The BFI-44 is a 44-item self-report inventory for assessing five personality traits: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (O'Connor, Berry, Weiss, Bush & Sampson, 1997). The IGQ-67 is a 67-item measure that uses Likert scales to assess guilt. It includes four subscales: separations and loved ones (e.g., “I do not deserve other people's respect or admiration”), interpersonal reactance (e.g., “I often find myself doing what someone else wants me to do rather than doing what I would most enjoy”), empathy-based guilt (e.g., “If I make a mistake, I often feel guilty about it”), and moral judgments (e.g., “It makes me very angry when someone does not do what they promise”).

Americans were considered in our analyses due to the limited sample size of the other ethnic groups. We intend to examine other factors (i.e., religion, gender, and age) that may have on the relationship between altruism, empathy, and guilt.

Numerous studies have hypothesized that guilt serves a regulatory function to ensure that one is responsible for the happiness and well being of others (e.g., “I am reluctant to express an opinion that is different from the opinions held by my family or friends”).

The connections between guilt and moral judgments have been the topic of numerous studies. In this study, components of empathy were also included. Consistent with the first study, altruism to family, friends, and loved ones was significantly correlated with empathy-based guilt. However, among Asian Americans, the correlations were not significant while among European Americans, there were no correlations.

Altruism has been hypothesized to be associated with moral judgments, empathy, and personality traits. Our data revealed that altruism to family was significantly correlated with empathy-based guilt in both Asian and European Americans. There was no correlation between guilt and altruism to strangers across all cultures.

Altruism toward strangers is highly correlated to Extraversion and Agreeableness. However, whereas Asian Americans' altruism to strangers is positively correlated with Agreeableness, European American's altruism to strangers is highly correlated with Extraversion and Agreeableness. In Study 2, we added an empathy measure, which we did not use in Study 1. The results of the measure appear to support our findings of differences among Asian Americans and European Americans. In particular, Asian Americans reported a higher level of empathy toward strangers than European Americans. These results suggest that Asian Americans’ proneness to empathy-based guilt is positively correlated between Openness and altruism to strangers. However, whereas Asian Americans’ altruism to strangers is positively correlated to Openness, European American’s altruism to strangers is negatively correlated to Openness.

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