

Independent thinkers judge distances differently than holistic types

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Every day we're faced with decisions that involve spatial judgments. Which line should we choose at the supermarket? Which route should we take to work? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* shows that thinking styles affect spatial judgment.

Authors Aradhna Krishna (University of Michigan), Rongrong Zhou (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology), and Shi Zhang (UCLA), designed a series of experiments that tested participants to assess their thinking styles. The participants, who lived in China, Hong Kong, and the United States, fell into two categories: independent thinkers (self-focused) and interdependent (relationship-focused).

The researchers found significant differences between Western and Eastern participants. "The independent self-construal is more dominant in Western cultures, where people believe in the inherent separateness of distinct persons and view the self as a autonomous, independent person," write the authors. "The interdependent self-construal is more dominant in Eastern cultures, where people believe in the connectedness of human beings to each other and view the self as part of a larger social group."

They tested participants' ability to judge spatial distances. One experiment asked participants to imagine they were going to a football stadium to buy tickets. They were given a map showing two lines, one straight and one looped, and to estimate the number of dots in each line. The study found that independent thinkers are more likely to misjudge distance when they need to take multiple features into account (like how

winding a road is). Interdependent thinkers are less likely to make distance errors but more prone to other kinds of spatial errors (such as when intersecting lines on a map make one side of the line appear longer than the other).

"Our data indicate that individuals with an independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal are more likely to pay attention to only the focal aspects of stimuli and to ignore the context and background information in forming spatial judgments, resulting in biases. In contrast, interdependents are capable of going beyond the most salient dimension (e.g., direct distance) and incorporating other information (e.g. line configuration) in their judgments, leading to greater accuracy in these tasks."

Next time you pull out a map, remember that your thinking style may affect your perception.

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