



COSTAIN

Making the change stick – don't be too **WEIRD**

Maddy Sears, P3M Consultant, Costain

Improving people's lives.

The weirdest people in the world?

Joseph Henrich, Steven J Heine, Ara Norenzayan
Behav Brain Sci. 2010 Jun

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Western
Educated
Industrialised
Rich
Democratic

**makes up 12% of world's population*

Top journals from six
disciplines of
Psychology
(2003-2007)

68%

of subjects from the USA

96%

of subjects from WEIRD
societies

Premier journal of
social psychology
(*Journal of Personality
and Social Psychology*)

67%

of subjects from USA
were Psychology
undergraduates

So what?

Not an issue if...

- Researchers confined their interpretations to the populations they sampled
- Evidence demonstrates little variability between populations, or if sample was near centre of human distribution

But...

- Evidence suggests that Western (mainly American) Educated, Industrialised, Rich, Democratic participants are not “average” when it comes to some fundamental cognitive and behavioural factors
- Looked at domains assumed to be psychological universals
- Questions current ability to distinguish reliable aspects of cognition and behaviour to those impacted by development, culture, environment

**Industrialised vs.
Small scale**

**Western vs.
Non-Western**

**USA vs.
Rest of the World**

**Contemporary USA
vs. Historical USA**

1



5



2



6



3



7



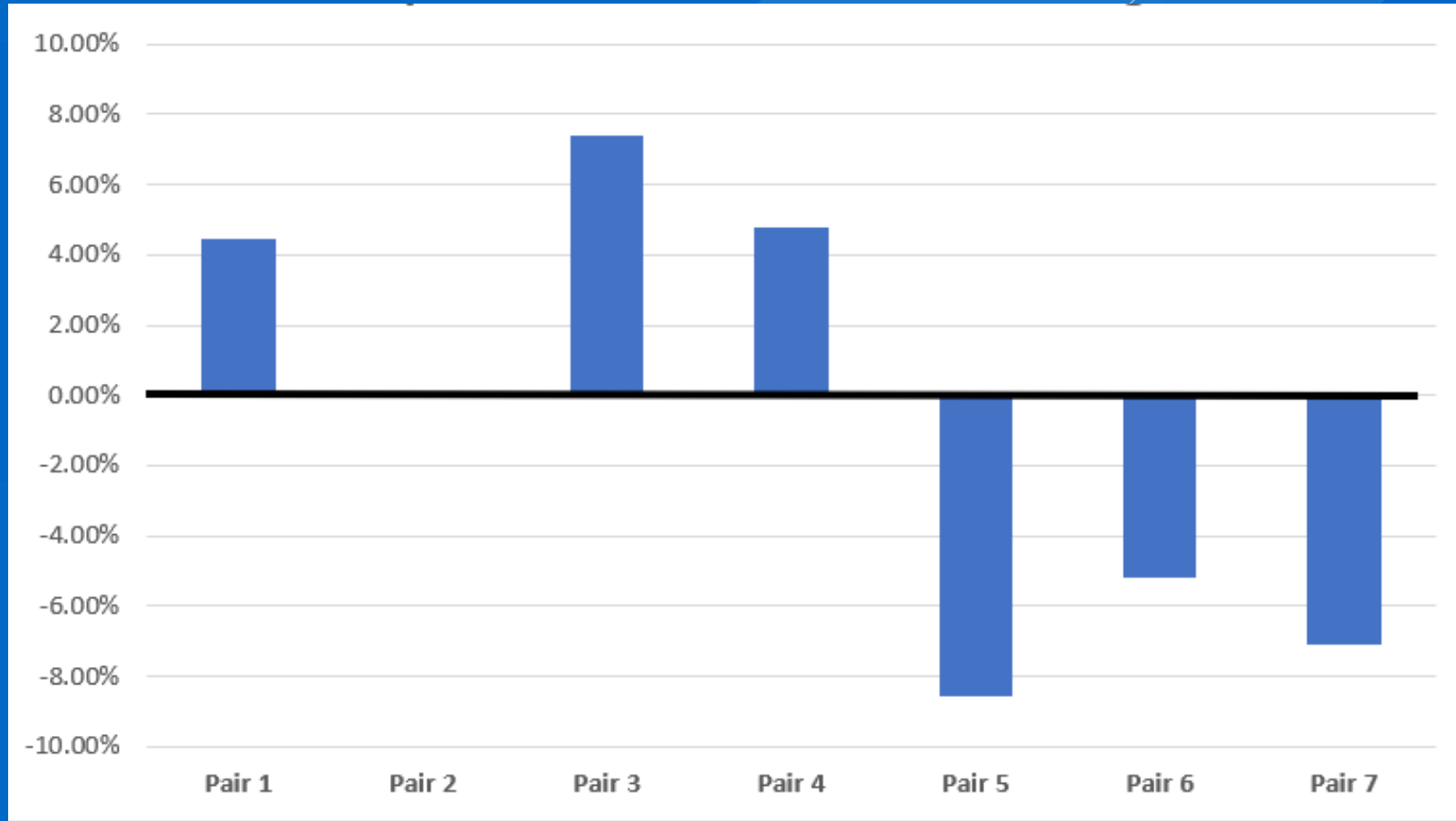
4



Which pair of lines are the same length?

Which pair of lines are the same length?

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Susceptibility to visual illusions

Muller – Lyer Illusion test

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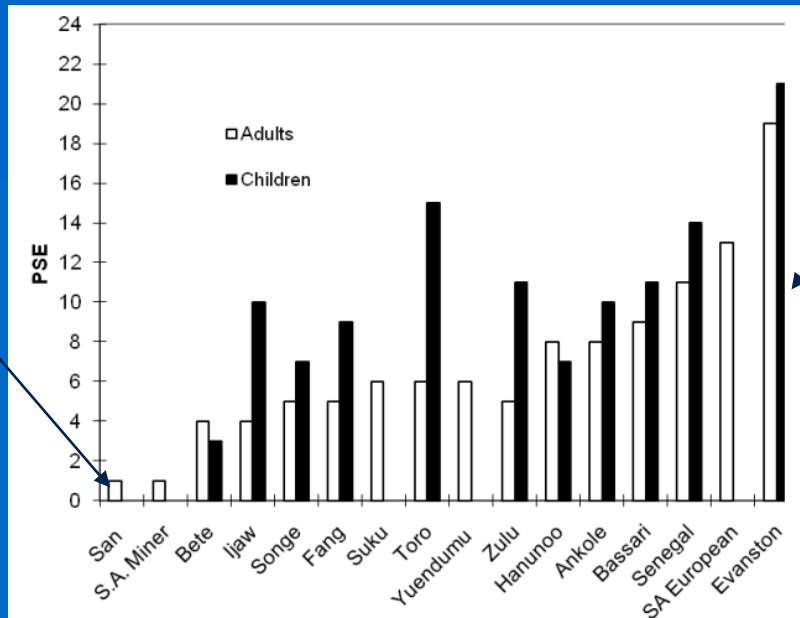
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Point of subject equality (PSE) – amount that first segment must be longer than b before two segments judged as equal.

PSE judges **strength of illusion**

San
foragers of
the Kalahari



American
undergraduates
and children

- Visual exposure during development to modern environments may favour certain optical illusions
- Visual system adapts to the presence of recurrent features in the local visual environment

