

THE RELATION BETWEEN SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION AND COLLECTIVE ACTION IN INDIVIDUALISTIC VERSUS COLLECTIVISTIC EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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The present study examined the moderation of individualism-collectivism on the (negative) relation between system justification and collective action in a representative sample of the European population, using data from the European Social Survey Round 9 (2018). Because collectivism (vs. individualism) emphasizes the relevance of one's group and its goals, but it also binds individuals to their broader system, we formulate the competing predictions that the negative relation between system justification and collective action may be weaker, or oppositely stronger, in collectivistic (vs. individualistic) countries. Results from a multilevel analysis revealed a cross-level interaction between system justification and individualism-collectivism confirming the negative relation between system justification and collective action in individualistic, but not collectivistic, countries. This study suggests that the strength of the negative relation between system justification and collective action differs across individualistic and collectivistic cultures: collectivistic (vs. individualistic) cultures dampen the system justification–collective action negative link.

Keywords: Culture; Individualism-collectivism; System justification; Collective action; Multilevel analysis.

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Across the globe, individuals differ in the relevance they give to values, defined as psychological priorities and benchmarks (Schwartz, 1994). Some individuals hold values of autonomy and independence, are concerned with pursuing individualistic goals, and construe their identity independent of others. Other individuals instead place value in interdependence, emphasize the importance of social harmony, and define themselves in terms of group members (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). Such differences in values about social relationships reflect, at a broader level, different cultural orientations (i.e., individualism and collectivism respectively) which may vary depending on contexts and populations (Oyserman et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2013), which makes it possible to identify some (national) cultures as more individualistic (e.g., the Netherlands) or more collectivistic (e.g., Italy). This can have intriguing consequences at a political level: For example, a recent meta-analysis showed that collectivism constrained the positive relationship between *group identification* and collective action (e.g., social protest; Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021; see also Van Zomeren et al., 2016). The presumed reason for this is that, in collectivistic contexts,

individuals value not only their group but also the broader system more, the latter of which reflects a potential constraint on their motivation to protest.

Extending this line of thought, the current study aimed to examine whether collectivism also affects the relationship between *system justification* and collective action. Previous research has shown that system justification, defined as the tendency to legitimize and defend societal systems (Jost & Banaji, 1994), has a detrimental effect on collective action, so that individuals who endorse stronger system-justifying beliefs are less likely to engage in collective action (unless it is aimed to protect the system; Osborne et al., 2019). This negative relation between system justification and collective action was replicated in Agostini and Van Zomeren's (2021) meta-analysis, but they did not test the potential moderating role of collectivism. However, as different and even opposite hypotheses can be generated regarding this role, we wanted to examine this in this study.

Specifically, as collectivism emphasizes interdependence and group loyalty (rather than independence, autonomy, and personal accomplishment; Hofstede, 1991), collectivism may promote motivations for collective action, and hence constrain the system justification demotivation. Unlike individualism, collectivism prioritizes the psychological relevance of one's group and its goals (Oyserman et al., 2002), which may sit well with collective action participation. Starting from the assumption that people from whom group identity is more relevant are more likely to engage in collective action (e.g., Ellemers, 1993; Kelly & Breinlinger, 1996; Klandermans, 1997; Sturmer & Simon, 2004), Van Zomeren, Spears, and Leach (2008) proposed that psychological relevance of group identity facilitates collective action engagement by implying group identification (as a more chronic factor; Ellemers et al., 1999) or group identity salience (as a more contextual factor; Turner et al., 1987). According to the authors, psychological relevance of group identity leads people to focus more on group concerns. As a result, when group identity is more relevant, people are more likely to engage in collective action, as any action that people engage in on behalf of the group (Van Zomeren, 2016b). Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that collectivism, which emphasizes relevance of the group and its goals, facilitates collective action engagement. It follows that the negative relation between system justification and collective action may be weaker in more collectivistic cultures. At the same time, however, collectivism may reduce collective action because the group and the system may be closely embedded in such contexts (Oyserman et al., 2002; Van Zomeren et al., 2016), and hence it should afford the system justification demotivation because individuals also need to defend values such as order, tradition, and self-restriction (Hofstede, 1991). Thus, the negative relation between system justification and collective action may be stronger in more collectivistic cultures.

In examining these competing predictions, this study directly helps us to understand how culture, which can be viewed as the background of shared ideas of what is valid and valuable in the world (Smith et al., 2013), serves to define priorities of individuals and collectives. As such, our study provides novel insights into cross-cultural variance in the negative relation between system justification and collective action (see Van Zomeren, 2019; Van Zomeren & Louis, 2017). Our line of thought underlines the idea that the justification of current societal systems may be not equally relevant for individuals in individualistic and collectivistic cultures so that system justification may be negatively related to collective action when some cultural values (individualistic or collectivistic) are prioritized relative to others.

