Redefining Home: How Cultural Distinctiveness Affects the Malleability of In-Group Boundaries and Brand Preferences

CARLOS J. TORELLI
ROHINI AHLUWALIA
SHIRLEY Y. Y. CHENG
NICHOLAS J. OLSON
JENNIFER L. STONER

In a world of increasing global mobility, we investigate how feelings of cultural distinctiveness—feelings of being different and separated from the surrounding cultural environment—influence consumers’ preferences for brands that symbolize a related cultural group (i.e., a group that is geographically proximal and/or shares sociohistorical and cultural roots with one’s own cultural group). Results from seven studies demonstrate that consumers experiencing cultural distinctiveness are likely to evaluate favorably and prefer brands associated with a related cultural group, in a choice set or consumption situation, even if they are not the favored option in the choice set. This pro-in-group bias for culturally related brands is driven by a heightened desire to connect with “home,” which prompts consumers to expand their in-group boundaries to include the related cultural group within a broadened definition of home. However, this pro-in-group bias is attenuated when the salience of intergroup rivalries is high, where experiencing cultural distinctiveness can backfire and result in less favorable evaluations of brands associated with a related cultural group. This research is the first to demonstrate that cultural consumption is a dynamic process, and that in-group boundaries can be malleable and expandable, depending upon the motivation of the consumer.

Keywords: culture, brand preferences, cultural symbolism, cultural distinctiveness, in-group bias

I imagine a Chinese study abroad student who walks into a crowded college cafeteria in Wichita, Kansas. He hears the local students talking away in an American accent, which he is barely able to follow, and sees an array of foods that he is still not very familiar with, and wonders what some of them are. Although he has tried a few of the items earlier, he did not like them very much. He thinks back to his college cafeteria in Xiamen, China. What he would give for a steamed yellow fish! He feels a strong sense of longing for home.

Now put yourself in the shoes of an American tourist who is visiting India. She steps into the street in front of her. On one side, a car whizzes past her with its horn blaring, and on the other side she sees a cow marching along. Bicyclists appear seemingly from nowhere, weaving past

Carlos J. Torelli is a professor of business administration at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (email: ctorelli@illinois.edu; phone: (217) 300-4158; fax: (217) 244-3118). Rohini Ahluwalia is the Curtis L. Carlson Trust Professor of Marketing at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota (email: rahluwalia@umn.edu; phone: (612) 626-1791; fax: (612) 624-8804). Shirley Y. Y. Cheng is an assistant professor of marketing at Hong Kong Baptist University (email: syycheng@hkbu.edu.hk; phone: (852) 3411-7533; fax: (852) 3411-5133). Nicholas J. Olson is a PhD student in marketing at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota (email: olso4693@umn.edu; phone: (612) 625-5314; fax: (612) 624-8804). Jennifer L. Stoner is an assistant professor of marketing, University of North Dakota (email: jennifer.stoner@UND.edu; phone: (701) 777-3748; fax: (701) 777-2225). The authors gratefully acknowledge funding support from the Hong Kong Research Grants Council (GRF 241011) awarded to Shirley Cheng. Results from two additional studies are included in the web appendix.

Darren Dahl served as editor and Zeynep Gu¨rhan-Canli served as associate editor for this article.

Advance Access publication January 23, 2017
and between the cars. She can’t figure out how to cross the road, since no one seems to be stopping. The pedestrians hustle and bustle past her, like a dense sea of humans, almost pushing her along with them. A very different world from the busy streets in Chicago! She feels a strong desire to connect with home.

In our scenarios, the student and the tourist are facing what we term “experiences of cultural distinctiveness.” That is, they perceive significant differences between their current cultural environment (host culture) and the culture at home. This leads them to experience a heightened sense of cultural separation between themselves and their surrounding environment, or a feeling of being culturally distinct from the host culture, which creates a strong desire to connect with the home culture. We argue that the phenomenon of cultural distinctiveness has important, hitherto unexamined, implications for the marketplace as well as the potential to provide novel theoretical insights relating to the expansion of in-group boundaries.

The relevance of this phenomenon for today’s marketplace is clearly evident. With rising levels of globalization, consumers increasingly come into contact with diverse cultures that are different from their own. For instance, in 2014, more than 1.1 billion tourists travelled internationally (UNWTO.org 2016), international business travel contributed $1.18 trillion to the global economy (Statista.com 2015), and about 4 million college students studied abroad (UNESCO.org 2016). In addition, the global estimate of international migrants—from expatriates to refugees and illegal immigrants, who are also likely to experience cultural distinctiveness to varying degrees—reached an all-time high of 232 million (UN.org 2016). More people than ever before are leaving the familiarity of their home culture to live, even if for a short period, in a different cultural environment.

How might the experience of cultural distinctiveness impact consumption behavior? Prior research in the related areas of ethnic-based consumption and consumer acculturation has primarily focused on the consumption of goods and services from one’s established home culture (e.g., one’s home country; Penalozá 1994; Stayman and Deshpandé 1989). Little attention has been paid to how consumption of goods and services related to other cultural groups might be impacted. Brands from the consumer’s home culture may not be available or immediately accessible in the new environment. How will consumption be influenced in such settings? For instance, would a college student from Hong Kong be more, or less, likely to choose a ticket on Singapore Airlines (associated with a related, but not her home, culture) if she were buying the ticket in Canada (experiencing cultural distinctiveness) versus if she were to make the same purchase in Hong Kong? Or would a New Yorker be more likely to root for a different NFL team if he were viewing a game during his business trip to Mumbai versus in New York? To date, such questions have received limited attention in the literature. By examining them, we hope to expand our understanding of inter-cultural consumption in today’s complex global environments.

We build a conceptual framework for cultural distinctiveness as well as develop experimental methods to manipulate it. In addition, we investigate the notion that cultural distinctiveness could potentially induce consumers to expand their definition of home by broadening their in-group boundaries. This is in contrast to both the past cultural research, which has traditionally conceptualized cultural home as static and enduring (Triandis 2007), and the past social identity literature, which has examined shifts between well-established accessible preexisting identities (e.g., math-science students nested within university students; Hornsey and Hogg 2000), but not necessarily the expansion of in-group boundaries. Notably, our research is the first to propose that consumers, who are known to be very adaptive decision makers and information processors (Bettman, Luce, and Payne 1998), are likely to have a malleable definition of their cultural home that can change adaptively based on the set of options available to them. It is important to note that past culture research has primarily focused on when home culture will influence people’s behavior (for a review, see Briley, Wyer, and Li 2014); our research breaks new ground in exploring factors that determine how home is defined.

Additionally, the past conceptualizations of culture- or country-based consumption have largely focused on the desirability of certain cultures (e.g., French culture; Leclerc, Schmitt, and Dubé 1994), but relatively less on the desire to reject specific cultures (for an exception, see Klein, Etenson, and Morris 1998). However, adjacent cultural groups often have rivalries as well. We attempt to address this important aspect of cultural consumption by incorporating salient rivalries in our integrative framework of cultural distinctiveness and consumption behavior. A series of seven studies empirically support our conceptual framework and its predicted effect on the broadening of in-group boundaries. We conclude with implications for research on acculturation, ethnic and group-based consumption, and brand management.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Cultural Distinctiveness

From immigrants living in a new country to tourists visiting an exotic destination, to business travelers and students studying abroad, people frequently encounter cultural environments that are different from their own. Being in these contexts often highlights the incongruities between the consumer’s current and home cultures, such as differences in daily life, food, social norms, beliefs, and values (Oberg 1960). People are known to experience
situational fluctuations in their feeling of distinctiveness from and association with the new culture (Berry 1997; Church 1982; Oberg 1960), depending upon the salience of these cultural differences (Berry 1997; Church 1982), regardless of their own personal characteristics (Berry 1997). When these discrepancies are salient and significant, people experience a heightened sense of cultural separation between the self and the surrounding environment (Oberg 1960). We formally name this experience, whereby people perceive significant cultural differences with their immediate environment and feel culturally distinct from it, as cultural distinctiveness.

We propose that enhanced cultural distinctiveness will be accompanied by a heightened desire to connect with one’s home culture. Past intercultural research reveals that those immersed in an unfamiliar cultural environment, with prominent cultural differences, are likely to engage in ruminative thoughts about home and exhibit a strong need to connect with the familiar environment of their home (Oberg 1960). Similarly, related work on acculturation reveals that for people who migrate from their home to new cultural surroundings, the higher the perceived dissimilarity between home and host cultures, the stronger their association with the home culture (Nesdale and Mak 2003). Our expectation is also consistent with optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer 1991), which posits that people seek a balance of being similar to but distinct from others both within and outside of their social groups. Thus, when they experience cultural distinctiveness and perceive significant differences between their current and home cultures, they should be motivated to counter the strong feelings of intergroup distinctiveness with feelings of similarity, which they can attain by associating with their home culture.

