

Self-Superiority in Context: Relationships Among Nation-Level Indices of Cultural Values on Self and Social Judgment



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Abstract

Traditional approaches to studying cultural differences in social judgment often involve comparisons between a few discrete groups, thereby posing difficulties when drawing conclusions about which cultural values drive differences. In contrast, the present research used a multi-nation approach to study cultural differences. In 4 studies, we sampled participants whose parents originated from 35 different countries and tested relationships among nation-level indices of Individualism, Masculinity (a proxy for valuation of modesty), and individual feelings of self-superiority in predictions regarding moral actions (Studies 1, 3, 4), intelligence (Study 2) and independent traits (Study 4). Individualism positively correlated with self-superiority, while Masculinity did not consistently relate to self-superiority. Cultural values tested at the nation level predicted individual-level tendencies to erroneously inflate self relative to social judgments.

Keywords: Above Average; Superiority; Culture; Motivation; Social Judgment

Introduction

The inclination to consider oneself superior to others is a pervasive aspect of American life. Individuals exaggerate their positive qualities relative to others' qualities. They claim to be more compassionate, generous, intelligent, and skilled than other people [1-4]. For example, even though the national divorce rate hovers around 50% (NCHS, 2007), parents still strongly believe that their child has a much greater chance than another child of remaining happily married [5]. Similarly, people rate themselves as less destructive and more constructive during conflict than their peers [6]. Likewise, though the risk of smoking is objectively great, many smokers estimate their own likelihood of developing serious health problems, such as lung cancer, to be much lower than that of the average smoker [7]. Within the medical field, people tend to underestimate their risk for side effects and overestimate their likelihood of experiencing benefits of medical treatment [8]. These statistics suggest that people, and in particular Americans, believe that their chances for success, health, and prosperity are superior to others'.

While pervasive in America, the magnitude of these types of self-superiority effects may be attenuated in other countries. For instance, some investigations find that unlike Americans, individuals in China, Japan, Korea, and Thailand are less likely to over

emphasize the superiority of their own positive traits in relation to others [9-11]. Indeed, one reason for such differences lies in the values endorsed among varying countries. For example, countries differ in the extent to which their citizens tend to espouse individualist versus collectivist values. Western countries, like America, value individualism. These countries foster a culture of independence [11-13], competitiveness, and differentiation of one's personal characteristics from others' [11,14,15]. Other countries, like China, value collectivism. These countries foster a culture that encourages the development of interdependencies with others [16] and urge individuals to be similar to members of their group [17]. Because countries promote different cultural value systems, individual members of these cultures may also personally adopt these values. People may shift their conceptions of themselves relative to others, as a result of these culturally-specified values [10,18-20].

However, the presence and magnitude of the self-superiority effect across different nations has been the subject of debate. Some researchers find that the drive to separate oneself from others is common to all people [21-23]. For instance, Japanese and American participants evinced equally positive implicit self-views as indexed using reaction time measures [24].

Why is the presence of self-superiority effects inconsistent? Such seeming inconsistencies may be the result of sampling techniques. The primary approach to the study of self and social judgment has been to test the effects of culture by focusing comparisons on individuals in one country compared to another. Using this tack, comprehensive multi-nation studies [25] and meta-analyses [19] suggest that at least the strength of self-superiority effects may be dependent on the country from which participants are selected. For instance, American thoughts and behaviors are compared to Chinese thoughts and behaviors.

However, there is one major problem with focusing comparisons on members of a few discrete groups that poses challenges to conclusions about the values or motives that drive self-superiority. That problem is *assumed equivalency*. When researchers consider countries to be psychologically or conceptually equivalent (e.g. America and Canada) because of shared cultural values (e.g. individualism), they obfuscate the impact of other contributing factors. Danes, for example, describe themselves in more independent terms than Americans on multiple measures of self-construal, but they also value “interpersonal leveling.” That is, while more independent, Danes avoid standing out above others more than Americans [26]. Likewise, national indices of Individualism are similar between Chile and China [27], but national indices of Neuroticism vary substantially between them [28]. The United States, Scandinavia, and Australia score approximately equivalently on indices of Individualism, yet the pressures for modesty within the cultures vary substantially. Scandinavians and Australians demonstrate an aversion to conspicuously immodest individuals who outwardly sing their own praises [29-32], whereas people in the United States openly share their successes [33,34]. Extending findings from the comparisons of discrete groups to other groups that are assumed to share a particular cultural value may ignore other important differences between the groups.

There is a second concern as well that arises when focusing on just a few discrete groups to explore the impact of one prepotent cultural value—namely *confounded values*. Countries that differ in their endorsement of one cultural value may also differ in their endorsement of a secondary value that is not measured [35,36]. This secondary value may in fact contribute to measured outcomes. Thus, comparing a few discrete cultural groups may lead researchers to conclude that one cultural-level value is responsible for differences when in fact other values that differ between groups may be at play.