THE NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SYSTEM JUSTIFICATION AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

System justification is regarded as the tendency to see the extant status quo as relatively fair and to legitimate existing social, economic, and political systems and institutions (Jost & Banaji, 1994). Past re-

search has suggested that system justification has a central function in undermining collective action participation. The starting point of these approaches is that perceiving the current status quo as fair — or the most representative of the way things should be — leads to see individuals and social groups as deserving the (unequal) outcomes they receive (Jost & Hunyady, 2005), favoring thus societal stability over change (Major et al., 2002; Schmader et al., 2001). As a result, those who are higher in system justification are less willing to participate in collective action for societal change.

The literature provides evidence in support of this claim. Becker and Wright (2011) have shown that engaging in system justification is negatively associated with intentions to participate in feminist collective action. In a similar vein, De Cristofaro et al. (2021) found that as system justification increases, women (the disadvantaged in that context) are less likely to act collectively against the gender leadership gap in the United States (Study 1), the gender pay gap in the United Kingdom (Study 2), and the gender power imbalance in Italy (Study 3). Jost et al. (2012) confirmed the negative effect of system justification on collective action across different contexts and social groups. Specifically, results of three studies revealed that holding high system-justifying beliefs inhibits collective action among students in the United States (Study 1) and May Day protesters in Greece (Study 2; see also Osborne & Sibley, 2013 for political mobilization), whereas holding low system-justifying beliefs promotes collective action among members of a teachers' union in the United Kingdom (Study 3). As such, system justification may be a key factor in demotivating system-challenging collective action (Jost et al., 2017; Osborne et al., 2019).

However, little is known about whether and how the negative relation between system justification and collective action may vary between individualistic and collectivistic cultural contexts. From Hofstede's (1991) cultural model, individualism and collectivism reflect cross-cultural differences in what individuals recognize as valid and valuable within cultures. Such differences guide individuals' perceptions of and behavioral strategies to deal with group situations they face (Oyserman et al., 2002) and, by extension, their collective action participation on behalf of the group (Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021). We therefore focused on individualism-collectivism as a potential moderator of the system justification–collective action negative link.

THE POTENTIAL MODERATING ROLE OF INDIVIDUALISM-COLLECTIVISM

Individualism-collectivism has been recognized as a meaningful and consequential dimension of cultural variation (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1988; Trubisky et al., 1991). In individualistic cultures, people construe their self in more independent self-ways; each person is viewed as a separate entity that is autonomous and self-contained (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People who hold individualistic values are more self-oriented: they look after themselves, are motivated to maintain positive self-evaluation and personal attributes (Hofstede, 1991). In collectivistic cultures, in contrast, people construe their self in more interdependent self-ways; each person has a sense of collective, rather than individual, identity, and perceives him/herself as part of a comprehensive social relationship (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

These differences in the degree of importance attributed to independence (i.e., individualism) versus interdependence (i.e., collectivism) become manifested in the relation between the individual and the collective (Chiu et al., 2011; see Realo et al., 2002 for a review) and, by implications, in the degree of willingness to engage in collective action. On the one hand, because of their tendency toward interdependent self-construal and their motivation to fit in the group (Hofstede, 1991), people in collectivistic cultures may be more willing to act collectively compared to people in individualistic cultures. Collectivism obligates individuals into groups and emphasizes the relevance of one's group and its goals to individuals (Oyserman

et al., 2002); it may be thus more conducive to collective action. We specifically propose that collectivism may constrain the system justification demotivation. Indeed, if collectivistic cultures prioritize interdependence and loyalty to one's group and its goals, then the system justification tendency to legitimate the system, including group-based inequality, may be less psychologically relevant and, in turn, collective action may be more likely to occur.

On the other hand, collectivism's emphasis on self-restriction as well as on the maintenance of social order and tradition (Hofstede, 1991) may not fit well with engaging in collective action. Bond and Smith (1996) demonstrated that people in collectivistic cultures are more inclined to conform compared to people in individualistic cultures. Given its emphasis on the self as interdependent with the group, collectivism evaluates positively the concept of conformity, which is associated with social harmony and cohesiveness. Conversely, concepts of uniqueness and autonomy, characterizing individualism, are perceived negatively as forms of deviance (Kim & Markus, 1999). Thus, it could be expected that collectivism may be less conducive to collective action. Specifically, collectivism may afford system justification demotivation because it also binds individuals to the broader system that affect them (Oyserman et al., 2002). This sense of connectedness to the system may strengthen the system justification tendency to see the (unequal) system as fair and legitimate and, in turn, collective action may be unlikely to occur.

We test these competing predictions that the negative relation between system justification and collective action may be stronger in collectivistic or individualistic cultures on a representative sample of the European population, using data from the European Social Survey Round 9 (2018). The European Social Survey is currently recognized as one of the highest quality cross-European surveys, which is designed to provide both individual-level and country-level data and is therefore ideal for cross-national analyses. We chose this dataset because a primary goal of the European Social Survey is to provide data for quantifying differences across the populations of different European countries, and thus it best serves our purpose and fits with our methodological approach. Also, using a representative sample increases confidence about the generalizability of the results.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Participants