**H1:** Experiencing high levels of cultural distinctiveness will lead to an increased desire to connect with the home culture.

Consumers can satisfy their heightened need to connect with home culture in many ways. They can, for instance, associate or interact with others from their home culture, or they can consume products and experiences related to home (Mehta and Belk 1991; Peñaloza 1994). Such consumption decisions are known to reinforce people’s commitment to and identification with the home culture (Saran 1985), satisfying their need to connect with home. Thus, it can be expected that people with heightened cultural distinctiveness should favor home culture—symbolic products as a way of connecting with their home culture. A key question, however, is how home culture is determined. We address this next.

Cultural “Home” as a Dynamic Concept

Home is where the heart is—that is, where one feels a sense of belonging or affiliation. The general notion of home can have a geographical as well as a psychological connotation. Hence, in culture research, home culture has often been conceptualized as the consumer’s cultural in-group, defined at a distinct geographical level (e.g., one’s home country; Peñaloza 1994; Stayman and Deshpandé 1989) but which also incorporates psychological bases of affiliation (e.g., cultural roots or similarities in norms, beliefs, and traditions). Notably, regardless of its level of conceptualization, home has predominantly been viewed as a relatively static entity in the extant literature. Indeed, early cultural work singularly characterized culture as a fixed set of shared values and practices that persisted among individuals within the culture over time and across contexts (Hofstede 1980; Triandis 2007). In recent years, although this view has evolved to include a more dynamic perspective, it has primarily limited its scope to the question of when a culture will guide judgments and behavior. That is, it has focused on factors that facilitate or inhibit a culture’s manifestation in people’s conduct, such as the presence of contextually salient cultural cues (e.g., pictures of cultural symbols; Briley, Morris, and Simonson 2005) and increased accessibility of cultural syndromes (e.g., first-person singular nouns, like I and me, which prime individualism; see Briley et al. 2014 for a review). Similarly, research in biculturalism focuses on the experience of switching the cultural lens from one cultural home to another, based on the situational primes or cues (Morris, Chiu, and Liu 2015).

However, notably, the important questions that precede this line of inquiry—what is the home culture and how is it determined—remain yet to be addressed. There is little work that examines what factors dictate how a consumer’s cultural home is bounded and defined, and whether the boundaries of this construct are relatively static or dynamic. Although people are known to shift their identification, based upon the cues in the situation, between hierarchical (Gaertner et al. 1993) and discreet nonoverlapping identities (e.g., local and global; Zhang and Khare 2009), such movement has been observed only between preexisting, clearly defined, chronically held identities, activated by contextual salience. In our research, we propose and test a novel malleable notion of home culture, conceptualized as an in-group with stretchable boundaries, expanded to meet the salient needs of the consumer, through adaptive consumption. We posit that, given sufficient motivation, consumers may broaden an established definition of home (e.g., home country or state) ad hoc, to include related cultural groups, simply on the basis of some perceived similarity (e.g., Pan Asian or upper Midwest), even when such an expanded in-group or identity might not be chronically accessible or salient. Therefore, our notion of malleable in-group boundaries doesn’t require well-established, accessible preexistent categories to move between—it is conceptualized as a much more fluid and ad hoc process. Thus, our research explores the broader topic of in-group boundary malleability in the absence of explicit group definitions, a topic that has received little attention in past research.
Although past work has not examined the motivated inclusion of other groups to expand in-group boundaries, findings from social identity research suggest that in-group malleability is a plausible notion. For instance, optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer 1991) suggests that perceptions of explicit in-groups can change in response to certain motivations, such as to assimilate with or be distinct from specific in-groups (Pickett, Silver, and Brewer 2002). For example, Pickett et al. (2002) found that university students who wanted to assimilate with their in-group (i.e., other students at the university) tended to overestimate the number of students enrolled at the university, perceiving the in-group to be larger than it actually was. Similarly, the possibility of expanding the in-group boundary to include other culturally related groups was hinted at in prior research on social identity complexity (Roccas and Brewer 2002). This research posits that people simultaneously hold numerous explicit social identities that are objectively distinguishable from one another (e.g., a male and a teacher), and the greater the level of perceived overlap between these specific identities, the higher the potential to construe them as a single, homogeneous in-group. Therefore, it seems plausible that consumers may be motivated to expand their home identity to include other groups to the extent that they perceive a sufficient overlap between their inherent home identity and these groups, and the groups’ inclusion in the consumers’ home identity will help fulfill the salient needs of the consumer.

Cultural Distinctiveness and Consumption

This takes us to the key question in our research: Could the desire to connect with home, associated with experiencing cultural distinctiveness, be strong enough to motivate boundary expansion of the consumer’s cultural home in-group? We expect that this would be likely, as boundary expansion can potentially enhance the likelihood of being able to connect with something or someone associated with the home culture. This may become even more likely if products and brands related to their inherent home culture are not easily available in the current consumption context (a likely scenario in foreign environments), and an available consumption option potentially affords some similarity or overlap with their home in terms of geographical proximity and/or similarity in cultural roots (the two dimensions that define home). Availability of such an option would allow consumers to broaden their in-group boundaries and, hence, fulfill their desire to connect with home. That is, when consumers experiencing cultural distinctiveness are exposed to products associated with a cultural group that could potentially be construed as “home” (geographical proximity or similarity in cultural roots), they will broaden their definition of home to include the related group. This broadened definition of home will trigger positive responses (pro-in-group bias) to brands and products associated with the related cultural group. Notably, we suggest that this enhanced evaluation of products/brands associated with the related cultural group (pro-in-group bias) will be likely even if these products/brands are typically not a preferred alternative in the choice set. For instance, a college student from Hong Kong, who might not typically prefer Singapore Airlines, may choose a ticket on this airline when studying abroad in Africa (and experiencing cultural distinctiveness). Stated more formally:

H2: Experiencing cultural distinctiveness will prompt consumers to expand their in-group boundaries to incorporate related cultural groups into a broadened definition of home.

H3: Expansion of in-group boundaries will lead to a pro-in-group bias toward brands and products associated with related cultural groups.

Role of Rivalry Salience

However, it is important to note that because similar cultural groups are often those in close geographical proximity, they may also frequently be viewed as out-groups, or even rival groups, given the likelihood of intergroup competition for resources (e.g., sharing of water or hunting grounds), supremacy in social and cultural events (e.g., sporting events or other forms of entertainment), and dominance in terms of political, social, and cultural issues in adjacent geographical regions. Thus, by their very nature, some cultural groups with close geographical proximity may not have a salient affiliation with the home culture (Mervis and Rosch 1981). The social identity complexity literature asserts that perceptions of overlap between groups, and their subsequent singular in-group representation, are contingent on situational, cognitive, and motivational factors (Roccas and Brewer 2002). Thus, as long as differences between groups are not irreconcilable (van Knippenberg et al. 2002), it seems feasible that people could potentially expand their definition of home to include related cultural groups, given sufficient motivation, as outlined in hypotheses 2 and 3.

However, people may sometimes be reluctant to forsake established identities by expanding them to incorporate related cultural groups (Dovidio, Gaertner, and Validzic 1998). Expansion of in-group boundaries is unlikely to occur in the face of enduring antagonistic relations between an established home culture and a related cultural group (Hewstone 1996). Indeed, a history of hostility can render intergroup rivalries chronically salient and trigger negative attitudes toward brands and products associated with the antagonistic cultural group (e.g., some Chinese consumers’ attitudes toward Japan and Japanese products; Klein et al. 1998). The broadening of in-group boundaries may also be hindered when less antagonistic, ongoing rivalries between two cultural groups (e.g., between the British and the French) render inclusion in a single group as a threat to
positivity and distinctiveness (Crisp, Stone, and Hall 2006). In this context, a heightened awareness of a related cultural group could further strengthen these negative feelings and out-group bias, increasing the desire to identify with one’s inherent and established home identity, while dissociating even more with members of the related cultural group (Crisp et al. 2006). Indeed, a situationally induced salience of intergroup rivalry (e.g., during sports competitions such as the Olympic Games) can prompt more negative attitudes toward brands associated with a rival cultural group (e.g., Chinese consumers’ attitudes toward American products; Cheng et al. 2011).

In other words, when salience of the rivalry between one’s established home culture and a geographically and/or culturally proximal group is high, inclusion of the related group within broadened in-group boundaries will be disrupted. This occurs because of the conflict and dissonance this inclusion is likely to create. Instead, the consumer will be motivated to identify even more strongly with the established home identity. In fact, a viable way of connecting with the home identity in this situation could be by denigrating or rejecting products and brands associated with the rival cultural group. The process of denigrating the things associated with a rival group can also make one feel closer to home and increase one’s sense of identification with the home culture (Oyserman, Fryberg, and Yoder 2007). Therefore, one can connect with the home culture through two processes: by associating with “home”-related products, or by disassociating from or denigrating those from the rival culture. Consequently, for consumers experiencing cultural distinctiveness, salience of cultural group rivalries could result in lowered evaluations of brands (and a stronger out-group bias) associated with a related cultural group.

