Original Research Article

Latent Profiles of Cultural Orientation in a Multicultural Country: Implications for Career Development

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Abstract

Although cultural influences are a significant factor in career decision-making and progression, cultural orientations remain underexplored in career development research. This study investigated the relationship between underlying value patterns that define cultural orientation and career development among young adults. Latent profile analysis was used to identify four different cultural orientation groups in a sample of young Australians (N = 419; 70.5% female; mean age 20 years) based on combinations of underlying individualism (i.e., competitiveness, uniqueness, responsibility) and collectivism values (advice seeking, harmony). The four profiles were "high uniqueness" (53.6%), "low uniqueness" (27.9%), "low collectivism" (12.7%), and "low individualism" (5.8%). The "high uniqueness" and "low collectivism" groups had higher scores on protean career attitudes, career adaptability, and proactive career behaviors compared to the "low individualism" and "low uniqueness" groups, and the "high uniqueness" group reported more positive views of future employability and better current academic performance than the "low individualism" group. The results demonstrated that clusters of students can be identified based on expressed cultural values and that these groups differ on career development variables. We discuss implications for practice and theory development.

Keywords

cultural orientation, individualism-collectivism, career development, latent profile analysis

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Introduction

According to Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent et al., 1994), cultural influences encompass personal inputs and environmental affordances, including both distal contextual and proximal environmental influences, which shape self-efficacy and outcome expectations. One key expression of these cultural influences is an individual's cultural orientation, which refers to "individuals' affiliation with and engagement in their ethnic and racial group memberships, identity, values, and behavioural practices" (Trang & Yates, 2022, p. 3). Cultural orientation is shaped by the interaction between an individual's living environment, which reflects predominant cultural values, and personal preferences regarding cultural values. As such, cultural orientation serves as a critical factor in shaping both career development and career outcomes (Fan & Leong, 2016; Meijers et al., 2013).

Previous research has supported this claim by examining how career development tendencies vary along the individualism-collectivism continuum. Specifically, cross-cultural studies have compared career development behaviors across countries. They often assumed that Chinese students exhibit a stronger collectivist orientation, which shapes their career behaviors, whereas U.S. students tend to show a more individualistic orientation, which influence different career behaviors (Guan et al., 2015; Ye et al., 2018). While these studies provide valuable insights, they primarily rely on a binary individualism-collectivism framework (e.g., Oyserman et al., 2002) and focus predominantly on cross-national comparisons.

Australia is an ideal context within which to investigate diverse cultural orientation profiles. Australia is multi-cultural due to elevated levels of non-discriminatory immigration during the latter half of the 20th century, which led to importance being placed on some collectivist values, such as harmony, while maintaining dominant individualism values (Leung et al., 2011). Australia has a dominant individualist orientation (Hofstede Insights, 2023), but is highly multicultural (e.g., 27.6% born overseas; 48.2% have at least one parent born overseas; ABS, 2022), with a long history of Asian and other migration and influence. Of the top five countries of birth for immigrants to Australia, three are Asian (India, China, and Philippines) that have strong collectivist orientations (e.g., China = 57; Hofstede Insights, 2023). However, cultural orientations within multicultural societies are not uniform. For example, second-generation immigrants may adopt more individualistic values in alignment with mainstream Australian society compared to their parents, and acculturation processes can further influence the degree to which collectivist or individualist values are endorsed (Crisp & Turner, 2011; Kim, 2024). Thus, in this multicultural context, young adults may navigate and internalise diverse and sometimes conflicting cultural values, resulting in unique cultural orientation profiles that go beyond simple national or ethnic categories.

Drawing on SCCT (Lent et al., 1994) and Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 1980), we took a more nuanced perspective and investigated patterns of values that underlie these dominant cultural orientations and tested how those patterns differed on a range of career development variables, contributing to both theoretical advancement and empirical evidence. We used latent profile analysis (LPA) to address our research question: Do distinct cultural orientation profiles emerge from the interplay of individualist and collectivist values? This approach moves beyond traditional dichotomous classifications, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how cultural orientations manifest and influence career development. LPA is a classification system that can identify homogenous sub-groups in a sample that share similar characteristics (Spurk et al., 2020). Second, we examined how the resultant profiles differed on key career development and demographic variables. We examined these questions in a sample of young Australian adults who were completing tertiary education prior to entering the adult workforce (Monteiro & Almeida, 2015).

Cultural Orientation

Culture can be conceptualized as "a matter of ideas and values, a collective cast of mind" (Kuper, 1999, p. 227). Hofstede (1980) pioneered the simplification and quantification of cultural diversity by introducing a set of five dimensions to measure cultural orientation. These are individualism versus collectivism, power distance versus closeness, uncertainty avoidance versus acceptance, masculinity versus femininity, and long versus short term time orientation. This categorisation has gained widespread acceptance in scholarly research, with individualism versus collectivism widely recognized as the fundamental indicator of the prevalent societal mentality and cultural representation (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018).

