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### Abstract

This study explored relationships between argumentativeness and collectivism/individualism in Finland and the United States. Data were gathered in the US ( $n = 412$ ) and Finland ( $n = 261$ ).

The analysis suggested the following: 1) as predicted collectivism was negatively correlated with argumentativeness, 2) as predicted individualism was positively correlated with argumentativeness, and 3) Finnish participants reported significantly lower levels of argumentativeness than Americans. Cultural differences between the US and Finland are discussed as reasons for the differences between the nations on argumentativeness.

Keywords: Argumentativeness, Individualism/Collectivism, Cross-Cultural Communication, Hofstede, Finland

## A Test of the Relationship between Argumentativeness and Individualism/Collectivism in the United States and Finland

Over the past four decades, scholars have explored argumentativeness and its relationship with numerous communication traits and behaviors (e.g., Avtgis & Rancer, 2002; Hsu, 2007). An area that has received attention is how argumentativeness is related to Hofstede's (2001) concept of individualism/collectivism (Hsu, 2007; Klopff, Thompson, & Sallinen-Kuparinen, 1991). These studies have argued individualistic cultures are typically more likely to favor approaching argumentative situations, while collectivistic cultures are more likely to favor avoiding argumentative situations. However, few studies have empirically measured individualism/collectivism; instead these studies have relied on Hofstede's index, which can lead to overly broad cultural generalizations (Fougère & Moulettes, 2007).

Cross-cultural studies on argumentativeness have focused on differences between American and East-Asian cultures (Hsu, 2007). Research has explored argumentativeness in other regions like Western Europe and Turkey (Croucher et al., 2010; Croucher, Parrott, Zeng, & Gomez, 2014). In the current study, argumentativeness is explored in two nations, Finland and the United States. Individualism/collectivism is used to understand differences and similarities in argumentativeness between the two cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Shulruf, Hattie, & Dixon, 2007). These two nations have been chosen for the following reasons. First, studying argumentativeness in Finland provides a chance to expand our understanding of argumentativeness. Second, research demonstrates broad, communicative differences between Americans and Finns, which needs further analysis (Carbaugh, 1995; Siira, Rogan, & Hall, 2004). Third, the two nations differ on Hofstede's individualism/collectivism dimension, with the US scoring 91 and Finland scoring 63. However, researchers, except for Hofstede, have not measured

individualism/collectivism; instead they have relied on Hofstede's dimensions for comparison purposes. This study measures this dimension for a direct/empirical analysis of its relationship with argumentativeness. Fourth, these nations differ in their perceptions of argumentativeness and politeness, which could affect argumentativeness levels (Carbaugh, 1995; Siira et al., 2004).

### **Argumentativeness**

Infante and Rancer (1982) defined argumentativeness as “a relatively stable trait which predisposes an individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues” (p. 72).

Argumentativeness is measured based on the difference between an individual's tendency to approach arguments ( $ARG_{AP}$ ) and the tendency to avoid arguments ( $ARG_{AV}$ ). The difference between these two is total argumentativeness ( $ARG_{GT}$ ). Individuals who are high in argumentativeness have more confidence in their ability to argue, while those lower in argumentativeness prefer to avoid argumentative situations. Argumentativeness has been linked to numerous demographic variables, and traits/behaviors such as sex, age, and level of education (Schullery, 1998; Schullery & Schullery, 2003).

A body of research has explored the relationship between argumentativeness and cultural differences. Much of this research has focused on how individuals from individualistic and collectivistic cultures differ in argumentativeness. Individualistic cultures have typically been represented by the US, while collectivistic cultures have been represented by Southeast Asian cultures. In studies comparing these nations, the nations deemed “collectivistic” (China, Finland, France, Hong Kong, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Turkey) have generally been found to have lower levels of argumentativeness than the nations deemed “individualistic” (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US) (Croucher et al., 2013; Hsu, 2007; Klopff et al., 1991). While

these studies provide ample grounds to assert individuals from individualistic cultures should have higher levels of argumentativeness than individuals from collectivistic cultures, these researchers have not empirically measured individualism/collectivism. Instead, studies have relied on Hofstede's (2001) rankings. Some of these studies have included measures of self-construal, which is a micro-level version of individualism/collectivism (Singelis, 1994). It is essential to empirically measure an individual's individualism/collectivism to best ascertain its true relation to other traits/behaviors; therefore, individualism/collectivism, is empirically measured in this study. Thus, based on research demonstrating relationships between argumentativeness and individualism/collectivism, the following hypothesis is put forth.

*H1a:* There is a positive correlation between argumentativeness and individualism.

*H1b:* There is a negative correlation between argumentativeness and collectivism.

