

What Is Cultural Fit?: from cognition to behavior (and back)

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Abstract and Keywords

How people fit into social groups is a core topic of investigation across multiple sociological subfields, including education, immigration, and organizations. In this chapter, we synthesize findings from these literatures to develop an overarching framework for conceptualizing and measuring the level of cultural fit and the dynamics of enculturation between individuals and social groups. We distinguish between the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of fitting in, which previous work has tended to either examine in isolation or to conflate. Reviewing the literature through this lens enables us to identify the strengths and limitations of unitary—that is, primarily cognitive or primarily behavioral—approaches to studying cultural fit. In contrast, we develop a theoretical framework that integrates the two perspectives and highlights the value of considering their interplay over time. We then identify promising theoretical pathways that can link the two dimensions of cultural fit. We conclude by discussing the implications of pursuing these conceptual routes for research methods and provide some illustrative examples of such work.

Keywords: culture, fitting in, assimilation, socialization, cognition, groups, norms

HOW people fit into social groups is a core topic of investigation across a range of social science disciplines including sociology, social psychology, political science, and economics. Although the concept of fitting in bears many different names—for example, assimilation, enculturation, integration, socialization, acculturation, adaptation, or social belonging—it is fundamentally about how people construct similarities and navigate differences between themselves and social groups. Specifically, we conceptualize fitting in as the process of thinking and acting in ways that are aligned with the thoughts and behavioral expectations of members of a social group.

The process of fitting in and its consequences have been studied across multiple domains, including education, immigration, and organizations. Sociologists of education have investigated the many ways in which school environments—for example, those with a culture of bullying or characterized by racial or socioeconomic segregation—affect whether and how students fit in and how they consequently perform (Arum 2000; Carter and Wel-

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ner 2013; Reardon and Owens 2014; Jack 2016). On a larger scale, the social forces of urbanization, industrialization, and global migration have motivated research into whether, how, and when immigrants assimilate to new locales (Park and Burgess 1921; Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2003). Separately, organizational scholars have examined how congruence between values, norms, and beliefs of employees and an organization as a whole can affect the coordination of activity and thereby influence individual and organizational success (Van Maanen 1975; Chatman 1991; Srivastava et al. 2018). Although these literatures examine distinct social phenomena and have thus developed along parallel, mostly disconnected, trajectories, they share an underlying focus on the dynamics and consequences of cultural fit.

In this chapter, we synthesize findings from these literatures to develop an overarching framework for conceptualizing and measuring the level of cultural fit and the dynamics of enculturation between an individual and a social group. In particular, we distinguish (p. 306) between the *cognitive* and *behavioral* aspects of cultural fit, which previous work has tended to either examine in isolation or to conflate. Reviewing the literature through this lens enables us to identify the strengths and limitations of such unitary—that is, primarily cognitive or primarily behavioral—approaches. We then develop a theoretical framework that integrates the two perspectives and demonstrates the value of more closely interrogating the congruence, incongruence, and interplay between cognitive and behavioral cultural fit. We turn next to identifying promising theoretical pathways that can link the two perspectives. We conclude by discussing the implications of pursuing these conceptual routes for research methods and provide some illustrative examples of such work.

17.1 Cultural Fit: Cognitive and Behavioral Manifestations

Cultural fit can only be understood in reference to “culture”: a system of meanings and behavioral norms shared by members of a group (DiMaggio 1997; Small et al. 2010; Patterson 2014). Our parsimonious definition of culture highlights two fundamental dimensions that delineate the sources and implications of cultural fit: cognition and behavior. The cognitive dimension refers to the mental representations, beliefs, and values that individuals draw on to make sense of their everyday experiences. The behavioral dimension relates to the norms and expectations that circumscribe individuals’ actions.

To make these abstract definitions more tangible, consider differences between national cultures. Asian and Western cultures, for example, are said to differ systematically in how individuals understand themselves and their relationships with others. Whereas Westerners tend to espouse an independent and individualistic self-construal, Asians tend to think of the self as inherently interdependent with others (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Concomitantly, Asian and Western cultures promote different behavioral norms when it comes to personal disclosure, privacy, and the pursuit of self- versus group-oriented goals.

