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Research article

What is an “appropriate” migrant? Impact of the adoption of meritocratic worldviews by potential newcomers on their perceived ability to integrate into a Western society

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Abstract

The acceptance of migrant populations and the definition of an “appropriate” migrant are controversial issues in many countries. The present research focuses on the ideological determinants of how newcomers are evaluated by a host population in a Western country with a strongly rooted meritocratic ideology. We carried out two studies to examine how the expression of meritocratic beliefs by a male potential migrant affects the way he is evaluated by the host population. We measured the host population’s perception of the potential migrant’s ability to integrate into society, his tendency to adopt the host country’s culture, and the general desirability of his world vision for all newcomers. We also noted the host population’s judgments of the target’s agency and communality. The results showed that a potential newcomer who expresses a strong (vs. weak) belief in a just world (Study 1) or an internal (vs. external) locus of control (Study 2) is evaluated more favorably by the host population. In addition, judgments of the target’s integration capacity were only mediated by his perceived agency. We discuss these results in the light of work on the meritocratic ideology and intercultural relations. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Immigration is now a very controversial issue in Western countries (Sam & Berry, 2006), leading many governments to define desirable attributes for potential migrants in such areas as language skills, education, or economic status (Bourhis, Moise, Perrault, & Senecal, 1997; Green, 2009). In line with the view that Western countries are steeped in a meritocratic ideology (Kluegel & Smith, 1986; Sennett, 2006), research suggests that Western populations’ decisions about migrants are more strongly influenced by individual acquired criteria, such as working skills, way of life, and good education than by collective ascribed criteria, such as national origin, skin color, and religion (Green, 2007). This has led Western citizens to be described as “individualistic gatekeepers” (Green, 2007). The present research investigated whether, in a Western society, endorsement of meritocratic beliefs by potential newcomers affects their perceived ability to integrate and their predicted tendency to adopt the host culture.

Numerous studies have documented the prominence in Western countries of the meritocratic ideology, which places great importance on individual attributes (e.g., talent, abilities, effort) to explain and predict people’s successes and failures. Examples of meritocratic beliefs include the Protestant work ethic (the belief that hard work leads to success, Katz & Hass, 1988), belief in a just world (BJW, the belief that people get what they deserve and deserve what they get, Lerner, 1980), and internal locus of control (LOC, the belief that people are able to master the events that occur in their life, Rotter,

1966). These beliefs have been conceptually and empirically linked (Furnham & Procter, 1989; Jost, Pelham, Sheldon, & Sullivan, 2003). They are underlain by the notions of personal control and individual responsibility, which are core constituents of the meritocratic ideology (Quinn & Crocker, 1999). The meritocratic ideology “is particularly effective in placating people in democratic, free-market, post-totalitarian systems” (Jost & Hunyady, 2002, p. 145). By attributing the responsibility for differences in social status to the efforts and abilities of individuals, meritocratic beliefs serve a system justification function (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009; McCoy & Major, 2007), and endorsement of meritocratic beliefs is associated with the psychological justification of the existing social hierarchy and the derogation of disadvantaged people (Jost & Hunyady, 2002; Jost & Major, 2001). The meritocratic ideology also defines the standards a person must meet in order to be considered of “social and material value” (Major, Kaiser, O’Brien, & McCoy, 2007). Research has shown that endorsement of meritocratic beliefs is a valued behavior in the majority cultural group in Western countries. People who strongly endorse meritocratic beliefs are judged more favorably than people who weakly endorse these beliefs (Alves & Correia, 2008; Jellison & Green, 1981; Perrin & Testé, 2010). However, the value attributed to endorsement of meritocratic beliefs may differ according to whether a judgment relates to a person’s perceived ability to be successful in society (agency) or to that person’s perceived ability to affiliate with

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others (communality).¹ For example, endorsement of BJW and internal LOC has been shown to have a stronger effect on agentic traits (e.g., competent, ambitious) than it does on communal traits (e.g., tolerant, honest) (Alves & Correia, 2010; Cambon, Djouari, & Beauvois, 2006; Dubois & Beauvois, 2005; Testé & Perrin,). Other studies suggest that the meritocratic ideology affects expressions of prejudice toward racial minorities. Majority group members (e.g., White people) tend to express more positive attitudes and behavioral intentions toward minority group members (e.g., Black students) who endorse (vs. reject) meritocratic beliefs (Biernat, Vescio, & Theno, 1996; Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). The present research goes a step further by focusing on perceptions of a potential migrant's ability to integrate into a Western host country and to become a respected member of that country's community.

The way in which a migrant is evaluated depends on how he or she behaves with respect to the dominant culture in the host country (Berry, 1997). Intercultural psychology research has revealed a preference for migrants who adopt the host culture and who do not conserve their cultural heritage (Bourhis et al., 1997; Maisonneuve & Testé, 2007; Van Oudenhoven, Prins, & Buunk, 1998). The adoption and conservation dimensions manipulated in these studies were aspects of migrants' behaviors, such as the prevalence of original habits, language use, marital preferences for their children, and relations with people from their own cultural background or with people from the dominant group. Our research followed a new approach in that we focused on the role of a potential newcomer's ideological beliefs.

The central hypothesis guiding our research was that potential newcomers who endorse system-justifying beliefs are more likely to be perceived as "appropriate" than those who do not endorse these beliefs. More specifically, we postulated that newcomers have to endorse meritocratic beliefs if they are to be accepted in a host society. In two separate studies, we manipulated endorsement of BJW (Study 1) and of internal LOC (Study 2) in order to determine whether endorsement of meritocratic beliefs by a potential male migrant affects predictions of his ability to integrate into a Western country and his tendency to adopt the host culture, and the desirability of his worldview for all newcomers. A second goal was to examine whether the postulated relationship between the target's endorsement of meritocratic beliefs and his perceived ability to integrate is primarily founded on assessments of his communality or his agency. We expected strong endorsement of BJW (Study 1) and internal LOC (Study 2) by a potential male migrant to increase his perceived ability to integrate and his predicted tendency to adopt the host culture and for such endorsement to be considered generally desirable for all newcomers. The two studies separately examined the impact of endorsement of BJW and internal LOC for self versus for

others. Research into the normativity of BJW suggests that endorsement of BJW for self (BJW-Self) may be more strongly valued than endorsement of BJW for others (BJW-Others) (Alves & Correia, 2008, 2010; Testé & Perrin,). Research into the normativity of internal LOC has not revealed a similar difference between LOC for self and LOC for others (Dubois, 2003, 2009).

METHOD

Participants

Study 1 involved 97 participants (54 women, 43 men) aged between 18 and 29 years ($M=21.40$, $SD=2.21$); Study 2 involved 75 participants (42 women, 33 men) aged between 18 and 29 years ($M=20.73$, $SD=2.47$). All were of French nationality. They were recruited in the library at the University of Rennes and completed the task individually.

Procedure and Materials

Both experiments were presented as studies of people's judgments. Each participant was given a file containing information about a fictional person ("Ahmed"), followed by his supposed responses, expressed on Likert scales from 1 to 9, to an eight-item questionnaire. The target was presented as follow: "The following questionnaire was filled in by Ahmed. Ahmed is 23 years old. He is a student from North Africa who has only been living in France for a few months. He came to France to continue his studies, which he began in his home country. When he arrived, he wondered what things would be like, as his home country is very different from France. Some aspects of French life and customs were completely new to him. If possible, Ahmed would like to stay in France when he has finished his studies, rather than going home, although he remains attached to his country and its culture. The circled numbers correspond to his answers on a questionnaire he filled in as part of a survey". The questionnaire in Study 1 consisted of eight items measuring either BJW-Self (e.g., "I get what I deserve") or BJW-Others (e.g., "People get what they deserve") that were taken from Lipkus, Dalbert, and Siegler (1996). The questionnaire in Study 2 consisted of eight items adapted from Dubois's (1985) questionnaires for measuring LOC-Self (e.g., *When you pass your exams, it is because you have the required ability*) and LOC-Others (e.g., *Students pass their exams easily if they have the required ability*). In both studies, only responses "7" and "8" or "2" and "3" were ticked on the 9-point scales, in order to create "strong BJW" versus "weak BJW" (Study 1) and "internal" versus "external" (Study 2) profiles. After reading the target's responses, the participants formulated a series of judgments about him.