Individualistic cultural orientations prioritize the significance of "I"-consciousness and self-actualization, whereas collectivistic cultures place a high value on "we"-consciousness with personal identities derived from the social system. Individuals with a strong individualistic orientation tend to prioritize their own interests and engage openly in activities aimed at bolstering self-esteem and considering themselves as distinct from others. The most salient feature of individualism is the emphasis on personal independence, which involves taking responsibility for oneself (Shulruf et al., 2007). Individuals who develop this perspective are more likely to prioritize their own needs, perceive themselves as unique compared to others, and strive to achieve personal goals. Consequently, they often exhibit competitive behaviors that focus on their own success rather than the goals of society at large. Those with a strong collectivist orientation, on the other hand, perceive themselves as integral members of a specific group to which they become affiliated. They tend to internalize the objectives and values of this group and afford them more importance than self goals (Shulruf et al., 2007). Collectivists place importance on harmony and seeking others' advice, as they internalize their own goals in alignment with group goals (Mok et al., 2020).

So-called Western societies (e.g., US, UK, Australia) are classified primarily as individualistic, while non-Western cultures, such as those in Asia (Hughes, 2011; Noordin & Jusoff, 2010), are considered mostly collectivist. However, Asian nations exhibit varying degrees of individualism and collectivism depending on their broader social and political contexts. e.g., Kim (2024) observed a decline in collectivism over time in developed Asian countries but found no corresponding increase in individualism, suggesting that cultural values evolve in complex and non-linear ways rather than through a simple binary shift. e.g., Noordin and Jusoff (2010) found no differences between Australia and some Asian countries (e.g., Malaysia) on both horizontal individualism, which refers to the degree of support for equality and valuing uniqueness, and vertical individualism, which reflects status, hierarchy, and competition levels (Hong et al., 2022). Researchers have emphasized the importance of taking an individual-level approach to understand cultural orientation (Sharma, 2010; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012), especially when examining the role of cultural orientation in explaining individual behaviours and development, including career development. To date, these underlying cultural values have been examined to capture a nation's general tendencies (e.g., Ciochină & Faria, 2009; Shulruf et al., 2011), even though the level of endorsement can vary within the same cohort.

Cultural Orientation and Career Development

Young adulthood is a critical period for both career development and cultural identity development (Fan & Leong, 2016; Super, 1990). To date, studies have focused on examining differences in career development between nations that lie on different points of the individualism-collectivism continuum. Guan et al. (2015), e.g., found that national cultural norms of Chinese students, who scored higher on collectivism (e.g., advice seeking and harmony) and lower on

individualism (e.g., aspirations for an ideal occupation, internal locus of control, and effort invested) than US students were strongly related to career decision-making; whereas personal cultural orientation was more strongly related to career decision-making in the US students. Ye et al. (2018) found that placing greater emphasis on social harmony and interpersonal expectations, which is aligned to a collectivist orientation, was related to less career self-efficacy, although this negative relationship was weaker for Chinese compared to US students. This suggests that the impact of cultural values on self-efficacy may be context-dependent, highlighting that individuals derive self-efficacy from multiple sources beyond individual agency. While these studies showed that cultural orientation was related to career development and decision-making, they were limited by comparing groups from different countries, rather than examining how cultural orientation differences within a single multicultural country relate to career development.

We address this first by testing for distinguishable cultural orientation profiles within a sample of young adult students drawn from the same multicultural country, Australia and hypothesise that distinct profiles based on underlying individualist and collectivist values exist among them (H1). We then test whether the profiles differ on a range of career development variables. Drawing from SCCT, particularly its emphasis on performance domains and attainments, we tested for differences on protean career orientation, career adaptability, proactive career behavior, perceived future employability, and academic performance as key career development variables.

Protean Career Orientation. Career orientation refers to the approach people take when considering and making decisions about their career (Tschopp et al., 2014). The protean orientation is the most prominent current approach to have arisen in response to today's more dynamic and turbulent career environments (Hirschi & Koen, 2021). It is characterized by self-directedness and being values-driven (Briscoe et al., 2006; Hall, 2004), with research having demonstrated positive associations with positive career development outcomes in young adults across diverse cultures, including career decidedness (Li et al., 2019), perceived employability (Kim et al., 2023), career satisfaction (Liberato Borges et al., 2015), and both subjective and objective career success in university students (Kim et al., 2023). Other research has shown protean career attitudes are related to cultural orientation. For example, Hong et al. (2022) found that horizontal individualism was related positively to protean career attitudes in US working adults, while vertical collectivism had a negative relationship. Thus, we hypothesised that a profile endorsing individualist values would likely exhibit higher protean career attitudes (H2).

Career Adaptability. This refers to the "psychosocial construct that denotes an individual's resources for coping with current and anticipated tasks, transitions, [and] traumas in their occupational roles" (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, p. 662). The psychosocial resources that shape adaptive behaviors are conceptualized by combinations of concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas, 2002). Individuals with more positive core self-evaluations tend to be more adaptable, as they are engaged actively in career planning, exploration, and networking (Hirschi et al., 2015); thus, it is a crucial characteristic for students as they navigate and prepare to enter the challenging and constantly evolving 21st century job market and world of work. There are cultural orientation differences in career adaptability. Horizontal and vertical individualism and horizontal collectivism, for example, have positive relationships with career adaptability in ICT professionals in Malaysia (Omar & Noordin, 2016). Thus, individualistic values and equality appear important to career adaptability. Hence, we hypothesised that a profile endorsing both individualist and collectivist values would likely demonstrate higher career adaptability (H3).

