

Research Article

Bicultural self-defense in consumer contexts: Self-protection motives are the basis for contrast versus assimilation to cultural cues[☆]

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Abstract

Studies of social judgment found that the way bicultural individuals respond to cultural cues depends on their cultural identity structure. Biculturals differ in the degree to which they represent their two cultural identities as integrated (vs. nonintegrated), which is assessed as high (vs. low) bicultural identity integration (BII), respectively. High BII individuals assimilate to cultural cues, yet low BII individuals contrast to these cues. The current studies reveal that this dynamic extends to consumer behavior and elucidate the underlying psychological mechanism. We found that high (low) BII individuals exhibit assimilation (contrast) responses to cultural cues in consumer information-seeking and choice. Furthermore, the pattern occurs with both subliminal (study 1) and supraliminal (study 2) cultural primes, and is mediated by the experience of identity exclusion threat (study 2). Results suggest that the interactive effect of BII and cultural cues arises from nonconscious defense against the exclusion of a cultural identity. Implications for self-protective processes, automatic behavior, and marketing are discussed.

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Introduction

Consider a Japanese–American heading to a local shopping center for lunch. On her way to the shopping center, she strolls past either an American Apparel or UNIQLO store. The shopping center has two restaurants, one serving hamburgers and another one serving sushi. Would exposure to American Apparel make her more likely to act like an American and choose the burger joint? If she passed by UNIQLO instead, would she then be more inclined to follow her Japanese side and choose the sushi bar?

With globalization, consumers increasingly identify with more than one culture. Biculturalism was originally studied among immigrants who identify strongly with both heritage and

host cultures (Berry, 1990), which occurs when they acculturate to the host culture without abandoning their own heritage culture (Penaloza, 1994; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2000). Besides immigrants, other types of people develop bicultural identities: denizens of multicultural communities such as Hong Kong and Singapore (Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005; Chen, Ng, & Rao, 2005), devoted consumers of media, products, and practices from another culture (Arnett, 2002; Zhang, 2009), expatriates working abroad for years, and so forth (Friedman, Liu, Chi, Hong, & Sung, 2011; Maertz, Hassan, & Magnusson, 2009). A bicultural's dual cultural legacies present two alternative ways of interpreting or framing a given stimulus or problem. Which frame they apply affects their judgments, decisions and actions (Brumbaugh, 2002; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000). Cultural legacies can be activated by exposing individuals to cues of their cultural identities, such as images of iconic symbols (Hong et al., 2000), the language spoken in the culture (Luna, Ringberg, & Peracchio, 2008), or people, whether spokespersons or audiences from that culture

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(Forehand & Deshpande, 2001; Verkuyten & Pouliasi, 2002). For example, bicultural Singaporeans make different economic choices after exposure to Western images as opposed to Asian images. They become more willing to pay for expedited delivery of a product, reflecting Western norms of impatience as opposed to Chinese norms of patience (Chen et al., 2005). Asian-Americans make different choices after being queried about their American identity rather than their Asian identity. They become more likely to favor an unusually colored car over a traditionally colored one, reflecting American uniqueness values as opposed to Asian conformist values (LeBoeuf, Shafir, & Bayuk, 2010). In these examples, biculturals assimilate to the cultural cue; they adhere to the norms of the cued culture. Cultural cues are thought to raise the accessibility of knowledge structures associated with the cultural identity, such as norms and values, increasing the likelihood that they will be used as interpretive frames (Hong et al., 2000).

However, not all biculturals assimilate to cultural cues. Some biculturals contrast to the cultural cue; they act counter to the norms of the cued culture (e.g., Kibria, 2002; Yang & Bond, 1980). The direction of responses to cultural cues – assimilation or contrast – appears to be moderated by individual differences in bicultural identity structure. Biculturals differ on how they organize their dual cultural identifications (LaFrombroise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Lau-Gesk, 2003; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, and Morris (2002) developed the Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) scale, which assesses whether biculturals represent their two cultural identities as coherent and cohesive (high BII) as opposed to conflicting and noncompatible (low BII). Individuals with high BII tend to assimilate to cultural cues, whereas those with low BII tend to contrast to cultural cues (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). For example, when primed with images of American versus Asian culture, Asian-Americans with high BII judge themselves to be more extraverted and unique, whereas those with low BII judge themselves to be more introverted and conforming (Mok & Morris, 2009). These findings suggest that the responses of bicultural consumers cannot be simply predicted from their strength of cultural identifications (e.g., LeBoeuf et al., 2010); the structure of their cultural identities is critical to understanding their behavior. Biculturals with nonintegrated Western and Asian identities may choose unique products and avoid traditional products in Asian cultural contexts. The sight of American Apparel on the way to lunch might provoke a low BII Japanese-American consumer to choose sushi over burgers.

Past accounts for the contrastive process

Low BII individuals identify strongly with their two cultures and moreover endorse the values and practices from their two cultures (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). Why then do low BII individuals contrast to situations of their own cultural identities? Previous work proposed that perceived self-dissimilarity to cultural cues explains their contrastive responses (Cheng, Lee, & Benet-Martinez, 2006). Studies from the priming literature suggest that people contrast to primes that are perceived as self-dissimilar (Dijksterhuis et al., 1998; Wheeler, DeMarree, & Petty, 2007). Cheng et al. (2006) posited

that the cultural primes in studies that documented the BII moderation effect (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002) were self-discrepant to low BII individuals in terms of valence. Research on the antecedents of BII (including acculturation stressors and personality dispositions) found that low BII individuals have more negative acculturation experiences, such as discrimination (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005). Thus, cultural primes that are positively valenced (e.g., image of Mickey Mouse in the American prime condition, or the Summer Palace in the Asian prime condition, Benet-Martinez et al., 2002) may appear self-discrepant to low BII individuals and evoke contrastive responses. Cheng et al. (2006) found evidence for this proposal by showing that low BII individuals contrast to cultural cues of positive valence, yet assimilate to cultural cues of negative valence (presumably more self-similar). However, recent findings suggest that the perceived valence of cultural cues is not critical to the moderating effect of BII. Mok and Morris (2009) documented that low BII individuals contrast to cultural primes without any salient valence (e.g., “J. Harris” in the American prime condition, or “J. Chang” in the Asian prime condition).

A recent view is that the contrastive process reflects identity motives. A study by Zou, Morris, and Benet-Martinez (2008) found that low BII individuals have strong positive identification with their two cultures, yet they also exhibit cultural disidentification. Disidentification is not synonymous with a lack of positive identification, but identification and disidentification can be relatively distinct dimensions (Dukerich, Kramer, & McLean Parks, 1998; Elsbach, 1999). Disidentification involves a motive to defy a group’s norms or avoid being associated by others with the group (Goffman, 1963). Zou et al. (2008) observed that cultural disidentification associated with low BII could evoke contrastive responses to cultural cues. However, cultural disidentification did not mediate (explain) the moderating effect of BII. This suggests motivation to defy cultural norms is causally less proximal to contrastive responses to cultural cues than is BII.

