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A Conclusion, Yet an Opening to Enriching the Normative Approach of Culture

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Abstract

We compile in this article the target article authors' thoughtful responses to the commentaries. Their responses identify some common threads across the rich contents of the commentary pieces, interlink the observation and theoretical propositions in the commentaries with broader streams of research, present new perspectives inspired by the commentary contributors, and pose provocative questions to further ignite research efforts on the normative analysis of culture.

Keywords

culture, intersubjective representation, social norm

Heuristic Value of the Intersubjective Theory of Culture (by C.-Y. Chiu)

Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem which it was intended to solve.

—Karl Popper (1972, p. 266)

A good theory is not necessarily one that confers epistemic certainty; it can also be one that inspires new ideas of the ways in which further research may be conducted. The commentaries speak to the heuristic value of the intersubjective theory of culture (Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi,

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Shteynberg, & Wan, 2010). It has challenged researchers to clarify the meanings of norms by identifying different types of norms and their interrelations. The theory also invites investigators to elaborate on the significance of norms by connecting intersubjective norms with their conceptual cousins (e.g., social representations) and related theories (e.g., system justification, social identity theories). It has inspired new hypotheses and methods for studying cultures. It provokes thoughts on the evolution of behavioral variations across and within cultures, continuity and discontinuity in cultural transmission, homogenization and diversification of culture as it evolves, and the trajectory of emergent evolution in cultural transformations. It draws attention to nuanced distinctions between related theories (i.e., diffusionism and complexity theory) and affords possibilities for creative syntheses. It ignites interests in cross-level and transdisciplinary analysis of cultural dynamics.

Advances have been made in pursuing these possibilities. For example, in a recent article, Morris, Chiu, and Liu (2015) used two dimensions to classify norms: (a) norms codified in objective social structures versus norms that are subjective psychological representations and (b) the extent of institutionalization for objective norms and the extent of internalization for subjective norms. In the same article, the authors drew on existing theories to propose five cognitive and motivational mechanisms that induce norm adherence: self-expression and guilt avoidance, salience of identity and belongingness needs, utility maximization, effortless tactical social navigation, and identity signaling and validation.

These psychological inducements should be distinguished from the social functions of norm enforcement (e.g., social coordination, social cohesion) and the environmental conditions that increase society's reliance on conformity to regulate selfish maximization and optimize group fitness. To fully understand why people adhere to norms, we need detailed analyses of the interplay of pertinent environmental press, social functions, and psychological motives. One such study (Kwan, Yap, & Chiu, 2015), for example, shows that although environmental affordances allow implicit learning of descriptive norms (DNs), cultural identity signaling as a personal motive can moderate adherence to norms that were learned unconsciously through transactions with the environment. Thus, it is important to perform cross-level analysis of norms and cultural dynamics, leveraging on diverse methods (e.g., agent-based modeling, data science, epigenetics, and cross-level statistical models).

The intersubjective theory also raises new questions that motivate nuanced analyses of cultural differences. For example, do cultural variations in behaviors reflect group differences in (a) the contents of the norms, (b) the interrelations of different types of norms, (c) the motivation of the individuals to conform to group norms, or (d) the extent to which conformity versus being unique is the intersubjective norm in the culture?

Finally, studying cultures through an intersubjective lens requires analysis of the processes that mediate the diffusion, reproduction, and transformation of cultural norms. Norms in a cultural group may change in response to endogenous factors (e.g., population change), exogenous factors (e.g., change in intercultural relations), and the interactions of endogenous and exogenous factors (Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015). Again, to fully understand evolution of cultural norms, we need cross-level analyses supported by heterogeneous methods. In short, although not the only possible one to study culture, the intersubjective theory is a viable theory with good heuristic value for future research.

DNs Are Consequences, Not Causes, of Behavior **(by G. Shteynberg)**

Having read many thoughtful contributions to this issue, I believe our collective excitement about perceived DNs is open to a significant critique. Put simply, perceptions of DNs may follow, not precede, behavior. Take teeth brushing—we learn to brush our teeth through a public routine

that is overseen by our parents (Frese, 2015). At some point, it may dawn on us that most people in our group must do the same, but it is not clear that such DN perceptions are essential to cause or maintain the behavior. As such, explicit knowledge about what is normative in one's culture may not be the cause, but the consequence of one's public behavior.