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Drawing on these foundations, we propose that cultural fit should be understood as comprising both cognitive and behavioral components. We define *cognitive cultural fit* as the degree of similarity between an individual's set of mental representations, beliefs, and values, and those espoused by group members. By *behavioral cultural fit* we mean the individual's degree of compliance with the group's normative behavioral expectations. We can thus characterize individuals by the extent to which they have achieved cognitive and behavioral cultural fit, as illustrated in Figure 17.1.¹

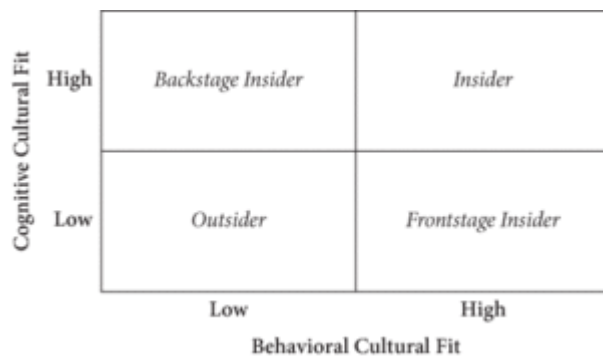


Figure 17.1 Framework—Two dimensions of cultural fit.

An American immigrating to China, to continue our (admittedly oversimplified) example, might exhibit high cognitive cultural fit if she adopts an interdependent self-construal and might demonstrate high behavioral cultural fit by conforming to normative expectations—for example, complying with requests from mere acquaintances to exchange sensitive information about work responsibilities and remuneration that might be considered rude or intrusive in her home country. As even this primitive example highlights, cognitive and behavioral cultural fit are distinct and separable. The American in China might accede to the request to share sensitive information but still consider it to be at odds with her independently construed private self; conversely, she might adopt an interdependent self-construal but still be habituated to refrain from asking acquaintances about the sensitive details of their work.

The distinction between cognition and behavior affords two important advantages. First, cognitive and behavioral cultural fit have different consequences for others' perceptions of the individual. While cognition is generally private, behavior is easier for others to observe. Goffman's (1959) dramaturgic analogy helps to make this distinction tangible. Individuals make inferences about others' backstage cognition by observing their frontstage behavior. These inferences are themselves mediated by the observer's own backstage cognition. If cognition and behavior are not aligned, then individuals might develop incorrect perceptions of their own and others' cultural fit. Furthermore, these perceptions might be inconsistent across group members. Such inconsistencies in members' perceptions can lead to schisms within the group or to dysfunction more broadly.

Second, the analytical distinction between cognition and behavior allows us to identify four ideal types of cultural fit, as illustrated in Figure 17.1. Whereas most of the literature

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conceives of cultural fit as a gradient ranging from being an outsider to being an insider, our framework also pays attention to individuals with incongruent levels of cognitive and behavioral cultural fit. The *frontstage insider* exhibits high behavioral cultural fit but is cognitively distant from other group members. This behavior may be strategic, for example, when organizational members purposively don façades to get ahead in their careers, but it can also be unintentional, such as when a newcomer to a group is pressured into adopting normatively compliant behaviors before she has the time to think of herself as being part of the group or when a group member reluctantly upholds a norm due to an incorrect impression of its popularity (Centola et al. 2005). Conversely, the *backstage insider* is cognitively similar to her peers but behaviorally (p. 308) inconsistent with group norms. This situation can emerge when the individual in question is not skillful in deciphering the group's cultural code or when habituated counternormative behaviors are difficult to abandon. An immigrant, for example, might adapt her beliefs and values but, years after moving to a new locale, still find it difficult to speak without an accent.