An alternative account for the contrastive process is awareness of a priming influence. Prior research suggests that conscious awareness of the priming manipulation or experimental hypothesis could evoke contrastive responses (Lombardi, Higgins, & Bargh, 1987; Strack, Schwarz, Bless, Kübler, & Wänke, 1993; Wheeler et al., 2007). Past demonstrations of the moderating effect of BII relied on supraliminal cultural primes and dependent measures that seemingly make cultural differences salient. For example, in studies tapping attributional biases (e.g., Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Zou et al., 2008), Asian-Americans first view a series of images from Asian or American culture and then form judgments on whether an actor’s behavior is caused by pressure from the group versus individual initiative. Participants are likely to be aware of the greater emphasis on group harmony and conformity in East Asian culture and on independence in American culture, even if the culture’s respective biases in attribution are not known. Low BII individuals, who tend to have personalities higher in neuroticism and vigilance (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005) may be particularly resistant to situational demands to exhibit culturally typical behavior (noted in Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). It remains

plausible that conscious awareness of the influence of primes (e.g., acting against perceived demand characteristics of the experiment) produce the contrastive responses.

A self-protective account

We propose a new mechanism for the moderating effect of BII, motivation to defend the self from perceived threat. We explore the possibility that low (vs. high) BII individuals perceive greater threat in situations that cue one cultural identity, in that their other non-cued cultural identity is excluded. For example, interviews of biculturals (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997) suggest that low BII individuals cannot feel a part of two cultures at once (“you have to choose one or the other”), whereas high BII individuals can feel affiliated with both of their cultures in a given cultural situation (“I put myself as a mixture. It works as me accepting some of their culture and I keep my culture too”). Losing a cultural identity can be perceived as a threat, and hence trigger defensive behavior. We propose that the contrastive responses by low BII individuals reflect a defense mechanism to protect the self from losing the non-cued cultural identity. Conversely, assimilative responses occur for high BII individuals because they do not perceive cultural cues to threaten the self. Low defensiveness in situations that cue one cultural identity may enable assimilative responses.

Our proposal builds on classical psychodynamic concepts of nonconscious defense mechanisms (Freud, 1914/1957), which have been reconsidered and empirically refined in research on self-motives (Baumeister, Dale, & Sommer, 1998; Cramer, 1991, 2000; Steele, 1988). When people encounter stimuli or information in the environment that is discrepant with self-views, it can be perceived as psychologically threatening. In order to protect the self, people employ defensive strategies, such as diverting their attention away from stimuli that threaten their self-concepts (Green, Pinter, & Sedikides, 2005; Klein & Harris, 2009; Puntoni, Sweldens, Tavassoli (2011). Sedikides & Green, 2009) or behaving in ways that sustain or affirm their self-image (Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009; Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 1985; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). For example, situationally inducing participants to feel the loss of one of their identities can trigger defensive behavior. When an experimenter denies the American identity of Asian–American participants (e.g. “Actually, you have to be American to be in this study”), participants respond by claiming greater participation in American cultural practices than otherwise, reflecting affirmation of the excluded identity (Cheryan & Monin, 2005).

Individuals differ in the degree to which they perceive the need to protect their self-concept (Barrett, Williams, & Fong, 2002; Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne, & Correll, 2003). Evidence suggests that individuals who possess conflicting self-views are more defensive than those who possess coherent self-views (e.g., Jordan et al., 2003; Kernis & Paradise, 2002). We conceptualize low BII individuals may have self-concepts that are easily threatened by cues to one cultural identity. Possessing two cultural identities that are conflicting/

noncompatible could foster perceptions that cues to one cultural identity exclude their other cultural identity. High BII individuals may have self-concepts that are less easily threatened by cultural cues. Possessing two cultural identities that are coherent/cohesive could reduce perceptions that cues to one cultural identity exclude their other cultural identity. Therefore, low BII individuals may chronically perceive threat in situations that cue one cultural identity, whereas high BII individuals do not. In turn, low BII individuals could be more guarded and defensive when pressed by situational cues of one of their cultural identities in that it highlights an experience of cultural identity exclusion. They could defend the self by contrasting from the cultural cue. Conversely, high BII individuals would perceive little need to defend the self and so assimilate to cultural cues.

A number of perspectives converge on the notion that defensive processes occur outside of awareness. People can make appraisals of threat automatically outside of awareness and these trigger defensive processing (Cramer, 2000, 2001; Freud, 1914/1957; Paulhus, Fridhandler, & Hayes, 1997). If the contrastive responses of low BII individuals reflect defensive processing, low BII individuals should be able to contrast to cultural cues outside of awareness because their appraisals of threat would be automatic. Conversely, high BII individuals would be less threatened by situations that cue one cultural identity; without a self-protective stance, they could assimilate to cultural cues with little conscious guidance.

Taken together, we propose that the contrastive responses of low BII individuals reflect a nonconscious, self-protective stance. Individuals with low (vs. high) BII would be more likely to perceive threat in situations that cue one cultural identity, in that their non-cued cultural identity is excluded. Perceived identity exclusion threat would, in turn, activate nonconscious defensive processing that result in contrast from cultural cues. Low perceived identity exclusion threat should not activate defensive processing but make individuals more likely to assimilate to cultural cues.

The present research

We report two experiments that investigate the process underlying the moderating effect of BII on responses to cultural cues. In study 1, we examined our hypothesis that the contrastive responses to cultural cues reflect a defensive mechanism. Because defense mechanisms occur outside of awareness, it can be hard to measure empirically. We introduce a method for detecting nonconscious defensive processing by using a subliminal priming technique. We predict that low BII individuals would contrast to cultural cues presented outside of conscious awareness. This would also disconfirm the account that conscious awareness of a priming influence may be relevant to the contrast effects.

We provide a fuller account for the defensive process in study 2. We measured the degree of perceived threat in situations that cue one cultural identity. We examined whether low (vs. high) BII individuals would perceive greater threat, in that their non-cued cultural identity is excluded. We also tested whether perceived threat produces contrastive responses to

cultural cues, suggesting defensiveness or self-protection motives. Finally, we tested whether perceived threat predicts divergent responses to cultural cues beyond BII. This would highlight that the contrastive responses of low BII individuals are driven by motivation to protect the self from threat of losing their non-cued cultural identity. Also, assimilative responses result for high BII individuals because they do not feel threatened by cultural cues, and hence, they could be more open to its influence.

We tested our predictions in the context of consumer behavior. While past research of biculturals observed their consumer behavior can be shifted by cultural cues (e.g., Chen et al., 2005), it has not explored the interaction of cultural cues and bicultural identity structure. Among East Asian–Americans in the U.S., we expected their consumer behaviors related to individuality (study 1) and extraversion (study 2) are shaped by an interplay of cultural cues and BII. High BII individuals would exhibit culturally congruent behaviors, whereas low BII individuals would exhibit culturally contrastive behaviors.

The current research makes several noteworthy contributions. We show that BII is related to individual differences in defensive processing. Specifically, individuals with low (vs. high) BII perceive greater threat in situations that cue one cultural identity. Perceived threat explains why low BII individuals contrast from, rather than assimilate to cultural cues. Hence, the contrastive responses represent a self-protective behavior. Our proposal of self-protection motives is the most complete account to date for why BII moderates responses to cultural cues. Identifying the basic mechanism for the BII moderation effect yields a broader understanding of the types of cultural situations that influence assimilative versus contrastive responses among biculturals.

