

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

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

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

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

Study 3

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

In this study, participants were asked to choose one pen from a group of five pens. The purpose was to test how the appearance of an object—whether it appeared as part of a minority or majority in relation to other objects—would affect the pattern of choices by people from American or East Asian cultural contexts. It was

hypothesized that cultural differences in individual preferences tested in Study 1 and 2 would be expressed through choice: Americans would choose objects that are different from others, whereas East Asians would choose objects that are the same as others. Moreover, we manipulated the ratio of the minority and majority objects. We predicted that regardless of the ratio, people's choice would be determined by the labels that an object acquires: either uncommon or common.

Method

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

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

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

Results

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The results show that what each culture values was consistent with what individuals picked. Study 3 supports the idea that cultural preference for conformity or uniqueness and individual choices for those qualities are interconnected; people seemed to

genuinely like what their culture values. However, several alternative explanations besides the cultural preference explanation can be given for the results.

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

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

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

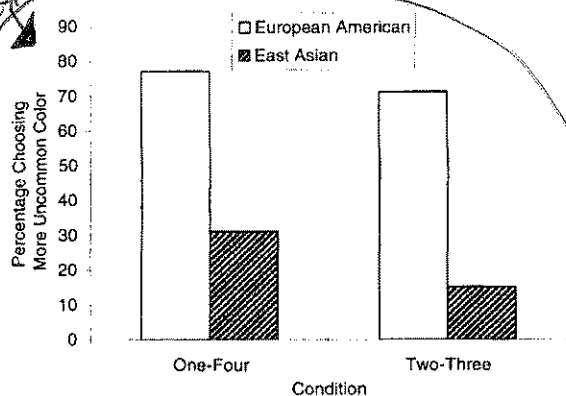


Figure 4. Percentage of participants choosing a more uncommon color as a function of participants' culture and condition.

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

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

Discussion

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

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

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

Study 4

In Study 4, we analyzed one example of the public and collective representation of cultural values: themes in magazine advertisements from the United States and Korea. There are several

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

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

Method

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

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

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