



8-1-2015

# Cultural Priming as a Tool to Understand Multiculturalism and Culture

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This article was supported by a grant from the Jacobs Foundation to the second author (grant reference number 2010-861). Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Arzu Aydinli, School of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Tilburg University, P. O. Box 90153, Tilburg 5000 LE, The Netherlands. Phone: +31 (0) 13 466 2526. E-mail: A.Aydinli@tilburguniversity.edu

## Recommended Citation

Aydinli, A., & Bender, M. (2015). Cultural Priming as a Tool to Understand Multiculturalism and Culture. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1134>

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## Abstract

What is multiculturalism, and how is it typically studied? The current paper provides answers to these questions by introducing approaches to the study of multiculturalism and their implications. We first present the view of multiculturalism as a static and dispositional phenomenon (i.e., demographic, as well as most uni- and bidimensional conceptualizations of acculturation) and then focus on more dynamic approaches to multiculturalism, that view culture as emerging from domain-specificity, situated cognition, or as a dynamic constructivist process. As part of a dynamic approach to culture, two prominent techniques of priming cultural orientations (i.e., priming Individualism – Collectivism versus Cultural Frame Switching) are introduced and compared, and implications are outlined. We propose that it is necessary to perceive culture as more than a categorical variable that is stable over situations, and highlight future research avenues that might help to further advance our understanding of multiculturalism and culture as dynamic constructs.

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## Introduction

Globalization as the international exchange of products, knowledge, and cultural values is steadily progressing in today's societies (Bandura, 2001; Berger, & Huntington, 2002; Chiu, Gries, Torelli, & Cheng, 2011). While several decades ago, cultures were largely defined by national borders, such a definition does not seem valid any more: Today, cultural or ethnic groups expand beyond national borders (e.g., North-American, Latin-American, Middle-Eastern); diverse cultural contexts coexist within one country, and individuals in such contexts often hold more than one cultural orientation; and are therefore referred to as bi- or multicultural (Bourhis, Moise, Perreault, & Senecal, 1997)<sup>1</sup>. Technological developments such as web-based social networks (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), or social communication platforms (e.g., Skype), further accelerate this trend by providing easy access to cross-cultural media and individuals through a single click. By that, the process of negotiating various cultural influences, and thus becoming multicultural, is no longer applicable only for migrating individuals, but increasingly affects sedentary ethnic groups, including a society's majority (globalization-based acculturation) (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008). You do not have to leave your home to come into contact with other cultures.

Mirroring these developments, interest in studying multiculturalism has grown over the last decades (e.g., Bender & Ng, 2009; LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton 1993; Ramirez-Esparza, Gosling, Benet-Martínez, Potter, & Pennebaker, 2006; Tadmor, Tetlock, & Peng 2009; for a review see Sam & Berry, 2006). The manner in which multiculturalism, and with it culture, is conceptualized, studied, and evaluated changed together with this development. In the past, culture was conceptualized as a static and categorical orientation or attribute (you "have" a specific culture, you are "from" a specific culture). Current research increasingly moves away from such a conceptualization and views culture as a dynamic and non-categorical process with multiple reference points (see for instance "polycultural psychology" proposed by Morris, Chiu, & Liu, 2015; van de Vijver, Blommaert, Gkoumasi, & Stogianni, 2015). Our review first describes traditional, static approaches to multiculturalism, and then moves towards more dynamic approaches, by focusing on the method of priming culture: Cultural priming is emphasized, as it allows the manipulation of cultural orientations and therefore offers the possibility to test competing views on culture, multiculturalism, and its outcomes in an experimental manner. By that, our understanding of what culture is and how multiculturalism develops can be substantially extended. Two prominent ways of priming culture are highlighted and compared; and their implications for understanding and conceptualizing multiculturalism and culture are outlined and discussed. Finally, limitations of current practices in priming culture and directions for future research to advance our understanding of multiculturalism and culture are presented.

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<sup>1</sup> By 'multicultural' we refer to *individuals* with two or more cultural affiliations. Note that we do not refer to multiculturalism in the sense of a political ideology, or a societal or nation-level orientation.

## Studying Multiculturalism: From Static to Dynamic Approaches

The question of *who* can be considered multicultural, and how different, sometimes even conflicting, cultural influences are negotiated by the individual has not been uniformly answered. Definitions can be separated into static versus dynamic conceptualizations. In addition, approaches differ in how much they focus on external/demographic markers of multiculturalism versus internal/psychological indicators. In the following, the most popular approaches, including their most relevant combinations, are summarized. Notably, this summary of approaches is not exhaustive.