Thus, we propose that the salience of intergroup rivalries would moderate the effect of experiencing cultural distinctiveness on a broadened definition of home and its concomitant pro-in-group (or out-group) bias toward brands associated with related cultural groups. We expect to observe the previously hypothesized positive effects of an expanded home identity on pro-in-group bias toward brands associated with a related cultural group only when the salience of intergroup rivalry is low. When the rivalry salience is high, we expect a reversal, or an out-group bias toward products and brands associated with the rival culture. Back to our earlier example, a Hong Kong student for whom the rivalry between Singapore and Hong Kong is salient might become less motivated to choose Singapore Airlines when studying abroad (i.e., experiencing cultural distinctiveness) than he normally would in Hong Kong. Stated more formally:

**H4a:** When the salience of the rivalry between one’s established home culture and a related cultural group is high, consumers experiencing cultural distinctiveness will not exhibit an expansion of in-group boundaries.

**H4b:** When the salience of the rivalry between one’s established home culture and a related cultural group is high, consumers experiencing cultural distinctiveness (vs. baseline condition) will exhibit an attenuation of the pro-in-group bias, or potentially a reversal, with an out-group bias toward products and brands associated with the related cultural group.

**OVERVIEW OF STUDIES**

We developed and tested a manipulation of cultural distinctiveness using three pilots. Next, the hypotheses derived from our conceptual framework (see figure 1) were tested in a series of seven studies (see appendix A for a summary of the findings). The first two (studies 1a and 1b) tested the basic predictions of our framework: experiencing cultural distinctiveness leads to a heightened desire to connect with home (hypothesis 1), and this desire motivates people to expand the boundaries of their in-groups (hypothesis 2), with a view of making it easier to connect with home. The next two studies (2a and 2b) assessed the impact of experiencing cultural distinctiveness on preference for products and brands associated with a related cultural group (geographically proximal and/or sharing sociohistorical and cultural roots), due to the expected pro-in-group bias toward this cultural group. Study 3 examined the role of intergroup rivalry salience, in the context of the Sochi Olympics. It supported the reversal predicted by our framework in high-intergroup settings (hypotheses 4a and 4b). Study 4 tested the complete theoretical framework (high- and low-rivalry conditions), using a different method for assessing boundary expansion. Study 5 examined the role of salient intergroup rivalries in an economic context, via assessing brand evaluations, in a different part of the world (Asia).

**PILOT STUDIES: THE CULTURAL DISTINCTIVENESS MANIPULATION**

A manipulation of cultural distinctiveness was developed in the lab, on the basis of extensive pretesting. Recall that cultural distinctiveness is associated with experiencing a heightened sense of cultural separation between the self and the surrounding environment, which is accompanied by a desire to connect with the home culture. The final task that emerged from these efforts used videos incorporating sights and sounds of everyday situations in a foreign culture, in order to induce the state of cultural distinctiveness. One of the videos displayed the sights and sounds of a street in an Indian town, the second vividly captured a cafeteria in an Asian college, and a third depicted sights and sounds of a street in an African town. The first two videos were used in studies 1a through 4, which were conducted in the United States, and the last video was used in study 5.
which was run in an Asian city. Before watching each video, participants were told to imagine that they were in the situation (e.g., navigating these streets during a study abroad program) and asked to think about how this situation differed (e.g., the street differed from a street in their hometown) and what they might miss from home during the study abroad program. Participants in the control baseline condition were presented with two videos containing facts about insects. After watching each video, participants in all conditions described their thoughts, feelings, and impressions. Below we report the pilots, assessing the validity of this manipulation for capturing the underlying construct of cultural distinctiveness.

Pilot 1

A first pilot assessed the extent to which the videos induced feelings of cultural distinctiveness—that is, a heightened sense of cultural separation between the self and the surrounding environment. Participants were undergraduate students enrolled in an American public university (N = 60) who participated in exchange for course credit. They were randomly assigned to view either the first two cultural distinctiveness or the baseline insect videos. They rated (three-item scale, anchored by 1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much) the extent to which the videos prompted an experience of cultural distinctiveness (e.g., “Feeling culturally distinct from those around you”; see appendix B for items) as well as provided their open-ended responses to the videos. As expected, participants in the cultural distinctiveness condition reported a mean rating of experiencing cultural distinctiveness (α = .93) that was significantly above the midpoint of the scale (M = 4.61; t(29) = 2.18, p < .04), as well as significantly higher than the participants in the baseline condition (M = 2.43; t(58) = 5.44, p < .001). Two coders, blind to conditions, rated the open-ended thoughts on the extent to which they implied experiencing cultural distinctiveness (1 = Absolutely no mention of cultural differences, feeling culturally distinct, or standing out culturally, 7 = Multiple and detailed examples of cultural differences, feeling culturally distinct, or standing out culturally). The mean ratings of the two coders (r = .96) indicated that the participants’ thoughts were not only significantly more indicative of cultural distinctiveness in the experimental (vs. the control baseline) condition (M = 4.50 vs. 1.00; t(58) = 14.90, p < .001), but also significantly above the midpoint of the scale (M = 4.50; t(29) = 2.13, p < .05) when participants were exposed to the cultural videos. These results indicate that the manipulations were effective in inducing the experience of cultural distinctiveness.

Pilot 2 (Mood Effects)

A second pilot with 39 participants from the same subject pool assessed the extent to which the videos from pilot 1 impacted affective states. After watching the videos, participants completed the PANAS scale (inspired, alert, excited, enthusiastic, determined, afraid, upset, nervous, scared, and distressed). No differences emerged in positive (α = .80) or negative (α = .77) mood between the cultural distinctiveness and neutral baseline video conditions (positive mood: M = 2.95 vs. 2.96; F = .002, NS; negative mood: M = 1.43 vs. 1.71; F = 1.65, NS).

Pilot 3 (Need for Closure and Robustness across Cultures)

A third pilot was run to examine the extent to which our manipulation influenced the participants’ need for closure, as well as to assess its robustness with participants from a different culture (Asian), using the African town sights and sounds video. University students recruited in Hong Kong (N = 80) were randomly assigned to either the cultural distinctiveness or the baseline insect videos. They responded to the three-item scale from pilot 1, completed the short Need for Closure Scale (15-item, six-point scale, 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree; Roets and Van Hiel 2011), and completed the PANAS scale from pilot 2.
Supporting robustness of the manipulation, participants in the cultural distinctiveness condition reported a mean rating of experiencing cultural distinctiveness (α = .85) that was significantly above the midpoint of the scale (M = 4.92; t(36) = 5.24, p < .001), as well as significantly higher than the participants in the baseline condition (M = 3.35; t(78) = 5.73, p < .001). However, no significant differences in need for closure (α = .75), positive mood (α = .87), or negative mood (α = .92) emerged between the cultural distinctiveness and baseline video conditions (need for closure: M = 3.81 vs. 3.63; F = 2.73, NS; positive mood: M = 3.75 vs. 3.62; F = .23, NS; negative mood: M = 2.63 vs. 2.50; F = .20, NS).

STUDIES 1A AND 1B: CULTURAL DISTINCTIVENESS AND BOUNDARY EXPANSION

These studies examine the two basic notions we propose with regards to cultural distinctiveness: first, that experiencing cultural distinctiveness should lead to a heightened desire to connect with home (hypothesis 1), and second, that this desire should motivate people to expand the boundaries of their in-groups (hypothesis 2), with a view to making it easier to connect with home. Study 1a examines whether cultural distinctiveness leads to a heightened desire to connect with home, and the subsequent expansion of in-group boundaries. Study 1b assesses the tendency for boundary expansion using a different measure (from 1a). Notably, both studies included participants who were citizens of the United States, and assessed the extent to which they would be likely to include neighboring geographical regions in their home culture, when experiencing cultural distinctiveness versus in the neutral baseline conditions.

Study 1a

Participants, Design, and Procedures. One hundred fifteen undergraduate students enrolled in an American public university participated in exchange for course credit in a between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to the cultural distinctiveness or baseline condition. After completing this task, they rated the extent to which they felt a desire to connect with home (four-item, seven-point scale; e.g., “Feel like connecting with home,” 1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much; see appendix B). Next, they were presented with an exercise about defining home. They were told that people sometimes refer to their dwelling as home, while at other times they might identify their country, their continent, or even planet Earth as home, and were prompted to think about their own notion of home. After this, participants rated the extent to which Canada overlapped with their notion of home (1 = two circles representing “home” and “Canada” the farthest apart with no overlap, 7 = “home” and “Canada” fully overlapping in a single circle) and hence was included in their in-group (four items; e.g., “Canadians are part of your social group,” 1 = Not at all; 7 = Very much; see appendix B).