We also document automatic consumer behaviors as a function of cultural cues and BII. Conscious attention to cultural cues is not required low BII consumers to exhibit culturally contrastive behaviors, nor for high BII consumers to exhibit culturally congruent behaviors. We provide the first evidence in consumer psychology that divergent responses to cultural cues hinge on bicultural identity structure and occur outside of awareness.

Study 1

We examined whether the contrastive responses of low BII individuals reflect a nonconscious defense mechanism. If so, low BII individuals could contrast to cultural cues automatically, outside of awareness. We examined whether BII moderates responses to subliminal cultural primes. We predicted that low BII individuals would contrast to subliminal cultural primes, whereas high BII individuals would assimilate. These results would imply that low (vs. high) BII individuals are more defensive in situations that cue one cultural identity, or that high BII individuals are less defensive.

The use of subliminal cultural priming also helps to rule out an alternative account for the contrastive process; we minimize participants' awareness of the link between the priming task and dependent measure. This priming procedure would demonstrate that conscious awareness of a priming influence is not an important determinant of the moderating effect of BII.

We studied the moderating effect of BII in consumer information-seeking. We used an online choice context that asked participants what information they would like to receive about a product. The context resembles a real-life consumer situation as an emerging form of marketing allows consumers to choose which ads they can watch online (e.g., on Hulu in the U.S.). In the current study, we primed Asian-American participants with Asian or American culture, and then presented them with advertisements that appealed to individualistic or collectivistic ideals. As American norms emphasize individualism whereas Asian norms emphasize collectivism (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), we hypothesized that participants with high BII would be more likely to choose the individualistic product information after American versus Asian priming (assimilative response). Also they would be less likely to choose the collectivistic product information after American versus Asian priming. Conversely, participants with low BII would be less likely to choose the individualistic product information after American versus Asian priming (contrastive response). Also they would be more likely to choose the collectivistic product information after American versus Asian priming.

Method

Participants

Participants were 50 self-identified East Asian-Americans (mean years lived in the U.S.=13.35, $SD=8.81$; 16 males; mean age=23.18, $SD=3.86$) recruited at a university in New York City. On a scale of 1 (*very weak*) to 7 (*very strong*), participants rated their identification with East Asian ($M=5.08$, $SD=1.35$) and American culture ($M=4.98$, $SD=1.08$). Twenty-two participants were first-generation (born in an Asian country) and 28 were second-generation (born in the U.S.). No sex or immigrant-generation differences emerged on the independent and dependent measures so these demographic factors are not analyzed further.

Materials and procedure

On arrival, participants were randomly assigned to the Asian or American priming manipulation. The cultural priming was embedded in a lexical decision task administered on the computer. Participants were told that strings of letters would appear on the screen. They were instructed to press the letter “z” when the string was a word and the letter “m” when the string was a nonword. Participants were told that their goal was to respond as quickly and as accurately as possible.

Participants then completed 4 practice trials and 72 lexical decision trials. Each trial included a 250 ms premask (XXXXXXXX), a 15 ms exposure to the prime (the word Asian or American in the Asian- and American-prime conditions, respectively), a 50 ms postmask (XXXXXXXX), followed by the target letter string (Dijksterhuis, Preston, Wegner, & Aarts, 2008). Target words remained on the screen until a response was made. The trials were evenly divided between target letters strings that were words and nonwords. The words were not specific to Asian or American culture (e.g., design, locate, inform). The practice trials did not contain any prime words.

Following this task, participants were administered a paper survey asking about their decisions in consumer situations. Participants were asked to imagine they were browsing the main web page of Mercedes-Benz. It contained a new press release which read:

PRNEWSWIRE- Today, the Chairman and CEO of Mercedes-Benz announced that Mercedes-Benz will launch a new automobile line, named Ultraline which will include a 2-door and 4-door sedan. Shipments will begin at the end of the year.

The caption was adapted from [Monga and John \(2008\)](#). Below this were two options for learning more about Ultraline, presented side-by-side in separate text boxes labeled A and B. Participants were asked which box, A or B, they would click to find out more information.

The two kinds of information tapped individualistic or collectivistic ideals. We adapted the advertising appeal in [Torelli and Kaikati \(2009\)](#). The individualistic appeal read:

The Ultraline is designed for unique individuals like you who want to go where others cannot. [Click here](#) for information about how stylish and unique the design is, and to show you how the product surpasses the competition in those features to help get you to the top.

The collectivistic appeal read:

The Ultraline is designed for spending quality time with those you care for. [Click here](#) for information about design features to provide excellent comfort for rear passengers, and to show you how the product surpasses the competition in security and ergonomic features to provide a better experience for those riding with you.

Whether the individualistic or collectivistic appeal was displayed on the left versus right was counterbalanced across participants and it did not affect the results.

To assess the choice of product information (individualistic or collectivistic), participants rated “how likely would you be to click the hyperlink in Description A [B]?” on a scale of 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*), and “how important would it be for you to find out about the product features in description A [B]” on a scale of 1 (*not at all important*) to 7 (*very important*) ([Torelli & Kaikati, 2009](#)). The two items were highly correlated for each type of information (individualistic: $r = .71, p < .001$; collectivistic: $r = .60, p < .001$) and were averaged to form a score of information choice. Higher scores reflect clicking on the respective hyperlink for more information. Choosing individualistic information ($M = 4.54, SD = 1.73$) was unrelated to choosing collectivistic information ($M = 4.63, SD = 1.48$), $r = .02, p > .10$.

Next, we assessed participants’ bicultural identity structure or BII. Research has developed several scales to capture the degree of integration between two cultural identities, (BII; [Benet-Martinez et al., 2002](#); [Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005](#)), such as measuring the perceived connectedness (vs. separation) between two cultural identities, or the feeling of compatibility (vs. conflict) between the two. The latter measure has been used extensively in studies of the moderating effect of

BII ([Mok & Morris, 2009, 2012a](#); [Zou et al., 2008](#)), so we used this scale in the current study. Participants rated four items (“I feel conflicted between the American and Asian ways of doing things,” “I feel like someone moving between two cultures,” “I feel caught between the Asian and American cultures,” “I don’t feel trapped between the Asian and American cultures”); [Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005](#)) on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). We formed a BII score by reverse-scoring the first three items and averaging them with the last item. Higher scores reflect more integrated cultural identities ($\alpha = .82$; $M = 4.32, SD = 1.42$).

Last, participants were probed for suspicions. No participants reported seeing a word repeated throughout the lexical decision task, suggesting they were unaware of the priming.

Results and discussion

Initial analysis found that BII was uncorrelated with Asian or American identification, or with the dependent variables (choice of individualistic or collectivistic information), all $p > .10$. American identification was unrelated to choosing individualistic or collectivistic information, both $r < .05, p > .10$. Asian identification was related to choosing collectivistic information $r = .45, p < .01$, but not individualistic information, $r = .15, p > .10$.

We examined the hypothesis that BII interacts with the effects of cultural priming on choice of product information. We conducted a 2 (information type: individualistic vs. collectivistic) \times 2 (cultural prime: Asian vs. American) \times BII (mean-centered) General Linear Model (GLM), including all main and interaction effects. Information type was entered as a within-subjects factor. We added Asian and American cultural identification as covariates (both mean-centered) to show that bicultural identity structure affects divergent responses to cultural cues, independent of cultural identity strength. Results showed a main effect of Asian identification, $F(1, 44) = 8.22, p < .01$, a 2-way interaction between cultural prime and BII, $F(1, 44) = 4.90, p < .05$, and a 3-way interaction between information type, cultural prime, and BII, $F(1, 44) = 5.89, p < .05$. The 3-way interaction suggests that the moderating effect of BII on cultural priming effects varies by the type of information. To probe the 3-way interaction, we examined the BII moderation effect for the information types separately. We used multiple regression analysis.