### Static Approaches

#### Demographic / Sociological Approach

External or *demographic* conceptualizations define multiculturalism on the basis of mostly categorical indicators: being of a mixed racial or ethnic background, having parents from different cultures, or having migrated recently (i.e., being an immigrant, refugee, or expatriate). A person is considered multicultural due to dispositional, unalterable qualities that are objectively assessable (see Berry, 2003; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997).

#### Psychological Approach

Internal or psychological conceptualizations of multiculturalism focus on the degree of *internalization* as an indicator of multiculturalism. While mere exposure to a culture would be sufficient for being classified as multicultural according to a demographic conceptualization (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007), the psychological approach requires more – it requires internalization (or integration) of different cultural identities, which amounts to negotiating one's position along cultural coordinates (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; LaFramboise et al., 1993). By that, the psychological conceptualization of multiculturalism as internalization transcends the distinctions prevalent in many demographic approaches: Individuals who internalized a second culture through more indirect ways of exposure (e.g., through the media, or internet) can be classified as bicultural. In other words, physically relocating would not be necessary to become bicultural. Instead, the immediate context becomes important, clarifying that the psychological approach to multiculturalism strongly builds on theories about *acculturation* (individual change as a consequence of contact with other culture) (Berry, 2003; see Celenk & van de Vijver, 2011, 2014). Conceptualizations of acculturation therefore appear useful in understanding the process of internalization of multiple cultures. In acculturation research, two dominant modes of thought can be distinguished: that individuals acquire a new culture at the cost of losing their 'former' culture (unidimensional models), or that multiple cultural reference points are possible to sustain in one individual (multidimensional models).

#### *Unidimensional acculturation models*

Traditional views on acculturation proposed acculturation to be a unidimensional process (Gordon, 1964). This view implies that a strong endorsement of one's ethnic culture cannot coexist with a strong orientation towards the host society's culture (in case of an immigrant

who moved to another country). In other words, the two cultural orientations are conceptualized as opposing endpoints of one and the same dimension. The unidimensional model of acculturation has also implications for the conceptualization of multiculturalism: It does not allow the concurrent internalization of more than one culture. Therefore, multiculturalism is an ephemeral, transitional stage on the continuum from maintenance to adoption (Goldlust & Richmond, 1974; LaFramboise et al., 1993). Consequently, the multicultural individual had been viewed as a marginal person who experiences strong conflict and ambivalence in the course of accommodating two complex and incompatible cultural orientations, and who has not been successful in reaching the inevitable end-state of assimilation yet (Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1935).

#### *Multidimensional acculturation models*

More recent conceptualizations propose a multidimensional conceptualization of acculturation (Berry, 1990; Berry & Sam, 1997; La Framboise et al., 1993; for three-dimensional acculturation see Ferguson, Bornstein, & Pottinger, 2012). The most prominent model in this regard has been the bidimensional acculturation model by Berry and colleagues (Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992). It proposes that acculturating individuals (both immigrants and members of the host society) engage in the negotiation of two separate and independent processes: Firstly, individuals have to negotiate to what extent they are motivated, willing, or able to maintain their culture of origin, and secondly to what extent they are motivated, willing, or able to adopt the host society's dominant culture (independent from their first choice). As a result, four prototypical acculturation orientations illustrate these acculturative choices: assimilation (strong mainstream adoption, weak ethnic maintenance), separation (weak mainstream adoption, strong ethnic maintenance), marginalization (weak adoption and maintenance), and finally integration (strong mainstream adoption and ethnic maintenance). In Berry et al.'s model, bi- or multiculturals would be those individuals who engage in the acculturation strategy of integration (1992). Notably, integration has been shown to be most beneficial acculturation strategy in terms of socio-cultural adjustment and psychological well-being (Berry, 1997; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007).

Multiculturalism research based on both these demographic and psychological approaches to multiculturalism often treats culture and multiculturalism as categorical entities. Even though the approaches per se do not claim cultural orientations to be stable across situations and time, the way they are applied is often static: At a particular assessment time, a snapshot is taken, and the possibility that the same individual may dynamically exercise different acculturation strategies in different situations, and life domains is often neglected. Approaches that take such variations more strongly into account will be presented in the following.