Measures

All the measures were taken using 9-point Likert scales (from 1 to 9). In the two studies, the target's ability to integrate into the host society was evaluated using three items: *The person*

¹Social psychological research has shown that individuals' evaluations of people involve two fundamental dimensions. One dimension relates to the affects aroused by the target; the other dimension relates to the target's perceived ability to gain power and status. Researchers have defined these dimensions in a number of ways (e.g., communality/agency; warmth/competence, other-profitability/self-profitability, social desirability/social utility; see Abele, Cuddy, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2008). For the purposes of the present research, we refer to these two dimensions as "communality" and "agency" (Wojciszke & Abele, 2008).

presented will not have any problems adapting to French culture; The person presented will find it very difficult to integrate into French society (inverted); The person presented should find it easy to integrate into French society ($\alpha_{\text{Study1}} = .87$; $\alpha_{\text{Study2}} = .78$). In Study 1, the prediction of the target's tendency to adopt the host culture and perceptions of whether the target is likely to conserve his own culture were assessed using two items derived from the cultural model (Bourhis et al., 1997): *The person presented will adopt French culture if he stays in France; The person presented will conserve his original culture if he stays in France.* In Study 2, we added two items derived from the contact model (Berry, 1980): *The person presented will spend a lot of time with French people if he stays in France; The person presented will spend a lot of time with North Africans if he stays in France.* These items were added because focusing on cultural or social aspects may have different effects (Snauwaert, Soenens, Vanbeselaere, & Boen, 2003). In both studies, the general desirability of the target's worldview for all newcomers was measured by one item: *It would be good if everyone wanting to come and live in France adopted the way of viewing the world expressed by the person presented.* In addition, the participants estimated the likelihood of becoming friends with the target (communality), on a scale from 1 "Would not at all like to have him as a friend" to 9 "Would really love to have him as a friend", and the future professional success of the target (agency), on a scale from 1 "Very unlikely to succeed professionally" to 9 "Certain to succeed professionally". The participants also indicated the extent to which 12 personality traits described the target (taken from Dubois & Beauvois, 2005). The traits were presented in alphabetical order, and each trait was accompanied by a scale from 1 "Not at all applicable to the target" to 9 "Fully applicable to the target". Six traits related to communality (three positive: loveable, honest, nice; three negative: irritating, hypocritical, pretentious). The other six traits related to agency (three positive: ambitious, dynamic, industrious; three negative: naive, vulnerable, unstable). Composite scores of communality (seven items, $\alpha_{\text{Study1}} = .83$, $\alpha_{\text{Study2}} = .80$) and agency (seven items, $\alpha_{\text{Study1}} = .63$, $\alpha_{\text{Study2}} = .87$) were calculated.

RESULTS

For Study 1, the between-subjects factorial design was as follows: 2 (degree of BJW: strong vs. weak) \times 2 (BJW type: BJW-Self vs. BJW-Others); for Study 2, it was 2 (LOC orientation:

internal vs. external) \times 2 (LOC type: LOC-Self vs. LOC-Others) (see Tables 1 and 2 for means and standard deviations).

Integration into the Host Society

Study 1

An ANOVA revealed a main effect for degree of BJW, $F(1, 93) = 70.24$, $p < .001$, and a significant interaction, $F(1, 93) = 10.79$, $p = .001$. The participants felt that integration into the host society would be easier for the target who expressed strong BJW rather than weak BJW. This effect was stronger for BJW-Self, $F(1, 93) = 70.35$, $p < .001$, than for BJW-Others, $F(1, 93) = 12.57$, $p < .001$.

Study 2

An ANOVA revealed a main effect only for LOC orientation, $F(1, 71) = 31.18$, $p < .001$. The participants judged that the target with internal LOC would integrate more easily into the host society.

Culture Adoption and Culture Conservation

Study 1

An ANOVA on cultural adoption revealed a main effect only for degree of BJW, $F(1, 93) = 9.57$, $p = .002$. The participants were more likely to predict that the target would adopt the host culture when he expressed strong BJW. No significant effect emerged on culture conservation, $F(1, 93) < 0.24$, p 's $> .600$.