We regressed the choice score for individualistic information on cultural prime, BII (mean-centered), and the interaction between the two variables. We controlled for Asian and American identification (both mean-centered). The predicted interaction between cultural prime and BII was significant, $\beta = .51, t(44) = 3.04, p < .01$; no other effects emerged. Individuals with high BII (1 *SD* above the mean) were more likely to choose the individualistic information after American versus Asian priming ($M = 5.54$ vs. $M = 3.97$), $\beta = .78, t(44) = 2.35, p < .05$, suggesting an assimilative response. Conversely, individuals with low BII (1 *SD* below the mean) were less likely to choose the individualistic information after American versus Asian priming ($M = 3.62$ vs. $M = 4.94$), $\beta = -.66, t(44) = -2.00,$

$p = .05$, suggesting a contrastive response. (See Fig. 1). Hence, BII moderates the effects of cultural cues in consumer behavior. Moreover, the divergent responses occur automatically, outside of awareness. We show the contrastive responses do not reflect conscious awareness of the influence of primes.

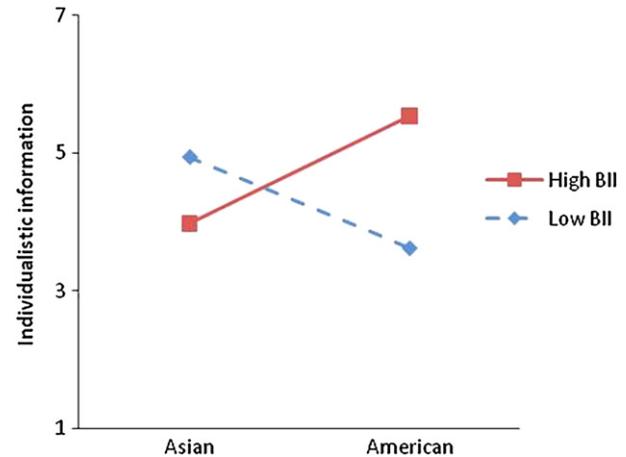
We conducted a similar regression analysis predicting the score for collectivistic information. Apart from a main effect of Asian identification, $\beta = .54$, $t(44) = 3.57$, $p < .01$, no effects of cultural priming or BII were found on choosing the collectivistic information (all $p > .10$).¹

Results provide evidence that BII moderates responses to subliminal cultural cues. High BII individuals can automatically assimilate to cultural cues in consumer choice; low BII individuals can automatically contrast to cultural cues. The results disconfirm the account that the contrastive responses of low BII individuals are artifacts of awareness of priming. It lends support for our conceptualization that the contrastive responses represent a form of defensive behavior. Low BII individuals behave more defensively than high BII individuals in situations that cue one cultural identity.

Study 2

Study 1 showed that a defensive process underlies the moderating effect of BII. We next examined whether the defensive, contrastive responses are driven by the perceived threat of losing a cultural identity. We predicted that BII is negatively related to perceiving threat in situations that cue one cultural identity. Low BII individuals would perceive greater threat, in that their other cultural identity is excluded. Perceived identity exclusion threat should produce contrastive responses to cultural

¹ Additional data corroborates the current evidence that BII moderates the effects of cultural cues on the individualistic appeal, though not the collectivistic appeal. In a web survey with 64 Asian-Americans recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, a nation-wide participant pool, participants were first supraliminally primed with Asian or American culture. (We used the priming task described in Mok & Morris (2012b), study 2.) Then they completed the consumer task. Results, controlling for Asian and American identification, showed that the interaction between cultural prime and BII was not significant for the collectivistic appeal ($p = .72$); rather, it was significant for the individualistic appeal, $\beta = .53$, $t(58) = 3.25$, $p < .01$. Consistent with the pattern of results in study 1, individuals with high (low) BII were significantly more (less) likely to choose the individualistic information after American versus Asian priming. Hence, the lack of a cultural prime \times BII interaction on the collectivistic appeal is unlikely due to particular characteristics of a university student sample. A possible explanation for the result is that the collectivistic appeal did not convey collectivistic aspects on which East-Western cultural differences are pronounced. For example, the collectivistic appeal emphasized comfort, safety, and care for other passengers, reflecting sympathy and consideration for others. Past evidence does not suggest reliable differences between Asian and American cultures on sympathy and consideration, associated with agreeableness (McCrae, Terracciano, & 78 Members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project, 2005). We believe that highlighting collectivistic aspects in the appeal where Asian versus American cultural differences are more pronounced (e.g., concern about face, Bond, 1991; obligations to the group, prioritizing group goals, Triandis, 2002) would reveal the predicted interaction between cultural cues and BII. Future research could test this notion.



Note. High and low BII is plotted at one standard deviation above and below the mean.

Fig. 1. Information-seeking as a function of cultural priming for High and Low Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) participants (Study 1).

cues, implying defensive behavior. Finally, we tested whether high or low identity exclusion threat, respectively, would account for why low BII individuals contrast to cultural cues whereas high BII individuals assimilate. These results would demonstrate that self-protection motives give rise to the BII moderating effect.

We explored whether the moderating effect of BII generalizes to a different behavior domain. We studied consumer choices related to extroversion. As noted earlier, research found that Asian-Americans' self-perceived extroversion is responsive to cultural cues and BII (Mok & Morris, 2009). Self-perceived extroversion is associated with choosing activities and products that are exciting and sociable (Furnham, 1984; Wheeler & Berger, 2007). This implies that biculturals' preference for extraverted choice options could shift as a function of cultural cues and BII. We hypothesized that Asian-Americans with high BII would choose more extraverted items after American versus Asian priming (assimilative response). Conversely, those with low BII would choose fewer extraverted items after American versus Asian priming (contrastive response).

Past studies have used supraliminal cultural primes to document a moderating effect of BII on responses to cultural cues (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002; Zou et al., 2008). To demonstrate the current proposal of self-protection motives can account for the BII moderation effect in past studies, we examined the hypothesis using supraliminal cultural primes.

Method

Participants

Forty six self-identified East Asian-Americans (mean years in the U.S. = 19.14, $SD = 8.39$; 24 males; mean age = 25.96, $SD = 6.95$) were recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk, a large online participant pool based in the U.S. Research suggests that recruitment from this source yields similar participants and findings as university student samples (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participants were limited to those who responded

yes to several eligibility-check questions presented at the outset of the study (“I identify with both American and East Asian culture,” “I am a resident of the United States with East Asian heritage”). Thirty-two were first-generation, 7 were second-generation, and 7 were third-generation (born in the U.S. with at least one parent born in the U.S.). Level of identification with East Asian and American culture, assessed on the same scale as the previous study was 5.07 ($SD=1.39$) and 5.24 ($SD=1.25$), respectively. No sex or immigrant-generation differences emerged on the independent or dependent measures so these factors are not analyzed further.

