

Cultural Differences in the Better-Than-Average Effect
for Easy and Difficult Skills

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Abstract

Japanese and American college students rated themselves compared with their peers in terms of their ability to perform various skills. There were four easy skills for which people generally judge themselves to be better than their peers (the better-than-average effect) and four difficult skills for which people generally judge themselves to be worse than their peers (the worse-than-average effect). The American students showed a stronger better-than-average effect for easy skills—consistent with previous research—but they also showed a stronger worse-than-average effect for difficult skills. The latter result, in particular, seems inconsistent with the idea that Americans are more strongly motivated to be better than their peers. It is consistent, however, with an explanation based on cognitive egocentrism. Both the American and Japanese students thought more about their own abilities than about their peers' abilities, leading them to judge themselves as more extreme than their peers. But this tendency was stronger among the American students.