Study 2

A MANOVA on the two items relating to cultural adoption revealed a main effect only for LOC orientation, $F(2, 70) = 8.71$, $p < .001$, Pillai's trace = .20. Subsequent ANOVAs showed that the participants considered adoption of the host culture to be more likely for the target with internal LOC than for the target with external LOC (although marginally), $F(1, 71) = 2.65$, $p = .108$, and that the internal LOC target would have more contact with members of the host society, $F(1, 71) = 15.29$, $p < .001$. No significant effect emerged on culture conservation, $F(2, 70) < 1.20$, p 's $> .300$.

Table 1. Study 1—Measure means (standard deviations) as a function of the target's BJW degree and BJW type

Measures	Strong BJW			Weak BJW		
	Self	Others	Total	Self	Others	Total
Integration into the host society	6.52 (1.01)	5.74 (1.63)	6.16 (1.38)	3.39 (1.37)	4.37 (1.24)	3.88 (1.38)
Cultural adoption	5.48 (2.14)	5.45 (1.74)	5.47 (1.94)	4.60 (1.22)	4.20 (1.55)	4.40 (1.40)
Cultural conservation	5.84 (1.84)	6.09 (1.63)	5.96 (1.73)	6.08 (1.66)	6.00 (1.53)	6.04 (1.57)
General desirability for all newcomers	5.60 (2.53)	3.86 (2.51)	4.79 (2.64)	2.24 (1.27)	3.56 (1.98)	2.90 (1.78)
Communality	6.61 (1.36)	6.20 (1.39)	6.42 (1.37)	5.33 (1.41)	6.42 (1.26)	5.87 (1.44)
Agency	6.35 (1.14)	5.88 (0.92)	6.13 (1.06)	5.09 (1.10)	5.63 (1.15)	5.36 (1.15)

Note: scores from 1 to 9.

Table 2. Study 2—Measure means (standard deviations) as a function of the target's LOC orientation and LOC type

Measures	Internal LOC			External LOC		
	Self	Others	Total	Self	Others	Total
Integration into the host society	6.96 (1.25)	6.32 (1.43)	6.62 (1.37)	4.99 (1.35)	4.81 (1.07)	4.82 (1.21)
Cultural adoption	5.76 (1.71)	5.21 (1.69)	5.47 (1.70)	5.30 (1.78)	4.38 (1.71)	4.85 (1.79)
Cultural conservation	5.65 (2.03)	5.84 (1.30)	5.75 (1.66)	5.75 (1.77)	5.89 (1.41)	5.82 (1.59)
Contact with French people	7.24 (1.20)	6.32 (0.82)	6.75 (1.10)	5.40 (2.01)	5.58 (1.35)	5.49 (1.70)
Contact with North Africans	5.88 (1.99)	5.16 (1.50)	5.50 (1.76)	5.78 (1.51)	5.53 (1.31)	5.66 (1.40)
General desirability for all newcomers	4.47 (3.08)	4.84 (2.01)	4.67 (2.54)	3.10 (2.02)	3.21 (1.69)	3.15 (1.84)
Communality	6.69 (1.16)	6.65 (1.08)	6.67 (1.10)	6.13 (1.29)	5.78 (1.13)	5.96 (1.21)
Agency	7.18 (0.96)	6.84 (0.96)	7.00 (0.96)	4.44 (1.22)	4.32 (1.23)	4.38 (1.21)

Note: scores from 1 to 9.

General Desirability for all Newcomers

Study 1

An ANOVA revealed a main effect for degree of BJW, $F(1, 93)=17.99$, $p < .001$, and a significant interaction, $F(1, 93)=12.52$, $p < .001$. The participants felt more strongly that all newcomers should adopt the target's worldview when the target expressed strong BJW. This effect was significant for BJW-Self, $F(1, 93)=31.30$, $p < .001$, but not for BJW-Others, $F(1, 93)=0.24$, $p = .626$.

Study 2

An ANOVA revealed a main effect only for LOC orientation, $F(1, 71)=8.45$, $p = .004$. The participants felt more strongly that all newcomers should adopt the target's worldview when the target showed internal LOC.