Materials and procedure

In a web survey, participants first rated their identification with East Asian and American culture along the same scale as the prior study. We began the survey with these items to check that participants identified with both cultures, a requirement for the study. We also assessed individual differences in BII. Participants received the same items and scale as the previous study. We formed a composite of BII such that higher scores reflect more integrated cultural identities ($\alpha=.76$; $M=4.40$, $SD=1.32$).²

Next, participants were randomly assigned to Asian or American priming in a picture evaluation task, taken from Mok and Morris (2012a). Participants read: “You are looking at some pictures in magazines. List two things that come to mind as you look at each picture. For example, you can think about the feelings, places, people, or memories that the picture elicits.” Participants viewed four pictures (e.g., fried rice in the Asian prime condition vs. mashed potatoes in the American prime condition; see Fig. 2). Example responses included “I look at the man playing music and I can almost hear it in my head” (Asian condition), and “The combination of candle and colors makes me feel like it’s Christmas” (American condition).³

Next, participants received the choice task. We adapted the task developed by Wheeler and Berger (2007), previously used to study the link between self-perceived extraversion and choice. In the current study, participants were asked to choose what they would like to receive in a random drawing for a free

gift. Participants were presented with 14 pairs of options and asked to select one option from each pair. In each pair, one option was more exciting or sociable than the other. For example, participants could choose between a free pass to a nightclub versus a free pass to a museum, or between free movie tickets versus a free DVD rental (see Appendix A).⁴ We formed an index of choice by summing the number of exciting or sociable items selected (Wheeler & Berger, 2007). Higher scores reflect greater choice of extraverted items ($M=7.41$, $SD=1.77$).

Afterwards, we assessed perceived threat in situations that cue one cultural identity. Participants rated whether situations that emphasize one of their cultural identities exclude their other cultural identity. We developed items that tapped feelings and fears of cultural identity exclusion. Higher ratings imply greater perceived threat in the cultural situation.

Specifically, participants rated their perceptions of American identity exclusion in Asian situations, and perceptions of Asian identity exclusion in American situations. All ratings were made on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*). To assess perceptions of American identity exclusion in Asian situations, participants rated “In Asian cultural contexts, to what extent do you feel that your American side / American identity is...”. The response items were (a) “left out?” (b) “underemphasized?” (c) “unrecognized?” and (d) “unaffirmed?” They also rated: “In Asian cultural contexts, to what extent are you afraid that your American side/American identity is...” on the same four response items. We averaged the eight items ($\alpha=.94$) to form an index of American identity threat. (The items cohered for the first question ($\alpha=.90$) and the second question ($\alpha=.95$) and the two resulting indices were highly correlated, $r=.79$, $p<.001$.) Higher scores reflect greater perceived threat that Asian situations risk excluding one’s American identity. To assess perceptions of Asian identity exclusion in American situations, participants rated the same items except the words Asian cultural context was replaced with “American cultural context” and American side / American identity was replaced with “Asian side / Asian identity”. We averaged the eight items ($\alpha=.95$) to form an index of Asian identity threat. (The items cohered for the first question ($\alpha=.91$) and the second question ($\alpha=.94$) and the two resulting indices were highly correlated, $r=.84$, $p<.001$.) Higher scores reflect greater perceived threat that American situations risk excluding one’s Asian identity.

Lastly, participants completed a demographic survey and were probed for suspicions. No participants saw a connection between the tasks and could not guess the true purpose of the study.

² While cultural priming experiments typically administer the individual difference measure of BII at the end of the experiment (e.g., Benet-Martinez et al., 2002), recent research provides evidence that BII is not easily influenced by cues of the cultural identities. BII measured prior to the cultural priming experiment does not significantly differ from BII measured at the end of the experiment (see Mok & Morris, 2012b).

³ Research shows that identity salience is dynamic and can rapidly shift in response to stimuli encountered in the environment (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Wheeler et al., 2007). While participants were initially asked to rate the BII questionnaire which may prime two cultures simultaneously, we consider it highly unlikely that both cultures remained simultaneously accessible after the cultural priming task. This priming task provides vivid visual cues to one of the cultural identities and lasts for about five minutes, so participants are likely to focus on cues to the single culture at the time they encounter the dependent measure. We consider the below results evidence for effects of single culture priming and the pattern of findings are consistent with past studies of the moderating effect of BII (e.g., Benet-Martinez et al., 2002).

⁴ We conducted a pretest to ensure that the options in each pair varied in excitement or sociability. A separate group of ten participants rated each pair of options on a scale ranging from -5 (*the left option is more exciting*) to 5 (*the right option is more exciting*), and also on a scale of -5 (*the left option involves more social interaction*) and (*the right option involves more social interaction*). Ratings for each pair of options differed significantly from the scale midpoint (0) on excitement or sociability ($p<.05$). This suggests that the choice task allows a discrimination between choices that are extraverted versus introverted.

A) Asian primes



B) American primes

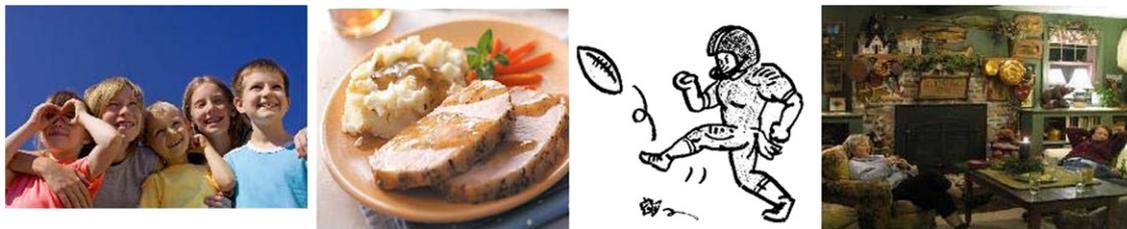


Fig. 2. Cultural primes (study 2).

Results and discussion

Preliminary considerations

Table 1 reports the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study variables. BII was uncorrelated Asian identification, $r=.01, p>.10$, although it was correlated with American identification, $r=.38, p<.05$. The choice index was related to Asian identification, $r=.31, p<.05$, although not to American identification or BII (both $p>.05$). The analysis below therefore controlled for the strength of Asian and American identification.

Hypothesis testing

We examined the hypothesis that low versus high BII individuals perceive different levels of threat in situations that cue one cultural identity. We expected that low BII individuals would perceive greater threat than high BII individuals. We tested whether for low BII Asian-Americans, Asian situations risk excluding their American identity and American situations risk excluding their Asian identity. We conducted a 2 (Asian identity threat vs. American identity threat) X BII

(mean-centered) GLM, with the former factor being within-subjects. To demonstrate that low BII individuals chronically feel threat (cultural identity exclusion) in situations that cue one cultural identity, we included cultural prime condition as a covariate. We also controlled for strength of Asian and American identification (both mean-centered) to show that perceptions of cultural identity exclusion is mirrored more in bicultural identity structure rather than cultural identity strength.

Results indicated a main effect of BII, $F(1, 40)=16.37, p<.001$; no other effects emerged. To further examine this result, we assessed the correlation between BII and the measures of identity threat. Supporting our conceptualization, BII was associated with Asian identity threat ($r=-.56, p<.001$) and American identity threat ($r=-.56, p<.001$). That is, low BII Asian-Americans perceive American situations to exclude their Asian identity and Asian situations to exclude their American identity. The perceptions of cultural identity exclusion appeared symmetrical regardless of the cultural context. Thus, we derived an overall index of identity exclusion threat by averaging across the measure of Asian identity threat and American identity threat

Table 1
Intercorrelations between study variables (study 2).