This study consisted of a representative sample of the European population who participated in the European Social Survey (ESS; Round 9, 2018). The sample population was composed of 46,402 participants, 53.8% female and 46.2% male, aged 15-90 years ($M = 51.45$, $SD = 18.43$) from 27 countries of the European Union. The educational level was measured through the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). Among the sample, the educational level was distributed as follows: 1.1% had not completed ISCED 1, 6.6% had completed primary education (ISCED 1), 16.4% had completed lower secondary education (ISCED 2), 39.8% had completed upper secondary education (ISCED 3), 6.1% had completed post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4), 6.2% had completed short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED 5), 10.7% had a bachelor's degree (ISCED 6), 11.8% had a master's degree (ISCED 7), and the remaining 1% had higher-level qualifications (ISCED 8). For the household's income, responses were given in deciles: 10.1% was from the 1st decile (the lower decile), 11.4% was from the 2nd decile, 11.2% was from the 3rd decile, 11.2% was from the 4th decile, 10.7% was from the 5th and 10.2% was from the 6th decile, 10% was from the 7th decile, 9.6% was from the 8th decile, 8.1% was from the 9th decile, and 7.6%

was from the 10th decile (the upper decile). Finally, political orientation ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 2.26$) was measured by an item: “In politics people sometimes talk of ‘left’ and ‘right’. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?.” Because people’s gender, age, educational level, income, and political orientation could be related to their collective action participation (e.g., De Cristofaro et al., 2019; Lubell et al., 2007), we tested our predictions including these variables as covariates. The inclusion of these covariates in the analysis model enabled us to test the robustness of the results.

Measures

System Justification. System justification was measured through four items: “Society is fair when people from families with high social status enjoy privileges,” “By and large, people get what they deserve,” “I am confident that justice always prevails over injustice,” and “I am convinced that in the long run people are compensated for injustices.” Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with these items on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A composite system justification score was computed by averaging the responses to each item ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 0.75$, $\alpha = .67$), with high values indicating higher system-justifying beliefs.

Individualism-Collectivism. We operationalized individualism-collectivism, following previous research employing the ESS data (Beilmann et al., 2018; Verkasalo et al., 2009), as Schwartz’s (1994) openness to change-conservation value dimension. Participants indicated the extent to which 10 items reflect their goals and central aspirations in life (Schwartz, 2007) on 6-point scales where 1 = *not at all* and 6 = *very much*. For individualism, the items are: “Important to think new ideas and being creative,” “Important to make own decisions and be free,” “Important to try new and different things in life,” and “Important to seek adventures and have an exciting life.” For collectivism, the items are: “Important to be humble and modest, not draw attention,” “Important to follow traditions and customs,” “Important to live in secure and safe surroundings,” “Important that government is strong and ensures safety,” “Important to do what is told and follow rules,” and “Important to behave properly.” Given the purpose of the present study to investigate whether and how the relation between system justification and collective action may vary across individualistic and collectivistic cultural contexts, we rescaled individualism-collectivism scores of each participant to the average that characterized his/her country of origin (i.e., Level-2 units; cf. Aguinis et al., 2013; Enders & Tofighi, 2007). Thus, all participants within each European country had the same average cultural orientation score.

Collective Action. The measure of collective action was obtained through the following eight items: During the last 12 months, have you “contacted a politician, government or local government official,” “worked in a political party or action group,” “worked in another organization or association,” “worn or displayed a campaign badge or sticker,” “signed a petition,” “taken part in a lawful public demonstration,” “boycotted certain products,” “posted or shared anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as Facebook or Twitter.” Ratings were reported on a dichotomous scale (1 = *no*, 2 = *yes*). We computed a composite collective action index by averaging the responses to each item ($M = 1.13$, $SD = 0.19$), with high values indicating higher collective action participation. Kuder-Richardson’s alpha was .70.

Analytical Strategy and Preliminary Analyses

The present study aimed at investigating the cross-level interactive effect of individualism-collectivism and system justification on collective action. We expected that system justification would be negatively related to collective action, and that this negative relationship would be stronger in individualistic or collectivistic cultural contexts. We investigated these predictions by means of a multilevel model. Multilevel analysis considers the nested structure of data, and their hierarchical order may vary in terms of relevance as a function of the research purposes (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). In our case, we were interested in testing a cross-level interaction where the predictor (i.e., system justification) and criterion (i.e., collective action) were measured at Level 1, while the moderator (individualism-collectivism) was considered at Level 2. Specifically, we were focused on the average fixed effect of system justification on collective action within each Level-2 unit (i.e., 27 European countries), and how it could be moderated by cultural orientation (i.e., individualism-collectivism) of countries. Analysis of fixed effects provided us with relevant — but overarching — understanding about the moderating role of individualism-collectivism. However, we were also interested in exploring how the relation between system justification and collective action was shaped as a function of the peculiar collectivistic (vs. individualistic) cultural orientation of each country. Besides fixed effects, we hence estimated the random slope variability of the system justification effect across the 27 European countries involved in the ESS. Thus, multilevel analysis allowed us to estimate the average within countries relation between system justification and collective action, and how it was moderated by an overarching element (i.e., the average cultural orientation of a country), simultaneously considering the peculiar random variability across countries of such relation.

