

# Deny the Voice Inside: Accessible Attitudes May Hinder Decision Making for Collectivists

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## Main Idea

Although accessible personal attitudes are generally seen as desirable and helpful, our research suggests that, for collectivists, such attitudes may be problematic or dissonance-inducing, particularly when those attitudes appear to be at odds with prevailing norms.

## Introduction

For decades, research has associated accessible personal attitudes—preferences that quickly come to mind—with numerous psychological benefits. However, the evidence supporting these claims is based on primarily Western participants and thus, draws upon a Western cultural view of attitudes.

Traditional attitude theory posits that attitudes represent the individual's personal desires and these are focal in making choices. Normative inputs are external to the attitude.

In contrast, recent theorizing based upon cultural psychology suggests that because collectivists (vs. individualists) want to be normative, they incorporate norms into their attitudes (Riemer, Shavitt, Markus, & Koo, 2014).

Based on this normative-contextual (N-C) model of attitudes, we suggest that accessible personal preferences may have negative psychological consequences for collectivists (vs. individualists) because, rather than facilitating good decisions, they have the potential to interfere with adapting to normative expectations. Accessible personal attitudes are particularly likely to be a liability when they are norm-incongruent.

## Experiment 1: Restaurant Choice

**Objective:** To assess whether collectivists (vs. individualists) experience more negative psychological consequences (e.g. decision regret) when their preferences conflict with normative information.

**Main Hypothesis:** Compared to the other groups, collectivists (e.g. Asians, Latinos) who were told their choice was norm-incongruent should report more decision regret.

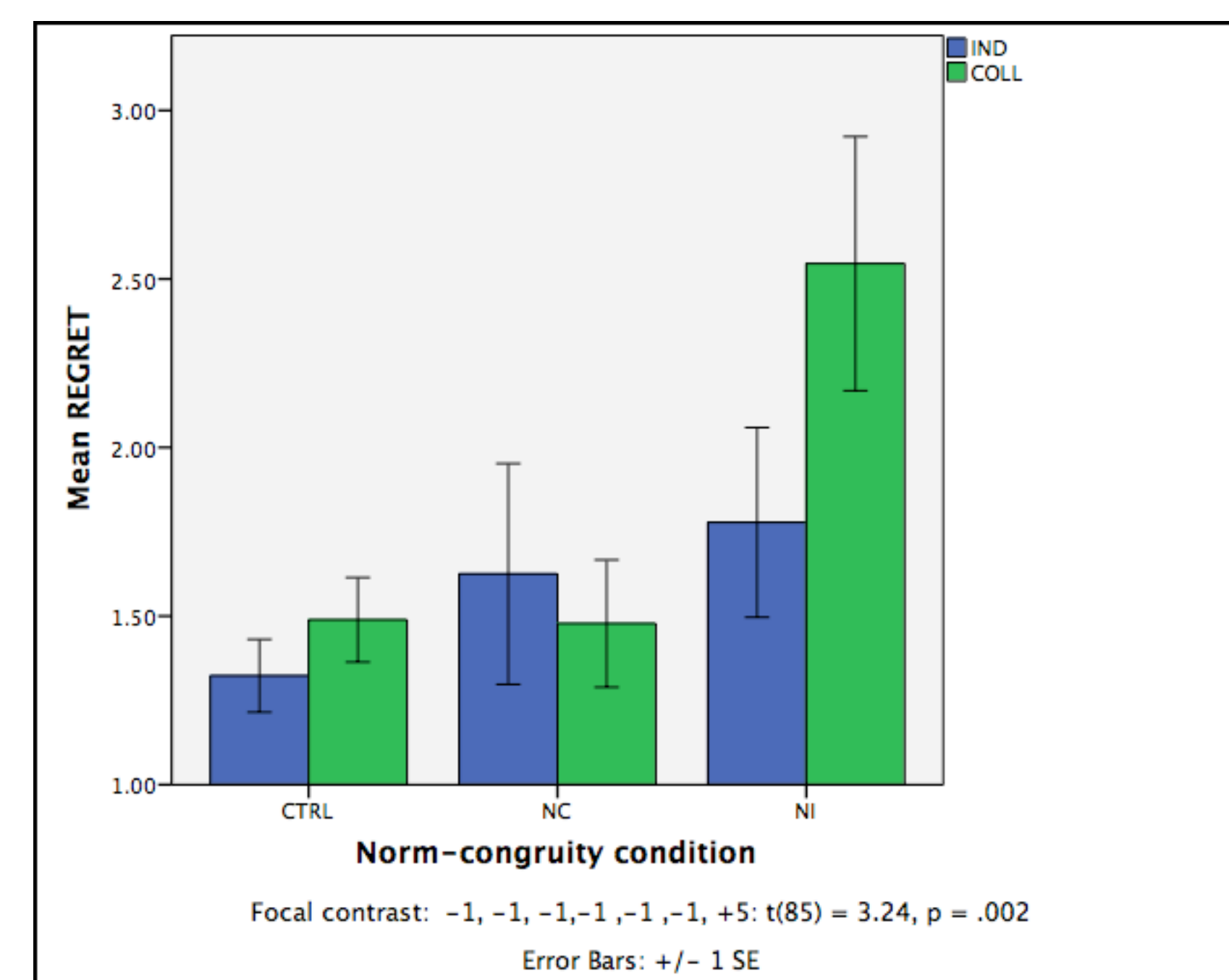
**Design:** 3 x 2 between subjects (N = 91)