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Cultural prime (-1: Asian, 1: American)	-	-	-								
2. Sex (1: Male, 2: Female)	-	-	-.26	-							
3. Immigrant-generation	1.46	.75	.03	.29	-						
4. Asian identification	5.07	1.39	.08	.21	-.24	-					
5. American identification	5.24	1.25	.04	.03	-.17	.26	-				
6. BII	4.40	1.32	.15	-.03	.21	.08	.38*	-			
7. Asian identity threat	3.22	1.34	-.06	-.02	-.18	-.01	-.20	-.56**	-		
8. American identity threat	3.15	1.26	-.22	-.06	-.07	-.01	-.30	-.56**	.83**	-	
9. Identity exclusion threat	3.19	1.24	-.15	-.04	-.13	-.01	-.26	-.58**	.96**	.95**	-
10. Extraverted choice	7.41	1.77	.07	-.01	-.05	.31*	.26	.18	.06	.16	.12

* $p<.05$.

** $p<.01$.

($r=.83$, $p<.001$). Higher scores reflect greater perceptions of threat in situations that cue one cultural identity ($\alpha=.97$, $M=3.19$, $SD=1.25$).

Perceived threat should motivate individuals to engage in defensive behavior to protect the self. We hypothesized that higher levels of identity exclusion threat would motivate biculturals to contrast, rather than assimilate to cultural cues. We analyzed whether identity exclusion threat moderates responses to cultural primes in choice of extraverted items. We regressed the choice index on cultural prime and identity exclusion threat, including the interaction between the two variables. We included Asian and American identification (both mean-centered) as covariates (see Table 2, Model 1). There was a main effect of American identification, $\beta=.38$, $t(40)=2.08$, $p<.05$, and a main effect of identity exclusion threat, $\beta=.49$, $t(40)=2.58$, $p<.05$. Importantly, the interaction of cultural prime and identity exclusion threat was significant, $\beta=-.75$, $t(40)=-4.11$, $p<.001$. Supporting our conceptualization, individuals with low identity exclusion threat (1 SD below the mean) assimilated to cultural primes. They chose more extraverted items after American versus Asian priming ($M=7.76$ vs. $M=5.57$), $\beta=1.10$, $t(40)=3.41$, $p<.01$. Conversely, individuals with high identity exclusion threat (1 SD above the mean) contrasted to cultural primes. They chose fewer extraverted items after American versus Asian priming ($M=7.11$ vs. $M=8.64$), $\beta=-.77$, $t(40)=2.51$, $p<.05$. (See Fig. 3.) This evidence corroborates the findings in study 1 that contrastive responses to cultural cues reflect a defensive behavior. Next, we examined whether individual differences in perceived threat accounts for why low BII individuals contrast to cultural cues, whereas high BII individuals assimilate. This would imply that self-protection motives give rise to the BII moderating effect.

Mediation analysis

We tested whether BII moderates the effects of cultural cues on choice of extraverted items. We regressed the choice index

on cultural prime (Asian vs. American), BII (mean-centered), and the interaction between the two variables. Asian and American identification (both mean-centered) were included as a covariates (see Table 2, Model 2). The predicted interaction between cultural prime and BII was significant, $\beta=.60$, $t(40)=3.28$, $p<.01$; no other effects emerged. Individuals with high BII (1 SD above the mean) increased their choice of extraverted items after American versus Asian priming ($M=8.25$ vs. $M=6.49$), $\beta=.88$, $t(40)=2.57$, $p<.05$, suggesting an assimilative response. Conversely, individuals with low BII (1 SD below the mean) decreased their choice of extraverted items after American versus Asian priming ($M=6.51$ vs. $M=7.92$), $\beta=-.71$, $t(40)=-2.17$, $p<.05$, suggesting a contrastive response. We corroborate the evidence in study 1 that BII moderates the effects of cultural cues on consumer behavior.

Given that both BII and identity exclusion threat moderates the effects of cultural primes, we examined whether the moderating effect of BII is mediated by identity exclusion threat (Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005). BII and identity exclusion threat were correlated, $r=-.58$, $p<.001$. In the above regression that predicted extraverted choice as a function of cultural prime and BII, we added the predictors of identity exclusion threat and the interaction term of cultural prime and identity exclusion threat (see Table 2, Model 3). Supporting our mediation hypothesis, the interaction effect of cultural prime and identity exclusion threat was significant, $\beta=-.80$, $t(38)=-3.39$, $p<.01$, while the interaction effect of cultural prime and BII was no longer significant, $\beta=.06$, $t(38)=-.27$, $p=.79$. The Sobel test was significant ($z=2.74$, $p<.01$). To further explore the mediation effect, we used the bootstrap method (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to determine a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (based on 1000 bootstrap samples) for the indirect effect. The confidence interval did not contain zero [.08, 1.02], confirming the significant mediation effect. The results indicate that the moderating effect of BII on choice was significantly reduced when perceptions of identity exclusion threat were taken into account.

A reverse direction mediation account was not supported. Adding the main effect of BII and its interaction effect with

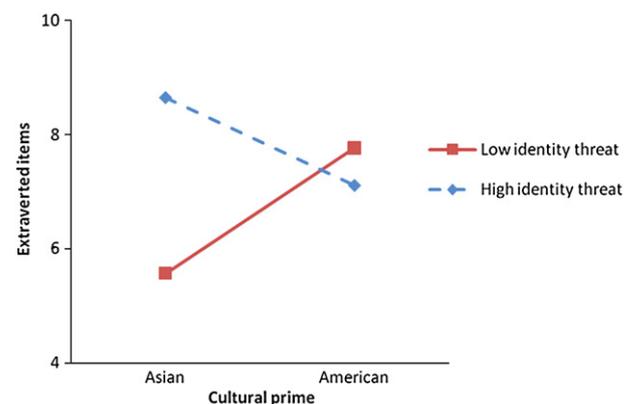
Table 2
Mediation results for interaction effect between cultural prime and Bicultural Identity Integration (BII) on item choice (study 2).

Step and variable	Extraverted choice		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
1 Asian identification	.31	.23	.30
American identification	.38*	.16	.25
2 Cultural prime	.16	.09	.13
3 Identity exclusion threat	.49*	–	.79**
Cultural prime × Identity exclusion threat	-.75**	–	-.80**
4 BII		.06	.54*
Cultural prime × BII		.60**	.06
R^2	.41	.32	.52
Overall F	5.65**	3.81**	5.81**
df	5, 40	5, 40	7, 38

Note. Entries represent unstandardized coefficients. All continuous predictors are mean-centered.

* $p<.05$.

** $p<.01$.



Note. High and low identity exclusion threat is plotted at one standard deviation above and below the mean.

Fig. 3. Item choice as a function of cultural priming for participants perceiving high versus low identity exclusion threat (Study 2).

cultural prime did not significantly reduce the interaction effect of cultural prime and identity exclusion threat on extraverted choice (sobel $z = -.27$, $p = .79$). This suggests that identity exclusion threat is a more proximal predictor of divergent responses to cultural primes than BII.