Communality and Agency

Study 1

An ANOVA on communality scores revealed a marginally significant main effect for degree of BJW, $F(1, 93)=3.77$, $p = .055$, and a significant interaction, $F(1, 93)=7.42$, $p = .008$. Strong BJW was judged more positively than weak BJW. Although strong BJW-Self led to more positive target evaluations than weak BJW-Self, $F(1, 93)=11.25$, $p = .001$, the effect for BJW-Others did not reach significance, $F(1, 93)=0.30$, $p = .587$. An ANOVA on agency scores revealed a main effect for degree of BJW, $F(1, 93)=11.65$, $p < .001$, and a significant interaction, $F(1, 93)=5.36$, $p = .023$. The participants attributed greater agency to strong BJW than they did to weak BJW. This effect was significant for BJW-Self, $F(1, 93)=16.96$, $p < .001$, but not for BJW-Others, $F(1, 93)=0.58$, $p = .446$.²

Study 2

An ANOVA on communality scores revealed a main effect only for LOC orientation, $F(1, 71)=7.04$, $p = .010$. Target

²We examined the effects of degree of BJW on communality controlling for agency and on agency controlling for communality. The effect of degree of BJW on communality controlling for agency was not significant, $F(1, 92)=0.02$, $p = .887$; degree of BJW \times BJW type, $F(1, 92)=2.59$, $p = .111$. In contrast, the effect of degree of BJW on agency controlling for communality remained significant, $F(1, 92)=7.52$, $p = .007$; degree of BJW \times BJW type, $F(1, 92)=0.65$, $p = .423$.

evaluations were more positive for the target with internal LOC than for the target with external LOC. Similarly, an ANOVA on agency scores revealed a main effect only for LOC orientation, $F(1, 71)=105.43$, $p < .001$. The participants attributed greater agency to the "internal" target than they did to the "external" target.³

Mediation Analyses

To determine whether the target's perceived communality and agency mediated the relationship between the target's worldviews and the prediction of his ability to integrate into the host society, we conducted mediation analyses by using the SPSS macro, created by Preacher and Hayes (2008) for estimating direct and indirect effects with multiple mediators.

Study 1

The analysis showed that the total effect of BJW on integration, $t = 8.11$, $p < .001$, remained significant when communality and agency were included in the model, $t = 6.91$, $p < .001$. However, the total indirect effect of BJW through communality and agency was significant, $z = 2.95$, $p = .003$. The indirect effect of BJW through agency was significant, $z = 2.71$, $p = .007$, whereas the indirect effect of BJW through communality was not significant, $z = 0.27$, $p = .786$. These results indicate that agency (but not communality) mediated the effect of BJW on integration.

Study 2

The analysis showed that the total effect of LOC on integration, $t = 5.77$, $p < .001$, became non-significant when communality and agency were included in the model, $t = 1.11$, $p = .269$. The total indirect effect of LOC through communality and agency was significant, $z = 3.57$, $p < .001$. The indirect effect of LOC through agency was significant, $z = 2.99$, $p = .003$, whereas the indirect effect of LOC through communality was not significant, $z = 1.49$, $p = .137$. These results indicate that agency (but not communality) mediated the effect of LOC on integration.

³The effect of LOC orientation on communality controlling for agency was not significant, $F(1, 70)=1.60$, $p = .210$. In contrast, the effect of LOC orientation on agency controlling for communality remained significant, $F(1, 70)=91.87$, $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present research was to examine whether endorsement of meritocratic beliefs, as an individual criterion (Green, 2007), affects the perception of a potential newcomer as an “appropriate” migrant. Two main contributions can be drawn from our results. First, our research extends previous investigations into the impact of meritocratic ideology in Western societies by demonstrating that host populations generally expect newcomers to adopt meritocratic beliefs. Research has already shown that the meritocratic ideology affects the evaluation of individuals belonging to the majority cultural group (Dubois & Beauvois, 2005) and moderates the expression of prejudice toward minority groups already present in a country (Kaiser & Pratt-Hyatt, 2009). Our research goes a step further by focusing on the processes involved in a host community’s selection and acceptance of newcomers wishing to settle in a country. Overall, our results strongly support the view that newcomers must adopt the meritocratic ideology if they want to be accepted into the host society and judged positively. A potential migrant who strongly endorses meritocratic beliefs is (i) considered more able to integrate into the host society; (ii) perceived as more likely to adopt the culture of the host country and to develop relations with people from that country; and (iii) evaluated more favorably on the dimensions of agency and communality. In addition, strong endorsement of meritocratic beliefs is considered desirable for all newcomers wishing to live in the host country.

