives varied in terms of the equality of the allocations to self and other. Under these conditions, hypothesis 3 implies that making participants’ cultural identity salient should increase their tendency to base their allocations on equality, and this should be true for both Chinese and Americans.

**Method**

*Design and Participants.* Thirty-seven United States and 55 Hong Kong Chinese students participated for course credit. Before performing the resource-allocation task, some participants were exposed to the pictures of either American or Chinese cultural icons used in experiment 4. Thus, the design was a 2 (cultural icon exposure: American vs. Chinese) by 2 (participant sample: Chinese or European-American) factorial.

*Procedure.* Participants’ consciousness of their cultural identity was induced using the procedure developed by Hong et al. (2000) and employed in experiment 4. That is, some representatives of each cultural group were exposed to American icons, whereas others were exposed to Chinese icons. Then, all participants were given the resource-allocation task. To introduce this task, participants were asked to imagine that a firm for which they are working will provide a monetary bonus to themselves and a coworker for their work on a special project. The instructions indicated that the firm was considering several alternative possibilities for distributing the money and wished to know the alternative they would prefer. With this preamble, participants were given eight possible allocation schemes and asked to rank them in order of preference.

The allocations composing each alternative scheme, in units of $1,000, are shown in table 2. In each case, the money allocated to the participant is indicated first, and the allocation to the coworker is indicated second. As the table indicates, the eight allocation possibilities compose a three-factor design involving (a) the equality of the allocations to the participant and the coworker, (b) the joint allocation to the two individuals in combination, and (c) whether the participant’s allocation was greater or less than the coworker’s. Thus, the difference in allocations was either $1,000 (high equality) or $3,000 (low equality); the total amount awarded to the work group was either $15,000 (high joint gain) or $13,000 (low joint gain); and the participant could get more or less money than the coworker (positive vs. negative relative gain). Participants were asked to rank order the eight allocation alternatives using 1 to denote the most preferred allocation, 2 to denote the next most preferred, and so on.

**Results and Discussion**

Subjects’ rankings of the eight schemes were reverse scored so that higher numbers would reflect stronger preferences. Mean (reverse) rankings of the four schemes that
TABLE 3
MEAN RANKINGS AND UTILITIES OF EACH MOTIVE BY SAMPLE AND EXPOSURE CONDITIONS: EXPERIMENT 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample and exposure condition</th>
<th>Equality</th>
<th>Joint gains</th>
<th>Self relative to other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rankings:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture exposure</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture exposure</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td>4.84</td>
<td>5.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture exposure</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>5.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture exposure</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>5.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture exposure</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture exposure</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td>.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same culture exposure</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different culture exposure</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE.—Rankings are reverse scored so that larger numbers indicate higher (more favorable) rankings.

offer high equality (the schemes composing the top row of table 2), high joint gain (table 2, second and fourth columns), and positive relative gain (table 2, first and second columns) each are shown in table 3 as a function of participants’ nationality and priming condition. (Rankings of the remaining four schemes, which are the mirror images of the first four, are not shown.) These means indicate preference for each of the associated motives. Participants reported a stronger preference for equality when they had seen pictures from their own culture ($M = 5.36$) than when they had seen pictures of a different culture ($M = 5.08$; $F(1, 90) = 3.83$, $p < .05$). Although this difference appears to be somewhat less for Hong Kong participants (5.25 vs. 5.11) than for Americans (5.46 vs. 5.06), the contingency of this difference on cultural background was not at all reliable ($F < 1$).

Although the mean ranking of alternatives that reflected high (vs. low) joint gain was somewhat greater when participants’ own culture had been called to their attention ($M = 5.01$) than when it had not ($M = 4.81$), this difference was not significant ($F(1, 90) = 2.60$, $p > .10$). Similarly, the preference for allocations in which one’s own outcomes exceeded the other’s also did not depend significantly on whether participants’ own culture was made salient to them ($M = 6.02$) or not ($M = 5.83$; $F(1, 90) = 1.02$, $p > .10$).