Our conceptualization also affords greater precision in the definition of the *insider* and the *outsider*. Despite their divergent orientations toward the group, both insiders and outsiders exhibit congruence between their behaviors and subjective experiences. An important methodological implication follows: while behavioral measures of cultural fit can be used as proxies for cognitive cultural fit (and vice versa) for insiders and outsiders, focusing on just observable behaviors or only self-reported feelings of fit would lead to incomplete and potentially even inaccurate assessments of fit for individuals who are backstage or frontstage insiders. Compliance with a firm's conversational norms, for example, is likely to be a poor indicator of cultural fit for the frontstage insider, just as self-reported fit with the organization's prevailing values and norms is likely to be an inaccurate measure of cultural fit for the backstage insider. Purely cognitive or purely behavioral measures are most likely to be informative only for the subset of individuals whose cognitive fit is aligned with their behavioral fit.

17.2 Mapping Prior Work on the Spectrum from Cognition to Behavior

Previous work tends to conceptually and methodologically privilege either the cognitive or the behavioral dimension of cultural fit or to conflate the two. To understand the commonalities, strengths, and limitations of research on fitting in across the domains of education, immigration, and organizations, we assemble prior work along a continuum that ranges from primarily cognitive to primarily behavioral. Figure 17.2 below depicts this spectrum and arrays along it the methods most commonly used in these literatures.

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Figure 17.2 Continuum of research approaches to the study of fitting in.

17.2.1 Primarily Cognitive Approaches

A critical component of fitting in is its subjective experience—what people think and perceive about themselves in relation to their social groups. Each of the three literatures—education, immigration, and organizations—has highlighted different aspects of this subjective experience.

Research in the sociology of education has focused, for example, on how students feel they fit into the “mainstream” (often middle-class, white) culture that prevails in many schools or into the specific culture (e.g., sports- or drama- or service-oriented) of their own school; the extent to which they have similar attitudes, preferences, tastes, and (p. 309) styles as their peers; and the degree to which they are valued by teachers, administrators, and other students (Bourdieu and Passeron 1970; Bourdieu 1977; Willis 1977; Bowles et al. 2009). Social psychological research on education has more specifically called attention to students’ sense of social belonging—defined as a “need for frequent, nonaversive interactions within an ongoing relational bond” (Baumeister and Leary 1995: 497; Walton and Cohen 2007, 2011; Yeager and Walton 2011; Stephens et al. 2014).

Within immigration research, the subjective experience of assimilation has been conceptualized as achieving shared “peoplehood” or similarity (Park and Burgess 1921).² Other work in this tradition has instead thought of fitting in as the perceived match between a person’s self-presentation and the distinguishing characteristics of the social group into which that person seeks to assimilate (Gordon 1964; Alba and Nee 2003). More recently, Schacter (2016) introduced the notion of “symbolic belonging,” which considers how both immigrants and natives think about and relate to each other.

Organizational research has similarly highlighted the process of socializing into groups within an organization and the organization as a whole. Building on Schein’s (1985) theory of organizational culture, which highlights the importance of assumptions shared by organizational members, extant research has explored how values, norms, and beliefs held by members are related to group and organizational culture. These shared assumptions affect how members coordinate activities and engage in work that supports or does not support the organization’s goals and success (Chatman and O’Reilly 2016). In this literature, cultural fit is often thought of as shared patterns of meaning among group mem-

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bers (Martin and Siehl 1983), shared sets of symbols and myths within an organization (Ouchi 1981), or shared attitudes and practices (Tellis et al. 2009).

Three of the most common methods for studying cognitive cultural fit are: implicit, explicit, and indirect self-reports. Building on the insight that there are two distinct modes of thinking—automatic and deliberative—implicit self-reports gather information about the former: what a person thinks about the self in relation to the social group in more rapid, involuntary, and less conscious cognition (Chen and Bargh 1997; (p. 310) Vaisey 2009; Kahneman 2011; Shepherd 2011; Lizardo 2016). Implicit self-reports are especially useful when people are less aware of, or otherwise lack the capacity to report, their underlying thoughts, preferences, or beliefs (Nisbett and Wilson 1977; Banaji and Greenwald 1994; Fiske and Taylor 2007). For example, Srivastava and Banaji (2011) develop an implicit measure of fitting in to the culture of an organization: the extent to which a person's self-concept matches the prevailing collaborative norms in an organization. They demonstrate that this implicit measure of cognitive cultural fit is more closely associated with the boundary-spanning ties a person forms in the organization than is a corresponding measure of cognitive cultural fit based on an explicit self-report.