Prior to proceed with multilevel analysis, we assessed the amount of variance of the dependent variable that was explained by the nested nature of the data (Aguinis et al., 2013). More specifically, we gauged the amount of collective action variability due to the different countries (i.e., intraclass correlation coefficient [ICC]). We thus ran the analysis on the null model to test the variability of collective action across the 27 European countries (i.e., Level-2 units). We found an ICC of .11, which suggested that 11% of collective action variance was explained by the clusters' structure. In relation to this ICC, we obtained also a significant between-clusters variance of collective action — $Var = 0.004$, $SE = 0.001$, $Z = 3.66$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.002, 0.01]. Moreover, further support for using multilevel analysis was provided by a likelihood ratio test (Hayes, 2006) comparing two null models (one with the collective action's intercept as a random effect and the other without the intercept as a random effect). It came out decisively significant, $\chi^2(1) = 5059.76$, $p < .001$, showing that the model which considered the random intercept of collective action was significantly more informative than the other one.

These preliminary analyses suggested that it was appropriate and informative to consider the random variance of the predicted effects across the 27 European countries. Once the suitability of a multilevel model was established, it was necessary to carry out a restructuring of the independent variables. Thus, we centered system justification within group by subtracting the group mean value from each individual score on such variable. This granted us to estimate the average within-group relation between system justification and collective action and to interpret the intercept for a group j as the expected response for individuals in group j who have their average group response on system justification measure. In other words, such variable's centering removed all between-cluster variation from the predictor and yielded an unbiased estimate of the pooled within-cluster (i.e., Level 1) regression coefficient (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). As regard the Level 2 moderator, we first transformed the cultural orientation into a second level variable. In other words, individualism-collectivism scores of each person were rescaled to the average that characterized

his/her country of origin (i.e., Level-2 units). Thus, all participants from a given country had the same average cultural orientation score. Subsequently, we centered this variable on its grand-mean to probe the cross-level interaction (Aguinis et al., 2013; Enders & Tofighi, 2007).

Multilevel model was performed with the lme4 package (Bates et al., 2007) using RStudio (2020), a graphical interface for R software. Model was estimated using a restricted maximum likelihood method (REML). The nature of cross-level interaction was examined through the computational tool for probing interaction effects in multilevel model provided by Preacher et al. (2006). We were particularly interested in exploring the relation between system justification and collective action, by considering the peculiar cultural orientation (i.e., individualistic vs. collectivistic) of 27 European countries involved in the ESS. Pursuing this aim, we needed to identify which of the 27 countries could be considered to have a collectivistic rather than individualistic cultural orientation. Thus, we decided to descriptively explore the variability of the individualism-collectivism level that was peculiar to each country. This purely descriptive analysis was conducted through an analysis of variance (ANOVA). As expected, the level of individualism-collectivism was found to significantly vary between the different countries, $F [26, 45903] = 131.72, p < .001$. As shown below (Figure 1), some countries exhibited higher collectivism than others (i.e., above or below the grand-mean). Specifically, countries like Bulgaria, Serbia, Cyprus, and Italy were characterized by a collectivistic cultural orientation, while others (e.g., Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Germany) by an individualistic cultural orientation. Although in a purely descriptive way, this exploratory analysis provided us with key information about the specific cultural orientation characterizing each country. Coupled with our focal multilevel analysis, this allowed us to obtain a specific cultural framework through which interpreting the variability of the relation between system justification and collective action across the 27 European countries.

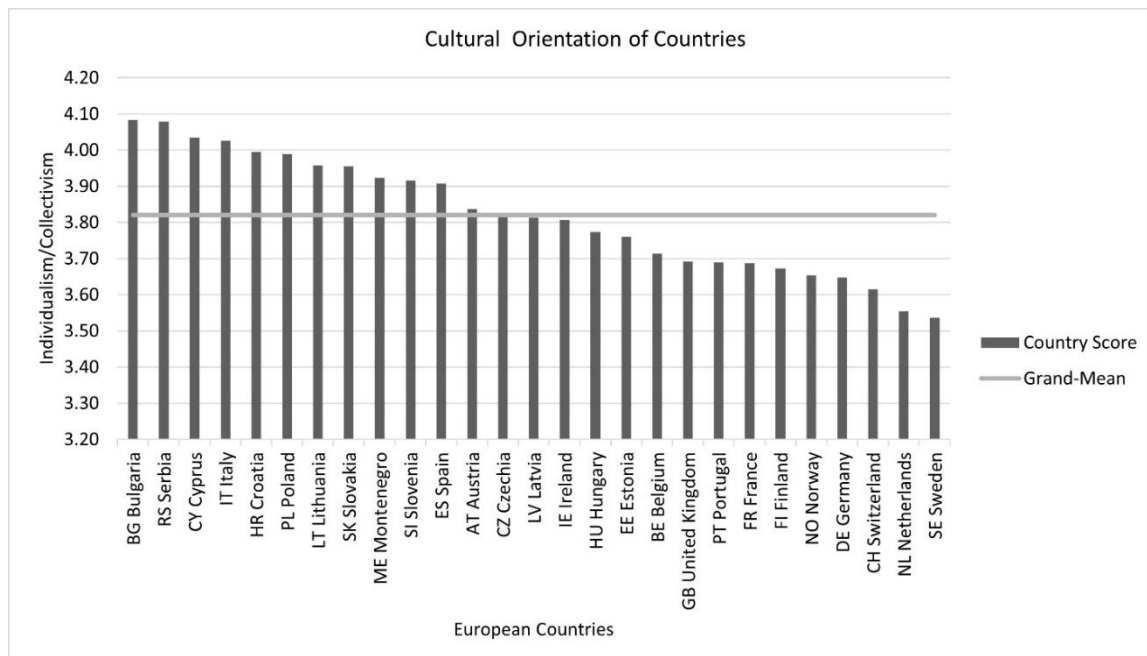


FIGURE 1
Cultural orientation of the 27 European countries.