Because participants’ rank orderings of the choice alternatives were not independent, an analysis of variance of these rankings is not strictly appropriate. However, a conjoint model yielded similar conclusions. This model predicts preference for allocation schemes using dummy variables for the three motives as predictors (0 = low equality = low joint gain = low self gain, 1 = high equality = high joint gain = high self gain). The coefficients (utilities) of the model, shown in table 3, estimate the relative influence of the three judgmental criteria on preferences. The Pearson correlation between participants’ actual rankings and those predicted by the model is significant ($r = .703$, $p < .05$), indicating that the model’s fit is acceptable.

The utility (or model coefficient) associated with allocation options that offer high (rather than low) equality was greater for subjects who had been exposed to icons from their own culture ($M = 0.72$) rather than another ($M = 0.52$; $F(1, 90) = 4.34$, $p < .05$), and this difference did not significantly depend on whether participants were from Hong Kong (0.71 vs. 0.57) or the United States (0.72 vs. 0.45; $F < 1$). In contrast, comparable analyses of the utilities associated with joint gain and self gain yielded no significant results whatsoever.

In summary, experiment 5 confirmed implications of the assumption that exposing participants to symbols of their own culture induced a tendency to think of themselves as part of a group rather than as an individual and, therefore, induced a prevention focus. That is, it increased their relative preference for equality when allocating resources to themselves and a coworker. This was true regardless of whether the participants were Chinese or American. Hypothesis 3 was therefore supported.

EXPERIMENT 6: EFFECTS OF CULTURAL SALIENCE ON INDIVIDUAL DECISION MAKING

Experiment 2 demonstrated that subjects’ participation in a group influenced their individual choice behavior in a later, ostensibly unrelated situation. According to hypothesis 4, making participants conscious of their national identity should have analogous effects. We explored this possibility in experiment 6. To do so, we employed a choice task in which the implications of participants’ choices for the relative importance of positive and negative outcomes could be more directly evaluated.

In this task, people are asked to consider two types of products. One type has a very favorable value along one attribute dimension and a very unfavorable value along a
second dimension. The second has moderately desirable values along both dimensions. A person who is primarily motivated by the attractiveness of positive features is likely to prefer the first type of product (which has a very desirable feature) to the second. In contrast, an individual who wishes to avoid the cost associated with undesirable features is likely to prefer the second, compromise alternative to the first (Simonson and Tversky 1992).

Cultural differences in choice behavior under these conditions were identified by Briley et al. (2000). Under conditions in which participants were asked to explain their choices, Americans tended to choose a product of the first type, whereas Chinese often chose the compromise alternative. These results could suggest that Chinese and North Americans differ in the relative emphasis they place on positive and negative attributes. Results obtained by Aaker and Lee (2001), noted earlier, suggest a similar conclusion.

However, the cultural difference observed by Briley et al. (2000) and Aaker and Lee (2001) occurred under conditions in which participants’ cultural identity was not explicitly called to their attention. Our theorizing suggests that making participants conscious of their country of origin is likely to increase their feelings of group identity regardless of their cultural background and, therefore, to produce a general tendency to avoid the risk of negative outcomes. To this extent, it may increase both Asians’ and North Americans’ preferences to compromise in the situation examined by Briley et al. (2000). Further, if the influence on compromising is mediated by a tendency to avoid negative choice outcomes, as we propose, we might find some evidence of this by examining the frequency with which subjects mention problems they would like to avoid (rather than features they find compelling) when explaining their selections.

Method

Sixty U.S. university students and 127 Hong Kong Chinese university students participated to fulfill a course requirement. Participants in each cultural sample were randomly assigned to one of three cultural icon exposure conditions (North American, Chinese, or none) using procedures employed in experiments 4 and 5.