Yet explicit self-reports, which involve directly asking respondents in surveys or interviews to report their beliefs, attitudes, and thoughts, remain the most common approach to assessing cognitive cultural fit. For example, to interrogate what native-born US citizens think it means for immigrants to achieve “symbolic belonging,” Schacter (2016:988) presents respondents with a survey containing various hypothetical profiles of potential new neighbors and directly asks: “In general, how similar is [Neighbor] to you?”; “In terms of culture, how much in common does [Neighbor] have with most Americans?”; and “If [Neighbor] moved to your block, how interested would you be in becoming friends?” Self-reports of cognitive cultural fit can also be found in organizational research. For example, Judge and Cable (1997) ask job seekers to report on their direct perception of fit with the culture of the organizations to which they are applying and examine how this measure relates to their attraction to the organization.

Like implicit measures, indirect self-reports offer researchers the benefit of collecting data from participants without revealing the relationship between their responses and the intended use of this data. This approach helps to alleviate concerns about social desirability bias, which can distort the accuracy of explicit self-reports. In organizational research, one of the most widely used indirect approaches to assessing cultural fit is the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP). The OCP measures fit by correlating an individual's self-reported preferences for a work environment with the aggregated perceptions of the environment made by organizational leaders (O'Reilly et al. 1991). The key to this measure is that respondents are not directly asked to state whether or how they fit in. Instead, data about their preferences are collected independently from others' assessments of the organization's prevailing culture. In a sense, the OCP is more behavioral than an explicit self-report because the aggregate views of the prevailing culture—the culture people are

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fitting into—are informed by people’s actual behavior. Yet the first component of the OCP—a person’s own values and preferences—is still primarily cognitive.

Implicit, explicit, and indirect self-reports yield measures of fitting in that have certain advantages. First, they illuminate the subjective experience of cultural fit, which is itself worthy of study and which has been shown to have consequences for individual and group outcomes (Chatman and O’Reilly 2016). Second, the instruments used to collect these measures can be tailored to the setting to reveal the content of group culture, the hierarchy of affiliations people have with different social groups, and the extent to which they fit in within and across these groups. For example, a student might fit in well with the academic culture of a school but less well with its athletic culture. Similarly, a new immigrant might resonate with the entrepreneurial culture of a destination country but be at odds with its family culture. Finally, such measures allow for comparisons across individuals, thus revealing which cultural dimensions are strongly shared and thus most salient to the process of fitting in. (p. 311)

These virtues of primarily cognitive approaches to measuring cultural fit are counterbalanced by some key limitations. First, people may have varying interpretations of survey or interview questions, which may lead to mismeasurement of cultural features and of how people fit in. Although both implicit and indirect self-reports are less susceptible to social desirability bias than explicit self-reports (Wittenbrink and Schwarz 2007), none of these approaches is entirely immune to the problem. For example, respondents may claim to value collaboration but nevertheless be inclined not to pursue it in practice (Srivastava and Banaji 2011). Second, it is typically not feasible to administer self-reports on a frequent basis. Thus, self-reports provide mostly static pictures of how people assimilate into social groups. Third, the flipside of a core benefit of self-reports—their ability to highlight different facets of cultural content—is that the categories of cultural content are typically defined by researchers or a handful of informants who may not comprehend the categories that matter to group members. Finally, not everyone chooses to respond to surveys or participate in interviews. Moreover, response rates to surveys are in a period of steady decline (Baker et al. 2010). Although various techniques exist to try to account for nonresponse bias (e.g., Wooldridge 2002), self-reports typically yield not only static but also incomplete portraits of social integration into groups.