## **Dynamic Approaches**

### **Domain-Specificity**

The domain-specificity approach to acculturation by Arends-Toth and van de Vijver (2003) distinguishes between the public and the private domain, and acculturation strategies for each domain are assessed independently, building on the conceptualization of Berry and colleagues (1992). For instance, a Chinese-American bicultural may strongly endorse Chinese culture in the private domain (e.g., preferences for specific food, family traditions, or friends), but may lean more towards the American culture in the public domain (e.g., at educational institutions, in the workplace, or with colleagues). While acculturation preferences for each domain are assumed to remain rather stable, the interaction with a specific environment allows for an extension of prior acculturation models.

### **Dynamic Constructivist Approach**

The dynamic constructivist approach conceptualizes culture as an associative “network of discrete and specific constructs that guide cognition when they come to the fore in an individual’s mind” (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000; p. 709). Whether they come to the fore depends on how available, accessible, and applicable cultural knowledge is in a particular situation (Hong & Mallorie, 2004). It is assumed that multicultural individuals possess multiple associative knowledge networks or frames, and can switch between these frames flexibly, depending on the demands of a specific situation. The dynamic constructivist approach proposes that a particular cultural orientation describes a situation-dependent state, rather than a situation-overarching trait (Hong et al., 2000). Cultural Frame Switching (hereafter referred to as CFS, Hong et al., 2000) describes a method of studying culture from a dynamic constructivist approach.

### **Culture as Situated Cognition**

Similar to the two approaches presented above, Oyserman proposes to think of culture as situated cognition (Oyserman, 2011). Cultural orientations and behaviors interact with situational factors. Culture as cognition allows for flexible changes between more collective vs. more individual mindsets, in accordance with the surrounding context. Different from both the domain-specific and the dynamic constructivist approach to culture, the situated cognition approach does not require an internalized notion of multiculturalism, but proposes that mono-cultural individuals are able to adapt their cognitive mindsets to a variety of situational demands, akin to switches between cultural orientations. It is proposed that each culture and society socializes its individuals in a way that they have access to a wide range of options and may be geared to use both (more) individualistic and collectivistic mindsets, depending on the immediate context (Oyserman, Sorensen, Reber, & Chen, 2009; Smith & Semin, 2004). Priming Individualism vs. Collectivism (hereafter referred to as I-C priming) is one of the most common methods used to study the effects of culture as situated cognition.

## **Priming Culture: A Method to Study Multiculturalism Dynamically**

Priming cultural orientations is a popular method in contemporary research. Both the CFS method and the I-C priming method represent means for studying the dynamic nature of culture and multiculturalism (Morris et al., 2015), and have the potential to substantially advance our understanding of both concepts: Priming culture allows for an *experimental* approach, and thus opens unique research avenues with important implications for the notion of culture and multiculturalism. To advance our understanding of culture and multiculturalism, it therefore seems indispensable to take a closer look on the method of priming culture.

The two most prominent methods are (1) the CFS method, in which a cultural mindset is activated by presenting cultural icons (e.g., symbols, architecture) (Hong et al., 2000), and (2) I-C priming in which an individual vs. collective conceptualization of the self is triggered (Gardner, Gabriel, & Lee, 1999; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). In the following, we introduce and compare these two methods; we outline common principles of the CFS and I-C priming method, highlight their differences and point towards their implications for understanding culture and multiculturalism.

### **Common Principles of I-C Priming and CFS**

Both approaches build on the principle of *temporary* and *chronic construct accessibility*, fundamental principles in priming research in general (Bargh, Bond, Lombardi, & Tota, 1986; Oyserman, 2011). The method of priming is rooted in the principles and theories of knowledge structures, knowledge activation, and spreading (Higgins, 1996; Wyer & Srull, 1986). Human behavior is significantly affected by making knowledge structures salient. Knowledge can come to the fore through particular situations or situational cues (temporary accessibility), or can be salient by default (chronic accessibility).

#### **Temporary Accessibility**

Temporary accessibility refers to a short-term activation of a knowledge structure in response to a particular situation or cue. In our case, these cues are represented by the use of I-C primes or CFS, that both aim at activating culture-related knowledge. Such cues or primes make existing – but not necessarily chronically dominant - cultural orientations or knowledge accessible, and thereby influence behavior (Bargh et al., 1986).

