Delineating Culture

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How are notions of hierarchy and equality structured cognitively, how do they link to the self-concept, and how do they develop? Building on the base of work on horizontal/vertical cultural distinctions (Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006), this commentary discusses possible answers to these questions, focusing specifically on beliefs (e.g., egalitarianism versus group-based dominance) and self views (e.g., active versus passive), which may allow for a deeper examination of the horizontal/vertical dimensions. Integrating insights with those from anthropology and sociology, this commentary calls for more work on silence and time, as well as research that examines the antecedents of status and the dynamics underlying "boundary-shifting."

Cultural research in consumer psychology and marketing has thrived in the last two decades—fueled in large part by the work of anthropologists and sociologists (e.g., DiMaggio, 1997; Geertz, 1975; McCracken, 1986) as well as more recent work by psychologists (for reviews, see Maheswaran & Shavitt, 2000; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002). The culture research in psychology has focused mostly on the distinction between individuals as distinct entities with limited connections to others versus individuals as collective entities defined by their connections to close others. Central to this stream of research has been the identification of an individual-level construct (e.g., independent and interdependent self-view; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; see also Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985), which has conceptual links to the cultural-level variable (e.g., individualism and collectivism; Hofstede, 1980). Isolating this individual-level construct was useful because it allowed researchers to directly tackle the question: What drives observed cultural differences? Without a compelling theoretically based answer to this question, claims of descriptiveness and theoretical emptiness could be levied against the research. In that regard, the work on individualism–collectivism and independence–interdependence has been deeply important, propelling culture research forward, particularly in the realm of consumer psychology.

However, for the research on culture to retain its momentum, several challenges must be addressed. What are cultural dimensions that may spur another set of novel insights on the role of culture in consumer behavior? How might those cultural dimensions allow us to predict new consumer-related phenomena, refine known phenomena, and potentially also bridge discipline-based research on culture—an undertaking that has received scant attention to date? Such questions highlight the need to: (a) identify and empirically explore other theoretically fruitful cultural variables, and (b) examine their antecedents, correlates, and consequences, as well as individual-level variables that may help unpack cultural-level phenomena.

The ideas put forth by Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, and Torelli (2006) take a significant leap forward toward both goals. Building on extant research (e.g., Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), the authors argue that notions of hierarchy versus equality (as represented by the horizontal/vertical dimension) merit exploration, particularly in light of their conceptual independence from individualism–collectivism. They also argue that, for this cultural dimension to gain empirical traction, researchers need to identify individual-level variables that reflect and foster horizontal and vertical cultures. Although many ideas can be put forth to address this call, two of the most promising individual-level variables are: (a) beliefs and (b) selves.

In this article I review research on hierarchy versus equality. I focus on social dominance orientation (e.g., egalitarianism versus group-based dominance) and specific self-views (e.g., active versus passive) as individual-level tools that may allow for a deeper examination of the horizontal/vertical dimensions. Next, I hone in on silence and time-two research domains that merit additional examination, particularly as they implicate concepts of hierarchy and equality. Finally, I

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highlight several questions to be addressed in follow-up research on the horizontal/vertical cultural distinction.

HIERARCHY AND EQUALITY

The horizontal/vertical dimension relates to the degree to which some societies are horizontal (valuing equality) whereas others are vertical (emphasizing hierarchy; e.g., Singelis et al., 1995). At an individual level, the horizontal/vertical cultural dimension conceptually relates to personal values such as equality and conformity, hierarchy and power (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). Therefore, the types of individual-level variables that have conceptual connections to this cultural dimension are likely to involve beliefs and the self.

Beliefs: Attitudes Toward Egalitarianism and Group-Based Dominance

First, consider the shared beliefs that may underlie and reflect the horizontal/vertical cultural dimension, such as social dominance orientation (i.e., the degree to which beliefs are hierarchy-enhancing or hierarchy-attenuating; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Although the belief in the validity of hierarchies may be conceptually distinct from personal status-seeking (vertical individualism) or from an emphasis on in-group harmony (vertical collectivism), Shavitt et al. (2006) argue that future research is needed to examine the conditions under which they interrelate. One stream of work that may be useful to this end is that which parses social dominance orientation into two sets of beliefs (Jost & Thompson, 2000): (1) attitudes toward egalitarianism (e.g., “Group equality should be our ideal”) and (2) group-based dominance (e.g., “To get ahead in life, it is sometimes necessary to step on other groups”). Although these beliefs are correlated in some conditions (e.g., for high-status groups), they are less correlated in other conditions (e.g., low-status groups; Jost & Thompson, 2000).

