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Original

Culture as perceived context: An exploration of the distinction between dignity, face and honor cultures

La cultura como contexto percibido: explorando la esencia de las culturas de honor, dignidad y autopresentación

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Abstract

Researchers are making increasing use of the distinction between cultural logics emphasizing dignity, face, and honor. Students from eight nations including two from Latin America rated items tapping the extent to which they believed that most persons in their nation endorsed these types of mindset. Their ratings did not accord with prior beliefs as to which cultures exemplify dignity, face, and honor. However, the predictions that analytic cognition would be more prevalent in dignity cultures and contrasting types of holistic cognition would be more prevalent in face and honor cultures were supported. The belief that the logic of dignity was prevalent within one's nation was significantly associated with higher life satisfaction.

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Keywords: Face cultures; Honor cultures; Dignity cultures; Depression; Life satisfaction

Resumen

Las investigaciones se están centrando cada vez con mayor énfasis en el uso de la distinción entre lógicas culturales, haciendo más hincapié en la dignidad, el mantenimiento del status quo estructural de una sociedad (*face*) y el honor. Estudiantes de 8 países, incluyendo 2 de América Latina, clasificaron elementos sobre cuán importante para la aceptación social es la dignidad o el honor para la mayoría de las personas en su nación. Las calificaciones obtenidas no concuerdan con creencias previas en cuanto a cuáles culturas promueven más la dignidad y/o el honor como guías de su comportamiento.

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Sin embargo, las predicciones de que los patrones de cognición analítica serían más frecuentes en culturas que se centran en la dignidad, y que los patrones de cognición holística serían más frecuentes en culturas que se centran en la honra fueron apoyadas. Adicionalmente, la creencia de que la lógica de la dignidad era frecuente dentro de cada nación se asoció significativamente con una mayor satisfacción de vida.

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Palabras clave: Culturas de *status quo* estructural; Culturas de honor; Culturas de dignidad; Autopresentación; Depresión; Bienestar subjetivo

The identification of cultural dimensions that was initiated by Hofstede (1980) has provided a substantial basis for interpreting nation-level differences in a broad range of social behaviors. However, the mechanism whereby nation-level context could influence individual-level behaviors has come under increasing scrutiny. The measures of values, beliefs and norms that are typically used to define and construct nation-level dimensions are found to show much greater variability within nations than between nations (Fischer & Schwartz, 2011). This renders less plausible the assumption that individual behaviors within a nation are guided by an implicit or explicit awareness of the values, beliefs and norms that are most typically endorsed within their nation.

While it remains very likely that conformity to prevailing norms is a frequent occurrence within more specific subcultural groups within a nation (Gelfand & Harrington, 2015), we lack an adequate explanation of the mechanisms through which nation-level differences arise. Nation-level effects could for instance be considered as an aggregation of relevant subcultural effects. Alternatively, they might be accomplished through the impact over time of the social norms and institutions that arise as adaptations to salient environmental constraints. Relevant adaptations can include both behaviors and the ways of thinking about one's social context that facilitate particular behaviors.

One way to address these ambiguities is to obtain direct measures of intersubjective perceptions of the values, beliefs, and norms that prevail within a nation. Fischer (2006) asked students in ten nations to rate the values that they personally endorsed most strongly and also to rate the values that were most strongly endorsed by persons in their nation. The two sets of values correlated on average at only .28. In a further study conducted only in New Zealand, the students' subsequently reported behaviors were more strongly predicted by the perceived national norm than by their own values. In a later study, Fischer et al. (2009) found that across

samples from eleven nations, personal values and norms for 'what most people believe' concerning aspects of individualism and collectivism were cumulatively predictive of subsequent reported behaviors. Shteynberg, Gelfand and Kim (2009) found perceived national norms to be more strongly predictive of blame attributions than personal attitudes in Korea and the United States. The present study extends this increasing focus on the predictive power of subjective norms by applying it to a characterization of cultural differences based on contrasts between honor, face and dignity that is becoming increasingly influential, but for which no overt measures have yet been established.

A second way to explore the impact of social norms is to examine variations in social cognition. We have substantial evidence that respondents in the interdependent cultures of East Asia engage more frequently in holistic modes of cognition, while those in more independent cultures more often employ analytic modes of cognition (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2000; Norenzayan, Choi, & Peng, 2007). While the initial studies in this area by Nisbett and his colleagues focused on contrasts between East Asia and North America, more recent studies indicate that variations in analytic versus holistic cognition can be found within samples from many parts of the world (Varnum, Grossmann, Kitayama & Nisbett, 2011). Furthermore, experimental priming can induce shifts in cognitive style (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). Cultural differences in such styles are therefore probably best considered as habits induced by both proximal and distal circumstances, whether these circumstances be predominantly normative or personal (Muramoto, 2013). In contexts characterized by strong norms, it can be of value to scan all aspects of one's environment in order to be aware of every aspect affecting one's relations with others. Where norms are weaker, there can be greater possibilities for distinguishing different aspects of one's context and making choices that are more contingent on personal preference.

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