	CONTROL	NORM-CONGRUENT	NORM-INCONGRUENT
IND			
COLL			

**Procedure:**

1. Indicated preferences for 9 restaurant brands
2. Chose one to receive a \$30 gift card
3. **Manipulated norm-congruity**  
Were told either that their restaurant choice was ranked #2 (norm-congruent) among students, #8 (norm-incongruent) among students, or no ranking (control)  
Then, evaluated reviews of top 3 restaurants that either included (norm-congruent) or did not include (norm-incongruent) their preference. Control group did not see reviews.
4. 3-item regret scale (e.g., "I feel sorry for choosing X"; 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree;  $\alpha = .94$ )
5. Demographics

**Results:**



**Summary:**

People from collectivist (vs. individualist) ethnic backgrounds were more likely to regret norm-incongruent preferences. This increased regret suggests, in line with the N-C model, a greater conflict between the personal and normative components of N-C attitudes.

## Experiment 2: Painting Study

**Objective:** Examine whether, among collectivists who are told their preferences conflict with norms, increasing the accessibility of their personal preferences is associated with a greater effort to reduce dissonance.

**Main Hypothesis:** Compared to control, attitude accessibility should be associated with more dissonance reduction behavior (asking more to resell a chosen item) for collectivists who are told their choice was norm-incongruent, but not for other groups.

**Design:** 2 x 2 x 2 between subjects (N = 241)

	INDIVIDUALISTS		COLLECTIVISTS	
	CONTROL	HIGH ATTITUDE ACCESSIBILITY	CONTROL	HIGH ATTITUDE ACCESSIBILITY
NORM-CONGRUENT				
NORM-INCONGRUENT				

**Procedure:**

1. **Measured cultural orientation**
2. **Manipulated attitude accessibility**  
Participants rehearsed attitudes toward focal objects (paintings) or fillers by repeated attitude expression
3. Chose a painting to receive as a gift
4. **Norm-congruity manipulation**  
Were told others had chosen similar/dissimilar paintings
5. **DV: Dissonance reduction behavior**