The results support our predictions. Levels of BII correspond to levels of perceived threat in situations that cue one cultural identity. In these situations, low BII individuals perceive greater threat of losing their non-cued cultural identity than high BII individuals. Greater perceived threat leads individuals to contrast, rather than assimilate to cultural cues. Thus, contrastive responses to cultural cues serve a self-protective function. Furthermore, perceived threat of losing the non-cued cultural identity explains why low BII individuals contrast to cultural cues. Low perceptions of this threat explain why high BII individuals assimilate to cultural cues. The results support our hypothesis that motivation to protect the self against cultural identity exclusion is the basis for the BII moderating effect.

General discussion

We reveal the process for assimilative versus contrastive responses to cultural cues as a function of BII. We show that contrastive responses are a manifestation of a defense mechanism that operates outside of awareness (study 1) and functions to protect the self against losing a cultural identity (study 2). Low BII individuals perceive situations that cue one cultural identity as more threatening to their self-concepts than high BII individuals, in that their non-cued cultural identity is excluded. High perceptions of identity exclusion threat produce contrastive responses to cultural cues, indicating the presence of self-protection motives. Low perceptions of identity exclusion threat produce assimilative responses to cultural cues, implying the absence of self-protection motives. We further find that perceived threat of cultural identity exclusion mediates the (moderating) effect of BII on responses to cultural cues. Thus, low BII individuals contrast to cultural cues because of perceived threat of losing a cultural identity; high BII individuals assimilate because they are less likely to perceive cultural cues as a threat to the self.

We illustrate that BII moderates the effects of cultural cues in consumer behavior contexts. When primed with cues of American versus Asian culture, Asian-Americans with high BII sought more individualistic-framed information about a product (study 1) and more extraverted items (study 2), whereas those with low BII sought less individualistic-framed information (study 1) and fewer extraverted items (study 2). This suggests that high BII consumers assimilate to the norms of the cued culture, whereas low BII consumers contrast to these norms. Moreover, this pattern occurs automatically (study 1), implying that divergent responses to cultural cues do not require conscious attention to the cultural stimuli, but are based on a nonconscious defense mechanism.

Theoretical implications

Our research has implications for existing theories on why BII moderates responses to cultural cues. Prior research has

suggested several processes that could explain why low BII individuals contrast rather than assimilate to cultural cues, including perceptions of self-dissimilarity to cultural cues in terms of valence (Cheng et al., 2006), motivation to defy the norms of the cued culture (Zou et al., 2008), and conscious awareness of the influence of primes (e.g., Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). Our research uncovers a more basic process by which their contrastive responses occur. We document that motivation to protect the self-concept against perceived threat determines the moderating effect of BII. Low (vs. high) BII individuals perceive greater threat in situations that cue one cultural identity, in that their other cultural identity is excluded. Greater perceptions of cultural identity exclusion (losing the non-cued cultural identity) engender contrastive responses to cultural cues, implying motivation to protect against threat. Furthermore, perceived cultural identity exclusion explains why low BII individuals contrast to cultural cues. Conversely, high BII individuals assimilate to cultural cues because the cues are not perceived as threatening to their self-concepts, that is, exclude their non-cued cultural identity. The current proposal that self-protection motives underlie the moderating effect of BII is to our knowledge, the most comprehensive account to date.

We expand the literature on defensive processing. Past research suggests that individuals differ in the degree to which they perceive the need to protect their self-concept (e.g., Barrett et al., 2002; Jordan et al., 2003). We show that low BII individuals, who have conflicting cultural identities, are more easily threatened by situations that cue one cultural identity. They chronically perceive threat in these cultural environments. High BII individuals who have coherent cultural identities are less likely to perceive threat. As a result, low BII individuals are more likely than high BII individuals to defend the self such that they contrast from cultural cues. Our findings converge with evidence suggesting that individuals with a conflicting self-concept have a greater propensity towards defensiveness than those with coherent self-concept (Jordan et al., 2003; Kernis & Paradise, 2002).

We demonstrate that biculturals can experience the threat of losing a cultural identity at more subtle levels than shown in previous research (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Our findings suggest they can perceive the threat nonconsciously, and the magnitude of perceived threat depends on BII. Low (vs. high) BII individuals tend to perceive greater threat in situations that cue one cultural identity, which in turn leads to contrastive responses. The finding that low BII individuals automatically contrast to cultural cues is consistent with research that defensive processing occurs nonconsciously (Cramer, 2001; Freud, 1914/1957). We link BII to the use of nonconscious defense mechanisms in situations that cue one cultural identity. We also corroborate the evidence that appraisals of threat can be made automatically outside of awareness and motivate self-protective (contrastive) responses (e.g., Chartrand, Dalton, & Fitzsimons, 2007; Sherman & Cohen, 2006). Furthermore, we expand research on ways to document nonconscious defensive processing (Barrett et al., 2002; Jordan et al., 2003; Klein & Harris, 2009). We examine whether people behave

defensively when their self-concepts are threatened at less conscious levels, such as by subliminal stimuli (cf. Cheryan & Monin, 2005).

The present results have implications for research on how biculturals negotiate their two cultural identities. Past research found that biculturals experience threat when they perceive a cultural identity is excluded from the situation. Studies typically focus on threat stemming from perceptions that their host culture identity is denied by the host culture, a culture in which they do not look like they belong (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999; Cheryan & Monin, 2005; Guendelman, Cheryan, & Monin, 2011). We delve into a deeper question of how biculturals perceive their other, alternative cultural identity in host and heritage culture contexts. We show that low (vs. high) BII individuals perceive greater exclusion of their other cultural identity, and this gives rise to defensive responses. Thus, we demonstrate biculturals can respond defensively to the perceived exclusion of their non-cued cultural identity, not merely the cultural identity most related to the cultural situation (Cheryan & Monin, 2005). Consistent with our theory, evidence suggests that biculturals respond defensively when they perceive their heritage cultural identity is excluded from host culture situations (Bond & Yang, 1982). Our findings imply that bicultural identity structure affects the level of perceived cultural identity exclusion, and in turn, defensiveness. Individuals with low BII, who perceive greater identity exclusion threat, defend their heritage cultural identity in host culture situations. They moreover defend their host cultural identity in heritage culture situations.

We extend the literature on bicultural identity and consumer behavior. Whereas studies have found that biculturals are amenable to cultural cues in consumer contexts (Briley et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2005), we illustrate interactive effects of cultural cues and BII. We also show that the moderating effect of BII is not limited to perceptual biases (Benet-Martinez et al., 2002) but impacts behavior, even at the automatic level. Our research differs from previous consumer studies (Briley et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2005) as we do not observe a main effect of cultural cues (assimilative responses). An interesting question that arises is whether those prior studies, which did not measure BII, sampled primarily high BII individuals who are assimilatively inclined. As acculturation stress is associated with low BII (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005), studies of non-immigrants (Briley et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2005) who have low acculturation stress could feature high BII individuals. The current research sampled immigrants, specifically those who express identification with both their heritage and host culture. This operationalization of bicultural might increase the number of low BII participants and give rise to divergent responses to cultural priming.