One might object that we have a body of empirical evidence that suggests that DNs cause behavior (e.g., Shteynberg, Gelfand, & Kim, 2009; Zou et al., 2010). However, if we assume that routinized public performances (Frese, 2015; Shteynberg, 2015a) result in the emergence of perceived DNs, then measurements of the latter may also capture the former. Whereas perceived DNs do not correlate with explicitly endorsed values (Shteynberg et al., 2009), they may strongly overlap with public behavioral patterns. Similarly, manipulations of perceived DNs may activate mental representations of public routines that gave rise to the normative perceptions in the first place. In all, perceived DNs may only predict behavior because they activate mental representations of *enacted public behavior*.

The idea that perceived DNs are derived from the performance of public behavior may shed light on several lines of research. First, because cultural newcomers do not have the mental representations of enacted public performances that are necessary to produce culturally appropriate behavior, simply learning about the local norms may reduce feelings of belongingness rather than lead to acculturation (Stephens & Townsend, 2015). Relatedly, the performance of public behavior is likely to be more essential to intergenerational transmission of culture (Tam, 2015) than the explicit teaching of perceived DNs or personally endorsed values. Finally, knowing what to do and how to fit in may be critical to DN operation (Gelfand & Harrington, 2015), precisely because such concerns are already embedded in the enactment of public behavior. Of course, these examples do not exhaust possible applications.

In sum, it is possible that perceived DNs are consequences, rather than causes, of cultural behavior. If true, our attention should shift toward understanding the sociopsychological processes that drive implicit cultural learning during the public routines of everyday life (Frese & Stewart, 1984). Shared attention theory (Shteynberg, 2015b) is one such attempt, positing that experiences of co-attention during public performances amplify memories, emotions, and behaviors (Shteynberg, 2015a). As such, it is conceivable that routinized performances under shared attention are critical to the emergence, maintenance, and transmission of human cultural life, whereas perceived DNs are less relevant.

Considering Other Roles of Perceived Norms in Intergenerational Cultural Transmission (by K.-P. Tam)

Commentaries in this Special Issue highlight a number of roles perceived norms may play in intergenerational transmission. I believe that some of the suggestions can be understood through the existing framework of the perceived norms perspective of intergenerational cultural transmission (Tam, 2015), while the others require a certain level of expansion of the perspective. I summarize these ideas in three points below.

First, perceived norms do not always result in conformity. People might use their understanding of norms to guide their deviance (e.g., Leung, 2015; Morris & Liu, 2015; Smith, 2015). In previous studies (e.g., Tam & Chan, 2015; Tam, Lee, Kim, Li, & Chao, 2012), the analytic angle was typically focused on norm adherence (i.e., parents incorporating perceived norms into their socialization or transmission preference). By contending that parents' reference to norms is goal directed, I believe that the perceived norms perspective is already flexible enough to explain and predict behavior of parents who devalue norm adherence or even value norm deviance. For instance, in two specific studies (Tam et al., 2012, Studies 1 and 2), it was found that more educated parents, arguably because they have more social resources to cope with adaptation stress, show independence from norms by referring to personal values to a larger extent and referring to

perceived norms to a smaller extent. Future studies should continue to explore other norm-related motives that parents may hold (Hasenfratz & Knafo-Noam, 2015).

Second, when understanding how parents use their perceived norms, one should also take into account the variability in parents' reference groups. In the normative approaches in cultural psychology, norms have been typically conceptualized with reference to a nation or the society as a whole. This conceptualization is sensible because the typical norms that characterize the "national culture" applies to every individual, but it overlooks the fact that people often look to more specific, localized groups for guidance (Huff & Lee, 2015; Leung, 2015; Livi, Pierro, Rullo, & Kruglanski, 2015). Religious parents may look to their churches for reference, and aspiring parents may refer to the norms among elites (e.g., innovators, opinion leaders) in the society or even in other parts of the world. In the process, these parents may conform to or defy the norms in the broader society. Accordingly, future studies should thoroughly analyze the social situations faced by the studied population and thereby identify the multiple groups that are of relevance, and assess parents' norm-related motives with respect to these groups. When multiple sources of norms are considered, it is also important for researchers to take into account the integration versus incompatibility among the multiple norms as perceived by the parent (Huff & Lee, 2015).

Third, in relation to the two points above, subscribers to the perceived norms perspective have to consider the contexts (e.g., interpersonal context, cultural context) wherein intergenerational transmission takes place (Eom & Kim, 2015; Smith, 2015). Contexts determine a number of parameters, including but not limited to how important norms are (e.g., cultural differences in importance of norms; see Tam et al., 2012), which reference groups parents look to (e.g., religious context), what motives parents hold (e.g., sociodemographic background), how adherence to norms versus deviance from norms is socially rewarded versus sanctioned (e.g., composition of the immediate neighborhood).