Given these two problems, research that compares people from one country to people from another leaves uncertain what cultural value drives self-superiority. It is necessary to unpack the culturally-specified values that may be responsible for self-other differences. In the current research, we chose to address these issues by sampling participants whose backgrounds originate in many countries and measuring more than one cultural value. In so doing, this research argues for the importance of a comprehensive, multi-nation approach to the study of cultural differences in

self and social judgment in order to pinpoint cultural values that drive self-superiority effects.

Overview of Current Research

In four studies, participants reported the countries in which their parents were born. We assigned nation-level cultural value scores to each participant based on the country in which each parent was born. We chose to ask about parents’ origin countries, given that cultural values and societal norms are strongly transmitted from parent to child [37] through multiple and pervasive means, including parents’ language to their children beginning as early as 4-years of age [38]. Further, first-generation immigrants, who are exposed to competing cultures from both their parents and society, show stronger positive correlations between their own and their parents’ cultural values than the correlations exhibited by individuals who are not exposed to competing cultural values [39]. Individuals’ cultural values are based strongly on those of their parents’ backgrounds.

We assigned cultural value index scores to each parent’s country based on Hofstede’s [27] cultural dimensions. Hofstede catalogued countries on six dimensions based on relative differences in the values espoused by 116,000 survey respondents in 72 different countries [27,40]. Although Hofstede developed multiple dimensions, we selected two dimensions relevant to self-superiority effects for our first three studies—namely Individualism/Collectivism and Masculinity/Femininity. In Study 4, we explored the influence of all of Hofstede’s dimensions on self-superiority effects.

We focused on Individualism and Masculinity because both dimensions quantify cultural values related to self and social judgment. Although related and at times correlated, they are considered conceptually distinct values. The Individualism dimension indexes the degree to which members of the country value personal success, reinforce individuality, and discourage close ties among individuals [27]. If differences in self and social judgments are the result of a cultural appreciation for standing out amongst peers and triumphing over others for personal gain, the cultural value of Individualism should predict self-superiority effects.

The Masculinity dimension also quantifies a country’s valuation of personal success. However, the reasons for valuing personal success differ within masculine societies compared to individualistic societies [41]. Specifically, masculine countries encourage ego-boosting, whereas more feminine countries encourage humility [42]. Countries high in masculinity value personal success and achievement and discourage cooperation or consensus, particularly when material gain is at stake [27,43]. Masculinity seems then to quantify the degree to which modesty is accepted, encouraged, and valued.

Hofstede [42] provided empirical evidence of the relationship between the cultural index of Masculinity and valuation of modesty. He analyzed data, collected by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, from a representative

sample of thousands of participants across seven countries. Participants completed literacy tests, on which performance could be objectively assessed, and indicated subjective ratings of their literary abilities. Within the subset of participants who actually performed the highest, Hofstede computed the percentage of participants who reported that their skills were “excellent” rather than “good,” “moderate,” or “poor.” The relationship between the masculinity score for participants’ home country and the percent of participants in each country who indicated having excellent skills was strong ($r = .71$). Respondents in masculine countries were inclined to assert the strength of their skills, while respondents in more feminine countries were inclined to be more modest in self-description, even among respondents who actually performed well. If self-other differences in judgments are the result of culturally endorsed values to boost one’s ego and to immodestly tout one’s successes, Masculinity should predict self-superiority effects.

Hofstede’s cultural dimensions have several unique properties that suggest they are appropriate for studying cultural values in self and social judgment. First, although the dimensions describe nation-level differences, these group indices can serve as proxies for individual differences. In fact, these indices can at times better predict individual outcomes than individual-level measures of values, motivations, and personality. In a meta-analysis using data from 598 studies representing over 200,000 individuals, the variance in outcomes explained by Hofstede’s cultural values was equivalent, and at times greater than, the variance explained by individual differences [44]. In addition, the cultural index scores are stable. Correlations among countries computed across decades did not weaken and the relative rankings remained intact, suggesting the indices tap into resilient aspects of national cultural differences [41,45,46]. Further, Hofstede’s cultural values converged with those found using the CPQ-4, a different measure of Individualism on a national level [47]. Hofstede’s dimensions provide a consistent, quantifiable metric of cultural values that are reliable across countries and can serve as meaningful explanatory factors for individual outcomes.

We applied the cultural indices to the study of individual differences in self-superiority. In four studies, we quantified the Individualism and Masculinity of participants’ cultural backgrounds. Using Hofstede’s indices, we computed the average level of each value dimension based on the birth countries of participants’ parents. We tested whether the Individualism index predicted the tendency to describe the self as superior to others, given culturally-specified valuation of personal success relative to others’ success in individualistic countries. We also tested whether the Masculinity index related to self-superiority, given the culturally-specified valuation of immodesty within masculine countries. In Study 4, we tested the relationship between all cultural indices in Hofstede’s model – Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence – and self-superiority in order to develop a more robust model of the effects of Individualism and Masculinity.