Anti-social punishment and cooperation

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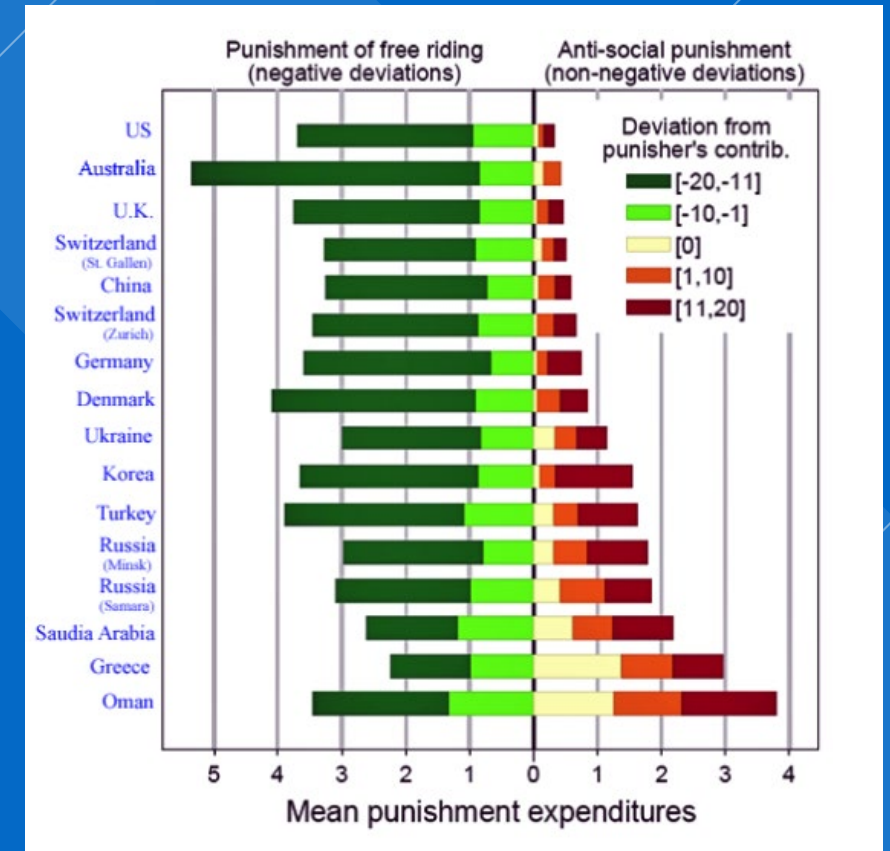
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Previous studies (WEIRD) showed adding possibility of punishment to a cooperative dilemma altered outcome

i.e. subjects willing to punish uncooperative participants at a cost to themselves to shift balance from free-riding to cooperation

Second study looked at different industrialised samples.

- Difference in initial willingness to cooperate
- New phenomenon in half of samples not seen in first study - subjects engaged in anti-social punishments (paid to reduce the earnings of overly co-operative individuals)



Independent and Interdependent self-concepts

- Self-concepts organise information people have about themselves
- Significant consequences for a variety of emotions, cognitions and motivations.
- Numerous studies show Western populations are far more likely to understand their selves in terms of internal psychological characteristics (e.g. personality traits) less likely to understand them in terms of roles and relationships

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Independent

Self-contained individuals

Interdependent

Interpersonal beings intertwined with one another in social webs



People with **independent** self-concepts are more likely to demonstrate

Positively biased
views of themselves

Heightened valuation of
Personal choice

Increased motivation to
Stand out
rather than fit in

Terror Management Theory

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- Concept first introduced by Becker (1973) – human ability to grasp inevitability of death resulting in building and believing cultural elements to build self esteem and give life significance and meaning
- Mortality Salience (MS) hypothesis suggests threatening ones cultural world view will produce defences aimed at restoring psychology state of invulnerability
- Meta-analysis by Burke (2010) shows worldview defence was significantly more pronounced in Americans compared to other Western and non-Western samples
- Significant evidence to show Americans are the most individualistic people in the world, have most independent self concepts – suggest would have impact on many psychological processes e.g. demand for increased amount of personal choice



How is this relevant to us?

Understanding the impact of culture and society on individuals, and how we navigate business change

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Look critically about theories or models you may deploy or consider when it comes to behaviour / culture – are they relevant to the population?

You can't influence people's experience – fundamental point of behavioural management – this may impact their cognition (more than you thought?)

Truly diverse workforce = range in cognition. Simple games or illusions can shed light on cognitive diversity, why stay limited to just “traditional” diversity metrics?

Consider the micro-level, impact of culture and society within populations, limited research available but implications that even within populations may be variations in cognition

Thank you



www.linkedin.com/in/maddy-madeleine-sears-04548198/



madeleine.sears@costain.com