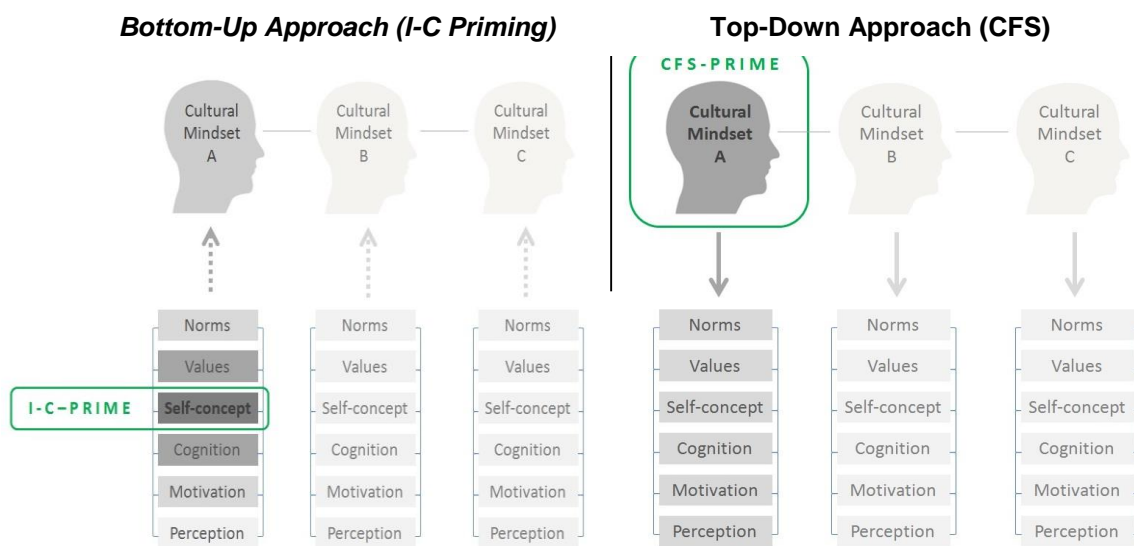
#### **Chronic Accessibility**

During socialization, the situations or contexts we repeatedly encounter provide us with a rich tapestry to learn various knowledge structures. For example, we experience situations in which we learn that modesty is appropriate and required. The more we encounter such situations, the more likely they are encoded in our cognitive repertoire. Content that is activated more frequently becomes more easily accessible, and in turn more likely to guide our behaviors than structures that are activated less frequently. The availability of specific content depends on an individual's context: When, for instance, modesty is desired or adaptive in a particular (cultural) context, individuals are likely to use and apply the concept

of modesty more frequently (situational requirements to be modest are not equal across contexts). Through regular activation, content becomes chronically accessible – and effectively forms a default mode of cognitive functioning that guides individuals' behaviors in general, across a variety of contexts (Higgins, 1996).

### CFS vs. I-C Priming: A Conceptual and Methodological Comparison

Even though the I-C priming and CFS approaches share many common principles (as outlined above), they also differ conceptually and methodologically in at least four major aspects: (a) the priming approach, (b) the manipulation method, (c) the target group, (d) and the projected range and limits of priming effects.



**Figure 1:** Comparing I-C Priming and CFS – Bottom-Up versus Top-Down approach

### The Priming Approach: Top-down vs. Bottom-up Priming

I-C priming has its roots in experimental social psychological research on the self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gardner et al., 1999). Initially, studies focused on priming the personal and relational/collective self-conceptualizations (Gardner et al., 1999). Later, the same method was labeled as priming individualism vs. collectivism, and thereby considered a prime of culture or cultural orientations. The shift from self-conceptualizations to culture is not surprising, as the self has been argued to be at the core of cultural differences (Kagitcibasi, 2005; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1995). I-C Priming was successful in experimentally obtaining cross-cultural differences (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). However, it is unclear whether the self as a proxy for culture is conceptually exhaustive. Procedures like CFS might be more encompassing. Derived from a cognitive approach, in CFS procedures culture is conceptualized as an associative knowledge network that can be triggered, activating a specific cultural mindset – which goes beyond priming specific concepts like individualism vs. collectivism or the



independent vs. interdependent self (Hong et al., 2000). CFS can therefore be described as a top-down approach of priming cultural knowledge that in turn leads to activation of various subordinate aspects related to culture (e.g., norms, values, beliefs, self-concept) (see Figure 1). Priming I-C represents a bottom-up approach as it only primes particular aspect of culture (i.e., sociocultural orientations, the self).