Study 1

In Study 1, participants indicated their cultural backgrounds before predicting whether they would respond in unhelpful ways in three situations. They also predicted the prevalence of these negative actions within their own cultural group. Participants predicted their own and others’ actions separately rather than responding to comparative statements (i.e. are you more or less likely than your peers to engage in unhelpful actions). Indirect assessments of self-superiority, whereby people respond to separate questions assessing whether they or another person would engage in a behavior, helps to mitigate *focalism*, or the cognitive tendency to pay more attention to and weight more heavily the target of the judgment than the referent group when comparative statements are used [48,49]. Using indirect assessments, we tested whether indices of Individualism and Masculinity predicted self-superiority effects in social judgment.

Participants and Procedures

In exchange for extra credit, 99 Cornell University undergraduates completed an anonymous online survey. Participants were solicited from international student and psychology department email lists. Although most participants themselves were born in the United States, participants’ parents were born in 20 different countries. Parents’ Individualism indices ranged from 17 to 91 (on Hofstede’s scale which ranges 6-91). Parents’ Masculinity indices ranged from 26 to 95 (on Hofstede’s scale which ranges 5-95). For each participant, we averaged both parents’ Individualism indices ($M_{ind} = 54.73$, $SD_{ind} = 32.91$) and also their Masculinity indices ($M_{masc} = 57.71$, $SD_{masc} = 9.68$).

Participants considered three hypothetical scenarios. They considered whether they would drive by an old woman standing next to her broken car without helping or calling police. They considered whether they would leave less than a fair share of money when a group of friends went out for dinner and split the bill. Finally, they considered whether they would sabotage someone’s chances of success in a competitive game. Participants reported whether they would or would not engage in each behavior by indicating yes (coded as 100) or no (coded as 0). For each scenario, participants also predicted the percentage of randomly selected, typical students at their same university with their same cultural background who would engage in the behavior.

To test self-superiority, we relied on predictions made about oneself and about others (average of three judgments: $M_{self} = 26.60$, $SD_{self} = 25.63$; $M_{other} = 38.80$, $SD_{other} = 13.79$). We subtracted self-predictions from other-predictions within each scenario. Each of these three difference scores reflected the degree to which participants estimated that others would be more likely than the self to engage in each negative action. To create the self-superiority score, we averaged the three difference scores ($M = 36.61$, $SD = 71.52$). Higher scores indicated expectations that others would be more likely than the self to engage in negative actions; in other words, higher scores indicate greater self-superiority. A post-hoc

sensitivity analysis for a one-group linear, bivariate regression analysis investigating the size of the slope ($\alpha = .05$) indicated we had 80% to detect a slope for the effect of individualism of .53 and of masculinity of 1.80.

Results

We ran a regression predicting the self-superiority score from the Individualism index and the Masculinity index. The model was significant, $R^2 = .14$, $F(2, 96) = 7.75$, $p = .001$. When controlling for Masculinity, Individualism was positively correlated with the self-superiority score, $b = .41$, $t(96) = 3.92$, $p < .001$, $VIF = 1.22$. As Individualism of cultural background increased, so too did the tendency to predict that a greater percentage of other people would act in unhelpful ways compared to oneself. When controlling for Individualism, Masculinity was negatively correlated with the self-superiority score, $b = -1.53$, $t(96) = 1.97$, $p = .05$, $VIF = 1.22$. Although we did not predict this effect, results suggest that participants with backgrounds that were more masculine (and harbored reduced concerns for modesty) were less likely to claim to be superior to others.

In sum, as the Individualism of participants' backgrounds increased, so too did the tendency to proclaim the self as superior to others when predicting unhelpful actions. Counter-intuitively, Masculinity was negatively related to self-superiority, a point we return to in the general discussion.

Study 2

Members of different cultures vary in the degree to which they behave consistently across situations [49]. Due to these base-rate differences in consistency, people from individualist cultures may have expected themselves to behave consistently across situations, while people from collectivist cultures may have expected more variation in their own and possibly others' actions across situations. Thus, Study 2 tested evaluations in an objective, concrete, and non-hypothetical situation—performance on a trivia test. Moreover, in Study 1, self-judgments reflected a binary decision and social judgments reflected continuous estimates producing inequivalences; while this mathematically encourages discrepancies in self-compared to social judgment, we were modeling the magnitude of that difference as a function of cultural values. Regardless, in Study 2, the response options for self and social judgment were the same. Again, we tested whether cultural Individualism and Masculinity would predict self-superiority effects.

Participants and Procedures

In exchange for extra credit, 48 Cornell University undergraduates, recruited for a study of cultural differences, participated. Participants reported in what countries each of their parents were born; 23 different countries were mentioned. Parents' Individualism indices ranged from 12 to 91. Parents' Masculinity indices ranged from 17 to 88. We averaged both parents' Individualism indices and Masculinity indices ($M_{ind} = 58.3$, $SD_{ind} = 33.44$; $M_{masc} = 59.3$, $SD_{masc} = 9.67$).