To end, I want to add one more suggestion. The perceived norms perspective has thus far been focused on explaining how cultures are perpetuated. I believe that it could further contribute to the understanding of culture and psychology by exploring the other side of the coin: how cultures change. Cultures survive on not only continuity and stability but also diversity and flexibility in handling novelty. How this can be modeled and understood through the role of perceived norms is a vitally important question for future research in culture and psychology.

Considering the Role of Context in Intersubjective Cultural Representation (by C. Wan)

Various commentaries have mentioned the importance of considering contextual effects in the future development of the norm approach to culture. As the commentary contributors have suggested, research on the norm approach so far has largely been silent on the issue of contextual effects. Whereas the initial demonstration of an effect often ignores boundary conditions, future development of this approach would require a more nuanced theoretical and empirical analysis of how social and cultural contexts might shape such effect.

The commentary contributors have aptly pointed out (Benet-Martinez, 2015; Chang & Jetten, 2015) that the idea of intersubjective representation bears similarities with theories such as social representation theory and social identity theories in relating to the existence of certain common representations within a collective. However, these theories also provide useful insights for further consideration of the nature of intersubjective representations and the process of its formation and perpetuation.

Social representation theory views social representation as fluid, being continually constructed in a context (Moscovici, 1988). Social identity theories emphasize the variation in perceptions of prototypic group characteristics as dependent on the intergroup context (Chang & Jetten, 2015).

These theoretical perspectives raise two questions for the understanding of intersubjective representations. The first question pertains to contextual influence on the content of the intersubjective cultural representations that are being created and perpetuated. The existence of salient intergroup context during the formation of intersubjective representations could shape the specific representations that are formed in the culture. This could be especially relevant to cultures with intergroup contention or coexistence as a significant part of the collective discourse. The second question pertains to the stability of intersubjective cultural representations once they are formed. If intersubjective cultural representations are formed through dynamic social processes (Chiu et al., 2010), then there would be a certain degree of impermanence in the representations. However, it is doubtful that these representations would be as fluid and context dependent as those discussed in social representation theory and social identity theories. Yet the consideration of stability can open new avenue of research concerning the impact of social change on intersubjective representations of the culture.

With the norm approach featured in the various articles in this issue, a broader question to ask is how the link between perceived norms and psychological processes might be situated in certain social and cultural contexts. Wagner, Kello, and Howarth (2015) pointed out the importance of social representations in providing the grounding for interpreting norm-adhering behaviors. Smith (2015) raised the question of cross-cultural differences in the process examined by the norm approach featured in the various target articles. A broader question to be asked is whether certain social and cultural contexts would strengthen or attenuate the effect of perceived norms on psychological processes. Certain contributions to this issue have discussed the roles that individual motives might play in moderating the importance of perceived norms (e.g., Gelfand & Harrington, 2015; Huff & Lee, 2015; Tam, 2015). Beyond individual motives, the salience of the perceived norms, the function of intersubjective representations in a social context, the coherence between intersubjective representations, and the objective cultural context are all examples of potential factors that could change the role of perceived norms. These considerations offer exciting future direction for research on the norm approach.

A Framework for Understanding DN and Injunctive Norm (IN) Alignment (M. J. Gelfand, J. Harrington, and Y. Mu)¹

The interrelationship of DNs and INs has been widely discussed in this Special Issue. Although distinct, many commentators note that DNs and INs often overlap. That is, what people *actually* do commonly reflects what they feel they *should* do and vice versa (Eriksson & Strimlinge, 2015). Yet there are occasions when DNs and INs fail to align (Chen & Hong, 2015; Eom & Kim, 2015), and we need theory and research to identify precisely when this is the case.

In thinking about this issue, we can draw inspiration from Lewin (1951), and begin to identify the factors that potentially inhibit versus facilitate the enactment of INs into DNs. As a general principle, we assume that having both *high value* and *high expectancy* for enacting an IN will increase IN–DN consistency. Value will be high when individuals personally value the IN, either because they have come to internalize it or because they identify strongly with their group and want to be seen as a good group member (Chang & Jetten, 2015; Eriksson & Strimling, 2015) especially when the norm has been moralized (Morris & Liu, 2015). An IN will have high motivational force, when there is a strong possibility of punishment, as in public contexts where there is high monitoring. We would note that the value for any particular IN is always *relative* to other INs. In other words, INs operate within a hierarchical system wherein some have higher priority (and offer more potential value than others). For example, while not engaging in bribery may be an IN in China (Chen & Hong, 2015), fostering connections and gaining access to resources for one's ingroup may be more important INs in some contexts, thus affording moral licensing to not

implement the IN against bribery. More generally, in a norm systems approach, there will be higher IN–DN consistency to the extent that the norm has higher priority in the cultural system.