Results and Discussion. As expected, the mean rating of participants’ desire to connect with home (α = .94) was higher among those in the cultural distinctiveness condition (M = 3.70) compared to those in the baseline condition, M = 2.97; t(113) = 2.26, p < .03, Cohen’s d = .42. Further, supporting the notion of in-group boundary expansion, participants were more likely to perceive Canada as close to their notion of home (α = .90), and hence part of their in-group, in the cultural distinctiveness condition (M = 3.41) compared to their counterparts in the baseline condition, M = 2.17; t(113) = 4.68, p < .001, Cohen’s d = .90.

We conducted a mediation analysis to assess the extent to which the heightened desire to connect with home mediated the greater likelihood to include Canada within a broadened definition of home, for those experiencing cultural distinctiveness, using bootstrapping procedures. Unstandardized indirect effects were computed for each of 5,000 bootstrapped samples using the INDIRECT macro (Preacher and Hayes 2008). The bootstrapped unstandardized indirect effect obtained was .14, and the 95% confidence interval ranged from .01 to .37. Thus, the indirect effect was statistically significant, suggesting that priming cultural distinctiveness (vs. not) led American participants to feel a heightened desire to connect with home, which in turn led to the expansion of in-group boundaries to include Canadians in a broadened in-group definition.

Study 1b

Participants, Design, and Procedures. Sixty-one American participants watched either the cultural distinctiveness or baseline videos. After watching the videos, they were presented with a map of the Americas, in which the US states were delineated, and were asked to draw one circle on the map to identify the area they would identify as their home at this moment.

Results and Discussion. Because participants did not draw perfect circles, we measured the length in millimeters of the longest and shortest diameters of the circle drawn by each participant, and used the mean of the two diameters as a measure of the boundary that defined home for the participant. As expected, participants drew wider circles—implying an expansion of the boundaries that define home—in the cultural distinctiveness condition (M = 8.47) compared to the neutral baseline condition (M = 5.58; t(59) = 2.17, p < .035, Cohen’s d = .54).

Together, these studies suggest that experiencing cultural distinctiveness is likely to induce a desire to connect with home, which in turn is likely to motivate people to...
expand their in-group boundaries, presumably to enhance the likelihood of fulfilling this desire. Given the highly adaptive nature of consumption, we expect the nature and extent of this boundary expansion to be guided by availability of the consumption alternatives in marketplace contexts. That is, when consumers experiencing cultural distinctiveness are exposed to a product or brand symbolizing a cultural group with the potential to be included within a broadened definition of home (similar cultural roots or geographical proximity), they are likely to increase identification with this cultural group, expanding their in-group boundaries accordingly. This should enhance preferences for brands associated with this cultural group. We test these ideas next.

**STUDIES 2A AND 2B: BRAND AND PRODUCT PREFERENCES**

**Study 2a**

Study 2a was designed to test the basic prediction in hypothesis 3. Participants were recruited from the state of Minnesota, and we assessed their preferences for brands associated with a geographically adjacent state (Wisconsin) and with a distant state. We anticipated that when consumers were induced to experience cultural distinctiveness and presented with brands symbolic of a neighboring state, their heightened desire to connect with familiar things from home would foster an expansion of in-group boundaries to include that state, resulting in greater support for brands associated with that group (i.e., pro-in-group bias toward the neighboring state or members of the expanded in-group, which now includes them). However, such an effect should not be observed for products from a distant state (since they can’t be easily incorporated into an expanded boundary of home). The stimuli were carefully selected to ensure indifference in preferences between the brands symbolizing the two states (neighboring and distant).

Participants, Design, and Procedures. Eighty-nine undergraduate students enrolled in a university in Minnesota (residents of that state) participated in exchange for course credit in a between-subjects design. Participants were exposed to either the cultural distinctiveness manipulation or the baseline neutral videos. Next, they were presented with an ostensibly unrelated choice task. They were randomly assigned to one of the two target choice scenarios. In one scenario, participants were asked to imagine that their professor has just assigned a short project that comprised taking a brief online seminar and writing a one-page reflection paper. They could choose between a seminar offered by the University of Wisconsin and one offered by the University of Texas at Austin (note that both universities were similarly ranked; both seminars were of similar length and on the same topic). They indicated their relative preference for the seminars ($1 = $Definitely University of Texas, $9 = $Definitely University of Wisconsin). In the second scenario, participants imagined that they were at a community breakfast to raise money for a cause they believed in. They were asked to provide their relative preference for purchasing a breakfast from two kitchens (on a similar nine-point scale), one sporting a banner from a sausage brand associated with Wisconsin (Johnsonville), and the other sporting a banner associated with a sausage brand from a distant state, Ohio (Bob Evans).

A pretest with participants ($N = 114$) from the same subject pool revealed that a majority of participants associated UW with the state of Wisconsin (98.2%), and UT Austin with the state of Texas (95.6%). Similarly, Johnsonville was strongly related to Wisconsin (66.7%), whereas Bob Evans was very weakly associated with Wisconsin (5%), and associated instead with a distant state (Ohio: 60.9%).

Results and Discussion. Since there were no differences across the two choice scenarios, we pooled the preferences for the subsequent analysis. As predicted, participants in the cultural distinctiveness condition preferred the brands associated with the neighboring state ($M = 6.20$) more than those in the neutral baseline condition ($M = 5.08$) more than those in the neutral baseline condition ($F(1,87) = 4.75, p < .035, \eta^2 = .05$).

Viewing these data in another way, although participants in the neutral baseline condition were indifferent between the two brands presented in each scenario ($M_{brand preference} = 5.08$, not significantly different from the midpoint, $t = .21, NS$), those in the cultural distinctiveness condition preferred the neighboring state brands significantly more than the distant state brands ($M_{brand preference} = 6.20$, significantly different from the midpoint, $t(39) = 3.74, p < .001$).

Results from this study support the predictions in hypothesis 3. Priming cultural distinctiveness led to greater support for a brand strongly associated with a related cultural group, specifically a neighboring state sharing sociohistorical connections with the home state. To provide further evidence for hypothesis 3, we ran an additional study using the same cultural groups from study 2a (Minnesotans) in a sports context (NFL game: Wisconsin’s Green Bay Packers vs. Texas’s Dallas Cowboys). Notably, in this study, the pro-in-group bias induced by cultural distinctiveness (i.e., preference for the Packers) emerged despite modest rivalries (between the Packers and Minnesota’s Vikings) and a stronger overall preference for the Cowboys over the Packers (see online appendix 1).

**Study 2b**

Study 2b was designed to test the generalizability of the pro-in-group bias effect in a real choice setting with chronic (instead of lab-induced) cultural distinctiveness. Immigrants, as compared to those residing in their home country, are more likely to experience cultural
distinctiveness. Therefore, this study compared product choices of Mexican immigrants in the United States (chronically high in cultural distinctiveness) with Mexicans living in Mexico (less likely to be experiencing cultural distinctiveness).

Additionally, the study focused on expansion of in-group boundaries based on similarity of cultural roots instead of geographical adjacency (sharing boundaries). The two target cultural groups were selected carefully so that one (Argentine) shared similar cultural roots with Mexicans (Ainsa 1994), whereas the other (Turkish) did not, and both groups were equally infrequent immigrants to the United States (Turks: .32% and Argentines: .37% of all persons obtaining permanent resident status in the United States from 1981 to 2009; Census.gov 2014). This ensured that Mexican immigrants would not be more familiar with one group versus the other, and also that Mexican immigrants would not have higher familiarity with Argentines than their Mexican counterparts living in Mexico. A pretest with Mexican immigrants (N = 22) indeed revealed very low familiarity with products, brands, and people from Argentina (M = 1.99 on a 10-item, seven-point scale, significantly below midpoint; t(21) = 12.83, p < .0001; items available from the authors). Hence, although Mexicans share some cultural roots with Argentines, they are neither very familiar with them or their products, nor are they located adjacent to them.

Participants, Design, and Procedures. Mexican nationals residing in the United States (N = 100, average age = 39.5 years, 35% male, all lived in Mexico at least until the age of 14 and resided in the United States for an average of 4.6 years) and Mexico (N = 103, average age = 39.3 years, 49% male, never lived abroad) that were members of the Qualtrics online panel were recruited to participate in a consumer survey. Participants were first asked their place of birth (city, state, and country), and where they lived in their early years (until the age of 10). These questions were expected to highlight the cultural distinctiveness of the Mexican immigrants living in the United States, but not of the Mexicans living in Mexico (Deshpandé and Stayman 1994). Next, participants were presented with songs from two new rock bands (both bands were fictitious; one song was from an Argentine band and the other from a Turkish band) and asked to choose one of them to listen to. Participants made their choice, which constituted our dependent variable.