Next, participants answered 12 general knowledge questions (e.g., *What is the more common term for female ova; what type of footrace has an anchor leg; what drink did the Portuguese call cha when they introduced it to England?*) After answering all of the questions, participants estimated the number of questions they answered correctly, out of 12; one person did not supply a response. They were prompted to think about their cultural group, nation, or group of origin (e.g. Chinese, Japanese-Americans, etc). They estimated the number of questions they expected that the average person in their cultural group would answer correctly, out of 12.

We calculated a superiority score by subtracting participants' estimates of the number of trivia questions another person would answer correctly ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.93$) from estimates of the number that the self-answered correctly ($M = 4.65$, $SD = 1.85$). Higher numbers indicated expectations that the self would outperform the average other ($M = -0.19$, $SD = 2.10$). A post-hoc sensitivity analysis for a one-group linear, bivariate regression analysis investigating the size of the slope ($\alpha = .05$) indicated we had 80% to detect a slope for individualism of .022 and for masculinity of .075.

Results

We ran a regression predicting the superiority score from the Individualism and Masculinity indices. The model was significant, $R^2 = .12$, $F(2, 44) = 4.68$, $p = .014$. When controlling for Masculinity, Individualism predicted the superiority score, $b = .027$, $t(44) = 3.06$, $p = .004$, $VIF = 1.05$. As cultural Individualism increased, so too did participants' tendency to predict that oneself outperformed others. Masculinity did not predict the superiority score, $b = -.023$, $t(44) = -0.77$, $p = .45$, $VIF = 1.05$.

As the Individualism of participants' backgrounds increased, so too did the tendency to predict oneself would perform in ways superior to others on an objective trivia test. Individualism related to increased expectations of one's own successful performance, controlling for actual performance. Masculinity did not predict the self-superiority effect.

Study 3

In Studies 1 and 2, participants made predictions about other people in their cultural group, thus social-predictions were made about generalized, non-specified "others." Generalized, abstract targets are thought about in different ways than is a singular, concrete target [50]. Although there is no reason to believe that such processing differences should occur to different degrees as a function of participants' cultural backgrounds, in Study 3 participants made predictions about how they and a single person they knew well would react to a situation they vividly recalled. To offer a more conservative test of the hypothesis, participants recalled a specific experience from the past, rather than making predictions about a hypothetical experience in the future. When making predictions about the future for themselves, people rely on their best intentions [51], but they are less likely to do so for others [52],

which may contribute to their tendency to assert self-superiority. To constrain the possibility that people disproportionately weight their own and not others' ideal aspirations, participants imagined a situation from the past they had actually experienced in which they struggled morally to doing the right thing. We tested whether cultural Individualism and Masculinity would relate to self-superiority effects when predicting success at engaging in honorable actions.

Participants and Procedures

From New York University, 66 individuals participated in a study on cultural differences in exchange for entry into a raffle for a gift certificate. They reported in what countries each of their parents were born; 20 different countries were mentioned. Again, we assigned Individualism and Masculinity index scores to each country. Parents' Individualism scores ranged from 17 to 91, and their Masculinity scores ranged from 34 to 70. We averaged the scores associated with each parents' place of birth to compute a single Individualism and Masculinity index score for each participant ($M_{ind} = 52.36$, $SD_{ind} = 31.56$; $M_{masc} = 57.07$, $SD_{masc} = 8.68$) Participants recalled an incident where they experienced a moral challenge and struggled to do the right thing. They described the incident and their emotional reactions to it. To measure self-judgments, participants indicated the extent to which they considered the following statement to be true: *I stood firm and succeeded at doing the right thing*. Participants responded on a 1 (extremely untrue) to 9 (extremely true) Likert scale.

Next, we measured predictions about what another person would do in this situation. Participants wrote down the initials of a friend they know fairly well, of their same gender, age group, and cultural group, who was not a family member or romantic partner. Participants imagined this person in the same situation and indicated the extent to which, if in this situation, this other person would *stand firm and succeed at doing the right thing* on the same 1-9 scale. We calculated a superiority score by subtracting participants' estimates that the other person would succeed at doing the right thing ($M_{other} = 6.40$, $SD_{other} = 2.04$) from estimates that the self did succeed at doing the right thing ($M_{self} = 7.16$, $SD_{self} = 1.67$). Higher scores indicated greater self-superiority ($M = 0.77$, $SD = 2.18$). Finally, participants indicated how close they felt to the person whose initials they provided using the Inclusion of Others in the Self Scale [53]. A post-hoc sensitivity analysis for a one-group linear, bivariate regression analysis investigating the size of the slope ($\alpha = .05$) indicated we had 80% to detect a slope for Individualism of .02 and for Masculinity of .074

Results

i. Preliminary Analyses

Closeness to the selected comparison other did not relate to Individualism, $r(65) = -.006$, $p = .96$, or to Masculinity, $r(65) = .07$, $p = .56$, suggesting cultural values were not confounded with closeness to the comparison other.

ii. Self-Superiority

We ran a regression predicting this superiority score from the Individualism and Masculinity indices. The model was significant, $R^2 = .09$, $F(2, 63) = 3.22$, $p = .047$. When controlling for Masculinity, Individualism was a marginally significant predictor of the superiority score, $b = .016$, $t(63) = 1.76$, $p = .08$, $VIF = 1.14$. When controlling for Individualism, Masculinity did not predict the superiority score, $b = .036$, $t(63) = 1.11$, $p = .27$, $VIF = 1.14$. As the cultural backgrounds of the participants increased in Individualism, so too did participants' tendency to describe themselves as more likely to succeed in engaging in honorable actions compared to others.