Hypotheses Testing

Going deeper into our focal analysis (i.e., the cross-level interaction), we found a significant cross-level interaction of system justification (i.e., Level 1 predictor) and individualism-collectivism (i.e., Level 2 moderator) on collective action ($B = 0.08$, $SE = 0.03$, $t = 3.50$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.13]). The nature of this interactive effect was probed by means of simple slopes analysis precisely designed for multilevel model (Preacher et al., 2006). Simple slopes analysis (Figure 2) highlighted a negative relationship between system justification and collective action in individualistic cultural contexts, $B = -0.03$, $SE = 0.01$, $Z = -6.72$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = [-0.05, -0.02], but not in collectivistic cultural contexts, $B = -0.01$, $SE = 0.01$, $Z = -1.71$, $p = .088$, 95% CI = [-0.02, 0.001]. To ease the interpretation of the emerged simple effects and to quantify their magnitude, we computed a *marginal R^2* ($R^2_{LMM(m)}$) of the interested parameters, as indicated by Nakagawa et al. (2017). For the relationship between system justification and collective action in individualistic cultural contexts, we found an R^2 of 0.01, 95% CI = [0.007, 0.011], which can be interpreted as a small effect size according to Cohen's (1988) benchmarks. Instead, we found a lack of effect, $R^2 = 0.001$, 95% CI = [0.001, 0.000], for the relationship between system justification and collective action in collectivistic cultural contexts. These conditional effects indicated that system justification was negatively related with collective action when participants were from countries characterized by an individualistic cultural orientation. In contrast, system justification was unrelated with collective action when participants were from countries characterized by a collectivistic cultural orientation.

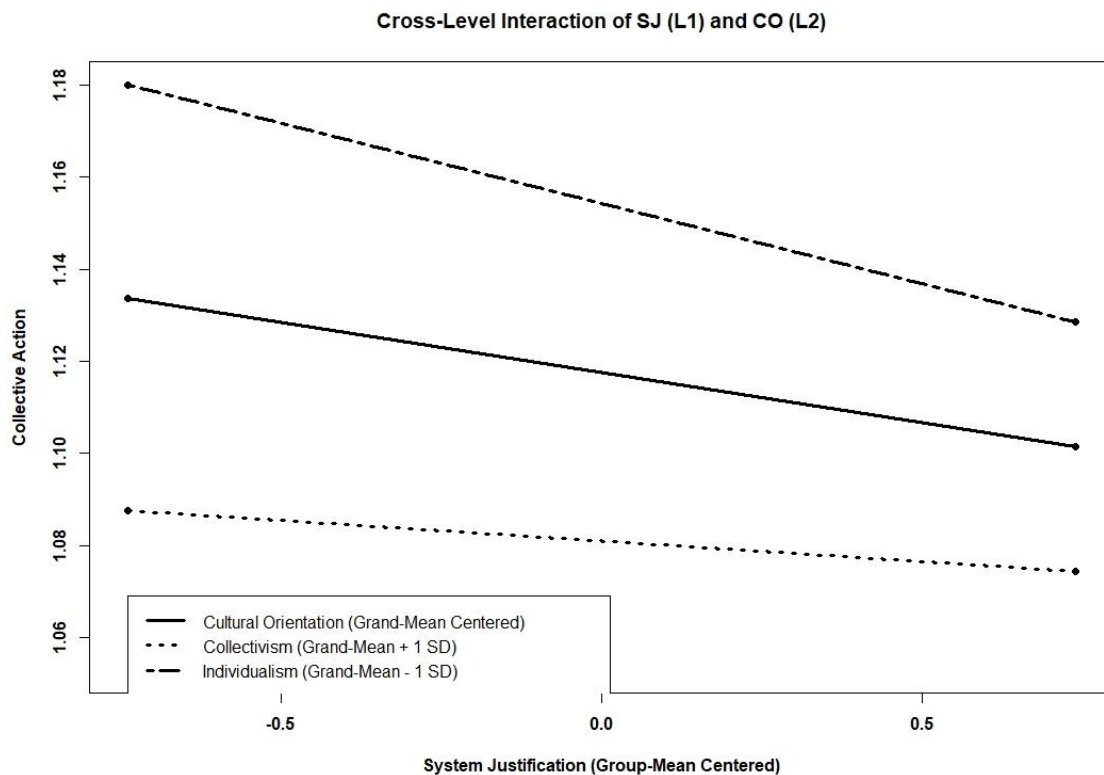


FIGURE 2
Cross-level interaction between system justification (SJ) and cultural orientation (CO).