Results and Discussion. Consistent with the findings of study 2a, Mexican immigrants in the United States chose the Argentine song 73% of the time, significantly more than random chance, z = 4.60, p < .001. In contrast, only 58% of Mexicans living in Mexico chose the Argentine song, no different than a random choice, z = 1.67, NS. Viewing the data in another way, Mexican immigrants preferred the song by an Argentine (vs. a Turkish) band significantly more compared to Mexicans living in their home country, who were indifferent between the two songs, (χ²(1) = 4.89, p < .03). Results from study 2b demonstrate the robustness of the pro-in-group bias toward related cultural groups, triggered by chronic cultural distinctiveness, using actual choices in a real-world setting.

Having established the existence of a pro-in-group bias toward related cultural groups under conditions of cultural distinctiveness, we shift our attention to the moderating role of rivalry in our subsequent studies (studies 3 through 5). We hypothesized that salient rivalry between home culture and a related cultural group is likely to disrupt any potential expansion of in-group boundaries and thus attenuate and potentially reverse the basic cultural distinctiveness effects on brand preferences (i.e., hypotheses 4a and 4b).

STUDY 3: RIVALRY SALIENCE IN OLYMPIC GAMES

Study 3 examined the role of intergroup rivalry salience. The Olympic Games provide a very pertinent context for studying rivalries. Notably, significant rivalries exist between the United States and Canada (its neighbor with whom it shares sociocultural similarities) in several key winter sports, such as ice hockey. Study 3 used this rivalry as a backdrop in a naturalistic study run during the Sochi Olympics. These types of competitive environments have been shown to heighten perceptions of intergroup rivalries (Cheng et al. 2011). This study tested the reversal in preferences predicted by our framework in the context of salient intergroup rivalries (hypotheses 4a and 4b). To take advantage of salient rivalries, we recruited participants for this study the day before the women’s curling final between Canada and Sweden, just a few hours before the highly publicized gold medal final between the US women’s hockey team and its archrival Canadian team. Throughout the Winter Olympics, the American media focused heavily on the US versus Canada rivalry in the medal count, and particularly the flagship hockey games between Canada and the United States. Only US citizens were recruited to participate in the study.

Method

Participants, Design, and Procedures. One hundred thirty American participants were recruited using MTurk and participated in exchange for a small monetary payment. They were randomly assigned to the cultural distinctiveness versus neutral video condition. They viewed only one of the videos used in the past studies (the college cafeteria video was dropped due to the lack of relevance for the participants) to prime cultural distinctiveness. Next, all participants were presented with a task relating to the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi. They were informed of the upcoming final for women’s curling, and then given a brief description of the sport and how it is played. Details of the upcoming game were provided: its date, where it was going...
to be held, and which two teams (Canada and Sweden) were going to compete for the gold medal. Next, they were asked to imagine that they were in Sochi attending this game and answered four questions assessing their support for the Canadian team (e.g., “At the game, which team will you cheer for?” 1 = Definitely Sweden, 9 = Definitely Canada; see appendix B).

**Rivalry Pretest.** A separate pretest with similar participants ($N = 80$) assessed the salience of the rivalry between Canada and the United States during the Winter Olympics (four-item, seven-point scale, $\alpha = .88$; see Appendix B). As expected, participants perceived a high level of rivalry between Canada and the United States during the Winter Olympics ($M = 4.63$, significantly above the midpoint of the scale, $t(80) = 4.26, p < .001$).

**Results and Discussion.**

An ANOVA on the support for the Canadian team ($\alpha = .70$) revealed a significant reversal of pro-in-group bias that our earlier studies uncovered ($F(1, 128) = 4.80, p < .03, \eta^2 = .04$). Specifically, participants primed with cultural distinctiveness were significantly less likely to support the Canadian curling team than their counterparts in the neutral baseline condition ($M = 6.13$ and 6.71, respectively). In other words, in contrast to the findings of our earlier studies, priming cultural distinctiveness backfired when intergroup rivalries were salient.

The results of study 3 shed light on the motivational process triggered by cultural distinctiveness, revealing that intergroup rivalry salience moderates the effect of cultural distinctiveness on pro-in-group bias toward related cultural groups. In high-rivalry contexts, a heightened need to connect to the home culture presumably cannot be channeled via increased identification with a related cultural group, given its salient rival status. Instead, individuals experiencing cultural distinctiveness in high-rivalry contexts adopt an alternate route to meet their desire to connect with home: rooting against or denigrating the rival.

We also ran a second study using the Winter Olympics context (see online appendix 2), where rivalry salience was manipulated. This study directly assessed the in-group boundary expansion effect, driven by the desire to connect with home. It demonstrated empirical support for this causal chain under low rivalry salience, and an attenuation under high rivalry salience.

**STUDY 4**

Study 4 was designed to build on the findings of study 3 by examining the interplay between the expansion of in-group boundaries (triggered by cultural distinctiveness) and intergroup rivalry salience, and their subsequent impact on individuals’ support for brands associated with a related cultural group, thereby testing the complete theoretical framework. Additionally, it attempted to assess boundary expansion using a different approach than in previous studies. Instead of assessing participants’ likelihood of including the related cultural group within their in-group, the study directly assessed participants’ felt level of association with an expanded in-group identity, and empirically tested the role of this expanded identity as a mediator of the effects obtained. The viability of using this alternate measurement approach rests upon clear identification of the appropriate expanded identity in the study context. Our stimuli were carefully chosen to enable this approximation, as described next.

The study was conducted in the context of a college football game. The focal teams were identified on the criteria that they belonged to the same conference, and were located in geographically adjacent states that shared sociohistorical roots and could be grouped together into a distinctive yet narrow region (which could serve as an expanded home identity). Moreover, the teams had to be perceived as rivals, but the rivalry was not highly strong and salient (e.g., unlike the visceral Ohio State/Michigan or Oklahoma/Texas rivalries), so that rivalry salience could be manipulated. The Minnesota/Wisconsin rivalry fit this profile very well. It is acknowledged as a credible rivalry, although not a very strong one (rated #20 in college football rivalries; Star 2010). Both teams not only belong to the same conference (Big Ten), but are also located in neighboring states that share sociohistorical roots and together with Michigan constitute the Upper Midwest region (Ostergren 1988), which a pretest ($n = 85$) revealed was not a highly salient identity for our participants ($M = 4.25$, not significantly different from the midpoint of the scale, $t(84) = 1.63$, NS, four items, e.g., “Being an Upper Midwesterner is an important part of my identity”; Roccas et al. 2008). Therefore, participants from Minnesota were recruited, and the Wisconsin Badgers were selected as the target neighboring team. The Texas Longhorns, a strong team from a different conference and region (second-best team in terms of win/loss record in the Big 12 conference; NCAA.com 2016), was chosen as the distant team. A pretest ($N = 53$) confirmed that the Wisconsin Badgers were strongly associated with the expanded identity (98% associated them with the Upper Midwest), whereas the Texas Longhorns were not (0% associated with them). Hence, if participants expanded their home identity to include Wisconsin, they would be likely to identify as Upper Midwesterners, even though this is not a salient identity for them; in contrast, if they were to exclude Wisconsin from their home identity, they would be less likely to identify with the expanded identity, but more likely to identify with their home state (Minnesota).

**Method.**

One hundred twenty-six undergraduate students from the University of Minnesota who were Minnesota residents...
participated in exchange for course credit. Participants completed either the cultural distinctiveness or neutral baseline video task. Next, they were randomly assigned to one of two rivalry conditions (low or high rivalry). Participants in the high-rivalry condition read an excerpt about college football rivalries, which described the rivalry between the University of Minnesota Gophers and the University of Wisconsin Badgers, characterizing it as the longest-played rivalry in NCAA Division I Football. Participants in the low-rivalry condition did not read the excerpt. Next, participants in both conditions were presented with an unrelated task about consumer situations. They were asked to imagine attending a football game between the Wisconsin Badgers and the Texas Longhorns, which would be played at the TCF Bank football stadium (home of the University of Minnesota Gophers). Participants answered two questions indicating their support for the Wisconsin Badgers (e.g., “At the game, which team will you cheer for?” 1 = Definitely the Longhorns, 9 = Definitely the Badgers; see appendix B). They rated their identification with an expanded in-group identity (three items, e.g., “Thinking about how important it is to belong to social groups, at the moment I feel strongly about belonging to” 1 = Minnesota, 9 = The broadly defined Upper Midwest). The mean of these items (x = .87) was used as a measure of expansion of in-group boundaries to include both Minnesota and Wisconsin within the broadly defined Upper Midwest. Finally, participants rated the extent to which the game situation induced notions of rivalry with the home state team (i.e., the Minnesota Golden Gophers, three items, x = .89; see appendix B).

Results and Discussion

Manipulation Checks. A 2 × 2 ANOVA on the mean rivalry ratings with cultural distinctiveness and rivalry conditions as fixed factors yielded only a significant main effect of rivalry, supporting the manipulation, with higher salience of rivalry in the high-rivalry as compared to the low-rivalry condition, M = 5.03 and 4.19, respectively; F(1,125) = 6.77, p < .01, η² = .05.