There are two reasons why this stream of research might be useful to consider when furthering the work on horizontal/vertical cultures. First, the power of understanding phenomena that relate to the horizontal/vertical cultural distinction may be an order of magnitude larger if horizontal/vertical was not always nested within the individualism–collectivism frame. Second, to the degree that the two belief systems (egalitarianism and group-based dominance) relate to horizontal versus vertical cultural distinctions, we may be able to more carefully nail down the theoretical distinction between horizontal and vertical cultures, and the ways in which personal values implicate support for hierarchies at the societal level.

Selves: Active Versus Passive, Work Versus Home

Next, consider the ways the horizontal/vertical cultural dimension might implicate the self. Although people may indeed not carry around vertical and horizontal “selves” (Shavitt et al., 2006), other selves are likely reflected in this cultural distinction. For example, the experience of power shapes the view of the self as active versus passive: Those experiencing power tend to view themselves as potent actors, whereas those without power tend to view themselves as impotent reactors (Henry, 2005). Importantly, these self-views influence expectations for the future and ways of behaving. To illustrate, in the domain of financial decision making, those with more (vs. less) power are more likely to set themselves up for opportunity and growth, to take a broad perspective on investing, and to engage in more elaborate budget planning (Henry, 2005). A deeper examination of the active versus passive self not only has the potential to build on such ethnographic work, but it also may bridge theoretical links to recent work in psychology (e.g., Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003) and promising ideas on distinct leadership styles (Shavitt et al., 2006).

A second stream of research on the self in the workplace also hints at concepts of self that relate to verticality. Tian and Belk (2005), for example, examined the meanings of possessions displayed in the offices of employees in a high-technology firm. Evidence was found for a work self and home self that (a) are distinct and (b) contend for dominance in these displays (whereby employees decide which aspects of the self belong to the domain of work and which belong elsewhere). The findings revealed that in some situations the home self may be displayed, but it may also be retracted and hidden—an effect that may well fluctuate based on power and status (as well as corporate norms; Tian & Belk, 2005). This particular self–view is promising in that it may help further explain gender and cultural differences discussed in Shavitt et al. (2006), as well as patterns of behavior relating to affiliative and task goals (e.g., Tiedens & Jimenez, 2003).

Although it is unclear whether and how these views of self might speak to the horizontal/vertical cultural dimension (and, indeed, isomorphism between cultural and individual levels should not be assumed; Shavitt et al., 2006), this line of exploration is promising in that it may help to (a) introduce self views previously unexplored in the consumer psychology literature, (b) unpack horizontal/vertical meaning, and (c) bridge work conducted using an experimental paradigm with that using an ethnography paradigm (e.g., Belk, 2005).

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POWER: IMPLICATIONS FOR SILENCE AND TIME

A focus on the horizontal/vertical distinction has the potential to illuminate issues relating to the psychology of power (Shavitt et al., 2006)—an area that has received scant attention in consumer behavior. In sharp contrast, a considerable amount of research in psychology has looked at the consequences of power, which is often defined in terms of a person’s ability to control both one’s own and others’ outcomes in a social world. For example, it has been widely demonstrated that high-power social perceivers look less at others, listen less to the speech of others, are more likely to use stereotypes, and are less likely to use individuating information than those with less power (Fiske, 1992). High-power individuals do not attend as carefully to what others are doing around them and consequently are less accurate in their judgments and appraisals of others than are those with less power (Gruenfeld & Fan, 1999). Power also affects activity level (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002). High-power individuals talk more and interrupt more than those with less power. Looking at the use of active versus passive verbs, Galinsky et al. (2003) found that individuals with more power use more active verbs and talk more about actions than those with less power. In another study, subjects in high- and low-power conditions played a game of computerized blackjack. High-power subjects were more likely to request a "hit," while low-power subjects were more likely to "stay." Further, high-power group members are more likely to actively engage in group activity than low-power members, who tend to be more passive and withdrawn. For example, in a study of fraternity brothers, the smiles of high-status members were found to be more intense than those of low-status members in response to the same joke (Keltner, Young, Heerey, Oemig, & Monarch, 1998; see also Belk, Tian, & Paavola, 2006).