Proactive Career Behaviors. Proactive career behaviors are essential to translate career attitudes and plans into career actions and outcomes, empowering young people to make informed choices and

take decisive actions for career preparation and transition (Kim et al., 2023). Plans play a pivotal role in young people's effective transition into the adult workforce (Hirschi et al., 2013). Smale et al. (2019), for example, reported that proactive career behaviors yielded psychological benefits, such as perceiving oneself as achieving career and financial success, regardless of cultural context, which, in turn, enhanced career resilience. Proactive career behaviors are a key agentic effort in translating protean career attitudes into career outcomes and are closely related to protean career attitudes (Hall et al., 2018). Thus, similar to protean career attitudes, we hypothesised that a profile endorsing individualist values would likely demonstrate greater proactive career behaviors (H4).

Perceived Future Employability. This refers to the ease with which students anticipate they will secure employment in their chosen career area upon completion of their formal education (Gunawan et al., 2018). Securing employment upon graduation is no longer guaranteed, so perceiving that one has good prospects for employment in a desired field bolsters indicators of subjective and objective career development success (Kim et al., 2022), self-assurance, and overall wellbeing (Hazelzet et al., 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2019). Chen and Jing (2012) found that individuals who scored higher on collectivism reported less confidence, while those with a stronger individualistic orientation were more optimistic about their self-presentation. Therefore, we hypothesised that a profile endorsing individualist values would be more assured about their career prospects, whereas those with collectivist values would exhibit lower expectations regarding their employment opportunities (H5).

Academic Performance. For young people, completing their formal education is an important career development task, and academic performance affects their capacity to meet this task. Vocational aspirations fuel the drive to perform well academically, and the level of educational attainment plays a pivotal role in shaping eventual career outcomes (Thiele et al., 2018) and serves as a gauge of anticipated objective achievements in the professional domain (Sulastri et al., 2015). At the same time, students who hold higher vocational aspirations dedicate more time and effort to educational pursuits to enable those aspirations to be realized (Presti et al., 2022), and, thus, achieve better academic performance and higher levels of education.

High importance is placed on academic achievement in collectivist cultures and young people tend to internalize these group-oriented values and goals and strive to meet the expectations of parents and family around high academic performance (Mok et al., 2020). Tan et al. (2021) found that in China, which is a strongly collectivist culture, students espoused aspects of both collectivism and individualism, but that there was a stronger association between collectivist orientation and academic performance. Similarly, in the US, students who expressed stronger collectivist values exhibited more favourable attitudes towards academic pursuits (Gore et al., 2011). In light of this, we hypothesised that a profile with stronger collectivist values would likely demonstrate higher levels of academic performance (H6).

The Current Study

The cultural context influences the individual's career pursuit (see Ott-Holland et al., 2013). In this study, we conceptualise cultural orientation based on the continuum of individualism and collectivism, recognising that individuals, regardless of the dominant cultural framework, may exhibit a mix of both orientations (Noordin et al., 2002). Rather than assuming fixed cultural orientations at a group level, adopting a person-centered approach allows for a more nuanced examination of individual variations in cultural orientations. To address this, we used a person-centred approach – latent profile analysis (LPA) – to construct profiles based on five values that are conceptualized as underlying individualism (competitiveness, uniqueness, and responsibility) and

collectivism (seeking advice and harmony) and tested differences between the resultant profiles on career development and demographic variables. LPA allows for the identification of naturally occurring subgroups within a population, moving beyond broad cultural assumptions to capture individual variations more effectively (Spurk et al., 2020). As an exploratory methodology, LPA enables a more data-driven classification of individuals based on their cultural orientations rather than predetermined cultural categories.

Method

Participants

These were 419 young adults (70.5% female; Mean age 20.29 years, *SD* 3.16, Range 17–31) recruited from one multi-campus Australian university. Participants completed a survey as part of their enrolled psychology courses, with students representing various academic years. Ninety-one percent were domestic students with 9% international (e.g., from India, Vietnam, Japan, and Scandinavia) studying in Australia, which is a typical mix for universities in Australia. Participants were asked to state their cultural background and the majority identified as Australian (70.9%), including 6.7% who reported a mixed Australian background, such as Japanese-Australian or Italian-Australian. A total of 2.9% of participants identified as English, 2.6% as New Zealander, 2.1% as Indian, and 1.7% as South African. The remaining participants, such as those of Chinese, Vietnamese, and Turkish heritage, each constituted less than 1% of the sample. Students were enrolled in an average of 3.22 subjects (*SD* 1.01; >2 subjects indicate a full-time load). To explore potential differences across profiles, we collected demographic data, including working hours and subjective social status (SSS), as these factors may influence participants' academic and career-related experiences. Almost 60% were working while studying (mean hours per week = 16.80; *SD* 11.66) in jobs such as tourism, retail, and hospitality. Working while studying is typical for Australian university students (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Mean SSS was 6.17 (*SD* 1.75, "Think of these numbers as a ladder representing where people stand in society"; 1 = *at bottom* to 10 = *at top*; based on Adler et al., 2000).

Procedure

Following approval from the authors' university ethics committee, participants were recruited by advertising study details on course websites. Volunteers completed an anonymous online questionnaire. As an incentive for their involvement, they were offered the opportunity to enter a draw for a chance to win one of two AU$50 shopping vouchers.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, respondents provided their answers on a 6-point Likert-like scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*), where higher scores indicated stronger construct endorsement.