Support for the Wisconsin Badgers. We computed an index of preference for the Wisconsin Badgers by reverse-scoring the measure of support for the Texas Longhorns. An ANOVA on the mean support for the Wisconsin Badgers (r = .62, p < .001) with the cultural distinctiveness and the rivalry conditions as between-subjects factors yielded a main effect of rivalry condition, reflecting a lower support for the Wisconsin Badgers under high (vs. low) rivalry salience, M = 2.10 and 3.94, respectively; F(1, 122) = 25.66, p < .001, η² = .17. More importantly, as predicted, there was a significant cultural distinctiveness × rivalry condition interaction, F(1, 122) = 3.96, p < .05, η² = .03. Simple contrasts revealed that, consistent with hypothesis 3 and past studies, under low rivalry salience, participants primed with cultural distinctiveness were significantly more likely to support the Wisconsin Badgers than those in the neutral baseline condition, M = 4.49 and 3.39, respectively; F(1, 122) = 5.94, p < .02, η² = .05. However, as predicted in hypothesis 4b, this effect was attenuated under high rivalry salience, as evidenced by the directionally lower support for the Wisconsin Badgers in the cultural distinctiveness condition compared to the neutral baseline condition, M = 1.93 and 2.28, respectively, F = .36, NS.

Identification with the Upper Midwest. A 2 × 2 ANOVA on the mean identification with the expanded Upper Midwestern identity yielded only a significant cultural distinctiveness × rivalry condition interaction, F(1, 122) = 5.29, p < .025, η² = .04. Simple contrasts revealed that, under low rivalry salience, participants primed with cultural distinctiveness were more likely to identify with the expanded Upper Midwest (rather than Minnesota) identity as compared to those in the neutral baseline, M = 3.44 and 2.62, respectively; F(1, 122) = 3.50, p < .04, one-sided, η² = .03. However, this effect was reversed under high rivalry salience, as evidenced by the marginally lower identification with the Upper Midwest in the cultural distinctiveness condition compared to the neutral baseline condition, M = 2.30 and 3.10, respectively; F(1, 122) = 2.10, p = .07, one-sided, η² = .02.

Mediating Role of Identification with the Upper Midwest. We conducted mediated moderation analyses to assess whether rivalry condition moderated the extent to which identification with the expanded home identity of the Upper Midwest mediates the effect of priming cultural distinctiveness (vs. neutral baseline) on the support for the Wisconsin Badgers. As predicted in hypotheses 2 and 3, results of these analyses suggest that a higher tendency to identify with the Upper Midwest, triggered by the cultural distinctiveness prime, mediated participants’ higher support for the Wisconsin Badgers in the low-rivalry condition (mediated effect = .18, SE = .12, 95% CI = .01 to .54). The mediation was not significant in the high-rivalry condition (mediated effect = −.18, SE = .18, 95% CI = −.75 to .05).

Results from study 4 further illuminate the psychological process triggered by cultural distinctiveness and provide evidence for the full model proposed in this research. Importantly, the effects in the low-rivalry condition were mediated by identification with an expanded in-group identity that included the related cultural group. The somewhat weaker effects in the high-rivalry condition might be attributed to a floor effect, given the very low scores in both Upper Midwest identification (M = 2.30) and support for the Wisconsin Badgers (M = .93, both on nine-point scales) in the cultural distinctiveness condition.
STUDY 5: INTERGROUP RIVALRY IN AN ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Study 5 was designed to examine the role of salient intergroup rivalries in the context of economic rivalries relating to brands. In free-market economies, because competition is the key for winning consumers, notions of rivalry between brands associated with different cultural groups are commonplace. However, people tend to vary in the extent to which such rivalries between in-group and out-group brands are salient for them (Shimp and Sharma 1987). Therefore, in this study we measure the extent to which these rivalry perceptions are salient for consumers in the marketplace, and examine their influence on brand evaluations when consumers experience cultural distinctiveness. Additionally, this study attempts to replicate our earlier findings in an economic context using participants from a different region of the world. Finally, instead of assessing choice or preference between two options (as past studies did), this study assessed the impact on brand evaluations, with a view to examining the generalizability of our framework to the domain of brand evaluations or judgments.

We chose Singapore and Hong Kong as our target cities for this study. Although these Asian cities are perceived as economic rivals and compete with each other in several markets (Grant 2014), they share similar sociohistorical and cultural roots (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008), thereby providing an ideal setting to test our hypotheses. We decided to collect data in Hong Kong and selected a brand strongly related with Singapore as our focal brand: Singapore Airlines. This brand competes closely with an airline from Hong Kong (Cathay Pacific) in the Asian market. Air France was selected as the distant comparison brand, since it was equivalent to Singapore Airlines in both familiarity and liking in pretests conducted with Hong Kong Chinese participants, but was associated with a very different cultural region of the world.

Method

Eighty-seven Hong Kong Chinese undergraduate students enrolled in a university in Hong Kong were paid HK $70 (about US $9) to participate in the study. Participants were randomly assigned to the cultural distinctiveness versus a neutral baseline condition. In the cultural distinctiveness condition, they were shown a video about the sights and sounds of a street in an African town. In the neutral baseline condition, participants saw a video about insects. Next, all participants were presented with a task about consumer opinions on brands. They were first asked to evaluate Singapore Airlines on an eight-item scale (e.g., “I like Singapore Airlines” 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; see appendix B). Next, they evaluated Air France on the same scale. Participants also rated the extent to which they perceived a salient rivalry between Singapore Airlines and the airlines from Hong Kong, as well as the overall rivalry between Singapore and Hong Kong (six items, e.g., “I think that Singapore Airlines has a strong rivalry with a brand in Hong Kong,” 1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly agree; see appendix B). Finally, participants rated their familiarity with the brands (1 = Not at all familiar, 7 = Very familiar), and indicated the country of origin for each of the two brands (95% of respondents accurately identified the country of origin for both brands).

Results and Discussion

A repeated measures ANOVA on the mean of the brand attitude ratings (α = .92 – .95)—with the brand (Singapore Airlines or Air France) as a within-subjects factor, cultural distinctiveness as a between-subjects factor, rivalry salience as a continuous predictor, and familiarity with the two brands as covariates—yielded a significant main effect of cultural distinctiveness, F(1,81) = 4.92, p < .05, η² = .06; a significant cultural distinctiveness × rivalry salience interaction, F(1, 81) = 5.09, p < .05, η² = .06; and a marginal brand × cultural distinctiveness interaction, F(1, 81) = 2.82, p = .09, η² = .03. To explore these effects further, we conducted separate ANOVAs for each brand. A significant main effect of cultural distinctiveness, F(1,83) = 5.51, p < .025, η² = .06, as well as a significant cultural distinctiveness × rivalry salience interaction, F(1,83) = 5.62, p < .025, η² = .06, emerged for Singapore Airlines. Planned contrasts (see table 1) supported the directional hypothesis (one-sided test) that, when rivalry salience was low (1 SD below the mean), participants primed with cultural distinctiveness evaluated Singapore Airlines more favorably than those in the neutral baseline condition (M = 5.06 vs. 4.55; F(1,83) = 2.90, p < .05, η² = .03). However, as predicted in hypothesis 4b, when rivalry salience was high (1 SD above the mean), this effect was reversed, with participants primed with cultural distinctiveness evaluating Singapore Airlines less favorably than those in the neutral baseline condition (M = 4.81 vs. 5.30; F(1,83) = 2.79, p < .05, η² = .03). In contrast, participants’ attitudes toward Air France were not influenced by cultural distinctiveness or the levels of rivalry salience. Analyses conducted without the covariates yielded the same pattern of significant effects.

The results from this study support the proposed model and attest to its generalizability to a branding context. Participants primed with cultural distinctiveness evaluated a culturally proximal brand more favorably than their neutral baseline counterparts, but only when the salience of intergroup rivalry in the marketplace was low. When the salience of intergroup rivalry was high, the effect reversed and priming cultural distinctiveness led to less favorable evaluations of the strongly related brand. Interestingly, the finding in the neutral baseline condition—that Singapore
Airlines was evaluated more favorably by those who perceived high (vs. low) rivalry—consistent with the expectations that the consumers who perceived high rivalry between the two competitors were also those who had more knowledge of the marketplace, and hence, were more likely to be aware of Singapore Airlines’ high level of performance in the marketplace. In light of this, our finding of a reversal for these consumers (i.e., attenuation of evaluations for Singapore Airlines) is even more impressive.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION**

With rising levels of globalization, consumers increasingly come into contact with diverse cultures different from their own. Traveling to a foreign country for a short period or being an immigrant in a foreign country are events that can heighten feelings of being different and separated from the surrounding cultural environment, often accompanied by a desire to connect with the home culture—an experience that we term *cultural distinctiveness*. We investigate how cultural distinctiveness influences consumers’ preferences for brands that symbolize a related cultural group (i.e., a group that is geographically proximal and/or shares sociohistorical and cultural roots with one’s own cultural group). Our results show that consumers experiencing cultural distinctiveness are likely to prefer brands associated with a related cultural group, even if they are not the favored option in the choice set. This pro-in-group bias for culturally related brands is driven by a heightened desire to connect with “home,” which prompts consumers to expand their in-group boundaries to include the related cultural group in a broadened definition of home. However, this pro-in-group bias is attenuated when the salience of intergroup rivalries is high. Experiencing cultural distinctiveness can backfire in these contexts, resulting in less favorable evaluations of brands associated with a related cultural group.