One proposition stemming from these findings is that goods may be marketed in fundamentally distinct ways in horizontal versus vertical cultures. Whereas mass advertising may be an accepted and effective way of marketing in vertical cultures, it may be ineffective and negatively construed in horizontal cultures. A corollary to this proposition is that the style of advertising should fundamentally differ, whereby modesty and acts of silent endorsement may typify marketing appeals in horizontal cultures (cf. Nelson & Shavitt, 2002), in contrast to louder, more obvious endorsement and discursive techniques in vertical cultures (e.g., Sherry & Camargo, 1987). One might also expect differences in proclivity for barter and bargaining (e.g., Graham, Mintu, & Rodgers, 1994). More generally, the use of silence as a way to perpetuate hierarchy is an under-explored area of research.

A related proposition that falls from the aforementioned findings involves cultural variations in the patience one exemplifies before buying a product (Chen, Ng, & Rao, 2005). More generally, cultural differences in individuals' conceptions of time—what the passing of time means and how its passing affects decision making—merit much more research than currently received (Bergadaa, 1990). One framework that speaks to the horizontal/vertical distinction is that of linear versus traditional views of time (Graham, 1981). The linear view of time refers to the Anglo perception that there is a past, present, and future, which are separable into discrete compartments and move toward the future in a linear fashion. In contrast, the traditional perception eschews the notion that time is not linear, and thus deemphasizes a long-term outlook and planned approach to life. This perception suggests that the past is just like the future; the notion of time is circular. Therefore, it is less necessary to do one thing at a time or to structure time through planning.

In this light, the linear focus of time may likely be adopted within vertical cultures (where time is more likely to be equated with money; Graham, 1981), whereas traditional perceptions of time may be more consistent with a horizontal cultural perspective (where time is not valued as a commodity, but rather valued in the way in which it can be enjoyed with close others; Nelson & Shavitt, 2002). Future research exploring such a hypothesis might also address consequences of such perceptual differences in time. For example, when a need is uncovered, how patiently does a consumer wait before purchasing a good or service to satisfy that need? Under what conditions do consumers refrain from buying, and instead exhibit patience? Indeed, recent work has shown that consumers across cultural contexts make decisions at very different times (Chen et al., 2005). Thus, those who follow a traditional model of time may feel less urgency to make a decision (relative to those who follow a linear time model; Briley & Aaker, in press).

LOOKING FORWARD: HORIZONTALLY AND VERTICALLY

In the last two decades, research exploring how consumers' cultural backgrounds affect their preferences and choices has flourished. However, for this work to continue to thrive, a new stream of research needs to take hold. In that regard, the central article (Shavitt et al., 2006) makes a significant contribution, both in terms of a predictor of new consumer psychology phenomena and as a basis for refining the understanding of known phenomena attributed to individualism–collectivism. Furthermore, a series of implications fall from the ideas put forth in Shavitt et al. (2006), each of which holds promise—both in terms of the questions they generate and the follow-up research they suggest.

One implication of the increased emphasis placed on horizontal/vertical dimensions is a shift in the specific countries explored in the empirical work, as well as a broader outlook on "culture" more generally (allowing for a further decoupling of culture from nation status). Because of the ability to tap theoretical frameworks that operate at both individual and cultural levels, culture research has focused largely on cross-nation comparisons involving North America versus East Asia (for a review, see Oyserman et al., 2002). However, although this focus helped to strengthen the theoretical reputation of culture research, it has come at a significant expense. As one example, research on cultures that cannot be clearly categorized as highly collectivistic or individualistic has been sparse, particularly within the cultural psychology tradition. Therefore, at least two positive outcomes hopefully will result from the ideas put forth in Shavitt et al. (2006). First, more consumer research examining and understanding countries that have received limited attention to date (e.g., Sweden, Poland, Russia) should come to the fore. Second, the focus on the United States as a central country of comparison should fade. In its place, research that focuses on a single culture (e.g., Thompson, 2005) or work that compares tendencies across non-U.S. contexts will ideally gather momentum (e.g., kibbutzim in Israel vs. collective communities in India).

