

The Cultural Cognition Quiz

Question Set One. For each question, rank yourself from 1 - 10. 1 means you absolutely disagree. 10 means you absolutely agree. Write your answers down somewhere. When you get to the end of the list you'll need to add them up.

1. The government interferes too much in our everyday lives.
2. Government needs to make laws that keep people from hurting themselves.
3. The government should stop telling people how to live their lives.
4. The government should do more to advance society's goals, even if that means limiting the freedom and choices of individuals.
5. Too many people today expect society to do things for them that they should have to do for themselves.
6. People should be able to rely on the government for help when they need it.
7. Society works best when it lets individuals take responsibility for their own lives without telling them what to do.
8. It's society's responsibility to make sure everyone's basic needs are met.
9. People who are successful in business have a right to enjoy their wealth as they see fit.
10. Taxes should be higher on the wealthy as a fair way of getting them to share the benefits society gives them.

Now add up the answers to the odd-numbered questions, then add up the answers for the even-numbered questions. Write down the totals.

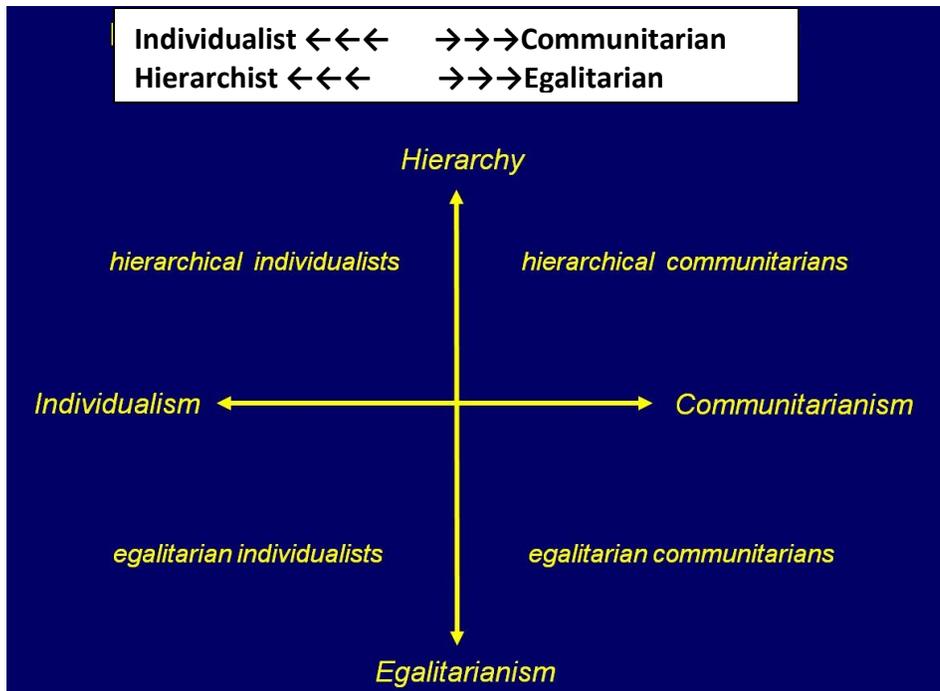
Question Set Two.

1. Our society would be better off if the distribution of wealth was more equal.
2. Nowadays it seems like there is just as much discrimination against whites as there is against blacks.
3. We need to dramatically reduce inequalities between the rich and the poor, whites and people of color, and men and women.
4. It seems like blacks, women, homosexuals and other groups don't want equal rights, they want special rights just for them.
5. It's old-fashioned and wrong to think that one culture's set of values is better than any other culture's way of seeing the world.
6. The women's rights movement has gone too far.
7. We live in a sexist society that that is fundamentally set up to discriminate against women.
8. A lot of problems in our society today come from the decline in the traditional family, where the man works and the woman stays home.
9. Parents should encourage young boys to be more sensitive and less rough and tough.
10. Society as a whole has become too soft.

Same exercise for Question Set Two. Add up the odd-numbered answers, and the even-numbered ones. Write down the totals.

[Cultural Cognition research](#) has found that the positions we take on many things have less to do with the facts we cite to support those positions, and much more to do with our subconscious general sense of how we'd like to see society organized and operate. This makes sense in the context of evolutionary psychology, since as social animals we depend on the tribe for our own health and well-being. So it increases our chances of survival to adopt positions that agree with the group/tribe, since that strengthens our tribe's dominance in society, and our tribe's acceptance of us as a member in good standing.

Cultural Cognition identifies our views about society and how it should operate, along two continuums:



In Quiz One, if your answers to the odd-numbered questions were higher, you are more of an **Individualist**, which means you prefer a society that mostly leaves the individual alone. "The Tea Party", or "Libertarian"... those are just labels for people who support an individualist "society should mostly leave the individual alone" worldview.

If the sum of your answers to the even-numbered questions in Quiz One was higher, you're a **Communitarian** and you believe more in a "we're all in this together" society where the collective is more involved in determining how things go.

Communitarians are more likely to believe in the threat of climate change, because solutions to climate change would enhance the kind of 'we're all in this together" society they prefer.

Quiz Two identifies us along the second continuum, on which we are either more Hierarchists or more Egalitarians. If the sum of your answers to the even-numbered questions in Quiz Two was higher, you're more of a **Hierarchist**. You prefer a society with fixed class and race and economic divisions, the status quo, and the old reliable way of doing things. You're big on predictability and stability.

But if the sum of your answers to the odd-numbered questions in Quiz Two was higher you are more of an **Egalitarian**. You bristle at the restrictions of class and hierarchy that the status quo and the old fixed ways of doing things impose. You want a more flexible society.

(For both quizzes, the bigger the gap between the sums, the stronger you identify with that worldview and the more intensely you probably hold your positions. The closer together the two sums are, the more you fall in the middle, and the more flexible you probably are on many issues.)

We label ourselves Republicans or Democrats, Conservatives or Liberals, and we argue our selective view of the evidence on any of the divisive issues of the day as though our truth is the only possible truth. But our minds are not always informed by the evidence. They are often closed by the deep drive to conform our views to those with whom we identify, in the name of the safety which tribal unity provides. In uncertain and threatening times, this Cultural Cognition only grows more fierce.

We'd do well to learn what Cultural Cognition teaches us, and use that knowledge to temper its influence on our own views, while summoning up some respect for the underlying Cultural Cognition influences that contribute to the views of those with whom we disagree.

Source: David Ropeik is an Instructor at Harvard University, author, and a consultant on risk perception, risk communication, and risk management. He is a former Instructor of risk communication at the Harvard School of Public Health.
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