What Is the Relation Between Culture and Desirable Responding?
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EXTENDED ABSTRACT - The literature in cross-cultural psychology suggests that collectivists are more likely to engage in deception in order to save face and maintain harmonious relationships with others. In contrast, individualists are portrayed as candid and sincere because individualism encourages people to be yourself. For example, Trilling (1972) argues that people in individualist cultures are more likely to seek sincerity and authenticity, whereas people in collectivist cultures de-emphasize authenticity. Similarly, Triandis (1995) proposes that honesty in interactions with strangers is a characteristic that is more highly valued by individualists than collectivists.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

The literature in cross-cultural psychology suggests that collectivists are more likely to engage in deception in order to save face and maintain harmonious relationships with others. In contrast, individualists are portrayed as candid and sincere because individualism encourages people to “be yourself.” For example, Trilling (1972) argues that people in individualist cultures are more likely to seek sincerity and authenticity, whereas people in collectivist cultures de-emphasize authenticity. Similarly, Triandis (1995) proposes that honesty in interactions with strangers is a characteristic that is more highly valued by individualists than collectivists.

We argue that people with both types of cultural orientations engage in desirable responding, albeit in distinct ways. Given that individualists exhibit considerable biases in the form of possessing overly positive and unrealistic views of the self, enhancing the positivity of the self-view, and actively seeking information that maintains that inflated self-view (Diener, Diener and Diener, 1996; Heine and Lehman, 1995; Heine, Lehman, Markus and Kitayama, 1999; Taylor and Brown, 1988), we argue that individualists are likely to exhibit self-deceptive enhancement, the tendency to see oneself in a positive light and to give inflated assessment of one’s skills and abilities.

On the other hand, given that collectivists are more likely to engage in deception (e.g., Triandis and Suh 2002; Trilling 1972), which in turn has been linked to impression-management motives (e.g., Jacobson, Berger & Millham, 1970; Kashy & DePaulo, 1996; Sengupta, Dahl & Gorn, 2002), we argue that collectivists are more likely to answer dishonestly in order to present themselves in a socially desirable manner.

Data were collected by administering questionnaires to an ethnically diverse sample of adults residing outside the campus of a major metropolitan area (study 1), and students attending a large Midwestern University (studies 2 and 3). In general, the results supported the above propositions. Findings also indicated that the horizontal dimension of both individualism and collectivism accounts for these relationships. Furthermore, the tendency of collectivists to engage in impression management was mediated by scores measuring their tendency to lie.

Our findings have important implications for researchers using surveys as a method of data collection. As is well known, desirable responding is one of the major causes of response bias and is a major threat to the validity of research findings (Johnson & Van de Vijver, 2002). Our findings suggest that researchers need to account for response bias in data collected across different cultures.

Further, the results of this study likely have important implications for various domains of consumer behavior. For example, our findings suggest that people with collectivistic cultural orientations would be more prone to overstating consumption of goods that help them maintain face or enhance their social standing, such as branded or expensive products. Collectivists may also understate their consumption of undesirable products like cigarettes and alcohol. Similarly, our findings suggest that people with an individualistic orientation and more particularly with a horizontal individualistic orientation may be more likely to exaggerate their skills and prowess in various matters (e.g., financial decision making, consumer judgments, and the like).

References