### **Manipulation Method**

For I-C priming various priming methods have been used (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). The most common I-C manipulation is borrowed from research on social identities: the pronoun circling task (Gardner et al., 1999). Here, participants are presented with a story (e.g., a trip to a city) that either contains self-related pronouns (i.e., I, me, myself), or group-related pronouns (i.e., we, us, ourselves). The task of the participant is to circle these pronouns (for similar methods, see Oyserman & Lee, 2008). In contrast, CFS presents participants with cultural icons to activate global cultural knowledge structures. In the first CFS study conducted by Hong and colleagues (2000), pictures of the American flag versus the Chinese dragon, or figures of famous cartoons (e.g. Superman versus Stone Monkey) were presented as such cultural icons. Both methods have advantages and disadvantages. CFS enables language-free (or language-reduced) priming, which allows for a separate investigation of language – as language by itself has effects on cognition and behavior (Semin, 2000). On the other hand, CFS is a more apparent and potentially obtrusive way of manipulating cultural orientations. As a consequence, the method of CFS has demand characteristics, and may elicit reactance and resistance. This might be particularly relevant when investigating participants who perceive multiple cultural identities as oppositional, as they are more likely to suppress a prime-consistent response and to show contrastive effects (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005). So far, however, only assimilative responses have been found for I-C priming, that is, responses in line with the primed cultural orientation. This is likely due to the priming being less apparent, and eliciting little or no demand characteristics (see Hong & Khei, 2014).

### **Target Group: Who Can Be Primed?**

I-C priming is grounded in research on social identities and the self, and all individuals have personal, relational, as well as public aspects of their self (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Accordingly, every individual (including monoculturals) can be affected by priming. In contrast, CFS is (so far) restricted to study the shifts between cultural knowledge mindsets within multicultural individuals, who are assumed to have internalized more than one cultural frame and therefore are expected to be able to switch between these frames (Hong et al., 2000).

### **Range and Limits of Priming Effects**

A last difference regarding the two priming methods can be expected with respect to the range and of effects on various dependent variables. A review of the literature suggests that the range of variables affected by CFS is broader than that of I-C priming. I-C primes mainly affect values, the self, relationality, and cognition (see Oyserman & Lee, 2008). CFS not only affects the self and cognition (Bender & Ng, 2009), but also impacts creativity (Cheng,

Sanchez-Burks, & Lee, 2008; Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008), cooperation (Kim-Jo, Benet-Martínez, & Ozer, 2010), acculturation and ethnic identity (Lechuga, 2008; Verkuyten & Pouliasi, 2002), autobiographical memory (Bender & Ng, 2009), decision making (Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005), and perceptions of body ideals (Guan, Lee, & Cole, 2012) (for more examples, see Cheng, Lee, Benet-Martínez, & Huynh, 2014). A wider range of effects could also imply that effects of CFS are less specific and therefore small or even absent, if the required psychological mechanism is not activated during the CFS (see also Figure 1). For example, a study by Hong and colleagues shows that CFS was only effective in changing group agency beliefs when social group perception was made salient in addition to the CFS manipulation (Hong, Benet-Martínez, Chiu, & Morris, 2003). At present there are not enough studies to arrive at a conclusive evaluation of the differences in the range of effects that CFS and I-C priming.

## **Priming Culture: Implications for Multiculturalism and Culture**

### **The Past and the Present: What We Already Know**

There has been a lack of agreement on a definition of culture since its inception (Baskerville, 2003; Hofstede, 1980; Kagitcibasi & Berry, 1989). Often, culture has been defined and treated as a *stable* and distinct set of values or self-conceptualizations, or *trait* (for overviews, see Kagitcibasi, 2005; Morris et al., 2015). Findings from priming studies, however, highlight that individuals can flexibly switch between various cultural orientations (see for instance Cheng et al., 2014; Hong & Khei, 2014; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Priming studies have therefore been instrumental in advancing our definition of culture and multiculturalism in at least two ways. First, cultural priming studies (both I-C priming and CFS) support the notion that different cultural orientations can coexist within one individual (Cheng & Lee, 2009; Chiu & Cheng, 2007; Ferguson et al., 2012). Second, cultural priming studies substantially extend the understanding of culture and highlight its *dynamic* quality, thereby advocating a more flexible view on culture (Hong et al., 2000; Morris et al., 2015; Oyserman, 2011).