### **Argumentativeness in the United States and Finland**

One study explored argumentativeness in Finland (Klopf et al., 1991) and found Finnish students prefer avoiding arguments. In a study of conflict style approaches, Siira et al. (2004) found Finns prefer to use solution-oriented approaches to conflict, and Americans more prefer controlling behaviors than Finns do. The hypotheses in the Siira et al. (2004) study are based on assumptions from Hofstede (2001). Particularly, that Finland is more collectivistic and higher context than the US. However, many of the assumptions were not empirically measured. Furthermore, researchers have urged more developed comparisons of Finland and other nations that focus on empirical testing, instead of generalizations (Croucher et al., 2014; Litosseliti, Marttunen, Laurinen, & Salminen, 2005).

The current study compares the US and Finland to further our understanding of argumentativeness. Although argumentativeness research exists about the US, there is limited

research on how Finns approach arguments. Salo-Lee (1994) stated that although many believe Finns to be non-confrontational, a study found Finns prefer to approach arguments and conflict situations directly, when compared to Chinese businesspersons. Siira et al. (2004) stated Finns are likely to be quiet during a conversation, as they wait their turn to speak, which may explain the misconception that Finns are “quiet.” Finns are also more likely to avoid small talk and just say what they feel (Carbaugh, 1995). Finnish approaches to communication appear to conflict with what is expected. The stereotypical “quiet” Finn (Carbaugh, 1995; Siira et al., 2004) is perceived by some to actually be argumentative and confrontational (Salo-Lee, 1994), which is more similar to US communication patterns than expected. Furthermore, individuals from different cultures are likely to present different perceptions of self, which will affect communication behaviors/traits (Hofstede, 2001). Thus, the following research question is put forth regarding the relationship between national culture and argumentativeness:

*RQ:* To what extent will argumentativeness differ between Finland and the United States?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Upon completion of appropriate ethical board approvals, participants were recruited online in Finland ( $n = 261$ ) and the United States ( $n = 412$ ) from 2011-2013. Finnish participants ranged in age from 17 to 63 ( $M = 32.38$ ,  $SD = 10.32$ ) and US participants ranged in age from 18 to 57 ( $M = 30.91$ ,  $SD = 9.85$ ). Females made up 60.2% ( $n = 157$ ) and males 39.8% ( $n = 104$ ) of the Finnish sample. Females made up 40.5% ( $n = 167$ ) and males 59.5% ( $n = 245$ ) of the US sample. Participants were recruited via convenience samples through various social networks (family, friends, colleagues, community groups, etc.), and also through part of a university project in which students received extra credit for finding non students willing to

complete a survey. At the end of each survey, participants were asked to provide their e-mail address and name. At the end of data collection, a random 10% of the participants in each nation were contacted to verify their answers. This step was taken to verify the authenticity of responses. Only the researchers had access to the file with participant names and e-mails. Non-students were the focus of the study to move away from the tendency to rely on undergraduate students as participants. Students made up 10.2% of the US, and 11.5% of the Finnish sample.

### **Instruments**

Surveys were originally prepared in English, and then translated into Finnish. Two bilingual native speakers of Finnish translated the English version of the survey into Finnish, and then two bilingual native Finnish speakers back-translated the survey into English. After back-translation, all translations were compared for accuracy. The translation was reliable ( $\kappa = .84$ ). As none of the scales had previously been used in Finland, confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were conducted. For the factor analyses items loading below .40 were eliminated (Bollen, 1989).

**Argumentativeness Scale.** Infante and Rancer's (1982) 20-item Argumentativeness Scale measured a person's level of argumentativeness ( $ARG_{GT}$ ).<sup>1</sup> Ten of the items measure tendency to avoid arguments ( $ARG_{AV}$ ), and 10 items measure tendency to approach arguments ( $ARG_{AP}$ ). The difference between  $ARG_{AV}$  and  $ARG_{AP}$  is  $ARG_{GT}$ . Low to negative scores represent low argumentativeness, while high scores represent high argumentativeness. The items are rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 *almost never true* to 5 *almost always true*. Cronbach alphas for the scale have ranged from .79 to .91 (Croucher et al., 2013). For the current study,

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<sup>1</sup> There is debate over the Argumentativeness Scale. One side (e.g., Levine, Kotowski, Beatty, & Van Kelegom, 2012) asserts the conceptualization of the scale is inconsistent with research results, that it lacks construct validity, and thus the scale measures "want to be" argumentativeness and not "the tendency to engage in actual argumentativeness" (Levine et al., 2012, p. 95). Others (e.g., Infante, Rancer, & Wigley, 2011) defend the scale's validity, dimensionality, and theoretical construction. We use the Argumentativeness Scale and argumentativeness as conceptualized by Infante and Rancer (1982) with the hope of adding to this discussion.

the  $\alpha$  for ARG<sub>AV</sub> in the US was .85 and .79 in Finland. The  $\alpha$  for ARG<sub>AP</sub> in the US was .89 and .83 in Finland. CFA suggested the two dimensional scale demonstrated acceptable model fit in Finland,  $\chi^2(206) = 501.68, p < .001, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .06$ .