Cultural Orientation Values. Shulruf et al.'s (2007) 20-item scale assesses five dimensions relevant to individualism (i.e., competitiveness, uniqueness, responsibility) and collectivism (advice seeking, harmony). Sample items are "I define myself as a competitive person" (competitiveness), "I see myself as my own person" (uniqueness), "I take responsibility for my own actions" (responsibility), "I discuss job or study-related problems with my parents" (advice seeking), and "When interacting with seniors, I am always polite" (harmony). Shulruf et al. reported alpha

reliabilities ranging from .73 to .78 for the subscales and the measure has been validated in samples from several countries (Affum-Osei et al., 2019), with support for a 5-factor model and the presence of two overarching factors of individualism and collectivism. In our study, each subscale demonstrated acceptable reliability, with α values ranging from .73 to .86: competitiveness (.79), uniqueness (.80), responsibility (.73), advice-seeking (.86), and harmony (.73).

Protean Career Attitude. We used Kim et al.'s (2022) modified version of the 14-item Protean Career Orientation Scale (Briscoe et al., 2006) to ensure appropriateness for students. For example, "I navigate my own career based on my personal priorities, as opposed to *priorities of those around me* [original: *my employer's priorities*]." Kim et al. (2022; 2023) reported αs of .83–.84 in an Australian student sample. Validity has been supported by finding positive associations with proactivity, career authenticity (Briscoe et al., 2006), vocational identity, and career adaptability (Kim et al., 2023). In our sample, α was .84.

Career Adaptability. The 12-item Career Adapt-Abilities Scale - Short (Maggiori et al., 2015) evaluates four domains of concern, curiosity, control, and confidence. Respondents rate the strength of their adaptability from 1 = *minimal strength* to 5 = *utmost strength*. Example items are "thinking about what my future will be like" (concern), "making decisions by myself" (control), "looking for opportunities to grow" (curiosity), and "learning new skills" (confidence). Maggiori et al. (2015) reported an α of .90 and provided evidence of validity by finding negative associations with work-related stress and positive associations with job satisfaction and vocational self-efficacy. In the present study, α was .90.

Proactive Career Behavio. The 9-item Career Engagement Scale (Hirschi et al., 2013) evaluates agentic behaviors associated with career planning, exploration, networking, positioning behavior, and voluntary training; for example, "To what extent have you actively sought to design your professional future in the past six months?" Hirschi et al. (2013) reported an α of .87 and supported validity by finding positive associations with vocational identity clarity and self-efficacy. In our study, α was .85.

Perceived Future Employability. We used Creed et al.'s (2023) 6-item version of Gunawan et al.'s (2018) 24-item Perceived Future Employability Scale to gauge students' perceptions of their post-graduation employability. The six items reflected perceived future skills, accumulated experiences, personal characteristics, networks, labor market knowledge, and reputation of students' educational institution. For example, "When I complete my studies, I will be able to draw on the network I have developed to succeed at my future work." Gunawan et al. reported a full-scale α of .95 with Australian students and Creed et al. reported α of .87 for the 6-items. Evidence of validity is provided by finding negative associations with career distress and positive associations with university commitment (Gunawan et al.). In the current study, α was .83.

Academic Performance. We used the 5-item Perceived Academic Performance Scale (Verner-Filion & Vallerand, 2016). A sample item is "I meet performance requirements expected of a student." The authors reported an α of .87 and a positive association with positive affect as evidence of validity. Our α was .82.

Analytical Procedure

Latent profile analysis was performed using the tidyLPA package in R (Version 4.2.2). This person-centered approach categorizes groups exhibiting similar patterns based on variables of

interest (Marsh et al., 2009). As outliers can distort the profiles generated (Spurk et al., 2020), cases were removed based on Mahalanobis Distance scores greater than 20.52, which corresponds to the critical χ^2 value for df = 5 at $p < .001$. Several fit criteria were considered to determine the most appropriate solution: the lowest values for the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), and the sample-size adjusted BIC (SABIC; Akaike, 1987; Schwarz, 1978; Sclove, 1987). The accuracy of individual case classification into profiles was assessed using the entropy score (Spurk et al., 2020), and the Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test (BLRT) was employed to identify the best profile solution (McLachlan & Peel, 2000). After model selection, one-way between-group ANOVAs and chi-square cross-tabs (SPSS, V29) were used to test profile differences on the career development and demographic variables.

Results

No missing data were found, and three cases were excluded based on Mahalanobis Distance scores. Table 1 presents descriptive data and bivariate correlations among the cultural orientation variables. There were significant correlations among the three individualism dimensions (although competitiveness was only weakly related to responsibility). Similarly, there was a significant, but weak, correlation between the two collectivism dimensions (advice and harmony). Across dimensions, competitiveness and uniqueness were associated positively with advice, but not with harmony, and responsibility was not related to either collectivism dimension.

Determining Latent Profiles

Five models (with 1–5 profiles) were evaluated and compared. See Table 2. Based on the entropy cut-off criterion (.60 – .80; Jung & Wickrama, 2008), the 1-profile model was not acceptable. The BLRT for the 5-profile model was non-significant, indicating it did not fit adequately. The lowest AIC, BIC, and SABIC values were for the 4-profile model, indicating it was the optimal solution. Thus, the 4-profile model was chosen as the best fit. For a visual representation of this model, see Figure 1.

To interpret the profiles, we treated all values >0.50 *SD* above or below the mean as meaningful, whereas values <0.50 *SD* away from the mean were considered average (see Gustafsson et al., 2018). Profile 1 (N = 24, 5.8%) was labelled "low individualism", as it was characterized by low scores on all individualism values and was also low on advice seeking. Profile 2 (N = 116, 27.9%) was labelled "low uniqueness" as it was characterized by low uniqueness scores and average scores on all other dimensions. Profile 3, (N = 223, 53.6%) was termed "high uniqueness" as it was high on uniqueness and average on all other dimensions. Profile 4 (N = 53, 12.7%), "low collectivism", was characterized by low scores on advice seeking, and had low scores on harmony and high scores on responsibility.