### **The Future: What Priming Culture Can Tell Us about Multiculturalism and Culture**

Showing that individuals are able to accommodate more than one cultural orientation and are able to switch between these orientations, was an important milestone for research and our understanding of multiculturalism and culture (Hong et al., 2000; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Hence, culture emerges not as a stable set of values, norms or self-representations within individuals' minds, but as a specific *state* that emerges from the interaction between the person and the current situation. Culture can therefore be described as the accessibility of a particular knowledge structure in response to a particular situation or cue. The cross-cultural differences we observe would then represent a result of differences in individuals' immediate environments and their experiences with that environment, which renders different default behaviors more or less adaptive. This line of research is still ongoing, and

many issues are unresolved. In the following, avenues for research on priming cultural orientations and challenges will be outlined.

### **Making Multiple Cultural Orientations Salient: Priming Multiculturalism**

As stated earlier, the method of priming cultural orientations, and particularly CFS priming, requires the internalization of various cultural orientations, and thereby supports the view of multiculturalism as a multidimensional concept. Yet, only few studies apply cultural priming in a multidimensional manner: mostly *either one or another* cultural mindset is primed. There are only few studies on priming two or more cultural identities or orientations simultaneously. Two such studies are the ones conducted by Chiu and Cheng (2007) and Cheng et al. (2008), who show that the simultaneous activation of two different cultural mindsets increased individuals' creativity. We can likely derive significant implications for today's highly multicultural societies and global workplaces when we experimentally examine and replicate such effects of multiculturalism on socio-cognitive processes (for an overview, see Cheng et al., 2014), socio-cultural adjustment and psychological well-being (e.g., Berry, 1997; Dimitrova, Aydinli, Chasiotis, Bender, & van de Vijver, 2015; Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007, 2012), and in the organizational context (for an overview see Brannen & Lee, 2014).

### **Extending the Samples: Priming Culture Among Monoculturals**

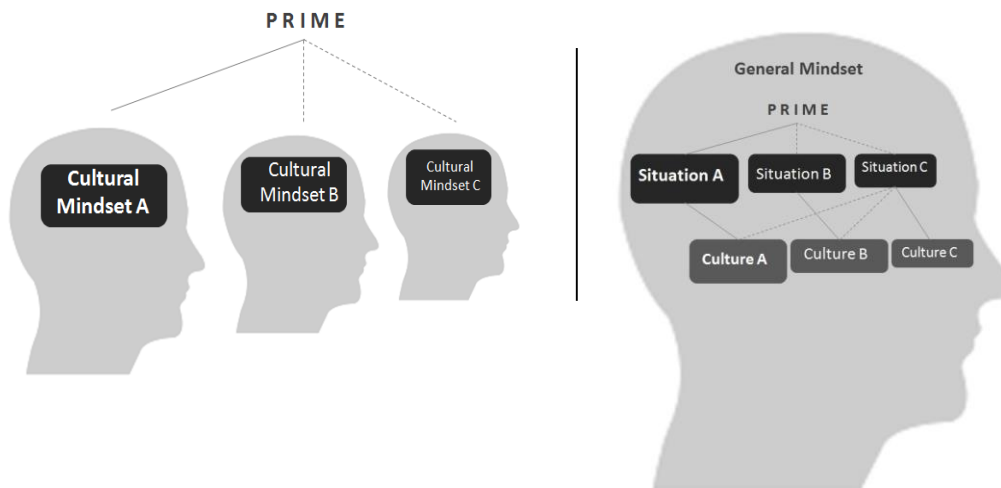
The method of priming culture gained substantial popularity in research on culture and multiculturalism. A literature search revealed that at least 98 empirical papers applied a form of cultural priming. This popularity of cultural priming has gained momentum over the last 15 years: 8% of the studies were published before 2000, 29% were published between 2000 and 2005, and the remaining 63% were published after 2006.