17.2.2 Primarily Behavioral Approaches

Behavioral data are often considered the gold standard in social science research. Scholars of education, immigration, and organizations have each emphasized a distinct set of behaviors that serve as markers of individuals fitting in.

Education research has examined cultural fit as enacted behaviors that align with an institution’s dominant, “mainstream,” or “common” cultural ideal type (Darder 1991; Carter 2005). This work has drawn heavily on Bourdieu’s (1984) theory of cultural capital to examine the resources that enable or constrain people in conforming to these expectations (Bourdieu 1984; Carter 2005; Lareau and Weininger 2008; Armstrong and Hamilton

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2013). For example, prior work has considered the tensions that black students can face between conforming to the ideal type of intelligent student while not coming across as “acting white” (Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Carter 2005). Similarly, marginal class backgrounds shape the behavioral strategies students draw on in daily life, such as asking for help from teachers, leaning on a community (versus relying on themselves), or building relationships with peers (Calarco 2011; Stephens et al. 2012; Jack 2014; Rivera 2016).

In immigration research, cultural fit has often been examined with respect to the concrete choices that immigrants and their children make relative to those made by native populations—for example, where people choose to live, what language and dialect they adopt, and whom they decide to marry (Waters and Jimenez 2005). Similarly, Alba and Nee’s (2003:11) definition of assimilation considers not only the declining salience of an ethnic distinction but also “its corollary cultural and social differences.” The latter can be detected in concrete behaviors such as family rituals that are practiced on important occasions even when ethnic distinctions have otherwise receded to background.

In organizational research, cultural fit is typically conceptualized as the individuals’ acting in ways that conform to normative expectations defined by the shared beliefs, assumptions, and values of organizational members (Kanter 1977/1993; Schein 1985; Kunda 2009). Although this work has often conceptualized cultural fit in concrete behavioral terms—for example, the correspondence between an individual’s propensity to engage in team-oriented, rather than individually focused, work and the organization’s normative focus on teamwork—it has typically measured the cognitive aspects of fitting in and implicitly assumed a high degree of correspondence between cognition and behavior.

Across these literatures, the three most commonly used methods for assessing behavioral cultural fit are: (1) reported behaviors (including but not limited to self-reports) and outcomes; (2) analyses of language use and other behavioral artifacts; and (3) participant observation. Examples of the first can be found in education research, which studies behaviors that can easily be aggregated across schools—for example, whether students graduate, how they perform on standardized tests, and the grades they earn in school. Such outcomes are often archived in databases such as Common Core Data, The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (“Add Health”), High School and Beyond, or other databases collected and managed by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Coleman et al. 1966; Lucas 1999; Card and Rothstein 2007). Economists studying assimilation use reports of occupational choices and earnings to examine the degree of convergence between immigrants and native groups. These studies have employed cross-sectional or longitudinal survey data on reported behaviors—for example, from the Census or Social Security records (Chiswick 1978; Borjas 1985; Lubotsky 2007; Abramitzky et al. 2016).

Immigration researchers have also considered the names people choose to give to their children as a marker of assimilation. Names facilitate the study of immigrant assimilation because the choice of a name represents the trade-off that immigrant parents face between preserving their native naming traditions or naming their children in ways that

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promote assimilated identities, which can increase their chance of success in a new country. Goldstein and Stecklov (2016), for example, distinguish given from last names as a means to differentiate between origin- and ethnicity-based mechanisms of labor market discrimination. They find that American-sounding first names help second-generation immigrants achieve occupational success.

In addition to direct and indirect reports on behaviors or outcomes, a growing body of work relies on people's use of language to assess cultural fit. Recent scholarship has measured cultural fit in terms of the topics, such as sports talk, that enable some people (p. 313) to fit in and that keep others from doing so (Turco 2010; McFarland et al. 2013), as well as the linguistic style they use when communicating with group members. For example, Srivastava and colleagues (2018) derive a measure of cultural fit using a corpus of e-mail messages exchanged among employees in a midsized firm and demonstrate that this measure produces distinct "enculturation trajectories" for employees who quit, who leave involuntarily, and who stay in the organization. Goldberg et al. (2016) further demonstrate that the consequences of cultural fit for individual attainment depend on a person's position in the network structure: those in positions of brokerage that connect them to otherwise disconnected groups fare substantially better when they have high levels of fit, while individuals ensconced in dense networks derive advantage by exhibiting cultural nonconformity in their language style.