Also, and in line with past research on system justification (e.g., Osborne et al., 2019), we found a negative relationship between system justification and collective action — $B = -0.02$, $SE = 0.004$, $t = -5.96$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.03, -0.02]$. Interestingly, we found a negative relationship between individualism-collectivism and collective action — $B = -0.23$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = -4.35$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-0.33, -0.13]$ — indicating that people in collectivistic (vs. individualistic) countries were less likely to act collectively. Note that all these coefficients represent unique associations once the covariates were controlled for (Table 1).

TABLE 1
Fixed and random effects of the multilevel model

Fixed Effects	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CIs	
					Lower	Upper
Intercept	1.1	0.01	108.95	< .001	[1.09	1.13]
SJ	-0.02	0.004	-5.96	< .001	[-0.03	-0.02]
CO	-0.23	0.05	-4.35	< .001	[-0.33	-0.13]
SJ×CO	0.08	0.02	3.50	.001	[0.04	0.13]
Sex	-0.01	0.002	-3.66	< .001	[-0.01	-0.003]
Age	-0.001	0.0001	-11.20	< .001	[-0.0007	-0.0005]
Education	0.02	0.001	36.89	< .001	[0.02	0.02]
Income	0.004	0.0004	10.17	< .001	[0.003	0.01]
PO	-0.01	0.0004	-14.95	< .001	[-0.01	-0.01]
Random Effects	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CIs	
					Lower	Upper
Intercept	0.002	0.001	3.48	.001	[0.0011	0.0033]
SJ	0.0003	0.0001	3.02	.003	[0.0001	0.0005]

Note. *SE* = standard error; CI = confidence interval. Table reports fixed and random effects of system justification (SJ), fixed effect of cultural orientation (CO), and their cross-level interaction (SJ×CO). Political orientation (PO), education, sex, age, and income are the covariates inserted into the model.

Random effects analysis allowed us to clarify the different nuances that the association between system justification and collective action could assume as a function of individualistic (vs. collectivistic) cultural orientation of the 27 European countries. As expected, analysis revealed a significant random intercept variability of collective action — $B = 0.002$, $SE = 0.001$, $Z = 3.48$, $p = .001$, 95% CI $[0.0011, 0.0033]$ — indicating the different baseline levels of the variable across countries. Importantly, analysis also revealed a significant random slope variability of the system justification relation with collective action — $B = 0.0003$, $SE = 0.0001$, $Z = 3.02$, $p = .003$, 95% CI $[0.0001, 0.0005]$. As can be seen below (Figure 3), system justification was negatively related to collective action in individualistic countries, with more pronounced slopes in Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Norway, Finland, France, Portugal, United Kingdom, and Belgium. As suggested by descriptive analysis in Figure 1, all these countries were characterized by the higher level of individualistic — rather than collectivistic — cultural orientation. On the other hand, Figure 3 showed that in countries with a higher collectivistic — rather than individualistic — cultural orientation, system justification was unrelated to collective action. Specifically, in countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Cyprus, Italy, Croatia, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Montenegro, and Slovenia, slopes of the relation between system justification and collective action appeared almost consistently flat.