Attesting to the robustness of our theoretical model, evidence for the hypothesized effects emerged: (a) among participants from different cultural groups (Mexicans, Americans, and Hong Kong Chinese); (b) when we assessed preferences for brands associated with geographically proximal groups as well as nonproximal groups with shared sociohistorical and cultural roots; (c) when cultural distinctiveness was primed in the lab as well as when it was assessed chronically (i.e., immigrants); and (d) when we used different dependent variables (real choices in naturalistic environments, preferences, and attitudes), as well as products/brands (music, sports teams, universities, food products, and airlines). Evidence for the underlying process—heightened desire to connect with home, prompting the expansion of in-group boundaries to include the related cultural group within a broadened definition of home—emerged in direct analysis of the mediating role of inclusion of the related cultural group within an expanded in-group definition. Overall, the depth and breadth of the empirical evidence strengthens our confidence in the internal validity of our theoretical model and attests to the ecological validity of the findings.

Our research offers a number of contributions to theories of ethnic-based consumption, consumer acculturation, social identity, and brand symbolism. Prior research in ethnic-based consumption and consumer acculturation has primarily focused on the consumption of goods and services from one’s established home culture (e.g., one’s home country; Penaloza 1994; Stayman and Deshpande 1989). Research in this area highlights the notion that members of ethnic groups are more likely to favor ethnic symbols in ads and ethnic products when their ethnic identity is salient (Deshpandé and Stayman 1994). Veering from past research, which has traditionally adopted a static view of home (Triandis 2007) or has limited its investigation of home culture to the question of *when* the culture will influence people’s behavior (Briley et al. 2014), our research provides a novel exploration of *how* home culture is bounded and defined. Specifically, our research is the first to demonstrate that, when motivated, consumers can malleably define their home culture based on the sets of options available in the consumption environment. That is, when consumers experiencing cultural distinctiveness are exposed to products associated with a cultural group that could potentially be construed as “home” (geographical proximity or similarity in cultural roots), they broaden their definition of home to include the related group. This

### TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural distinctiveness manipulation</th>
<th>Favorability toward Singapore Airlines (culturally proximal brand)</th>
<th>Favorability toward Air France (culturally distant brand)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low rivalry salience</td>
<td>High rivalry salience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural distinctiveness condition</td>
<td>5.06_b</td>
<td>4.81_a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral baseline condition</td>
<td>4.55_b</td>
<td>5.30_b</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE.**—Cells not sharing the same subscript in the same column differ significantly, p < .05 (one-sided).
broadened definition allows them to fulfill the need to connect with home by favoring brands/products associated with the related cultural group. It is important to note, however, that the broadening of “home” is driven by the underlying perceived similarity between the groups. If the groups are not perceived to be similar, despite their geographical proximity (e.g., some Indians might not view Southeast Asians as a similar group), then the boundary expansion effects are unlikely to emerge.

Acculturation research describes the different stages that international migrants (i.e., immigrants, sojourners, and short-term international visitors) go through when adapting to a host cultural environment, such as separation, assimilation, or integration (Berry 1997). However, because there is variation in the extent to which migrants move along the different stages and/or the time they spend in each stage (Church 1982), this descriptive approach makes it difficult to predict migrants’ consumer behavior. Consistent with the dynamic nature of acculturation, our findings suggest that the adaptation of migrants to the host culture can imply the dynamic experience of different psychological states. In particular, our research on cultural distinctiveness not only offers a method for manipulating this construct in the lab, but also has the potential to provide insights regarding the differences observed in the acculturation process of different immigrant groups. Some groups tend to assimilate well with the host culture, whereas others tend to separate from, and even become antagonistic toward, their host culture. Our framework suggests that when intergroup rivalries (between cultural home and geographically proximal host cultures) are low to moderate, assimilation processes may be more likely for immigrants (boundary expansion of in-group to include host). However, when intergroup rivalries (or cultural and ideological disagreements) are highly salient, then immigrants (experiencing cultural distinctiveness) might instead be disposed toward separation behaviors, with the added potential to denigrate or even harm the rivalrous host. These speculations are consistent with the situated perspective of identity arguing that the meaning of an identity is dynamically constructed in the particular context in which it is cued, and that such meaning prompts readiness to act in identity-congruent ways (Oyserman et al. 2007). Thus, considering acculturation as a dynamic process characterized by the experience of mental states (chronic or temporary) associated with flexible cultural identity goals opens the door for studying acculturation more systematically in a laboratory setting—something that has greatly helped to advance our understanding of other cultural phenomena (Oyserman and Lee 2007).

Our findings also contribute to research on brand symbolism. Past research on the cultural symbolism of brands has mainly focused on how brands can become icons of national cultures (Torelli and Ahluwalia 2012; Torelli, Keh, and Chiu 2010). Less is known about the meanings of brands for geographically defined regions within a country, or including more than one country. However, with globalization, brands associated with geographically defined regions within a country (e.g., Jack Daniel’s for the American South) are attempting to build a global image (Kiley 2007). Similarly, some national brands (e.g., Singaporean Tiger beer) are attempting to build cultural meanings pan-regionally (e.g., a Pan-Asian image; Cayla and Eckhardt 2008). Our research highlights that the symbolic meaning of brands for different cultural groups can be dynamically constructed. Brands can symbolize a more broadly defined group with expanded boundaries that include more than one cultural group.

Our findings have several implications for brand managers. First, our results demonstrate how consumers dynamically construct the cultural significance of brands. Priming cultural distinctiveness caused our participants to increase their preference for brands associated with a related culture, even when such brands would not otherwise be their preferred choice. That is, cultural distinctiveness highlighted the cultural significance of the brand, or its cultural equity (Torelli and Stoner 2015), and hence rendered the brand more desirable. These findings suggest that a regular brand audit for assessing the equity of a brand should analyze brand meanings not only for the cultural group inherently associated with the brand, but also for related cultural groups in close geographical proximity and/or sharing sociohistorical and cultural roots. For instance, Singapore Airlines might analyze the meanings of the brand not only for Singaporeans, but more broadly for consumers who might expand their boundaries to include Singapore within a broadened definition of home (e.g., Hong Kong Chinese), and particularly so when targeting such consumers in foreign environments (i.e., likely to prime cultural distinctiveness). This understanding can be used for developing more impactful advertising campaigns.

The implications may be even more pertinent for marketers of ethnic-oriented products catering to immigrants. Ethnic-oriented products are those that reflect the cultural experience of an ethnic-oriented group (Grier, Brumbaugh, and Thornton 2006). Such companies might be able to expand their target market among immigrant communities (who are likely to experience cultural distinctiveness), to the extent that their product assortment and cultural associations allow these consumers to expand their definition of home. For instance, a company like Grace Foods, a large Jamaican company that beckons consumers to “experience the authentic taste of Jamaica and the Caribbean” (Gracefoods.com 2016), might find it difficult to expand its target market to include Hispanic immigrants in the United States, given the difficulty of finding cultural similarity between the Spanish-speaking Hispanics and the English-speaking Caribbean people. Given the difficulties
of broadening in-group boundaries among Hispanics to include Jamaica, the company might be better advised to target the Hispanic market with a separate ethnic brand. In contrast, Goya Foods, a food company with roots in Spain and Puerto Rico (Goya.com 2015), is likely to be more successful in capturing the broadly defined Hispanic market—which includes immigrants from all Latin American countries—given the greater potential for expansion of in-group boundaries on the basis of cultural similarity (Spanish language and culture).

Although the empirical evidence for our framework is robust, there are some limitations that should be acknowledged. Because each of our studies focused on a single related cultural group (i.e., a neighboring state or a neighboring country), our findings do not determine which level of association will be prioritized when consumers confront choices associated with both related states and countries. For instance, if a consumer from Minnesota, upon experiencing cultural distinctiveness, is presented with a choice set including Wisconsinite (neighboring state) and Manitoban (neighboring region across the border with Canada) brands, which brand would she prefer? Based on our framework, it seems reasonable to predict that people would latch on to the group that is culturally closer or similar to the inherent in-group. In our example, this would mean identifying with Wisconsinites, which are likely to be more similar to Minnesotans (due to stronger sociohistorical and cultural roots as part of the Upper Midwest US region) than Manitobans. This prediction awaits further investigation.