The proliferation of digital trace data (Salganik in press) have provided researchers with access to other kinds of behavioral artifacts that can be associated with enculturation. For example, education technology platforms can indicate how students are integrating into classes by tracking online behaviors such as the number of online discussions a student has with their peers and the time spent on these peer discussions (Coetzee et al. 2015). Similarly, mobile phone data such as students' phone calls, text messaging, face-to-face interactions, and mobility patterns, have also been used to measure dimensions of behavioral cultural fit, such as who students choose to communicate with, how often they choose to communicate, and the spatial distribution of their contacts (Yang et al. 2016).

Even with the advent of these new forms of data, perhaps the richest forms of behavioral data still come from ethnography and participant observation. Notable examples include Kunda's (2009) account of the culture of a high-tech engineering firm, Lareau's (2002) work on how parents transmit to their children the cultural resources needed to fit into schools, and Hondagneu-Sotelo's (2003) study of the role of gender in immigrant assimilation.

Behavioral approaches to assessing cultural fit have some obvious advantages over more cognitive approaches. First, they provide arguably more objective indicators of fit, given that how people report thinking about their fit with a social group may not correspond to how they act in response to the group. Indeed, observing how people vary in their conformity to the norms of different social groups can help uncover their implicit hierarchy of group affiliations. Second, behavioral approaches are generally better suited to understanding interactional dynamics that give rise to cultural fit because they can easily be

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observed by other group members. Finally, certain behavioral approaches employed over a period of time—for example, analyses of archived electronic communications—can help uncover the dynamics of enculturation at a level of granularity that is typically infeasible with more cognitive approaches.

Yet researchers who use behavioral measures of cultural fit can only draw indirect inferences about the thoughts, beliefs, and motivations that give rise to normatively compliant or nonconforming behavior. The subjective experience of fitting in is itself important to study yet has thus far remained largely outside the reach of researchers who only employ behavioral measures. In addition, with only behavioral indicators of (p. 314) cultural fit, researchers cannot examine how thoughts and actions about the individual in relation to a social group can be mutually constitutive. Finally, some approaches to assessing behavioral cultural fit—for example, ethnography and participant observation—are difficult to scale to large social groups, require significant investments of time, and rely heavily on the subjective interpretations of individual observers, which may or may not correspond to the interpretations that other observers would have of the same setting.

17.3 Theoretical Pathways Between Cognitive and Behavioral Fit

Across the diverse contexts of education, immigration, and organizations, research on cultural fit has tended to take either a primarily cognitive or a primarily behavioral approach. Given that both approaches have strengths and limitations, we see great potential in work that investigates the interplay between the two. Two interrelated overarching questions are particularly pertinent. First, to what extent is congruence—or lack thereof—between one's levels of behavioral and cognitive cultural fit related to individual and group outcomes? For example, how do backstage and frontstage insiders fare compared to insiders and outsiders and how does their membership in these categories affect the group? Second, how do cognitive and behavioral cultural fit shape one another? How do others' perceptions and behaviors toward a person, for example, affect cognitive cultural fit and in turn produce behaviors that influence others' subjective experiences?

To make initial progress on this agenda, we propose four conceptual pathways that represent promising theoretical linkages between the cognitive and behavioral aspects of cultural fit. The first, which draws inspiration from Goffman's (1959) insights about impression management, is *strategic decoupling*, which references purposive choices people make to act toward social group members in ways that do not correspond to how they think about the group. The second pathway, which we term *unintentional decoupling*, refers to instances when cognition and behavior can become decoupled but not because the person actively chooses or wants to sever the link. For example, people may know how one should behave in a social group but may simply lack the capacity or skills to enact that behavior. Or they may face structural constraints—for example, the inability to

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coordinate actions with others—that keep them from acting in ways they know they should act.