Even though numerous studies have been conducted that made individuals switch between different cultural frames, and even though the numbers of studies seem to steadily rise, there is little variation in samples that were studied. Often student samples were used to examine effects of priming culture, and mainly Eastern (often Chinese) and Western (often American) cultural orientations were contrasted (e.g., Bender & Ng, 2009; Hong et al., 2000; Hong et al., 2003; Ng & Lai, 2009, 2010). Fewer studies examined priming effects among other samples, such as bicultural Spanish-American, African-American, Greek-Dutch, or Turkish-German individuals (e.g., Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Bohner, Siebler, Gonzalez, Haye, & Schmidt, 2008; Guan et al., 2012; Verkuyten & Pouliasi, 2006). Undoubtedly, future research should expand towards including further samples that go beyond the traditional contrast of East versus West. There are even fewer studies that have investigated the effects of priming (particularly CFS) on monocultural samples have been (for I-C priming among monoculturals, see Oyserman & Lee, 2008). As already noted earlier, CFS represents a top-down operation and therefore postulates that the internalization of advanced culture-related knowledge structures is only present in multicultural individuals. A comparison of the effects of CFS obtained with mono- and bicultural samples could reveal the importance of internalization for the responsiveness to CFS. In other words, it would help clarify the degree to which having cultural *knowledge* would suffice for being or behaving multicultural versus the degree to which the internalization of cultural orientations is an indispensable ingredient

of multiculturalism. For example, if CFS effects would hypothetically turn out to be similar for monocultural and multicultural individuals, an internalization of a particular cultural mindset would not be needed for switching, as cultural knowledge would suffice.

**Priming Culture: Do Individuals Alternate Between Cultural Mindsets or Situations?**

Both I-C priming and CFS priming propose that individuals can flexibly alternate between various cultural mindsets as a response to situational cues or primes (Hong et al., 2000; Oyserman & Lee, 2008). However, the question of what actually changes when individuals are presented with cultural primes is unclear. Does priming prompt an individual to alternate between various cognitive mindsets coming to the fore, or does it only situate an individual in a different situations or context, prompting him to respond with a regular aspect of his cultural repertoire? To exemplify, do Asian-American biculturals that are primed with culturally laden cues switch between a more Asian versus more American cultural mindset or “self”, or do they remain with the same mindset or “self” which is only positioned in different situations or contexts (that are prototypically more encountered in / associated with a specific culture) (see Figure 2)?



**Figure 2:** Priming culture: Do individuals alternate between cultural mindsets or situations?

For instance, research by Arends-Tóth and van de Vijver (2003) has shown that Turkish-Dutch immigrants strongly maintain their heritage culture in private life domains of their life (e.g., with family, friends), but adopt the mainstream culture in public domains of their life (e.g., with colleagues, in school or work). It would be useful to compare to what extent the salience of life domains (e.g., a family celebration vs. job interview) would produce the same (or different) effects among Turkish-Dutch immigrants as priming them with Turkish vs. Dutch cultural cues. If both procedures render similar effects, it would indicate that both I-C priming and CFS are likely to position the same individual in different situations, rather than making an individual switch between different mindsets or selves. Moreover, these two types

of primes might even be combined to examine which type of priming will dominate: Individuals primed with Turkish culture might be instructed to imagine themselves in a job interview (i.e., public domain – a prototypically Dutch situation), while individuals primed with Dutch culture might be instructed to imagine themselves in a family celebration (i.e., private domain – a prototypically Turkish situation). If cultural priming would function regardless of the domain in which individuals are experimentally put, then cultural priming would imply that individuals in fact alternate between different cultural mindsets. However, if the procedure of cultural priming is overruled by the domain or context manipulation (or if it interacts with it), then priming culture (and eventually multiculturalism) would rather imply that the same individual with the same mindset only alternates between different contexts, and flexibly adapts to the requirements of the situation at present.

### **The Challenge of “Unpacking” Culture: The Inclusion of Mediators**

In many cultural priming methods it is unclear which underlying psychological process led to the observed outcome. What actually happens between the experimental manipulation and the assessment of the outcome often remains speculative. Particularly research using CFS priming will likely gain from including mediating variables, because CFS priming likely influences multiple psychological mechanisms at the same time (e.g., norms, values, perception, cognition, motivation, identification, and self-conceptualization) (see Figure 1). One study in which mediators were considered was conducted by Verkuyten and Pouliasi (2006), in which the effects of CFS priming on perceptual and evaluative responses among Greek-Dutch participants were studied by also assessing participants' group identification (i.e., collective vs. individual identification). Their results showed that the effects of cultural priming (i.e., Greek vs. Dutch cultural frame) were mediated by the type of identification.