It is important to highlight that we do not argue that all international experiences trigger cultural distinctiveness. People often travel to a new culture with anticipation and a desire to experience new environments, foods, customs, and traditions. When these motivations are salient, international migrants go through a “honeymoon” stage characterized by fascination with the new culture (Church 1982). However, this phase typically ends as soon as real, everyday coping and communication with the new culture must begin, and people confront the challenges from losing all the familiar signs and symbols of social interaction (Oberg 1960)—and hence are more likely to experience cultural distinctiveness. Future research should investigate the triggers of other types of mental states experienced by international migrants, such as those associated with assimilation to the host culture or integration of both the host and the home culture, and how these states impact brand preferences.

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION

The first and fourth authors supervised the collection of data for studies 1a and 1b by research assistants at the University of Minnesota in fall 2015. The first and fifth authors supervised the collection of data for study 2a, online appendix 1, and study 4 by research assistants at the University of Minnesota in spring 2013 and fall 2014. The first author supervised the collection of data for study 2b by Qualtrics LLC using online panels in Mexico and the United States in fall 2014. The first author supervised the collection of data for study 3 by the fifth author using MTurk workers in spring 2014. The first author supervised the collection of data for study in online appendix 2 by research assistants at the University of Minnesota in fall 2015. The third author supervised the collection of data for study 5 by research assistants at Hong Kong Baptist University in summer 2014. All the data analyses were conducted by the first author.
APPENDIX A

STUDY FINDINGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Key finding(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Study 1a</td>
<td>Cultural distinctiveness (CD) heightens the desire to connect with home, which leads to an expansion of in-group boundaries (Americans and Canada).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1b</td>
<td>CD leads to an expansion of in-group boundaries (map task).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2a</td>
<td>CD leads to pro-in-group bias toward related cultural groups (Minnesotans’ preference for Wisconsin-based products and services).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online appendix 1</td>
<td>CD leads to pro-in-group bias toward related cultural groups (Minnesotans’ increased support for Wisconsin’s NFL team: Green Bay Packers vs. a preferred team—Dallas Cowboys).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2b</td>
<td>CD leads to pro-in-group bias toward related cultural groups (Mexican immigrants’ choice of Argentinian vs. Turkish song).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 3</td>
<td>Rivalry salience high: CD reverses pro-in-group bias toward the related cultural group (Sochi Olympics: Americans’ support for Canadian curling team).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online appendix 2</td>
<td>Rivalry salience manipulated (Winter Olympics): CD leads to desire to connect with home and expansion of in-group boundaries to include the Canadians under low (but not high) rivalry by American participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 4</td>
<td>Rivalry salience manipulated (college football): CD under low (high) rivalry salience leads to (does not lead to) an expansion of in-group boundaries, which results in (does not result in) pro-in-group bias toward (support for) Wisconsin Badgers (vs. Texas Longhorns) for Minnesotan participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 5</td>
<td>Rivalry salience measured (economic rivalry): CD under low (high) rivalry leads to (reverses) pro-in-group bias toward Singapore Airlines (brand evaluation) for Hong Kong Chinese participants.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX B

Items Used in the Different Studies

Pilot 1

*Experience of Cultural Distinctiveness* (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)

Feeling culturally distinct from those around you

Feeling that you belong to a different culture

Feeling that your culture would stand out

Study 1a

*Desire to connect with home* (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)

Feel like connecting with home

Want to be in touch with something from home

Want to be around familiar faces from home

Want to connect to things from home

*Inclusion of Canadians within a broadened in-group*

Overlap between circles representing “home” and “Canada” (1 = Two circles the farthest apart with no overlap, 7 = “Home” and “Canada” fully overlapping in a single circle)

Canadians are part of your social group (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)

Canadians belong to your social group (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)

Canadians are similar to you (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)

Study 3

*Team support*

At the game, which team will you cheer for? (1 = Definitely Sweden, 9 = Definitely Canada)

How likely is it that you will wear clothing such as a T-shirt or hat that identifies you as a Sweden fan? (1 = Not at all likely, 9 = Extremely likely) — reverse-scored

How excited will you be if the Canada team wins an end? (1 = Not at all excited, 9 = Extremely excited)

How excited will you be if Sweden wins the game? (1 = Not at all excited, 9 = Extremely excited) — reverse-scored

*Salience of rivalry — Pretest* (1 = Not at all, 7 = A great deal)

How much of a rivalry existed between Canada and the United States during the Sochi Winter Olympic Games?

How much rivalry did you perceive between the United States and Canada during the Sochi Winter Olympic Games?

How much were rivalries a part of the Sochi Winter Olympic Games?

To what extent are Olympic games rivalrous?

Study 4

*Team support*

At the game, which team will you cheer for? (1 = Definitely the Longhorns, 9 = Definitely the Badgers)

How excited will you be if the Texas Longhorns win the game? (1 = Not at all excited, 9 = Extremely excited) — reverse-scored
Identification with the broadly defined Upper Midwest
(1 = Minnesota, 9 = The broadly defined Upper Midwest)

Thinking about how important it is to belong to social
groups, at the moment I feel strongly about belonging to
Thinking about my commitment to social groups, at the
moment I am committed to
Thinking about the social groups I want to connect to, at
the moment I want to connect to

Salience of rivalry (1 = Not at all, 7 = A great deal)

To what extent does this game make salient notions of ri-
valty with Minnesota Gophers?
How much of a rivalry with the Minnesota Gophers is eli-
cited by this game?
How much does thinking about this game remind you of a
rivalry with the Minnesota Gophers?

Study 5

Brand attitude

I like Singapore Airlines (1 = strongly disagree, 7 =
strongly agree)
I like the brand image of Singapore Airlines (1 = strongly
disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
I feel favorable toward Singapore Airlines (1 = strongly
disagree, 7 = strongly agree)
To what extent does “reliable” apply to Singapore
Airlines? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)
To what extent does “superior performance” apply to
Singapore Airlines? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)
To what extent does “attractive” apply to Singapore
Airlines? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)
To what extent does “excellent” apply to Singapore
Airlines? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)
To what extent does “favorable” apply to Singapore
Airlines? (1 = Not at all, 7 = Very much)

Salience of rivalry (1 = Strongly disagree, 7 = Strongly
agree)

I think that Singapore Airlines has a strong rivalry with a
brand in Hong Kong
I consider Singapore Airlines to be a competitor of a Hong
Kong brand
Singapore Airlines competes heavily with a Hong Kong
company in the commercial airline market
Hong Kong and Singapore are constantly in competition
In the economic domain, Singapore is a strong competitor
of Hong Kong
I think Hong Kong and Singapore are competitors

REFERENCES

Discourses of Identity and Their Fictional Representation,”
in Latin American Identity and Constructions of Difference, ed. Amaryll Chanady, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
Press, 1–25.
Berry, John W. (1997), “Immigration, Acculturation, and
Bettman, James R., Mary Frances Luce, and John W. Payne
and Different at the Same Time,” Personality & Social
Psychology Bulletin, 17 (5), 475–82.
Briley, Donnel, Michael W. Morris, and Itamar Simonson (2005),
“Cultural Chameleons: Biculturalism, Conformity Motives, and
Decision Making,” Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15 (4),
351–62.
Briley, Donnel, Robert S. Wyer Jr., and En Li (2014), “A
Dynamic View of Cultural Influence: A Review,” Journal
Cayla, Julien and Giana M. Eckhardt (2008), “Asian Brands and
the Shaping of a Transnational Imagined Community,”
census.gov.
Cheng, Shirley Y. Y., Jennifer L. Rosner, Melody Manchi Chao,
Siqing Peng, Xia Chen, Yanmei Li, Jessica Y. Y. Kwong,
Ying-yi Hong, and Chi-Yue Chiu (2011), “One World, One
Dream? Intergroup Consequences of the 2008 Beijing
Olympics,” International Journal of Intercultural Relations,
35 (3), 296–306.
Church, Austin T. (1982), “Sojourner Adjustment,” Psychological
Crisp, Richard J., Catriona H. Stone, and Natalie R. Hall (2006),
“Recategorization and Subgroup Identification: Predicting
and Preventing Threats from Common Ingroups,”
Two Cities: Distinctiveness Theory and Advertising
Effectiveness,” Journal of Marketing Research, 31 (1), 57–64.
Dovidio, John F, Samuel L. Gaertner, and Ana Validzic (1998),
“Intergroup Bias: Status, Differentiation, and a Common In-
Group Identity,” Journal of Personality and Social
Gaertner, Samuel L., John F. Dovidio, Phyllis A. Anastasio, Betty
Ingroup Identity Model: Recategorization and the Reduction of Intergroup Bias,” European Review of Social Psychology,
english/about.html.
Grant, Jeremy (2014), “Singapore Jostles with Hong Kong for
Financial Crown,” https://www.ft.com/content/b18372a6-
5297-11e4-a236-00144feab7de.
Grier, Sonya A., Anne M. Brumbaugh, and Corliss G. Thornton