Practical implications

Our research suggests that successfully appealing to bicultural consumers through identity-based marketing is not so straightforward. Past research implies that consumers prefer brands and products that resonate with their cultural identity

(Deshpande, Hoyer, & Donthu, 1986; Forehand & Deshpande, 2001; Stayman & Deshpande, 1989; Williams & Qualls, 1989). Also, a strong cultural identity elicits culturally congruent choices (LeBoeuf et al., 2010; Reed, 2004; Zhang & Khare, 2009). We, however, reveal that bicultural identity structure moderates responses to cultural cues beyond the strength of these cultural identities. Our findings suggest low BII consumers may defensively resist the influence of advertisements priming their cultural identity by avoiding the product or brand, even without their conscious awareness. Another implication is that low BII consumers may be less likely to choose brands that are popular in a cultural setting (e.g., Starbucks in the U.S.), whereas high BII consumers may feel attracted to them.

A large body of work shows that marketing cues presented outside of consumers' awareness can influence their consumer decisions (e.g., North, Hargreaves, & McKendrick, 1999; Sleeth-Keppler & Wheeler, 2011). Our research suggests that subliminal cues can be received in different ways. Low BII consumers could automatically contrast to subtle cultural influences on their choices, whereas high BII consumers could automatically assimilate. Contrastive responses that are automatic may be adaptive in some cases. For example, consumers with nonintegrated Asian and American identities may automatically orient away from indulging in fattening foods after watching the Superbowl, or be able to refuse a persistent Asian salesperson without feeling guilt. Marketing stimuli placed in web banners or roadside billboards that feature themes related to cultural identities ([American] Coffee-mate: Express Yourself), even when not consciously perceived, may not effectively stimulate purchasing behavior in these low BII consumers unless they are in an Asian context.

To enhance marketing effectiveness, companies could create different versions of their marketing campaigns, rather than assume that a single strategy works best for a particular cultural group or cultural context. For example, in the U.S., a juice company could advertise its product as “fun to drink” and “healthy to drink” on separate billboards. It is likely that consumers with integrated Asian and American identities would be more persuaded by promotion-focused appeals (e.g., “fun to drink”), congruent with American norms, whereas those with nonintegrated Asian and American identities would be more persuaded by prevention-focused appeals (e.g., “healthy to drink”), congruent with Asian norms (Aaker & Lee, 2001). Yet, billboards that simultaneously convey “fun to drink” and “healthy to drink” may turn away consumers with low BII. Evidence suggests that low BII individuals show less favorable attitudes toward ambivalent, mixed-theme messages than high BII individuals (Kramer, Lau-Gesk, & Chiu, 2009).

Limitations and future directions

We proposed that the contrastive responses of low BII individuals reflect defensive processing and provided evidence supporting it. More research should study the defense mechanism. For example, studies could use implicit measures to investigate whether in the process of contrasting away from a cultural cue, low BII activate their non-cued cultural identity to counteract the

undermining influence. Our results are inconsistent with a prior view that low BII (e.g., a conflicted identity structure) implies a cognitive linking between the two cultural knowledge systems, specifically that situational cues of one cultural identity would spread activation from the cued cultural identity to the non-cued cultural identity (see Benet-Martinez et al., 2002). Hence, low BII individuals seem to respond congruent with their non-cued cultural identity. The current findings of self-protection motives suggest that when exposed to cultural cues, low BII individuals might directly activate their non-cued cultural identity and block their cued cultural identity from being activated. That is, their contrastive responses may not require a transfer in activation from the cued identity to the non-cued identity. Further research should examine this notion.

Research could study how the threat of cultural identity exclusion develops for low BII individuals, such as whether it is influenced by characteristics including an insecure self-concept in general (e.g., low self-concept clarity, Campbell, 1990) or discrimination distress in heritage and host culture contexts (Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005; Huynh, Devos, & Smalarz, 2011). Studies could also explore the link between BII and defensive processing when BII is assessed as a cognitive orientation (e.g., the degree of separation between two cultural identities, Benet-Martinez & Haritatos, 2005), besides an affective orientation (e.g., the degree of conflict between two cultural identities) as assessed in the current studies.

Further work could examine how to counteract defensive processing among low BII individuals. Research shows that nonconscious defense mechanisms are reduced when people are made aware of the process (Cramer, 2000), for example, having an opportunity to voice their fears of identity threat prior to receiving identity-threatening information (Puntoni et al., 2011). Making low BII individuals voice their fears of leaving out a cultural identity prior to entering a situation that cues their other cultural identity might reduce their tendencies to contrast. Another approach to diminish contrastive responses to cultural cues is by temporarily bolstering BII, such as through tasks that enhance integrative thinking (Mok & Morris, 2012b).

Conclusion

The current research reconciles a broad range of studies that have attempted to explain why bicultural identity structure moderates the effects of cultural cues. Specifically, it is unclear why low BII individuals contrast, rather than assimilate to cultural cues of their own identities. Prior research posits that the contrast effects reflect the consequence of self-prime dissimilarity, motivation to oppose cultural norms, or priming awareness. We reveal that the primary determinant of the BII moderation effect is motivation to protect the self against perceived threat. Our proposal that low BII individuals contrast to cultural identity cues to defend against losing their non-cued cultural identity offers a new perspective to the literature on bicultural identity negotiation and defensive processing. Defensive processing of cultural cues occurs outside of awareness and can affect consumer behavior at an automatic level.

Appendix A

In each of the following pairs, if you were given a choice, please select the ONE option you would like to receive in a random drawing for a free gift. Indicate your choice (✓) below:

-
- | | |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 1) Which CD would you choose? | _____ ‘Children’s Evening Music’ |
| _____ ‘Rock’n Roll | |
| 2) Which meal would you choose? | _____ A free takeout meal from a restaurant |
| _____ A free eat-in meal at a restaurant | _____ Free pass to a nightclub |
| 3) Which option would you choose? | _____ Free pass to a museum |
| _____ Free pass to a museum | _____ Free DVD rental |
| 4) Which option would you choose? | _____ Free movie tickets |
| _____ Free movie tickets | _____ A pint of rocky road ice cream |
| 5) Which ice cream would you choose? | _____ A pint of vanilla ice cream |
| _____ A pint of vanilla ice cream | _____ Comfort foods cookbook |
| 6) Which book would you choose? | _____ Spicy foods cookbook |
| _____ Spicy foods cookbook | _____ A box of cookies from the grocery store |
| 7) Which option would you choose? | _____ A box of freshly baked cookies from a bakery |
| _____ A box of freshly baked cookies from a bakery | _____ Ticket to an acapella choir performance |
| 8) Which option would you choose? | _____ Ticket to a Latin dance performance |
| _____ Ticket to a Latin dance performance | _____ Ticket to Cirque du Soleil |
| 9) Which option would you choose? | _____ Ticket to the Metropolitan Opera |
| _____ Ticket to the Metropolitan Opera | _____ A can of ginger ale |
| 10) Which drink would you choose? | _____ A carton of milk |
| _____ A carton of milk | _____ A pack of pencils |
| 11) Which pens would you choose? | _____ A pack of highlighters |
| _____ A pack of highlighters | _____ A bottle of apple juice |
| 12) Which drink would you choose? | _____ A bottle of apple cider |
| _____ A bottle of apple cider | _____ Ticket to a basketball game |
| 13) Which option would you choose? | _____ Ticket to a golf tournament |
| _____ Ticket to a golf tournament | _____ A tube of wasabi |
| 14) Which option would you choose? | _____ A jar of mayonnaise |
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