In summary, we identified four profiles that could be distinguished by different levels of individualistic and collectivist values. Based on these results, Hypothesis 1, that different profiles based on individualistic and collectivist values exist in young people, was supported.

Demographic and Career Development Differences Across Profiles

We performed one-way ANOVAs followed by Scheffé's post hoc tests to determine differences among the four profiles on the continuous variables (Field, 2018) and chi-square tests to test differences on categorical variables. All analysis assumptions were met; see Table 3. For the demographic variables, there were no differences on gender, hours worked, and course load. The profiles differed by age, F (3, 412) = 5.96, $p < .001$, with Profile 4 participants [*low collectivism*]

Table 1. Means, SDs, and Bivariate Correlations for Individualism and Collectivism Measures.

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Individualism: Competitiveness	3.85	1.06	-													
2. Individualism: Uniqueness	4.88	0.80	.31***	-												
3. Individualism: Responsibility	5.34	0.60	.14**	.48***	-											
4. Collectivism:Advice	4.24	1.19	.13**	.17***	.04	-										
5. Collectivism: Harmony	4.19	0.94	−.06	−.02	.04	.23***	-									
6. Protean career attitude	4.83	0.55	.20***	.40***	.46***	−.01	−.17***	-								
7. Career adaptability	3.67	0.62	.24***	.38***	.36***	.07	.02	.49***	-							
8. Proactive career behavior	4.13	0.82	.25***	.31***	.14**	.14**	−.06	.30***	.43***	-						
9. Perceived future employability	4.67	0.75	.14**	.35***	.28***	.11*	−.01	.39***	.41***	.36***	-					
10. Academic performance	4.48	0.65	.17***	.38***	.31***	.14**	.09	.25***	.35***	.29***	.33***	-				
11. Age (years)	20.29	3.16	−.01	.02	.10*	−.27***	−.13**	.08	.08	.15**	−.02	.07	-			
12. Courseload	3.22	1.01	−.01	−.08	−.07	.13**	.04	−.03	.01	.09	.01	−.04	−.16***	-		
13. Hours worked per week	16.80	11.66	−.07	.01	.11	−.16*	−.01	.07	.07	.08	.09	.08	.28***	−.21***	-	
14. Subjective social status	6.17	1.75	.12*	.05	−.14**	.30***	.06	−.10*	−.02	.10*	−.02	.01	−.13*	.11*	−.05	-

Table 2. Results of Latent Profile Analyses for 1- to 5-Profile Models.

Profiles	LL	AIC	BIC	SABIC	BLRT *p*	Entropy
1	−2948.89	5917.78	5958.09	5926.35	-	1.00
2	−2857.90	5747.79	5812.28	5761.51	0.01	**0.76**
3	−2844.46	5732.91	5821.59	5751.78	0.01	**0.73**
4	−2812.34	**5680.67**	**5793.53**	**5704.68**	**0.01**	**0.74**
5	−2808.75	5685.50	5822.54	5714.65	0.50	0.67

Notes: *N* = 416, LL = model log likelihood; AIC = Akaike's Information Criterion; BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; SABIC = sample-size adjusted BIC; BLRT *p* = significance of bootstrap likelihood ratio test. Bold indicates best/most acceptable fit.

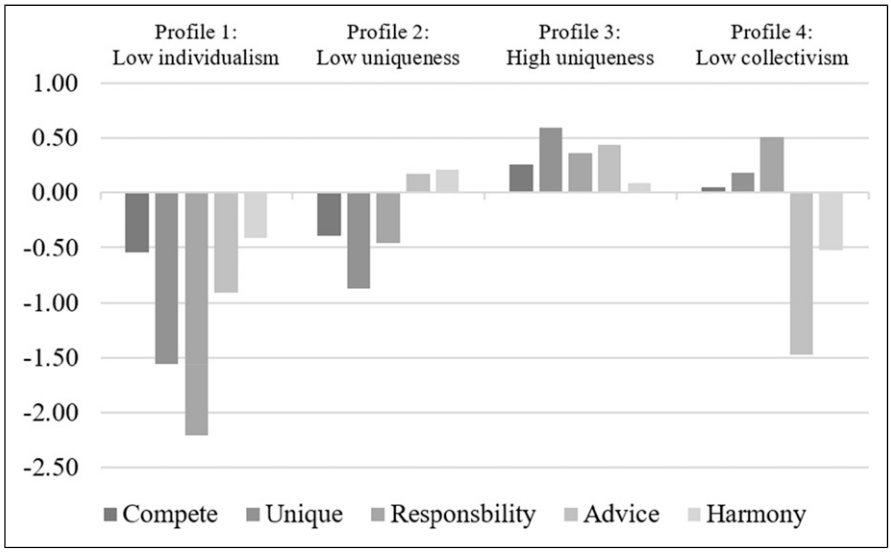

Figure 1. 4-Profile Model based on Individualism (Competitiveness, Uniqueness, and Responsibility) and Collectivism (Advice and Harmony) Values.

being older than those in Profiles 1 [*low individualism*] and 3 [*high uniqueness*], but not different to Profile 2 [*low uniqueness*]. Profiles also differed by SSS, $F(3, 412) = 9.64$, $p < .001$, with Profile 4 [*low collectivism*] reporting higher social status than Profiles 1, 2, and 3. From these analyses, those in Profile 4 [*low collectivism*] tended to be older and from a higher social status than the other groups.