Study 4

In Study 4, we sought to isolate the predictive ability of Individualism and Masculinity indices by including all cultural values reflected in Hofstede's model. There are reasons to suspect relationships between these additional Hofstede cultural values and self-superiority could emerge. Specifically, countries that embrace neoliberalism stress the value of power as a driver of self-superiority [54]; we aimed to model this relationship by adding the Power Distance Index as a predictor. Additionally, people self-enhance at times to maintain a desirable social reputation or positive self-regard [55], a feeling similar to that evoked by gratification which could be indexed by the Indulgence dimension. In Study 4, we modeled all Hofstede's cultural dimensions; in addition to those mentioned, we included the Uncertainty Avoidance Index, marking the extent to which people avoid and dislike ambiguity as expressed through regard for rigid rules of behavior, as well as the Long Term Orientation Index, reflecting the degree to which a country adapts, changes, and deprioritizes tradition. As a result of including all dimensions as predictors of self-superiority, we could test which value best predicted discrepant self and social judgments.

We asked participants to describe themselves and a singular, concrete target other they knew well, as in Study 3. They made behavioral predictions, as in Study 1. However, here, we asked about behaviors that have the potential to affect the experience of another person. The particular scenarios described and behaviors in question contain features that resonate with what are considered universally moral qualities for how to engage with others including trustworthiness, respect for others, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship [56].

In addition, we asked participants to describe themselves and another person along desirable trait dimensions. We compiled two lists of traits, one of which reflected those personality characteristics considered highly valued in individualistic cultures and ones highly valued in collectivist cultures [22]. Some research finds self-enhancement is universal, with all people self-enhancing on traits considered valuable in their respective cultures [22,57]. However, others find that self-enhancement is more prominent in Western countries compared to Eastern countries

even on equally valued qualities [10,19]. By requesting judgments on traits considered desirable in cultures that differ on individualism, we could test these competing possibilities.

Participants and Procedures

In exchange for 1 dollar or course credit, respectively, 430 participants (276 from Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform; 154 American university students) completed an anonymous online survey. We recruited participants between the ages of 18 and 26, though we received responses from older participants as well ($M_{age} = 22.29$, $SD_{age} = 3.32$, 55% female).

Participants reported in what countries each of their parents were born; 29 different countries were mentioned. We assigned index scores from all the Hofstede dimensions to each country. We averaged the scores associated with each parents' place of birth to compute a single index score for each participant, on each dimension ($M_{ind} = 63.68$, $SD_{ind} = 30.54$, range: 8-91, $M_{mas} = 59.02$, $SD_{mas} = 9.36$, range: 5-95, $M_{power_dist} = 54.71$, $SD_{power_dist} = 18.34$, range: 13-95, $M_{unc_avoid} = 49.75$, $SD_{unc_avoid} = 15.86$, range: 13-95, $M_{LTO} = 39.50$, $SD_{LTO} = 23.73$, range: 4-100, $M_{indul} = 55.99$, $SD_{indul} = 21.35$, range: 0-99).

Participants entered the initials of a friend they know well, of the same gender, age, and cultural group, who is not a family member or romantic partner. They indicated how close they felt to the person whose initials they provided using the Inclusion of Others in the Self Scale [53]. To assess self-superiority in trait ascriptions, participants indicated the degree to which a variety of traits described themselves and the person whose initials they supplied, in a randomly assigned order. The initials they offered were piped into the instructions when making judgments about the other. Drawing from the Individualistic and Collectivistic Traits measure [22], participants responded to 8 traits reflecting individualist values (i.e. "free," "original," "self-reliant"), in addition to 8 items reflecting collectivist values (i.e. "agreeable," "cooperative," "good listener"). Participants responded on a 9-point scale, from 1, extremely untrue, to 9, extremely true. We averaged the ratings made for the self and other of the individualist traits ($a_{self} = .85$, $a_{other} = .87$) and the collectivist traits ($a_{self} = .87$, $a_{other} = .91$).

We calculated a superiority score of individualistic self-descriptions by subtracting the average ratings of the degree to which the other possessed the collectivist traits ($M_{other} = 6.64$, $SD_{other} = 1.40$) from the average of the self ($M_{self} = 6.64$, $SD_{self} = 1.40$). We also calculated a superiority score of collectivist self-descriptions by subtracting the average rating that the other possessed collectivist traits ($M_{other} = 6.81$, $SD_{other} = 1.53$) from the average of the self ($M_{self} = 7.01$, $SD_{self} = 1.27$). Higher scores indicate greater self-superiority ($M_{indiv_traits} = -.21$, $SD_{indiv_traits} = 1.56$, $M_{collect_traits} = 0.20$, $SD_{collect_traits} = 1.46$).