Although they are not able to distinguish between its strategic and unintentional forms, Doyle et al. (2017) develop an approach that highlights a linguistic manifestation of decoupling. Using a directed measure of linguistic alignment applied to a corporate e-mail corpus, they distinguish between the internalization of linguistic norms related to pronoun use (e.g., “I” versus “we”), as measured by base rates of word usage over the first six months of new employees’ adjustment to a new organization, and self-regulation, (p. 315) as indicated by how their use of these pronouns changes in response to colleagues’ use of these terms in an e-mail thread. They propose that the former is more likely to reflect taken-for-granted dispositions rather than mere perfunctory normative compliance. For example, base rates of “we” usage tend to increase on entry and to decline before exit. By contrast, self-regulation represents departures from a person’s baseline tendency in response to others, and these deviations may represent acts of strategic decoupling.

Examining how cognitive and behavioral fit can be decoupled leads naturally to questions about their *interaction effects*—that is, the conditions under which the two forms of fit act as complements or substitutes in producing consequential outcomes. For example, are there contexts in which the alignment of thoughts and actions can accelerate assimilation and more quickly realize the benefits of group membership or conversely hasten a person’s exclusion and eventual exit from the group? Are there settings in which increases in one kind of fit decrease the efficacy of having the other kind of fit? And are there contexts in which cognitive and behavioral have no interaction effect and instead operate independently on outcomes of interest? If all three types of social contexts exist, what are the distinguishing features of these contexts?

Multiple group memberships are a fourth, and perhaps the most challenging yet promising, avenue for connecting cognitive and behavioral cultural fit to each other and to social outcomes of interest. It has long been recognized that people identify with, are characterized by, and maintain memberships to multiple groups simultaneously, with different self-conceptions being situationally activated (Markus and Nurius 1986; Markus and Wurf 1987; Banaji and Prentice 1994; Lahire 2011). Multiple group membership is a chronic challenge of cultural alignment when individuals intersect groups that impose different normative expectations and institutionalized belief and value systems (Friedland and Alford 1991; Bourdieu 2000; Stark 2011; DiMaggio and Goldberg 2017).

The concept of cultural fit conventionally implies movement from one group to the other, but in many cases, people may seek to fit in to multiple social groups simultaneously: children in the schoolyard often seek entry into distinct, sometimes rivalrous play groups; in a new locale, immigrants often wish to socialize with native groups but also stay tethered to other recent immigrants from their country of origin; and employees are frequently trying to integrate into their own department but also forge alliances and coalitions with colleagues in other departments who share common interests. Similarly, when people experi-

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ence social mobility they necessarily intersect cultural domains, potentially importing norms and beliefs from one domain to the other, for example, when working class boys complete their education and obtain jobs in finance or when upwardly mobile black Caribbeans gain entry into the white-dominated middle class (Rollock et al. 2011; Friedman 2016).

In cases of either stable or fluid intersectionality, the interplay between cognitive and behavioral fit is likely to be particularly complex. For example, when people seek to affiliate with multiple groups, do they find it easier or harder to decouple the two forms of fit? What are the consequences of cognitive and behavioral fit with multiple groups on one's thoughts, feelings, and social identity? For example, how do people navigate the experience of being frontstage insiders with respect to one group and backstage insiders (p. 316) with respect to others? Are people more likely to engage in unintentional or strategic decoupling in such situations? How does the hierarchy of group affiliations manifest in cognition versus behavior? Similarly, can cognitive and behavioral fit be substitutes for each other with respect to one social group and be complements to each other in the context of another social group? Does fitting into one group necessarily crowd out one's ability to fit into another?