Participants were told that they would be completing some unrelated studies. Then, those in American- and Chinese-exposure conditions completed the icon-exposure task used in experiments 4 and 5, whereas participants in no-exposure conditions did not. Finally, all participants were administered a choice task similar to that employed by Briley et al. (2000). Specifically, they were told that we were interested in the reasons that underlie people’s preferences for choice alternatives and that we wished to examine the choices that people make after they have narrowed potential selections down to a few alternatives that differ along two primary dimensions. On this pretense, participants were given four shopping scenarios, each involving a choice between three products. Each set of products was in a different domain (specifically, personal computers, 35 mm cameras, and stereo receivers and speakers). Each scenario contained a short description of the category and the features of the available alternatives. The features varied in such a way that participants were faced with a decision between two extreme options (i.e., options with a high value along one attribute dimension and a low value along a second dimension) and a compromise alternative (i.e., an option with moderate values along both dimensions). One scenario, for example, described three 35 mm cameras as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliability rating of expert panel</th>
<th>Maximum autofocus range (meters)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical range</td>
<td>40–70</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>

In each case, participants first wrote a sentence or phrase giving a reason for selecting one option over the others, and then indicated their choice.

Results

Manipulation Check. We assumed that participants are more inclined to think of themselves as group members when their cultural identity has been called to their attention than when it has not. If this is so, they might be less inclined to give self-referent explanations (e.g., “A is the best computer for me because it has lots of RAM”) in the former condition. To evaluate this possibility, the proportion of explanations that included a self-reference was computed for each participant separately and analyzed as a function of cultural sample and icon exposure conditions (same culture vs. different culture). Participants were clearly less likely to make self-references in their explanations after being exposed to icons of their own culture ($M = .08$) than after being exposed to icons of a different culture ($M = .19$; $F(1,112) = 3.85$, $p = .05$), and this pattern did not significantly depend on whether participants were from Hong Kong or the United States ($F < 1$). Thus, these results confirm the conclusions drawn from experiment 4.

Choice Data. Sixteen participants who failed to provide reasons for their selections were excluded from the analysis. The proportion of scenarios in which the compromise option was chosen was computed for each of the remaining participants. These proportions were analyzed as a function of icon exposures conditions and cultural sample. This analysis revealed a main effect of cultural icon exposure ($F(2,165) = 3.09$, $p < .05$) but no other main effects or interactions ($F$’s $< 1$).

In no-exposure conditions, Hong Kong participants made a greater proportion of compromise choices than U.S. participants did, though this difference did not reach significance (.58 vs. .51, $F(1,55) = 1.55$, $p > .10$). More important, planned comparisons indicated participants chose a greater proportion of compromise options when they had been exposed to icons from their own culture ($M = .63$) than when they had been exposed to icons from another
cultural priming condition variable was not included (adjusted $R^2 = .075$) further confirms that participants’ concerns about negative consequences is the proximal cause of compromising.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

Asians and North Americans often use different criteria to evaluate products and, therefore, have different preferences when making judgments and choices (e.g., Aaker and Lee 2001; Briley et al. 2000). As noted earlier, however, these differences are likely to be more apparent when participants are not consciously aware of their cultural identity. The present research shows that when participants’ cultural identity is called to their attention, they become aware of their membership in a group, and this awareness has similar effects on their decisions regardless of the culture to which they belong. Specifically, making Chinese aware of their identity as Chinese stimulates them to avoid decisions that might have negative consequences, as reflected in a tendency to compromise. However, making U.S. participants aware of their identity as Americans has precisely the same effect. To our knowledge, these effects have not previously been identified.