Another hopeful consequence of the heightened attention to the horizontal/vertical cultural distinction will be increasing research on the antecedents or determinants of status. To illustrate, "coolness" has been shown as a means of achieving status and power in American schools; indeed, some have argued that coolness is the new status system (Leland, 2004). For example, in a study conducted in two U.S. locales and one Finnish locale, Belk et al. (2006) empirically demonstrated how cool has become a globally adopted status system, rendering social class irrelevant. Left to be examined, however, is how "cool" attaches to people, products, and places, and how it has evolved over time.

More challenges will undoubtedly arise once researchers begin digging into the horizontal/ vertical dimension. One question to be addressed is whether the horizontal/vertical distinction is more usefully conceptualized as a cultural dimension in isolation or as a dimension that remains nested within individualism–collectivism. Which conceptualization has stronger theoretical legs? If the horizontal/vertical distinction remains nested within individualism–collectivism, one question to address will be: How porous are the boundaries of the 2 × 2 matrix? Considering the four quadrants characterized by VI, HI, VC and HC, how easily does one move from one quadrant to another, or "boundary-shift"? That is, when and by what means might such boundaries be crossed (Belk, 2005)?

To tackle such questions, one might contemplate taking a dynamic approach by examining how individuals boundary-shift—i.e., moving through various quadrants throughout their lives as new beliefs and values are adopted and old beliefs fade (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999). For example, a typical American[1] might endorse beliefs characterizing vertical individualism (e.g., agreeing that "winning is everything"). However, as he or she ages, those beliefs may fade in strength, and new beliefs may be adopted (Williams & Aaker, 2002). What are the factors that propel people toward vertical collectivism (endorsing beliefs such as "It is my duty to take care of my family, even when I have to sacrifice what I want") versus horizontal individualism ("I'd rather depend on myself than others"; Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998)? Of equal interest, how does that migration impact attitudes and behaviors (e.g., adopting long-term orientations; Liu & Aaker, in press), happiness and well-being (e.g., achievement is associated with happiness in the United States, but not in Denmark; Nelson & Shavitt, 2002), and physical consequences relating to illness and health (e.g., antecedents of depression vary across cultural contexts; Tsai, Knutson, & Fung, in press). Exploring such research contexts will help put more empirical meat on the theoretical premise that cultural effects are not static, bipolar frameworks depicting cultural differences, but rather are dynamic and fluid in nature (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000; McCracken, 1986; Tian & Belk, 2005).

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[1] Please forgive the glaring issues that arise when one uses the phrase "typical American."

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Using the Horizontal/Vertical Distinction to Advance Insights Into Consumer Psychology

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This commentary aims to build on Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, and Torelli's (2006) target article and extant work that demonstrates the value added by considering people's vertical or horizontal orientation. I suggest several ways by which one might attempt to advance literature concerning the horizontal/vertical distinction as well as our understanding of consumer psychology. In particular, I offer ideas about how pertinent methodological concerns might be addressed, how this stream of work may help predict certain consumer activities or interests, and some ways by which this body of literature can be applied to other domains of inquiry. Hopefully, such ideas and suggestions will prompt further inquiry into this fertile area of research.

The target article by Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, and Torelli (2006) is a highly welcomed piece. It discusses a provocative and important extension that is pertinent to a number of frameworks that concern culture-related differences. The latter include well-established dichotomies that investigate national culture (e.g., Western versus Eastern cultures, like the United States vs. China), individual differences in cultural orientation (e.g., individualist vs. collectivist societies), and salient self-construals (e.g., adoption of an independent

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