There were differences also on the career development measures. Profiles 3 [*high uniqueness*] and 4 [*low collectivism*] endorsed stronger protean career attitudes than Profile 2 [*low uniqueness*], with Profile 1 [*low individualism*] having lower protean attitudes than all other profiles, $F(3, 412) = 31.47$, $p < .001$. Profiles 3 [*high uniqueness*] and 4 [*low collectivism*] also reported higher career adaptability than Profiles 1 [*low individualism*] and 2 [*low uniqueness*], $F(3, 412) = 23.58$, $p < .001$. Profiles 3 [*high uniqueness*] and 4 [*low collectivism*] were higher on proactive career behavior than Profile 1 [*low individualism*], but did not differ from Profile 2 [*low uniqueness*], $F(3, 412) = 9.69$, $p < .001$. Last, Profile 3 [*high uniqueness*] perceived higher future employability, $F(3, 412) = 17.10$, $p < .001$ and academic performance, $F(3, 412) = 19.77$, $p < .001$ than Profile 1 [*low individualism*]. In summary, Profiles 3 [*high uniqueness*] and 4 [*low collectivism*] tended to

Table 3. Profile differences on career development and demographic variables.

Variables	Profile 1: Low individualism (*n* = 24, 5.8%)		Profile 2: Low uniqueness (*n* = 116, 27.9%)		Profile 3: High uniqueness (*n* = 223, 53.6%)		Profile 4: Low collectivism (*n* = 53, 12.7%)		Differences among profiles
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	
Protean career attitude	4.29	0.53	4.56	0.51	4.97	0.48	5.08	0.50	3, 4 > 2 > 1***
Career adaptability	3.13	0.53	3.39	0.57	3.84	0.58	3.81	0.56	3, 4 > 1, 2***
Proactive career behaviour	3.63	0.71	3.89	0.83	4.29	0.80	4.15	0.72	3, 4 > 1***
Future employability	4.24	0.59	4.34	0.67	4.87	0.74	4.70	0.73	3 > 1***
Academic performance	3.97	0.65	4.22	0.62	4.67	0.60	4.48	0.64	3 > 1***
Age (years)	19.30	2.75	20.32	3.28	19.97	2.81	21.81	3.68	4 > 1, 3***
Courseload	3.26	0.75	3.29	0.95	3.24	1.04	2.98	1.10	*NS*
Hours worked per week	15.60	9.50	15.38	9.05	15.92	9.39	19.97	12.36	*NS*
Subjective social status SSS	6.04	1.90	6.35	1.64	6.37	1.65	5.02	1.92	4 > 1, 2, 3***
Gender	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*NS*
Male	7	29.2	29	25.0	66	29.6	15	28.3	
Female	16	66.7	86	74.1	154	69.1	37	69.8	
Other	1	4.2	1	0.9	3	1.3	1	1.9	

be related to more positive indicators of career development, with Profile 1 [*low individualism*] having consistently lower scores on all career development indicators.

Discussion

We sought to generate profiles based on individualism (competitiveness, uniqueness, and responsibility) and collectivism indicators (seeking advice and harmony) and understand how profile membership related to and vocational and demographic variables among young Australian adults. A four-profile solution emerged as the best fit to our data, including "low individualism", "low uniqueness", "high uniqueness", and "low collectivism", providing support for H1. Specifically, the low Individualism profile (5.8%) showed low scores on all individualism values and advice-seeking, whereas the low collectivism (12.7%) was characterized by low advice-seeking, low harmony, and high responsibility. Given that advice-seeking and harmony are central components of collectivist orientations (Triandis, 1995), individuals in these profiles may be hesitant to seek support, which could limit their vocational development by reducing access to career-related information and guidance (Lent et al., 2000).

The low individualism profile showed that young adults may develop inconsistent cultural orientations despite living in an individualistic country like Australia, which reinforcing that individualism-collectivism is not a simple dichotomy. This group may reflect marginalization in Berry's acculturation model (Berry, 1997), where people excluded from both their heritage and dominant cultures struggle to develop a cultural identity, leading to cultural disconnection. Given that this was the smallest and youngest group, its members may still be navigating cultural adaptation and identity development. Consistent with Berry's model, where marginalization is

linked to poorer well-being and social outcomes, this profile also exhibited the lowest career development indicators, including academic performance. Those in this group may face greater career challenges than others and might be more inclined toward traditional career paths. Their lower proactivity, poorer academic performance, and weaker perceived employability suggest they may struggle to develop and pursue clear career goals, potentially reflecting a broader lack of personal agency.

Notably, two profiles differed in uniqueness: the low uniqueness profile (27.9%) had low uniqueness but average scores on other dimensions, whereas the high uniqueness (53.6%) displayed high uniqueness with average scores on other dimensions. Uniqueness has been associated with self-directed career management (Briscoe et al., 2006), which may explain why these profiles demonstrated stronger protean career attitudes and higher career adaptability. In contrast, the low individualism profile consistently had the lowest scores on career-related outcomes, suggesting that a lack of individualistic traits, such as competitiveness and responsibility, may be linked to lower career adaptability and self-directed career planning (Hirschi et al., 2015).

The high uniqueness profile appears to closely match an individualist orientation, whereas the low uniqueness profile came closest to a low individualist orientation. The low collectivism profile was characterized by members with both collectivism values below average. Of the cultural values, competitiveness and harmony were less distinct in defining cultural orientation compared to the remaining values. This suggests that they were not critical values in this sample of young adults in Australian tertiary education. In particular, harmony is associated typically with internalizing the goals and values of one's group over personal interests and avoiding conflicts by adhering to social norms (Oyserman et al., 2002). This tendency might be attributable to the stronger individualistic context of Australia, where independence is valued more than interdependence, and conflict avoidance is less emphasized. In addition, the lack of emphasis on competitiveness may be linked to Australia's egalitarian cultural values, which are deeply rooted in the Commonwealth ethos of fairness, social equity, and collective well-being (Huang, 2022). This orientation reflects a preference for collaboration over individual rivalry, potentially shaping career-related attitudes by reducing the perceived necessity of competitiveness in career development and decision-making.

The high uniqueness and low collectivism profiles were the closest to an overall individualist orientation and showed stronger protean career attitudes (H2 supported), career adaptability, and proactive career behaviors. They may be more likely to take responsibility for their own careers and to prefer distinctiveness and self-determination over external influences or advice from others in their career decision-making (Hall, 2004; Hall et al., 2018). However, cultural values influence career development in multiple ways. While protean career attitudes are often associated with adaptability and self-directed career paths, collectivist values such as advice-seeking and harmony may foster long-term career stability and stronger professional networks. For instance, seeking advice from others can facilitate informed career decisions, while an emphasis on harmony may enhance collaborative work environments and organisational cohesion. Supeli and Creed (2016) highlighted that the effectiveness of protean career attitudes may depend on cultural and organisational contexts, with potential limitations in collectivist settings. Accordingly, the present findings suggest that individualistic values, particularly uniqueness, may be associated with higher protean career attitudes, whereas collectivist values, such as advice-seeking, may support career development through relational and social mechanisms.

These two groups also reported higher career adaptability than the low individualism and low uniqueness groups. Previous research has shown that horizontal and vertical individualism and horizontal collectivism, but not vertical collectivism (i.e., sacrificing one's ideals for group goals; Györkös et al., 2012), are associated with career adaptability (Omar & Noordin, 2016). Horizontal

collectivism (i.e., valuing equality, interdependence, and sociability) shares some similarities with individualism. Thus, it can be observed that individualistic cultural values are more strongly linked to career adaptability, especially when individualistic cultural values, particularly uniqueness, are stronger. The current results do not support H3. However, career adaptability does not exclusively rely on individual decision-making but can also be reinforced through relational resources, guidance, and social support structures. For example, while individualistic values, particularly uniqueness, may encourage independent decision-making and proactive career self-management, collectivistic values, such as advice-seeking and interdependence, may support adaptability by facilitating informed decision-making and strong professional networks.

These two groups also scored higher on proactive career behaviors than the low individualism group, confirming H4. Proactive career behaviours involve actions such as planning, networking, and exploration (Hirschi et al., 2013). The prominence of individualistic values in proactive career behaviors in this study may reflect broader societal expectations within Australia, where career self-management is encouraged through policies and institutional structures that emphasize personal agency and independence in career decision-making. Australia's strong emphasis on meritocracy, self-directed learning, and career mobility may have contributed to a cultural environment where proactive career behaviors align more strongly with individualistic values. Moreover, Australian universities typically provide extensive career support services that promote career autonomy, which may reduce students' reliance on external guidance from family or close social networks. Thus, while proactive career behaviors can emerge from both individualistic and collectivistic orientations, the findings suggest that the Australian higher education and labor market contexts may reinforce an individualistic approach to career development.

The high uniqueness group scored higher than the low individualism group on both perceived future employability and academic performance, with no other between-group differences on these variables, supporting H5 and not supporting H6. Placing importance on uniqueness enables individuals to prioritize the self and express themselves more prominently compared to others (Shulruf et al., 2007, 2011). Shaping one's self-concept is a crucial task in career development; one's career choice serves as a means for expressing the vocational self (Super, 1963). Therefore, a cultural orientation that values uniqueness is more likely to facilitate identification of one's unique strengths and, thus, an alignment between the self and career (Holland, 1997). In this way, individuals who recognize their uniqueness are more likely to be more confident about securing future employment and to hold more optimistic views about their career prospects. This finding aligns with Chen and Jing's (2012) research, which suggests that individualistic traits enhance confidence in one's presentation. These individuals also tend to be more motivated in their studies, as they understand the purpose and value of education. However, we could not confirm that the underlying cultural values of collectivism enhance academic performance (Gore et al., 2011; Mok et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2021), as our identified profiles exhibited lower levels of collectivism. This may also reflect the influence of Australia's academic culture, which emphasises individual learning and self-directed study, potentially reducing the impact of collectivist values on academic achievement.

As for demographic information, participants in the low collectivism profile were older than those in the low individualism and the high uniqueness profiles, suggesting that age may play a role in shaping cultural orientations or advice-seeking behaviors. The age difference — particularly the pattern of older individuals in the low advice-seeking group and younger individuals in the low individualism group — may partly reflect developmental influences in addition to cultural values. As individuals grow older, they may take on greater responsibility (which was the most prominent trait in the low individualism profile) and become less inclined to seek advice, reflecting changes that can occur with age and experience.

In addition, low individualism, low uniqueness, and high uniqueness groups reported their subjective social status (SSS) to be lower than the low collectivism group. Lower SSS groups tend to display lower individualistic values compared to higher SSS groups, which is consistent with previous research finding that people in high social class backgrounds tend to emphasize self-orientation in Western culture that emphasizes individualism, independence, and self-expression (Miyamoto et al., 2018). Previous research has indicated that people from higher social classes are more likely to develop cultural ideals of independence and responsibility, as they can pursue their goals and interests with fewer constraints (Stephens et al., 2014). Also, the current findings revealed a pattern for young adults with higher SSS reporting above average responsibility in the context of low collectivism. However, the underlying reasons for low advice-seeking may vary among groups. Higher SSS individuals possess more social resources, which can lead them to be more selective in their advice-seeking, relying on their own expertise or established networks. In contrast, lower SSS groups often face resource constraints, leading them to avoid seeking advice due to a perceived lack of available options. Hence, future research could explore how SSS influences the development of individualistic and collectivistic values and its subsequent impact on career development.

Practical Implications

Our findings suggest that cultural uniqueness is associated with more optimistic career development in young adults enrolled in Australian tertiary education. Therefore, differentiating oneself from others and fostering independence may contribute to career development. In the context of career counseling, assessing the extent to which clients feel unique and have a robust self-concept becomes significant. Counselors can support clients in exploring their strengths and distinctive qualities, helping them shape their cultural and vocational identities. However, caution is needed when considering whether emphasising one's uniqueness in career development would be beneficial for students from predominantly collectivist cultures. Since this study focused on cultural value orientations rather than accounting for the broader environmental and personal contexts that may shape career development, its findings should be interpreted with caution.

Conversely, individuals with low levels of individualism and the collectivist cultural value of seeking advice showed the poorest career development. Profile 1 [Low Individualism] was low across all cultural values as well as all indicators of career development. While this could suggest general developmental immaturity, it may also reflect culturally embedded approaches to career decision-making. As Mok et al. (2020) note, in collectivist cultures, individuals often internalise family goals as their own, and may therefore appear less engaged in personal goal-setting or advice-seeking — not due to a lack of initiative, but because they view career development as a shared, relational process.

From this perspective, what might be perceived as passivity or a reluctance to take charge could, in fact, indicate a preference for aligning with collective goals over individual ambitions. Counselors should take care to explore these underlying cultural factors to ensure such individuals are not unfairly disadvantaged in their career development. When working with those who exhibit both low individualism and low collectivism, it is important to understand the distinct influences contributing to this profile and tailor interventions accordingly. Culturally responsive strategies — such as gradually building confidence and encouraging ownership of career decisions — may support more effective career adaptability.

Limitations and Future Research

We collected data from one multicultural country with a dominance of individualist values, and it will be important to ascertain whether these results are applicable to other countries, especially where collectivistic values dominate in a general multicultural context. For instance, holding individualistic values might not be encouraged in a culture with higher collectivism, even in the presence of multiculturalism, and this might hinder career development.

In the current sample, found no profiles that consistently had above average collectivist values, nor any profiles that were strongly individualist. The dominant patterns were mixtures of individualism and collectivism. Examining this in other similar multicultural contexts will be important to understanding whether these values resonate with young adults in these situations generally or whether this is a pattern specific to young Australian adults. Given that cultural orientation can be significantly influenced by race and familial racial background, future research should examine how cultural orientation varies across racial groups and explore its implications for career development. In addition, testing over time also will allow researchers to determine the extent to which this is a modern phenomenon, whether it is shaped by broader socio-cultural changes or influenced by specific social factors.

In addition, our study did not examine variations in cultural orientation across racial and ethnic groups due to sample size constraints. Given that cultural orientation can be significantly influenced by race and familial racial background, future research should explore how these factors shape cultural values and their implications for career development. Larger and more diverse samples will be necessary to better understand these nuances.

Furthermore, our study examined a limited set of career development variables, which may not fully capture the complexity of career-related decision-making and progression. While we included career adaptability, future research should incorporate additional variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding, particularly by addressing both cognitive influences and contextual influences. Integrating these factors in future studies would contribute to a more holistic understanding of career development across diverse populations and clarify the relationship between cultural influences and career-related factors, providing evidence aligned with SCCT.

Last, we cannot confirm the directionality of the associations; longitudinal data are needed to resolve this. While it is argued that cultural context and values precede individual career development outcomes, the interactive nature of cultural orientations with career attitudes, and how career attitudes might influence cultural orientation, remain unconfirmed. Longitudinal data would also allow for testing the dynamic characteristics of cultural orientations, offering insights into how profile changes might affect different aspects of career development over time.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore whether distinct cultural orientations based on values of both individualism and collectivism existed in young adults in a multicultural context, and, if so, whether aspects of career development differed based on the different profiles. We found four distinct cultural orientation profiles: “low individualism”, “low uniqueness”, “high uniqueness”, and “low collectivism”. Thus, the individualism-collectivism construct should not be considered as dichotomous, as individuals can embrace multiple cultural values simultaneously. The results also suggested the profiles differed on age, social status, and critical career development variables. Profiles characterised by placing importance on being unique and responsible showed more positive career development, whereas those that de-emphasised advice-seeking demonstrated poorer career development.

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