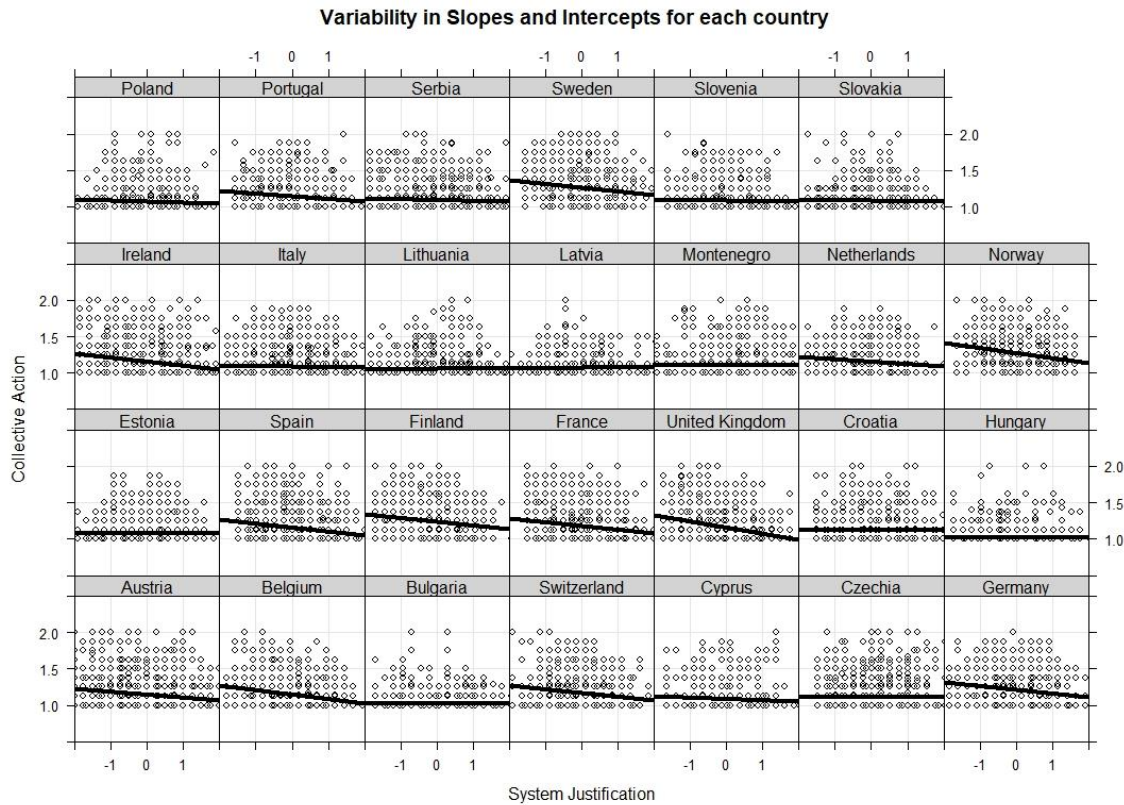


FIGURE 3

Random variability of the system justification–collective action link across the 27 European countries.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In this article, we have addressed the need to move toward a cultural psychology of collective action (see Van Zomeren, 2019; Van Zomeren & Louis, 2017) by using the cultural-psychological variable of individualism–collectivism as a moderator of the negative relation between system justification and collective action. Based on meta-analytic evidence that collectivism is a cultural constraint to identity, which is motivating for collective action (Agostini & Van Zomeren, 2021), this study aimed to examine whether collectivism may be a cultural constraint, or oppositely a cultural affordance, to system justification, which is demotivating for collective action. Also, this study aimed to disentangle system justification from *moral conviction*, which in the aforementioned meta-analysis were aggregate in a broader measure of moral motivation for collective action.

Besides confirming the negative association between system justification and collective action (e.g., Jost et al., 2017; Osborne et al., 2019), results of a multilevel analysis conducted on a representative sample of the European population (ESS 2018, Round 9) revealed that this negative relation may vary — and hence be stronger — across individualistic and collectivistic countries. Indeed, we found that system justification was negatively related to collective action in individualistic countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Norway, Finland, France, Portugal, United Kingdom, and Belgium, whereas system justification was unrelated to collective action in collectivistic countries such as Bulgaria, Serbia, Cyprus, Italy, Croatia, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, Montenegro, and Slovenia. More specifically,

we found a significant cross-level interaction between system justification and individualism-collectivism on collective action showing a negative relation between system justification and collective action in individualistic, but not collectivistic, countries. These results suggest that there are cross-cultural differences in the system justification demotivation for collective action: system justification not always, not for anyone, and not in any cultural context is negatively related to collective action. Indeed, the negative relation between system justification and collective action resulted stronger in individualistic countries. Conversely, we have not found a significant relation between system justification and collective action in collectivistic countries.

It seems thus that individuals in individualistic, but not collectivistic, cultures are sensitive to the system justification demotivation. One explanation could be that the tendency to accept and defend existing arrangements, which characterizes system justification, may pose a threat to the independence of thought and freedom to choose one's own goals, which characterizes individualism. In other words, system justification may be highly threatening for individualistic cultural values of independence and autonomy. As theorized by Jost and Banaji (1994), engaging in system justification leads to accept any (unequal) outcome people receive and to bolster the stability of existing societal arrangements. This may be more costly for individuals in individualistic cultures emphasizing the independent self, autonomy of choice, and personal accomplishment. As opposite, individuals in collectivistic cultures may be not sensitive to the system justification demotivation due to their innate preference for self-restriction, social order, and tradition. In line with meta-analytic findings by Agostini and Van Zomeren (2021), collectivism binds individuals to the groups but also to the system in which they are embedded, thereby reducing their need to see that system as fair and legitimate. If in collectivistic cultures the system is already accepted, then there may be a reduced need to defend it and the strength of system justification in demotivating collective action may thus be weaker.

Accordingly, our results showed a negative relation between individualism-collectivism and collective action, indicating that individuals in collectivistic (vs. individualistic) countries were less likely to act collectively. Put differently, individualism (vs. collectivism) appeared more conducive to collective action. This is consistent with past findings that individualism, but not collectivism, promotes the acceptance of diversity and mutual support between individuals (Rothstein, 2002). In individualistic cultures, people are viewed as possessing a unique pattern of traits that distinguishes them from each other (Markus & Kitayama, 1994). Individualism, as opposite to collectivism, was found to be more closely associated with altruism (Realo et al., 2002), volunteering (Kemmelmeyer et al., 2006), and social trust (Gheorghiu et al., 2009). Moreover, the fact that in individualistic countries collective action is more undertaken may imply that these cultural contexts are also more polarized about social change. It follows that the endorsement of system-justifying beliefs may strongly dampen collective action in individualistic cultures. Conversely, without that frame, that is in collectivistic countries, individuals' need to endorse system-justifying beliefs may be reduced and, as a result, the demotivating effect of system justification on collective action may be unlikely to manifest. The results of the present study support this line of thought.