To assess superiority of behavioral predictions, participants indicated the likelihood they would engage in various behaviors that directly, negatively affected others. We asked participants how likely they and the other were to take an extra turn to talk

in a group they were working with in order to persuade people, even if it meant one person did not get a chance to talk or share their idea. We also asked for predictions regarding the likelihood of dishonestly misrepresenting qualifications, skills, and previous experience when applying to a desired job or a position. We asked about the likelihood of taking credit for someone else's work if it increases the chances of getting a raise, promotion, or recognition. Finally, we asked for likelihood estimates of blocking or banning someone with a different perspective on an online blog. Participants reported likelihood estimates for the self and the other by entering as free text a value from 0%, described as extremely unlikely, to 100%, described as extremely likely. Eight people did not provide estimates for the self and others.

We calculated a behavior self-superiority score by averaging the estimated differences in self ($M_{self} = 29.14$, $SD_{self} = 20.8$) and social likelihoods for each of the four scenarios ($M_{other} = 32.43$, $SD_{other} = 22.23$). Lower scores indicated greater self-superiority, implying that others are more likely than the self to engage in behaviors that would negatively impact others' experiences ($M = -3.29$, $SD = 18.45$). Participants last completed demographic measures of where they were born, where they live or have lived, as well as their age and gender. A post-hoc sensitivity analysis for a one-group linear, bivariate regression analysis investigating the size of the slope ($\alpha = .05$) indicated we had 80% to detect slopes for trait descriptions as small as, for each of these predictors: $b_{indiv} = .006$, $b_{mas} = .019$, $b_{power_dist} = .010$, $b_{unc_avoid} = .010$, $b_{LTO} = .007$, $b_{indul} = .008$. We had 80% to detect slopes for behavioral predictions as small as, for each of these predictors: $b_{indiv} = .07$, $b_{mas} = .24$, $b_{power_dis} = .12$, $b_{unc_avoid} = .14$, $b_{LTO} = .09$, $b_{indul} = .106$.

Results

i. Preliminary Analyses

Closeness to the selected comparison other did not relate to Individualism, $r(417) = -.03$, $p = .55$, Masculinity, $r(417) = .005$, $p = .92$, Power Distance, $r(417) = .08$, $p = .11$, Uncertainty Avoidance, $r(417) = -.03$, $p = .54$., Long Term Orientation, $r(409) = -.04$, $p = .43$, or Indulgence, $r(408) = .01$, $p = .81$.

ii. Collinearity

We probed for collinearity when all cultural value indices were included in the model as simultaneous predictors. We found evidence of it: Individualism (VIF = 5.49), Power Distance (VIF = 4.70), Indulgence (VIF = 2.93), Long Term Orientation (VIF = 2.71), Masculinity (VIF = 1.39), and Uncertainty Avoidance (VIF = 1.25). As a result, we opted to run stepwise regressions to consider which set of explanatory variables best predicted self-superiority.

iii. Self-Superiority in Trait Ratings

We ran a stepwise multiple regression predicting the self-superiority score in individualistic traits from the Individualism, Masculinity, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence indices. We also included the collec-

tivist self-superiority score to adjust for general tendencies to describe the self as possessing more of any trait than ascribed to another. Parents' Individualism and interdependent self-superiority scores predicted individualistic self-superiority in trait ascriptions, $R^2 = .06$, $F(2,405) = 13.374$, $p < .001$. There was an effect of collectivist self-superiority, suggesting that there is a tendency for some people to ascribe more traits to themselves than others, regardless of the cultural value relevance of those traits, $b = .23$, $t(405) = 4.52$, $p < .001$. Controlling for this general tendency to ascribe more traits to the self than others, parental Individualism predicted the individualistic trait self-superiority score, $b = .005$, $t(405) = 2.17$, $p = .03$. Excluded from the model was parents' Masculinity, $b = -.09$, $t(405) = -1.78$, $p = .076$, Power Distance, $b = -.048$, $t(405) = -0.51$, $p = .61$, Uncertainty Avoidance, $b = .019$, $t(405) = -0.376$, $p = .707$, Long Term Orientation, $b = .034$, $t(405) = 0.537$, $p = .591$, and Indulgence, $b = .01$, $t(405) = 0.159$, $p = .874$.

We ran a second stepwise multiple regression predicting the collectivist trait self-superiority score from the Individualism, Masculinity, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence indices. We also included the individualistic self-superiority score to adjust for general tendencies to describe the self as possessing more of any trait than ascribed to another. Individualistic self-superiority was the only predictor of interdependent self-superiority, $R^2 = .05$, $b = .21$, $t(406) = 4.67$, $p < .001$. Again, this effect suggests a general tendency to ascribe more traits to the self than others regardless of the cultural value of those traits. Excluded from the model was parents' Individualism, $b = .046$, $t(406) = 0.948$, $p = .344$, Masculinity, $b = .011$, $t(406) = 0.237$, $p = .813$, Power Distance, $b = -.049$, $t(406) = -1.003$, $p = .317$, Uncertainty Avoidance, $b = .091$, $t(406) = 1.896$, $p = .059$, Long Term Orientation, $b = -.044$, $t(406) = -0.903$, $p = .367$, and Indulgence, $b = .035$, $t(406) = 0.717$, $p = .474$. While Individualism did predict self-superiority on independent traits, it did not predict the tendency to self-enhance on interdependent traits.

iv. Behavior Predictions

We ran a stepwise multiple regression predicting the behavioral self-superiority score from the Individualism, Masculinity, Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long Term Orientation, and Indulgence indices. Parents' Individualism was the only significant predictor of independent behavior self-superiority, $R^2 = .014$, $b = -.07$, $t(389) = 2.32$, $p = .021$. Excluded from the model was parents' Masculinity, $b = -.059$, $t(389) = -1.115$, $p = .266$, Power Distance, $b = .005$, $t(389) = 0.048$, $p = .962$, Uncertainty Avoidance, $b = -.055$, $t(389) = -1.071$, $p = .285$, Long Term Orientation, $b = .061$, $t(389) = 0.931$, $p = .352$, and Indulgence, $b = -.035$, $t(389) = -0.558$, $p = .577$.

General Discussion

Societies, nations, and communities promote different sets of values that trickle down to individual-level endorsements passed down through parents. We tested whether nation-level indices of Individualism and Masculinity related to individual differenc-

es in the tendency to describe the self as superior to others. Nation-level indices of Individualism related to stronger tendencies for participants to predict that others would engage in unhelpful actions (Study 1) that could negatively impact the experiences of others (Study 4) more often than would the self. Similarly, Individualism related to stronger tendencies to claim that oneself would be more likely to engage in more moral behaviors than others (Studies 3). Further, Individualism related to stronger tendencies to expect the self to outperform others on an objective test of knowledge (Study 2). Self-superiority effects emerged when the target of comparison was a generalized group (Studies 1, 2) and a specified, single person whom participants knew well (Studies 3, 4). Finally, Individualism predicted stronger self-superiority on traits considered desirable in individualistic but not collectivist cultures (Study 4). This evidence converges to support the conclusion that cultural indices of Individualism, reflecting societal level valuation of personal success relative to others' success, leads to increased individual level self-superiority effects, specifically because of increased and possibly erroneous positivity in conceptions of the self.

While in Studies 2-4, Masculinity did not relate to self-superiority scores, we found that unexpectedly in Study 1, Masculinity was negatively correlated with self-superiority. Masculine cultural backgrounds seemed to be related to an attenuation of self-other differences in this study. We speculate that the relationship between Masculinity and an attenuation of self-superiority emerged because these particular hypothetical scenarios involved one's own responses to others requiring assistance. Masculine cultures, which promote ego-oriented behaviors, may allow a person to act in more self-oriented ways without moral overtones. That is, in masculine cultures, assisting others may not be a domain in which one would be able to enhance the self. As a result, Masculinity may relate to an attenuation of self-other differences only because the self-enhancing nature of the domain in question changes. However, we note that we did not replicate this effect in Study 4. Thus, we are unable to make strong conclusions about the role of nation-level indices of masculinity on self-superiority effects.

Modesty

Our studies may seem in one sense to contradict intuition and research on the effect of modesty. Modesty is a value that manifests in portrayal of the self as "just right" [58]. A modest self-portrayal is one where the self varies little from the norm. Cultures that value modesty more strongly do in fact seem to show different patterns of social judgment than cultures that value modesty less strongly. For example, people from Singapore reported a stronger inclination towards modesty, compared to urban Israelis; people from Singapore also demonstrated reduced self-superiority effects, relative to urban Israelis when estimating their own and others' academic standing [59]. If the cultural index of Masculinity serves as a proxy for modesty, why did Masculinity only relate to self-superiority in Study 1 and do so in unexpected ways?

One obvious possibility is that Masculinity does not in fact index the cultural value of modesty. It is also possible that it does, but that situational contexts shift the way in which the value of modesty is expressed through self and social judgments. Indeed, the public or private nature of the evaluative settings can influence the prevalence of self-superiority effects. In public, people acknowledge others' contributions to their own personal success [60] and group achievements [61]. In public, people also attenuate the positivity of self-descriptions [62]. In private, however, these modest self-descriptions reverse. People instead emphasize their own contributions to a group project and to their personal successes. They privately flatter themselves when describing their characteristics and the merit of their accomplishments. This public-private distinction is also prevalent in Eastern culture: although modesty prevails in public transactions, self-superiority surfaces in private settings [63-65]. In order to understand the impact of modesty, future research should conduct multi-nation studies exploring both self and social judgments, manipulating the rationale for the evaluation, changing the public or private nature of evaluative settings, or measuring feelings of privacy.

Implications

Participants from less individualistic cultural backgrounds were less likely to claim superiority over others. We do not, however, take this to imply that some countries value being a "good person" any less. The desire to regard the self as good, capable, and successful is universal. Positive self-regard is one universal defense mechanism against feelings of existential terror [66] and serves to buffer against emotional and behavioral problems [67]. Self-enhancing tendencies are negatively associated with depression and positively associated with self-esteem and life satisfaction among Easterners [9,68], although to a lesser degree than they are for Westerners [20,69]. Given the psychological and health-related benefits of positive self-regard, it seems likely that all people, regardless of individualist background, are actively engaged in information seeking, evaluation, and prediction processes in light of their culturally specific motivational pressures—be them to see the self as unique or to adhere to and fit in with social custom.

The difference then among people from varying cultural backgrounds is how one comes to understand the self as a good person. To be a good person in an individualist culture implies expressing favorable attributes and standing out from the crowd, while being a good person in a collectivist culture implies adjusting to social contexts and changing the self so as to fit in with one's group. Thus, when individualists describe themselves as distinct from and superior to others, their behavior aligns with culturally-prescribed values. When collectivists describe themselves as similar to others, their behavior also aligns with culturally-prescribed values. Although the self-superiority effect appears attenuated in individuals with parents from less individualistic countries, we caution against the conclusion that people from these countries are any less motivated to feel good about themselves, to feel proud, or to maintain high self-esteem.

Interestingly, we found that Individualism did not predict self-superiority on interdependent traits. However, other work, for instance, found that Japanese respondents did in fact evidence self-superiority when the attributes reflected collectivistic values [22]. One reason for our divergent findings is that self-enhancing on interdependent traits would violate the collectivistic motivation of an external frame of reference. People with collectivistic backgrounds value social environmental cues and strive to present a normative self [55]. This value can be reflected and evinced by stronger similarity between ratings of the self and other on traits valued in interdependent cultures; increased similarity would serve to maintain the social structure of their culture. Simultaneously, people with individualistic backgrounds would not find their goals met by differentiating themselves from others on traits not valued strongly by their culture. The motive towards similarity in self and social judgment on interdependent traits by individuals from collectivist cultures and the lack of motive to differentiate the self from others on these traits by individuals from independent cultures could explain why Hofstede's value of Individualism failed to predict self-superiority effects on interdependent traits.

Other National Value Indices

We chose to operationalize cultural values through Hofstede's dimensions. Hofstede ranked countries according to values relevant to social domains calling for prosocial behavior, morality, and personal abilities—those very domains in which we asked participants to make judgments about themselves and others. We recognize the controversy around Hofstede's values, specifically debating their reliability and validity over time [57]. A meta-analysis of over 450 empirical studies suggests the correlations between decades for Hofstede's four primary dimensions is diminishing over time. The correlations are strongest in the 1980's and get considerably weaker with each decade [70]. However, a shift in magnitude like this only poses complications to our analysis if the such shifts disproportionately impact some countries over others. Evidence suggests they do not; an investigation compared Hofstede's original sample values to values gathered 30 years later [71]. Though worldwide Individualism and Indulgence increased, and Power Distance decreased, the countries' relative scores, marking the general rank order of one country compared to another, did not change between the two cohorts.

Other research has sought to identify the values that govern social judgment, complimenting and expanding beyond the foundational investigations Hofstede proposed. For instance, the World Values Survey [72,73] used market research agencies to survey adult populations across 81 countries, assessing work motivations, democracy, governance, political participation, and environmental concerns among other beliefs. The Survey of Values [74] sampled students in 54 countries and elementary school teachers in 56 countries to assess beliefs regarding organizational hierarchy, egalitarianism, world harmony, and unity, among other values [75]. Similarly, the Global Leadership and Organization-

al Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) research program ranked 62 countries or regions by surveying middle-level managers in telecommunications, finance, and food processing about workplace practices [76]. The GLOBE project focused on values important for international business, organizational practices, and leadership and included components indexing the centralized or distributed nature of power and a reliance on tradition to alleviate the unpredictability of future events, which hold similarities to Hofstede's Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance dimensions. Future research might empirically test the predictive ability of each dimension of these varied global value surveys across domains, including those relevant to trait ascriptions and moral behavior predictions as we have measured, and organizational dynamics and others in which some of these indices have been established.

Conclusion

Why do many people believe themselves to be better than others? This research suggests that one cause of these self-superiority effects within individual-level behavior may be cultural differences in the valuation of individualism that stem from the cultural values shared within families. While this evidence supports a well-established literature, though embroiled in debate, the purpose of this work was to move beyond the idiosyncratic selection of discrete nations to represent the values of many. When researchers elect singular, selected countries to represent a particular fundamental guiding societal value, they risk overgeneralization. They may speak for too many after sampling too few.

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