There is a variety of such mediating mechanisms for different target variables. For example, cross-cultural variance in helping strangers has been explained through variance in moral obligation (Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990), inclusiveness of the moral in-group (Schwartz, 2007), closeness and reciprocal expectations (Fijneman, Willemsen, & Poortinga, 1996), culture-specific prosocial norms and values (e.g., *simpatia*; Levine, Norzayan, & Philbrick, 2001), or motivation (Aydinli, Bender, Chasiotis, & van de Vijver, 2015). A priming study on helping behavior would therefore gain from including competing mediators to examine which of these psychological mechanisms best explains the outcomes – instead of labeling the process merely as priming. Such an approach would resonate with the goal of (cross-)cultural psychology to “unpack culture” (Whiting & Whiting, 1975) or to “peel the onion” (Poortinga, van de Vijver, Joe, & van de Koppel, 1987).

### **Identifying Moderators: What Is the Reach of Cultural Priming?**

The I-C priming and CFS methods build on conceptualizing culture as dynamic: individuals can flexibly switch between different cultural orientations or mindsets. Yet, what are possible limitations for engaging in such a switch? The extent to which individuals view their multiple cultural orientations as either more or less compatible with one another is one such moderating factor. Benet-Martinez introduced Bicultural Identity Integration (BII, Benet-Martínez et al., 2002; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005) as an operationalization to explain the presence or absence of assimilative vs. contrastive priming effects: While multicultural

individuals scoring high on BII (i.e., those who view their identities as compatible) displayed prime-consistent responses, individuals scoring low on BII (i.e., those who view their identities as incompatible) displayed prime-resistant responses. This demonstrates that the same prime can lead to opposing responses, depending on the individual.

The inclusion of BII represents only *one* example of how effects of cultural priming may be limited by moderating variables. Beyond psychological and thus generally invisible aspects (i.e., internalized culture), culture manifests itself in observable, non-malleable physical or racial features and appearances. Thus, the question of whether an individual views various cultural orientations as compatible or opposing might not only depend on what is inside individuals' minds, but also on how these individuals are physically perceived from outside, and the extent to which these features are considered compatible or incompatible with a primed cultural orientation. It is likely that such physical features (e.g., skin color, eye shape, or hair texture) moderates or limit the effects of cultural priming, similar to BII. Research on priming culture using *multiracial* individuals is, so far, in an early phase. A construct that has been proposed in this regard, is the concept of Multiracial Identity Integration (MII) by Cheng and Lee (2009), which produces patterns and dynamics similar to BII. More systematic research using multiracial individuals is needed to understand the dynamics of cultural priming and by that the dynamics of multiculturalism.

## Conclusion

Our review shows that the conceptualization of multiculturalism has undergone a transition from static, trait-based approaches to more dynamic and situation-based approaches. The method of priming cultural orientations substantially contributed to this development. Findings from numerous priming studies show that individuals flexibly switch between cultural orientations – which advances our understanding of multiculturalism and culture. First, using the method of cultural priming supports the notion that different cultural orientations can coexist, and thereby provides evidence for the multidimensionality of the concept of multiculturalism. Second, cultural priming showcases the dynamic nature of culture, and thereby highlights that we need to move beyond categorical conceptualizations of culture as a stable inter-individual trait variable. To this end, the method of cultural priming represents a promising research avenue to arrive at a truly dynamic understanding of multiculturalism and culture.

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### Suggestions for Further Reading

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### Discussion Questions

1. Identify different approaches to study multiculturalism, and discuss their implications for the notion of culture. Also consider how a working definition of culture may – vice versa – influence the approach to study multiculturalism.
2. Recall different situations in which you got into contact with a different culture, and discuss to what extent these experiences may have led you (or not) to develop aspects

of multiculturalism? Think of reasons of why multiculturalism may have emerged, or why it did not.

3. Recent research on multiculturalism uses the method of priming cultural orientations to study effects of culture on various outcomes. What would it mean for the notion of multiculturalism or for the method of priming culture, if also mono-cultural individuals could be primed with different cultural orientations? Relate this to considerations of discussion question #1.
4. How can cross-cultural differences be explained, if culture is conceptualized as “situated cognition” (i.e., if principles of temporary and chronic accessibility apply). What are possible limitations of this approach? Come up with examples where this framework would possibly not suffice to explain cross-cultural differences.