**Individualism/Collectivism** The 30-item Auckland Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Shulruf et al., 2007) measures two dimensions of collectivism (advice and harmony), and three dimensions of individualism (competitiveness, responsibility, and uniqueness). Scale items are rated on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 *never* to 6 *always*. The dimensions can be combined to create one dimension of individualism and one dimension of collectivism. The alphas are reported in Table 1. CFA suggested the two dimensional scale demonstrated acceptable fit in Finland,  $\chi^2(13) = 29.44, p < .01, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .06$ . Items 12, 16, and 20 were dropped from final analysis as they loaded below .40. Insert Table 1 here

## Results

Statistical analysis was conducted in SPSS 16.0. The correlations, means, and standard deviations are in Table 1. To test the *H1a* and *H1b* a Pearson correlation was conducted. To explore the *RQ* an independent samples *t*-test was conducted. *H1a* asserted there would be a positive relationship between argumentativeness and individualism. Among the entire sample this was supported ( $r = .08, p < .05$ )<sup>2</sup>. However, in analyzing Finland and the US individually, the correlation was not as expected. In the US, the relationship between argumentativeness and individualism was not significant ( $r = .03$ ), while in Finland this relationship was negative ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ). *H1b* asserted there would be a negative relationship between argumentativeness and collectivism. Among the entire sample this was supported ( $r = -.21, p < .01$ ). In Finland there was also a significant negative relationship ( $r = -.18, p < .01$ ). In the US the relationship was negative, but was not significant ( $r = -.06$ ). The research question explored the extent to

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<sup>2</sup> While this correlation is statistically significant, its practical significance should be considered carefully.



argumentativeness would differ between Finland and the United States. The independent samples *t*-test revealed Americans ( $M = 30.64$ ,  $SD = 3.65$ ) are significantly more argumentative than Finns ( $M = 29.38$ ,  $SD = 2.80$ );  $t(637.36) = 4.95$ ,  $p < .0001$ , Cohen's  $d = .39$ .

## Discussion

### Individualism/Collectivism, Argumentativeness, and National Culture

Results of the hypothesis testing showed collectivism was negatively related to argumentativeness, and individualism was positively correlated. While a relatively small correlation, these results mirror previous research, which has found individuals in collectivistic nations/cultures are more likely to avoid arguments, while individuals in individualistic cultures are more likely to approach arguments (Hsu, 2007). Yet, when analyzing each nation individually, the correlations are not consistent with previous research. In the US, argumentativeness was not correlated with collectivism or individualism. This may reflect the influence of other factors; research has shown, for example, differences in individualism/collectivism in the US along geographic lines (Vandello & Cohen, 1999). In Finland, argumentativeness and collectivism were negatively correlated as predicted; however, individualism and argumentativeness were also negatively correlated. A closer look at the dimensions of individualism may explain this result. There are negative relationships between argumentativeness and uniqueness ( $r = -.50$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and responsibility ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

For Finns, individuals who want to be unique are less argumentative, which could be a way for people to try to not stand out from the group. Although this may seem counterintuitive, research has distinguished between vertical and horizontal individualism, with the latter being associated with lack of comparison to others and doing one's own thing (Chiou, 2001). Argumentativeness may thus serve no purpose to Finns who are interested in being unique.

Also, Finns who emphasize individual responsibility are less argumentative, which supports the notion that Finns prefer to avoid arguments, as it is seen as harming the group. The results of the *t*-test support differences between Americans and Finns on argumentativeness; Finns have lower levels of argumentativeness than Americans. Such a result represents the tendency of Finns to approach conflicts or arguments from a solution-orientation, and to see arguments as a detriment to the group, as opposed to Americans, who approach such situations from a more dominating, individualistic approach. Scholars have alluded to the solution-orientation and group protectionist tendency among Finns, but have not empirically measured it (Carbaugh, 1995).

### **Implications and Limitation**

This study contributes to research in methodological, theoretical, and practical ways. First, this study adds to our understanding of the instruments used in this study in a new linguistic context. Gudykunst (2002) cautioned intercultural/cross-cultural researchers about assuming American derived instruments are reliable and valid in non-English speaking cultures/nations. As suggested by the CFAs, some items were dropped, as they did not “fit.” In many cases Finnish participants commented on how phrases seemed “juvenile,” “silly,” “stupid,” or “something that my little sister or brother would say.” Such items in the end were dropped due to the CFAs. Thus, a contribution of this study is its recognition of linguistic and cultural nuances. Second, this study’s use of a non-university-student sample is a contribution to our understanding of argumentativeness. While the majority of communication studies comment on how such samples are a limitation, they are still relied on by most researchers. As discussed by Meltzer, Naab, and Daschmann (2012), such samples can suffer from validity issues due to a cultivation effect. The current study had less than 12% students in each nation. Although student samples have provided a plethora of information about communication, such samples

might not provide information about the average population. The lived experiences of students are limited in some ways, particularly in regards to emotional issues like conflict. Thus, we contend a sample (even a convenience sample) of non-students is a more representative sample.