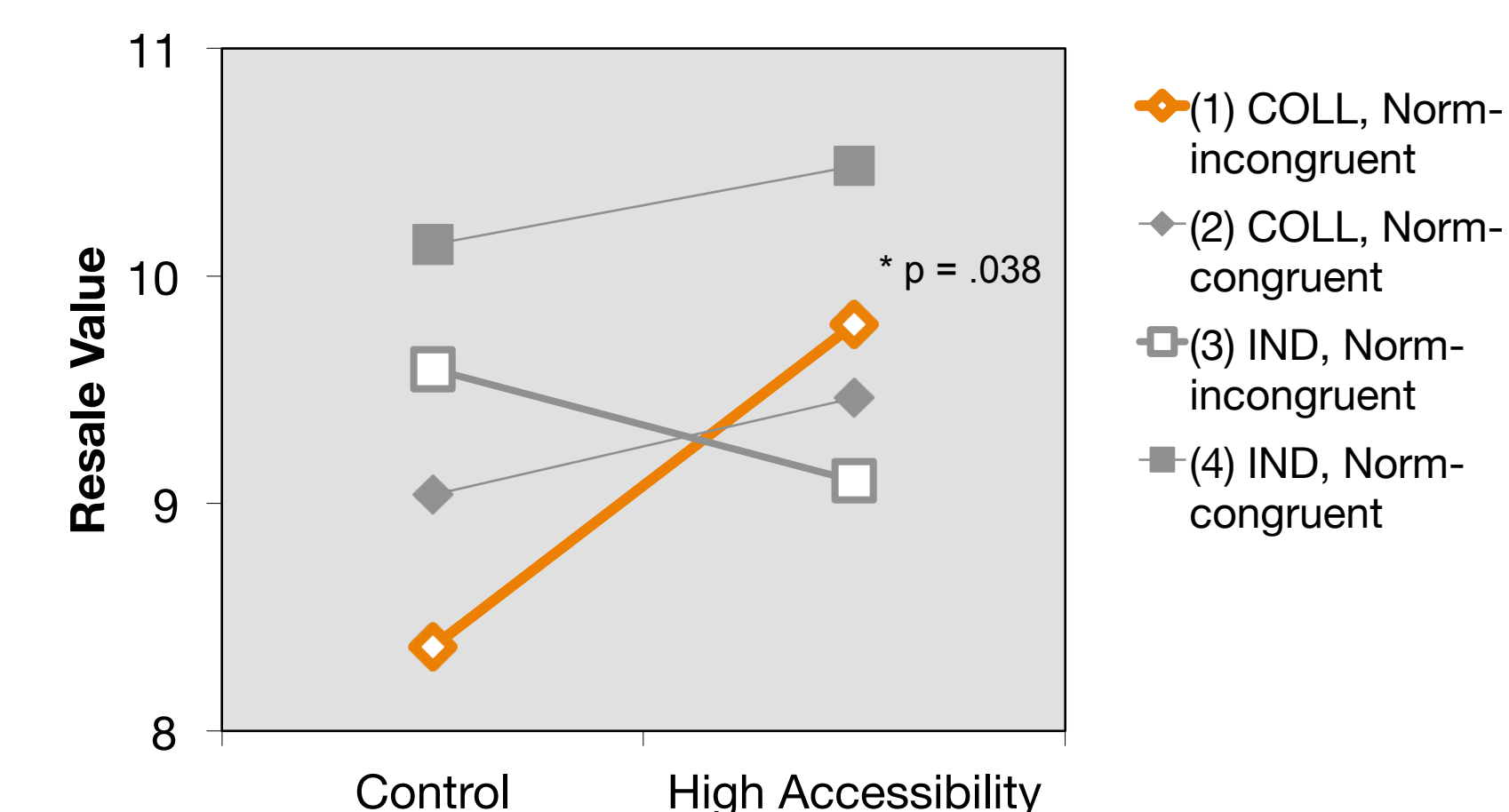
Via resale value (e.g., "After a few days, you receive a letter saying that you can sell the painting back to the company for cash. At what price would you sell the painting back to your company?"; respondents answered on 12-pt. scales from 1 = 10% of retail value to 12 = 120% of retail value)

**Manipulation Checks:**

	Accessibility condition		Norm condition	
	Control	High	Congruent	Incongruent
Choice latency (in seconds)	47.5	36.8		
2-item index ( $\alpha = .945$ )			6.0	1.6

$p < .001$ ; e.g., "In the study, I chose the same type of painting as the others on the artwork sub-committee."

**Results:**



Dawson & Richter (2006)

**Summary:**

We linked attitude accessibility with a negative psychological outcome (e.g. cognitive dissonance) and identified norm-incongruity as a potential boundary condition to its overall utility.

## General Discussion

Previous studies have suggested that people use accessible attitudes as a coping mechanism because they facilitate and ease the stress of decision-making.

Our findings suggest that accessible attitudes may not always serve as a coping mechanism. For collectivists, they may sometimes be associated with negative psychological consequences, such as regret and post-decision dissonance, especially when their accessible attitudes conflict with existing norms.

Our results are also consistent with recent theorizing that suggests that attitudes take on different forms and functions across cultures.

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