Limitations and Future Directions

During the last decade, social-psychological models of collective action have undoubtedly enriched our understanding of what drives collective action participation by providing solid evidence for factors de/motivating individuals to act collectively (e.g., Becker & Tausch, 2015; Jost et al., 2017; Osborne et

al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2009; Van Zomeren et al., 2018; Van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008; Van Zomeren et al., 2011). At the same time, however, these models have not paid adequate attention to the role of culture — despite collective action is undertaken within very different cultural contexts and populations (Van Zomeren, 2016a, 2016b). A strength of the current study is that it directly taps into this uncharted territory by focusing on a cultural dimension closely tied to the psychology of collective action.

However, our study of course also has limitations. For one, although the main aim of this study was to investigate the association between system justification and collective action across different cultural contexts, it would be desirable to move toward an empirical analysis of causality. In the light of evidence that the tendency to justify the system undermines willingness to challenge inequalities between social groups, investigating potential scenarios and/or tools for reducing this tendency is not only theoretically relevant, but it is important also for practical consequences.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge some limitations of the collective action measure we used in this study. First, it is doubtful that such measure as provided by the ESS Round 9 (2018) reflects individuals' intentions to participate in future collective action. Given that no items for collective action intentions was included in the ESS Round 9, we conceptualized the items we relied on as fair proxies for actual collective action behavior, hypothesizing that individuals who are higher in system justification (as a relatively stable tendency to legitimate the system) are "generally" less likely to act collectively, when they are from individualistic versus collectivistic countries. However, these collective action items seem to better reflect individuals' self-reported past participation in collective action. This, in conjunction with the correlational nature of the study, makes us hesitant to draw certain conclusions from our results. Indeed, different predictions and interpretations for our results could be formulated. For example, one could advance that individuals who had participated in collective action in the past are less likely to endorse system-justifying beliefs, especially when they are from individualistic versus collectivistic cultural contexts. This would be consistent with our and prior results on collective action, while would extend them by addressing the question of the consequences of individuals' participation. Therefore, we believe that other possibilities of interpretation deserve attention as well as other predictions deserve future investigation. Second, the collective action measure used here is not context-specific, but rather it seems to refer to political participation more generally. Thus, future research is needed to replicate our results by considering individuals' collective action participation not only against, but also in favor of context-specific (unequal) conditions. As documented by Osborne et al. (2019), system justification is positively related with system-supporting collective action (i.e., collective action aimed to protect the system). In this case, because system-supporting collective action fits well with the core tenets of collectivism which advocate acceptance of the system and maintenance of tradition, order, and self-restriction, we would expect that collectivism may be a cultural affordance to system justification. That is, the positive relation between system justification and system-supporting collective action may be stronger in more collectivistic cultures. This should be investigated in future studies.

Another limitation of the present study concerns the operationalization of individualism-collectivism as Schwartz's (1994) openness to change-conservation value dimension. As conceptualized by Schwartz (1994), openness to change emphasizes the expression of intellectual, behavioral, and emotional autonomy, whereas conservation emphasizes preferences for self-restriction and order, overlapping thus with individualism and collectivism, respectively. According to Schwartz (2004), given that both contrast an independent with an interdependent view of people, openness to change-conservation and individualism-collectivism can be considered equivalent to each other. Although the measure of individualism-collectivism as operationalized in this study is consistent with Schwartz's (2004) theory as well as with

previous research employing the ESS data (Beilmann et al., 2018; Verkasalo et al., 2009), we encourage future research to test our predictions by directly measuring the individualism-collectivism value orientations.

Finally, we acknowledge that the (negative) relation between individualism-collectivism and collective action may have mitigated the system justification demotivation for collective action. That is, the lack of association between system justification and collective action in collectivistic countries could be explained by the fact that individuals in collectivistic (vs. individualistic) countries are ideologically less willing to act collectively. Future research should thus investigate the psychological dynamics related to collective action participation, taking into consideration the peculiar situations characterizing collectivistic countries.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated whether the negative relationship between system justification and collective action would be stronger in individualistic or collectivistic cultural contexts. This investigation follows directly calls for studies on culture and collective action and extends existing evidence on the cross-cultural differences in collective action participation. More specifically, we examined the moderating effect of individualism-collectivism on the system justification–collective action negative link. Results of a multilevel analysis, employing a representative sample of the European population using data from the ESS Round 9 (2018), revealed a significant cross-level interaction between system justification and individualism-collectivism confirming the negative relation between system justification and collective action in individualistic, but not collectivistic, countries. Indeed, system justification resulted negatively related to collective action in individualistic countries (e.g., the Netherlands), whereas it was unrelated to collective action in collectivistic countries (e.g., Italy). These results suggest that there are cross-cultural differences in the system justification demotivation for collective action: collectivistic (vs. individualistic) cultures dampen the system justification–collective action negative link. Given their tendency to accept the system in which they are embedded, individuals in collectivistic (vs. individualistic) cultures seem unsensitive to the demotivating force of system justification, which leads them to protect the system as legitimate, and to favor thus societal stability over change. Further studies are needed to investigate such findings more thoroughly.

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