Although INs involve value, any goal-driven behavior such as actual norm abidance also has to involve high expectancy (Vroom, 1964). In situations wherein one has an abundance of internal resources and high self-control, there will be higher expectancy, and it will be easier to engage in IN-abiding behavior than in situations where one has low resources and low self-control. Likewise, external resources, or “normative props” in the environment, can make it more or less easy to enact INs. For example, people may agree that they should not litter but may be less likely to comply with this IN in areas where there are no trash cans.

As norms are fundamentally collective constructs, when we think about whether to engage in norm-abiding behavior, we also need to take into account our assumptions *about others in the environment* (Postmes, Akkus, & Stroebe, 2015); in other words, our beliefs of others’ values and expectancies for normative behavior. Children first learn about others’ values and expectancies through their parents (Tam, 2015), and later through their own cultural experience, come to have a sense of which INs are actually enacted in their cultural context. Individuals may be less willing to behave according to an IN to the extent that they perceive that others do not have high value or expectancy for doing so. In this respect, perceived consensus should moderate the impact of IN–DN consistency.

In sum, though in many contexts IN and DN are highly overlapping, they need not be. Future research should examine both self and generalized others’ values and expectancies, as well as how the relative weights of these factors affect IN–DN consistency in different cultural contexts. In addition to surveys and experiments, neuroscience methods may prove useful in predicting IN–DN consistency. When thinking about IN, networks associated with the processing of rewards and punishments, including the orbitofrontal cortex, anterior insula, ventral/dorsal striatum, amygdala and cingulate cortex (Elliott, Friston, & Dolan, 2000; Fujiwara, Tobler, Taira, Iijima, & Tsutsui, 2009; Seymour, Singer, & Dolan, 2007), as well as areas related to moral judgment (e.g., the medial prefrontal and posterior cingulate cortex; Koenigs et al., 2007; Young & Saxe, 2009), may be activated. When thinking of DN, areas involved in self-control processing when making decisions about one’s actions, particularly the right ventrolateral prefrontal cortex (Cohen & Lieberman, 2010) and dorsal fronto-median (Brass & Haggard, 2007), may be activated. And thinking of *others’* compliance with norms would likely recruit the “theory of mind” network (e.g., temporo-parietal junction; Saxe & Kanwisher, 2003). To the extent that INs and DN are highly aligned, as is the case potentially in tight cultures, we would expect more overlapping activation across all these areas when thinking about INs and DN.

Psychological Functions of Subjective Norms: Reference Groups, Moralization, Adherence, and Defiance (by M. W. Morris and Z. Liu)

Our target article (Morris & Liu, 2015) looked beyond conformity—copying the behavior of peers—to consider a few other ways that norms influence people. We distinguished DN from INs, peer from aspirational reference groups, and norm adherence from defiance.

DNs Versus INs

Chang and Jetten (2015) note that social identity theory has relaxed its traditional assumption that group prototypes emerge from intergroup comparisons, bringing its theorizing closer to the intersubjective approach. But a crucial difference remains: Group prototypes encompass both DN and IN—entailing that they operate in tandem—whereas more recent work has documented that they operate independently and in qualitatively different ways. Several key differences are captured by

the proposal that they play different roles in social navigation (Morris, Hong, Chiu, & Liu, 2015): DNs work like ship's *autopilot* in that they *automatically* direct *immediate* behaviors in a *safe* direction; INs are often used more like a ship's *radar* in that they inform *deliberate* choices about *longer term trajectories* to fulfill *strategic* goals (Morris et al., 2015).

Jost, Sterling, and Langer (2015) consider how the descriptive becomes injunctive. The motive to justify the status quo (Kay, Whitson, Gaucher, & Galinsky, 2009) is one factor among many that induces people to go from *is* to *ought* or from common to moral (Eriksson & Strimling, 2015). Other contributors to this process may be cultural syndromes such as holism (Smith, 2015), tightness, or collectivism (Eom & Kim, 2015). We used the term moralization but do not mean to imply that *all* INs have moral foundations. Injunctions about fashion and manners turn on aesthetic or social approval rather than moral approval. What defines INs is that they involve approval; people adhere to and enforce INs out of self-conscious emotions such as shame/pride and social signaling goals that do not figure in adherence to purely descriptive norms.

Kashima (2015) proposes that when a norm becomes injunctified (Kay et al., 2009), social consensus may no longer matter. But Bicchieri (2002) finds that it does matter; a perceived IN (Americans should vote) does not suffice to produce high adherence without the supplement of a perceived DN (most Americans vote). That said, public health studies of social norm in marketing campaigns do support a related idea, that INs are used more selectively than DNs. DN information about proximal groups (one's campus) and distal groups (one's country) have additive effects on one's behavior, whereas for INs, distal-group information does not contribute above and beyond proximal-group information (Cho, 2006; Neighbors et al., 2008).

Peer and Aspirational Groups

Our argument about distinctive functions of peer- and aspirational-group norms was drawn upon by Leung (2015) to inform Tam's (2015) question of when parents socialize children into habits and values different from their own. Leung suggests that parents instill not only mainstream norms but also aspirational-group norms. In this way, parental socialization efforts may contribute to intergenerational change rather than persistence. Most recent research on the influence of outgroup norms, whether aspirational or dissociative reference groups, is the field of consumer behavior (Berger & Rand, 2008).

For Stephens and Townsend (2015), the tension between peer-group norms (solidarity) and aspirational groups (mobility) is experienced by individuals from under-represented subcultures and classes entering elite colleges. However, past research provides clues about how some individuals transcend the tradeoff. Ethier and Deaux (1994) found that Hispanic students at elite universities with a strong ethnic identity re-negotiate their identity, weakening the link to home and linking to campus cultural groups, mooring their identity to something in the college context so that it provides solidarity and mobility. Ethnic subcultures do not always see the mainstream culture's ways of life as a path to mobility, the question of when people acculturate to or borrow from other cultures depends on intergroup perceptions of warmth and competence (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) in interaction with the domain of behavior: secular, stylistic, or sacred (Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015).

Votruba, Sng, and Kwan (2015) propose that focus on elites as aspirational reference group may depend on power distance. Theoretically, this could be argued both ways. Power distance involves acceptance of elites (a positive attitude) but also involves acceptance of one's place. Past research tells us that the orientation toward emulating elites depends on (perceived) upward mobility (Kanter, 1977; Merton, 1957), which may not be correlated with power distance. Smith (2015) notes that high power distance cultures may be arenas for perverse norms, rules that high power people personally breach but capriciously enforce.

Norm Adherence Versus Defiance

We argue that people adhere to a community's INs to signal loyalty and accrue status. Zhang and Ji (2015) note that the relationships to status and power are more complex than this. The highest status members of organizations and professions accrue "idiosyncrasy credits," a permission to violate norms. Likewise power reduces people's attention to norms and for this reason, breaching norms can make someone appear powerful (Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer, Gündemir, & Stamkou, 2011). Perhaps the best path to power is loyal adherence to INs but selective disregard for DNs.

Peterson and Barreto (2015) build on our arguments about norm defiance and functions at different levels of analysis to sketch a multi-level account of norm innovation. Individuals within a society vary not only in what they inherit (heritage) but also in their motivations and personalities, which shape cultural identity structures (Huff & Lee, 2015). Contrarian types try out novel behaviors or borrow foreign customs, enduring social sanctioning when they breach INs. Others observing this adopt the new behaviors through social learning and, as the social movement grows, conformity. Opinion leaders such as journalists can make a difference by changing their patterns of public sanctioning. Peterson and Barreto (2015) emphasize that norm innovation involves both motivational processes at the individual level and legitimization processes at the societal level.

Further insights about cultural change come from Kashima's (2015) comments on Gao and colleagues' (2015) modeling of how communication processes can reproduce cultural patterns and subcultural factions. Building on Bartlett's theory of conventionalization, Kashima's research on grounding processes in the reproduction of stories highlights that perceived DNs are constantly used for and reinforced by everyday ingroup communication. However, recent research finds that communication across cultural boundaries (telling stories to outgroup members) produces an opposite bias: Stories become less cultural stereotypical as they are retold rather than more stereotypical (Liu & Morris, 2014). Hence, the discourse at cultural borders and in multi-cultural communities is another crucible for cultural innovation. In these matters and others, as Bou Malham and Saucier (2015) note, norms research in psychology could benefit from concepts and methods in cultural anthropology.

Coda

In sum, we see this constructive dialogue as a concluding remark to this Special Issue and, at the same time, as an opening to stimulate more research to chart the future directions for the normative approaches in the study of cultural psychology.

Authors' Note

Authorship is presented in alphabetical order. This article is organized into six sessions, with each session written by a different group of authors and noted in the title of each section.

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