The series of experiments we have conducted, in combination with research evidence reported elsewhere, provide a coherent picture of the processes that underlie these effects (see fig. 1). As postulate 1 implies (see also Aaker and Lee 2001), feelings of belonging to a real or imagined group induce a prevention focus (Higgins 1997, 1998), or a tendency to make decisions that minimize the risk of negative outcomes. This disposition is not specific to the group that leads it to be activated and generalizes not only to other interpersonal situations but also to consumer decision situations in which only oneself is involved (postulate 2; see Higgins 1998). Consistent with this proposition, experiments 1 and 2 showed that real or imagined participation in an ad hoc laboratory group increased the tendency to endorse proverbs that advocated equality in interpersonal situations and to prefer to distribute one’s choices over a variety of products in a multiple-choice situation. The assumption that these effects are mediated by a concern with negative outcomes was confirmed by experiment 3, which showed that direct manipulations of participants’ concern about receiving negative outcomes had effects very similar to the effects of inducing feelings of group membership. Moreover, this more direct manipulation eliminated any effects that feelings of group membership otherwise had.

Furthermore, we expected that calling people’s attention to their cultural identity might induce feelings of group membership similar to those that result from actual participation in a group. This possibility was supported by evidence that exposing participants to symbols of their own culture increased their use of the first person plural pronoun in an unobtrusive sentence-construction task (experiment 4) and that the use of these pronouns is associated with a desire to be part of a group rather than independent (Adaval 2001; Gardner et al. 1999). If this assumption is valid, it implies...
that calling people’s attention to their cultural identity should have effects analogous to the effects of real or imagined group membership that we observed in experiments 1 and 2. This is in fact the case. Exposing participants to symbols of their own culture increased their tendency to use equality as a basis for allocating resources in an interpersonal situation (experiment 5) and to choose products that avoided the risk of negative consequences in a product choice task (experiment 6). Finally, mediational analyses in experiment 6 confirmed the assumption that exposing participants to symbols of their own culture induced a concern with negative consequences of their choices and that this concern, in turn, led them to chose compromise alternatives. In fact, the effect of cultural salience on choices was eliminated when differences in this concern were controlled.

It may be important to note that although people are obviously conscious of their feelings of group membership, they may not be clearly aware of the effects of these feelings on their decisions. As we noted earlier, the prevention focus that is induced by these feelings may give rise to a general goal-relevant cognitive procedure (Anderson 1983; Dijksterhuis et al. 2000; Markman and Brendl 2000) that, once activated, guides behavior in a number of situations without awareness of the factors that give rise to its activation (Bargh and Gollwitzer 1994). Thus, as our results suggest, increasing participants’ awareness of their cultural identity, or their membership in a group more generally, can have far-reaching effects, being manifested in decisions to which the culture or group is quite irrelevant.

Alternative Interpretations

The hypotheses we evaluated in the present research and the conclusions we have drawn are logical deductions from premises that were empirically validated in either this research or elsewhere. Moreover, the assumptions that underlie these hypotheses were generally confirmed empirically. Although alternative interpretations of specific findings exist, they generally do not clearly apply to our findings as a whole. For example, the preferences for equality that we observed in experiment 1 might be attributed in part to the evocation of a fairness or cooperativeness norm that is activated by awareness of group membership and applied independently of a concern with negative outcomes. Although this interpretation is plausible if considered in isolation, it could not clearly account for the effects of group and cultural awareness on the consumer decisions that we identified in experiments 2 and 6. Moreover, the findings of experiment 3 render this alternative interpretation less compelling. These results showed that a direct manipulation of concern with positive versus negative outcomes eliminated the effects of awareness of group membership on the experiment 1 dependent variable, proverb endorsements, and on candy choices (experiment 2; see table 1). Thus, any influence that group membership might have had on the salience of a cooperativeness or fairness norm appears to have had no effect on preferences for equality over and above its impact on participants’ concern about avoiding negative outcomes. The evidence that calling attention to participants’ cultural identity in experiment 5 induces awareness of group membership also seems unlikely to be mediated by a concern with equality per se. Indeed, a general preference for equality in resource-allocation situations could be the result of past experiences in which unequal allocations have had negative social consequences. To this extent, equality norms may not provide an alternative explanation for the effects of group membership but rather may be a consequence of the negative consequences that unequal allocations can have. Thus, although these and other ad hoc interpretations might be plausible for explaining individual findings, the conceptualization we have proposed provides a parsimonious and systematic account of our results as a whole.