These observations are in line with studies showing host communities’ preferences for migrants who adopt the host culture (Barette, Bourhis, Personnaz, & Personnaz, 2004; Maisonneuve & Testé, 2007). Nevertheless, an important aspect of our research was to focus on the role of the targets’ ideological positions. Previous studies of how migrants’ acculturation strategies are evaluated have mostly manipulated the targets’ practices or behaviors (i.e., behavioral norms, Cialdini & Trost, 1998). In contrast, the present research manipulated the adoption of socially valued general beliefs (i.e., judgment norms, Dubois & Beauvois, 2005). These results have practical implications because in many countries the procedure to obtain an entry permit for work or study includes interviews to assess potential immigrants. Our results suggest that expressing meritocratic beliefs may be an advantage for potential immigrants. Concomitant exploration of the two types of host society expectation with respect to migrants (behavioral vs. judgmental) would be an interesting avenue for further research. Another possible line of research is suggested by the finding that the two manipulated constructs (BJW and LOC) have different effects on social judgments. Our results support the interpretation that endorsement of BJW-Self is more normative than endorsement of BJW-Others and that it has more effect on the agency dimension than it does on the communality dimension (Alves & Correia, 2010; Testé & Perrin,). In contrast to what we found for BJW, we did not find any difference in the effect of LOC for self and the effect of LOC for others.

Our second contribution is provided by the results of the mediation analyses. Both of our studies showed that judgments of whether a migrant will be able to integrate into a host

society are mediated by agency and not by communality. This finding suggests that the immigration policies introduced by the French and other Western governments (e.g., USA), which focus on a migrant’s individual skills, mirror the expectations of the citizens of these countries. However, during periods of economic crisis, studies have shown that a real threat (Stephan & Stephan, 2000) may be the rejection of “competitive skilled migrants” (Esse, Jackson, & Armstrong, 1998). In addition, members of a host society do not always prefer migrants to adopt a cultural assimilation strategy (Guimond, De Oliveira, Kamiesjki, & Sidanius, 2010). Thomsen, Green, and Sidanius (2008) argued that assimilation into the dominant culture “blurs existing status boundaries between groups” (p. 1455) and challenges the existing social hierarchy. Consequently, assimilation is seen as threatening by some members of the dominant group (e.g., those with a high social dominance orientation (SDO)). However, individuals with high SDO would be expected to place even greater value on the endorsement of meritocratic beliefs by newcomers. In fact, meritocratic beliefs are system-justifying beliefs; hence, the adoption of this type of belief is clearly compatible with the maintenance of the existing social hierarchy. Potential migrants who adopt the meritocratic ideology indirectly show that they accept the social system and do not question it, whereas migrants who do not adopt the meritocratic ideology may be a threat to the social order. Rejection of these meritocratic beliefs may be associated with a feeling of injustice and relative deprivation that promotes rebellion (Guimond & Tougas, 1994).

The present research has a number of limitations. One is that all the participants were students. Consequently, studies using more representative samples are needed in order to obtain more generalizable results. Another limitation concerns the origin of the target, who was always depicted as being from North Africa. This was a relevant choice for France, given that the country has a large number of immigrants from North Africa. Although research has shown that the origin of targets has little impact on judgments concerning adoption of the host culture (Maisonneuve & Testé, 2007), this point should be verified.

One of the strengths of the meritocratic ideology is that it appears as a “self-evident” aspect of human nature that is deeply rooted in “common sense” rather than as an ideology that justifies a system. As a result, people use the meritocratic ideology to judge others without being aware that they are applying an ideology that favors the status quo (Jost & Hunyady, 2002) and without explicitly adhering to this ideology (McCoy & Major, 2007). The meritocratic ideology can be seen as favoring a self-perpetuating cycle in which meritocratic beliefs justify, help maintain, and even aggravate social inequalities. Although it is thought to embody the principle of justice and success for all, the meritocratic ideology actually contributes to the maintenance of a system of inequalities through its influence on judgments, especially those concerning migrant populations.

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