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The Geography of Sport: Evidence for the Domain-Specificity of Cultural Mindsets.

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Abstract

Sports are a microcosm of society. A nation's sports reflect its people's values, and contribute to their social identity. Here we investigated whether countries previously identified as individualistic versus collectivistic tend to excel in individual sports versus team sports, respectively. Individual sports like golf require athletes to focus on personal goals, whereas team sports like hockey require players to cooperate and to focus on collective goals. We analyzed the rate of Olympic medals won in individual versus team sports by 11 countries: 5 Western countries identified previously by sociological and psychological research as individualistic, and 6 East Asian or Eastern European countries identified as collectivistic. Paradoxically, results showed that individualistic countries won a greater proportion of medals in team sports, whereas collectivistic countries won more medals in individual sports. Findings support the view that cultural mindsets and value orientations are domain-specific, not monolithic.