Our conclusions concerning the effects of cultural salience are based largely on the differences in choice behavior when participants were exposed to symbols of their own culture and behavior when they were exposed to symbols of a different culture. In some cases, therefore, it is somewhat unclear whether calling attention to one’s own culture increases the tendency to avoid negative outcomes, whether the exposure to symbols of a different culture decreases this tendency, or both. In this regard, exposing Chinese to American cultural icons in experiment 6 decreased their tendency to compromise relative to conditions in which no cultural symbols at all were presented. This decrease may have been due to the association of American icons with individualistic values, which induce a tendency to focus on the positive attributes of choice alternatives rather than negative ones (Briley et al. 2000). However, this effect may be independent of the effect of making salient one’s own cultural identity (as implied by hypothesis 4).

General Implications and Future Research Directions

Cultural Influences on Consumer Behavior. The findings reported in this article can be viewed in the context of other research on cultural differences in product evaluations. When individuals are not conscious of their identity as members of a particular culture or nationality, their purchase decisions may be influenced by culture-related norms or behavioral dispositions that they spontaneously apply without awareness of the factors that influence their use. In particular, Asians may be generally more prevention focused than Westerners are (Lee et al. 2000) and consequently may be more inclined to compromise in choice situations (at least when they are asked to explain their decisions to others; see Briley et al. 2000). Making Asians aware of their national or cultural identity may further increase their feelings of belonging to a group and consequently may increase this focus. However, making Americans aware of their national identity may induce feelings of group membership as well and may produce a prevention focus similar to that of Asians. Moreover, the effects of this situationally induced focus may override the effects of cultural differences that might otherwise occur.
In this regard, Hong and Chiu (2001; see also Hong et al. 2000) point out that culture-related norms and values are only a subset of the criteria that people can potentially bring to bear on their judgments and decisions, and these criteria may not always be thought of at the time a judgment or decision is made. Thus, the effects of these norms may often be offset by transitory situational factors that make alternative criteria more accessible in memory. Exposure to cultural symbols could often increase the accessibility of culture-specific knowledge as well as inducing a prevention focus. However, the influence of this knowledge on judgments and behavior may only be apparent under conditions in which participants’ judgments have few real or imagined consequences for either themselves or others and, therefore, a concern with negative outcomes of behavior is not particularly relevant (cf. Briley and Wyer 2001; Hong et al. 2000; Oishi, Wyer, and Colcombe 2000).

The overriding influence of transitory situational factors we observed in the present research could reflect a more general tendency for people to base their judgments and decisions on the first relevant criterion that comes to mind, without thinking about alternative, equally relevant criteria (Taylor and Fiske 1978; Wyer and Srull 1989). In the conditions investigated in the present research, concepts activated by thoughts about one’s cultural identity may have been more salient than culture-specific norms and values, and so these latter criteria were not consulted. When people consider the choice situations with which they are confronted to be important, they might sample additional judgment criteria, and so the effect of culture-based norms and values might be more evident. Further exploration will be required to understand the interplay of cognitive consequences of awareness of cultural identity on knowledge accessibility and the motivational consequences of this awareness and to identify more precisely the mechanisms that are at work.

**General Effects of Group Salience.** Our results have implications, not only for the effects of cultural factors on choice behavior, but also for the impact of group salience more generally. The evidence that feelings of membership in a group can influence decisions that are irrelevant to this group is particularly provocative. Numerous situational factors that influence the salience of one’s membership in a collective could have effects similar to those we identified in experiments 2 and 6. For example, marketing communications that emphasize social affiliation or group interaction, or that call attention to family ties, could also induce heightened concern about the negative consequences of a product selection, such as potential product failure. References to a group in these communications may be beneficial when marketers wish consumers to focus on features that prevent problems (e.g., product safety, reliability, and durability), but may have less benefit when positive features (e.g., superior performance) are the intended focus. These influences could occur even when the products being considered are of minimal relevance to the particular type of group that was mentioned in the communication.

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