

Culture, Context, and Drinking: Pluralistic Ignorance Across Cultures

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Introduction

Pluralistic ignorance (PI) leads to the inaccurate perception that your peers drink more than you (Borsari, 2001). PI explains why American undergraduates report that their peers drink more (e.g., *drinks/event*) and more often (e.g., *drink frequency/week*). Since PI necessitates social comparison, a measure of cultural values would allow researchers to examine how culture influences social comparisons within the in-group.

Individualism-Collectivism (I-C), a construct that can explain social group orientation at a cultural level, may predict how PI impacts an individual's conception of drinking norms, which includes their own behavior (*actual behavior*) as well as the behavior of their peers (*perceived behavior*).

- Collectivism predisposes conformity to group values to increase cohesion, equality, and well-being of the in-group (Triandis, 1996). Because the focus is the in-group, the individual in a more collectivist culture should therefore report little, if any, discrepancy in actual and perceived drinking behaviors.
- Individualism predisposes uniqueness, personal well-being and competition between an individual and the in-group (Triandis, 1996). A person in a more individualist culture should therefore report a greater discrepancy in actual and perceived drinking behaviors.
- Social behavior can also be influenced by vertical (V) or horizontal (H) relationships (Triandis, 1996). In V relationships, hierarchy is important and can strongly influence social behavior. In H relationships, egalitarianism is more valued. These dimensions will provide more information regarding the nature of social comparisons within each I-C dimension.

This study investigates how PI manifests in the actual and perceived drinking behaviors of undergraduates in the United States (a highly individualistic culture) and Argentina (a relatively collectivist culture).

Hypotheses

1. PI should be observed in both cultural contexts, however, the self/peer drinking discrepancy should be significantly larger among American undergraduates.
2. American undergraduates should score higher on individualism than Argentine undergraduates, who in contrast should score higher on collectivism.
3. I-C scores will predict the magnitude of the self/peer drinking discrepancy.

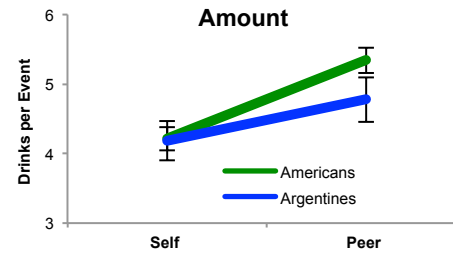
Methods

Participants: 27 Argentine (10 male, 17 female, $age_{mean} = 22.81$) and 92 American (31 male, 61 female, $age_{mean} = 21.36$ years) undergraduates completed an online survey.

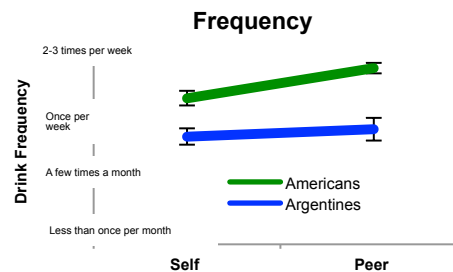
Survey and Sample Questions: Participants completed a survey in their native language (Spanish, English). The survey contained three sections:

- 1) **Demographics** included age, gender, year in school, housing situation
- 2) **Individualism-Collectivism** questionnaire based on Triandis (1996) which includes 20 questions to assess vertical and horizontal dimension of I-C. Each dimension was represented by the five top factor-loading questions containing a range from 1 (never/ino) to 9 (always/yes)
- 3) **Alcohol norms survey** asked participants to rate own and peer behavior for:
 - **Drink frequency:** *How frequently do you typically consume alcohol?* (1 = never, 6 almost every day or every day)
 - **Drink amount:** *When you do drink alcohol, how much alcohol do you typically consume per event or sitting?* (0 = 0 drinks, 10 = 10 or more drinks)
 - **Other behaviors** such as attitudes and situations involving drinking

Results

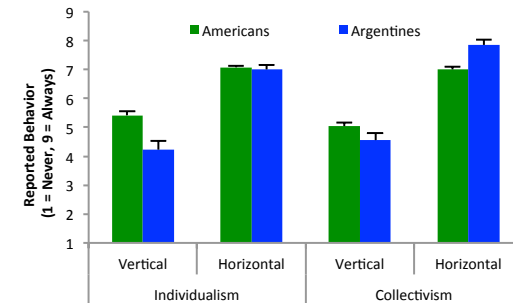


A 2 (Country) x 2 (Self/Peer) repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Self/Peer ($F_{(1,113)} = 25.69, p < .001$), but no significant main effect of country and no significant interaction. Argentines and Americans demonstrated PI and indicated peers drink significantly more.



A 2 (Country) x 2 (Self/Peer) repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant main effect of Self/Peer ($F_{(1,115)} = 7.30, p < .008$) and country ($F_{(1,115)} = 22.62, p < .001$), but no significant interaction. While the overall results also appear to indicate PI, planned post-hoc comparisons show that the Americans drive this effect: Americans' indicate that their peers drink significantly more frequently than the self ($t_{(89)} = -4.39, p < .001$), while the Argentines' do not differ significantly in self/peer ratings ($t_{(26)} = -.681, p = .502$).

Individualism-Collectivism Scores



A 2 (Country) x 2 (I-C) x 2 (VH) repeated measures ANOVA found significant interactions between I-C and country ($F_{(1,117)} = 10.82, p < .001$), VH and country ($F_{(1,117)} = 29.45, p < .001$), and IC and VH ($F_{(1,117)} = 4.30, p < .040$). Planned post-hoc comparisons show that Americans scored significantly higher than Argentines on VI ($t_{(117)} = -3.87, p < .001$), but that Argentines scored significantly higher than Americans on HC ($t_{(117)} = 3.79, p < .001$). The two groups did not differ on HI ($t_{(32.68)} = -0.46, p = .646$) or VC ($t_{(117)} = -1.76, p < .080$).

Correlations between Individualism-Collectivism Scores and Self/Peer Discrepancy

I-C values did *not* predict global discrepancies in self/peer drinking behavior:

- For Americans, there was a significant weak *positive* correlation between HI and amount ($r = .234, p < .05$). All other correlations were not significant.
- For Argentines, there was a significant weak *negative* correlation between VC and frequency ($r = -.397, p < .05$). All other correlations were not significant.

Conclusion

- PI and culture interact to mediate social comparisons:
- Argentines and Americans demonstrate PI for drink amount
 - Only the Americans demonstrated PI in drink frequency

- PI is partially predicted by I-C and VH:
- Argentines scored significantly higher on HC
 - Americans scored significantly higher on VI

The proposed *weekend hypothesis* may predict cultural differences in the expression of PI by type of observation:

- Observable behaviors, such as actual drinking amount that occurs in a single setting – such as the weekend – demonstrates PI across cultures.
- Non-observable behaviors, such as drink frequency that may occur in many settings during the week, draws on participants' cultural norms and therefore may not demonstrate PI.

References and Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the UEC for funding and the participants for being a part of this study. Address correspondence to David Adler at djadler@pugetsound.edu.
Borsari, B., & Carey, K. B. (2001). Peer influences on college drinking: A review of the research. *Journal of Substance Abuse, 13*(4), 391-424.
Triandis, H. C. (1996). The psychological measurement of cultural syndromes. *American Psychologist, 51*, 407-415.