17.4 Methodological Implications

To fully map and construct these pathways between cognitive and behavioral fit, researchers will increasingly need to bring together the tools and methods that have, until now, been used to study each form of fit independently. This is not just a call for more mixed methods research. Rather, we anticipate that significant insights will be uncovered through approaches, including but not limited to computational and field experimental methods, that can uncover systematic relationships between the two (cf. Salganik in press) and that can identify how they are causally linked.

Lu et al. (2019) provide an illustration of the former. They collect data from an OCP, an indirect self-report, and e-mail data from an organization. The OCP provides a snapshot of how accurately individuals perceive the organization's culture (based on how close or far their perception of the current culture is from the "typical" perception of their peers) and how they perceive their own fit (based on how close or far their preferred culture is from their perception of the current culture). Lu and colleagues (2017) then use machine learning techniques to train an algorithm to identify the "linguistic signature" of these two types of fit. They use the linguistic signatures to impute perceptual accuracy and perceived fit scores and propagate the imputed scores back in time based on historical e-mail data. Using this technique, they transform the OCP completed at one point in time into a longitudinal assessment, enabling them to examine the dynamic interplay between perceptions of culture and of fitting in and behavior that is or is not normatively compliant with group expectations.

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Examples of the latter—field experiments that identify the causal relationships between cognition and behavior—can be found in educational psychology research. For example, field experiments have produced tangible behavioral changes that signal greater fit—as indicated by grade point averages, grades, and test scores—through cognitive manipulations—how students think about themselves in relation to their academic environment (Yeager and Walton 2011; Stephens et al. 2014; Walton and Cohen 2007).

Other work in this vein manipulates students' beliefs about prevailing norms to change behavior in ways that foster the inclusion of all students (Tankard and Paluck 2016; Paluck and Shafir 2016). For example, Paluck and Shepherd (2012) influenced students' perceptions of norms about harassment in schools by identifying well-connected students, whom they label "social referents," and training them on new behavioral expectations that emphasize tolerance instead of harassment. Subtly changing these (p. 317) beliefs resulted in fewer reported cases of harassment, more public support for antiharassment campaigns, and fewer cases of disciplinary action against students engaged in harassment.

17.5 Conclusion

Whether in the context of education, immigration, or organizations, where there are social groups, there will be group cultures and individuals who, to varying degrees, seek to fit into those cultures. Whereas prior work has thought about fitting in as a continuum of group membership ranging from outsider to insider status, we instead propose that there are two analytically and theoretically distinct components of cultural fit: cognitive and behavioral. These dimensions help us to more sharply define what it means to be an outsider or an insider and also identify two other types of cultural fit: the frontstage insider and the backstage insider.

The many different strands of research on fitting in share a common feature: they focus on either the cognitive or the behavioral manifestations of cultural fit but pay insufficient attention to how they relate to one another whether contemporaneously or over time. The methods commonly used to study fitting in are similarly bifurcated into those that primarily uncover cognitive cultural fit and those that primarily reveal behavioral manifestations of cultural fit, often implicitly assuming that both relate to a singular underlying construct: cultural fit. To help remedy the imbalance, we propose four conceptual pathways that link the cognitive and behavioral aspects of cultural fit and identify how research methods will need to be better integrated for researchers to be able to traverse these pathways. Completing these and other yet-to-be-defined circuits from cognition to behavior—and back—promises to yield fresh insights about the cultural fit between individuals and the social groups to which they belong.

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Notes:

(1.) For simplicity, we begin by conceptualizing cognitive and behavioral fit with respect to one particular social group. Yet, as we discuss in greater detail below, people often seek to fit into multiple social groups and can achieve varying levels of cognitive and behavioral fit across these reference groups. Although immigration and education research sometimes focuses on a social group's "distance" from a dominant or mainstream culture, we focus instead on how individuals think of themselves and act in accordance with the norms of any given social group, without making normative assumptions about whether people "ought to" fit into that group.

(2.) We focus our review on research that examines the determinants and consequences of individual-level assimilation, although we recognize that immigration research has also considered how individual mobility over time and across generations can lead to the integration of entire social groups into society.

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