Bottoms up: Individualists more likely to be problem drinkers

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What makes residents of certain states or countries more likely to consume more
alcohol? According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, high
levels of individualism lead to more problem drinking.

"We looked at the extent to which consumer levels of individualism (vs. collectivism) were related to their beer and problem alcohol consumption," write authors Yinlong Zhang and L.J. Shrum (both University of Texas-San Antonio).

"We found that the higher a region scored on valuing individualism, the greater their beer and alcohol consumption, and this was true even when taking into account the effects of other variables such as income, climate, gender, and religion."

The researchers first used archival data to conduct comparisons of beer and alcohol consumption. They compared countries and compared states within the United States. They found that individualism, on a whole-country basis, could significantly predict alcohol consumption. In the United States, individualism correlated with teen drinking, teen heavy drinking, and adult binge drinking.

The researchers went on to manipulate the cultural orientation of individuals in the study. "We did this by simply asking people to either think and then write about enjoying their own life (independent self-

construal) or think and then write about enjoying relationships with family and friends (interdependent selfconstrual)," the authors wrote. "We found that people who were temporarily induced to have an independent self-construal were more receptive to immediate beer consumption than were people who were temporarily induced to have an interdependent self-construal." Study participants did not actually consume beer; they merely indicated whether they felt like it.

The researchers found that people with more interdependent mindsets were less likely to over-consume when they were with peers. "The results suggest that people with collectivistic cultural orientations tend to be more motivated to regulate impulsive consumption tendencies than those with individualistic cultural orientations, which in turn makes them less likely to engage in beer or alcohol consumption," the authors conclude.

Source: University of Chicago

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