Third, this study combines micro and macro-level approaches to the study of argumentativeness. At the micro-level, analyzing individual level variables such as individualism/collectivism (Avtgis & Rancer, 2002) offer researchers more ways to understand argumentativeness. As the results of this study show, individualism, and collectivism all have significant effects on argumentativeness. Future studies considering the effects of these micro-level variables on argumentativeness might produce fruitful results. On a macro-level, the broad cultural-level variable of nation might provide further insight into communicative behaviors and traits. Croucher et al. (2010) stated, “nationality/national identification is also an intrinsic identifier for many individuals” (p. 150). Future studies should include nationality as a macro-level variable to better understand this identifier. Fourth, little argumentativeness research has explored Finland. These results could serve as a starting point for developing argument or conflict resolution strategies. As the results of this study further enhance our understanding of how Finns prefer to approach arguments, let this study serve as a point of reference for practitioners and others interested in argument and conflict resolution strategies.

While the sample was diverse, most of the participants from both countries came from middle to upper middle-class income brackets. Thus, generalizations to a larger population that includes individuals in a lower income bracket must be done with caution.

This study compared argumentativeness in the US and Finland. Results showed associations between collectivism/individualism and argumentativeness, and suggested national differences in argumentativeness between the nations. These variables provide sufficient

opportunity for further study into argumentativeness and collectivism/individualism. While some results confirm previous research, and some are contrary, the findings show there are significant relationships and differences in levels of argumentativeness, and that empirically measuring individualism/collectivism can reveal insights into argumentativeness.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Alphas, and Correlations for Study Variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	range	<u>Combined Sample</u>								
				(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	
(1) ARG <sub>GT</sub>	30.14	3.39	16.50-42.00	-								
(2) Harmony	2.34	.84	1.25-6.00	-.19**	-							
(3) Advice	2.05	1.08	1.00-5.75	-.20**	.74****	-						
(4) Compete	3.95	1.01	1.25-6.00	.10**	-.49****	-.38****	-					
(5) Unique	3.52	1.43	1.00-6.00	.06	-.78****	-.55****	.72****	-				
(6) Responsibility	2.46	.91	1.00-6.00	.05	-.56****	-.32****	.70****	.84****	-			
(7) Collectivism	2.19	.90	1.13-5.88	-.21**	.91****	.95****	-.46****	-.70****	-.45****	-		
(8) Individualism	3.31	1.03	1.50-6.00	.08*	-.69****	-.48****	.87****	.85****	.92****	-.61****	-	

Finland

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	range	$\alpha$	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) ARG <sub>GT</sub>	29.38	2.80	17-35.5	-	-							
(2) Harmony	3.09	.65	2.00-6.00	.77	-.15**	-						
(3) Advice	3.03	1.15	1.00-5.75	.78	-.16**	.42****	-					



(4) Compete	3.36	1.19	1.25-6.00	.81	.01	.10	-.02	-				
(5) Unique	2.24	.78	1.00-6.00	.83	-.50***	.13*	.24***	.36***	-			
(6) Responsibility	1.97	.63	1.00-6.00	.84	-.20**	.43***	.24**	.25**	.46***	-		
(7) Collectivism	3.06	.77	1.63-5.88	-	-.18**	.73***	.92***	.03	.23**	.36***	-	
(8) Individualism	2.52	.64	1.5-6.00	-	-.26**	.25**	.16**	.81***	.77***	.66***	.23**	-

United States

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	range	$\alpha$	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
(1) ARG <sub>GT</sub>	30.64	3.65	26.5-42.00	-	-							
(2) Harmony	1.87	.57	1.25-2.75	.81	-.05	-						
(3) Advice	1.42	.29	1.00-1.75	.83	-.06	.90***	-					
(4) Compete	4.32	.72	3.25-5.00	.82	.02	-.68***	-.30	-				
(5) Unique	4.34	1.10	2.5-5.00	.85	.04	-.93***	-.68***	.90***	-			
(6) Responsibility	2.76	.93	1.25-3.5	.86	.03	-.82***	-.50***	.97***	.98***	-		
(7) Collectivism	1.65	.42	1.13-2.25	-	-.06	.99***	.96***	-.56***	-.87***	-.73***	-	
(8) Individualism	3.81	.90	2.33-4.5	-	.03	-.84***	-.53***	.97***	.98***	.99***	-.75***	-

Note: \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .