

# Integrating Collectivist Values Into Career Counseling With Asian Americans: A Test of Cultural Responsiveness

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Asian American undergraduates received career counseling from European American female counselors using either a collectivist or an individualist orientation. Counselors using the collectivist approach were perceived as more cross-culturally competent but equally credible as counselors using the individualist approach. Implications for culturally competent career counseling with Asian Americans are discussed.

Los estudiantes universitario Americanos Asiáticos recibieron consejos de carrera de consejeros femeninos, Americanas, y Europeas que utilizan o a un colectivista o a una orientación de individualista. Los consejeros que utilizan el enfoque colectivista fueron percibidos como más transculturalmente competentes pero igualmente creíbles como consejeros que utilizan el enfoque individualista. Las implicaciones de carrera para aconsejar culturalmente competente con Americanos Asiáticos se discuten.

Collectivism is hypothesized to have a tremendous effect on the psychological adjustment and personal/career goals of Asians and Asian Americans (Helms & Cook, 1999; Leong & Chou, 1994). However, much of career counseling derives from theory with a prominent individualist focus (Parsons, 1909). Although Super (1990) broadened the scope of career development to include exploration of values, he considered independence to be a central factor in career maturity. "The process of career development is essentially that of developing and implementing occupational self-concepts" (Super, 1990, p. 207). While collectivism does not deny the importance of self, there is a greater emphasis on interdependence, obligation to the in-group, and consideration of significant others in decision making (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), issues that may be relevant to Asian Americans in the career counseling context.

The trait and factor approach underlies most current career assessment approaches (Brown, Brooks, & Associates, 1990; Haverkamp, Collins, & Hansen, 1994) and is an obvious avenue for endorsement of individualist values in career counseling. Three widely used career assessment tools, the Strong Interest Inventory (Harmon, Hansen, Borgen, & Hammer, 1994), the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1985), and the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (Myers, 1962),

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focus on individual personality style functions as they intersect with the world of work. These frequently used instruments are devoid of attention to cultural, familial, and social-contextual factors in the career decision-making process.

Krumboltz's (1999) Career Beliefs Inventory (CBI) does assess the client's values within a familial and community context. However, the CBI Applications and Technical Guide advises counselors to "pay particular attention to lower scores because of the likelihood that some troublesome assumptions may be lurking behind them" (Krumboltz, 1999, p. 8). Low scores indicate a client's career path is influenced by others and that approval is important, both of which are normative from a collectivist perspective.

Research studies examining the occupational values of Asian American college students have revealed consistent evidence that their values differ from those of European American students. Leong (1991) reported that Asian Americans have greater preferences for dependent decision-making styles and also place more emphasis on extrinsic and security occupational value clusters relative to White Americans. Moy (1984) also reported that Chinese students attending American universities cited external reinforcers for their vocational choices, which can be construed as further evidence of interdependence or collectivist values. Hardin, Leong, and Osipow (2001) found that Asian Americans tended to score lower on career maturity than their European American counterparts, with the exception of highly acculturated Asian Americans and those with lower interdependent self-construals.

There is a paucity of research examining the relationship between individualism-collectivism and counseling variables. In a quasi-experimental analog study, Kelly and Shilo (1991) reported that Black and White participants did not prefer an individualist counseling approach to a social commitment counseling approach. Results demonstrated that participants in their study found the social commitment orientation to be as congruent with their individual welfare as the individualist orientation. Sodowsky (1991) reported that Asian Indian clients rated culturally consistent counselors as more expertlike and trustworthy, two aspects of credibility. In the career counseling realm, Leong (1993) suggested counselor credibility may be an indication that the cultural value orientation of clients is being appropriately addressed.

Asian American college students who seek career counseling are likely to encounter counselors who promote individualist values regarding career choice. Students face potential cultural misunderstandings, a lack of reinforcement of collectivistic values, and perhaps even messages that interdependence with significant others is psychological enmeshment or, in the career realm, less mature. As Leong (1993) suggested, an important issue to address in counseling research and practice is that of value conflicts (individualism vs. collectivism) between counselors and their clients, especially in the career counseling process with Asian Americans.

The present study compared two career counseling approaches, one that used a predominantly individualist perspective and one that used a predominantly collectivist perspective on career development. European American counse-

lors conducted counseling sessions focused on career development with Asian American college students using either an individualist approach or a collectivist approach. Following their session, clients evaluated their counselors on credibility and cross-cultural competence. Asian American participants were expected to rate European American counselors who expressed a collectivist counseling orientation higher on both measures than they would rate counselors who expressed an individualist counseling orientation. It was also predicted that the strength of the client's endorsement of individualist or collectivist values would directly affect ratings of counselors, such that a stronger value orientation match would result in enhanced ratings.

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## method

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### PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 103 (49 female and 54 male) undergraduate students at a major West Coast public university who self-identified as Asian American or Pacific Islander. Qualified participants either had not chosen a career/college major or had some questions or concerns regarding the career/college major they had selected. The mean age of participants was 20.28 years ( $SD = 2.28$ ). The self-reported ethnic composition of the sample was 36 Chinese (35%), 22 Filipino (21.4%), 14 Japanese (13.6%), 10 Vietnamese (9.7%), 9 Korean (8.7%), 2 Asian Indian (1.9%), 2 Cambodian (1.9%), 2 Chinese-Vietnamese (1.9%), 2 Burmese (1.9%), 2 who specified Asian (1.9%), 1 Hmong (1.0%), and 1 Thai (1.0%). Fifty-four participants (52.4%) were born in the United States, and 47 (45.6%) were born outside of the United States.

### INSTRUMENTS

*Demographic questionnaire.* Participants were asked to provide the following demographic data: age, sex, ethnicity, college grade level, citizenship status, family or personal income status, cultural commitment toward Asian culture and mainstream American culture, and willingness to seek counseling for career development concerns.

*Individualism-collectivism.* The measure of individualism-collectivism used in this study (1994INDCOL; Triandis, 1995) was a 32-item scale containing four subscales: (a) Vertical Individualism (VI), (b) Horizontal Individualism (HI), (c) Vertical Collectivism (VC), and (d) Horizontal Collectivism (HC). Vertical individualists value not only independence from one's groups but also competitive distinction. Horizontal individualists see themselves as unique but not necessarily better than other people. Vertical collectivists either submit to or dominate the group. Horizontal collectivists try to submerge in the group but do not see themselves as either subordinate or superordinate to others in the group. Items on the 1994INDCOL were rated and scored according to a

scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 9 = *strongly agree*. Ratings on each of the subscales were summed to obtain four subscale scores; the totals for the two individualism and collectivism scales were combined to make up composite scores, a procedure approved by Triandis (personal communication, 1995). Composite scores were used to capture the comparison between overall collectivism and individualism scores.

The data from Triandis's (1995) sample of 123 European American undergraduate students yielded Cronbach's alpha coefficients of .82, .81, .73, and .80 on the VI, HI, VC, and HC subscales, respectively. The 1994 INDCOL data from the present study yielded the following Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients: .82, .75, .69, and .67 on the VI, HI, VC, and HC subscales, respectively. The reliability coefficients of the collectivism subscales from participants in the present study were somewhat lower than Triandis's coefficients, raising some concern about differences between measuring this construct among European Americans versus Asian Americans.

*Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale.* Participant perceptions of counselor effectiveness, operationalized as credibility and utility, were measured using the 10-item Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (CERS; Atkinson & Wampold, 1982). On this scale, participants rate the counselor on four dimensions: (a) expertness, (b) attractiveness, (c) trustworthiness, and (d) utility. Respondents rate their counselors on the aforementioned attributes on a scale ranging from 1 (*bad*) to 7 (*good*). Atkinson and Wampold (1982) reported that the CERS was as reliable and successful a predictor of client willingness to self-refer to a counselor as the Counselor Rating Form (CRF; Barak & LaCrosse, 1975). The correlation between the total CERS score and the CRF has been reported to be .80 (Atkinson & Wampold, 1982), establishing good concurrent validity. The internal reliabilities for expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness were reported as .88, .78, and .75; the total score reliability was found to be .90 (Atkinson & Wampold, 1982). Internal reliabilities calculated on the present sample were .85, .81, and .74 for the expertness, attractiveness, and trustworthiness subscales, respectively. The alpha reliability coefficient for the entire scale was .93. A mean of the total ratings for all four dimensions was obtained for analysis in the present study.

*Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory.* Perceptions of counselor cross-cultural counseling competence were measured using a modified version of the Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory (CCCI-R; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991). On this 20-item inventory, participants rated the counselor's competence in three categories of cross-cultural competence (based on the report from the 1980 Education and Training Committee of Division 17 of the American Psychological Association): cultural awareness and beliefs, cultural knowledge, and flexibility in counseling skills. LaFromboise et al. reported that the scale yields an internal consistency (coefficient alpha) reliability of .95, with inter-item correlations ranging between .18 and .73. Although LaFromboise et al. identified a three-factor structure of the instrument, they recommended that the scale be scored unidimensionally, using the total score (Ponterotto, Rieger, Barrett, &

Sparks, 1994). They also reported an interrater reliability coefficient of .84. LaFromboise et al. found that the CCCI-R has acceptable content validity and is representative of the domain of cross-cultural competence, citing interrater reliability of judges as .58 ( $p < .001$ ).

LaFromboise et al. (1991) reported that their participants indicated insufficient information to judge all of the items on the measure. Because it was anticipated that in this single-session study a similar phenomenon may occur, the Likert scale was converted to a 7-point scale, providing participants the option to indicate either uncertainty or nonapplicability on rating items. The mean of the total counselor ratings was calculated for analysis. The internal consistency coefficient of the scale based on the present study's data was found to be .79.

## TREATMENT

*Counselors.* Four European American female doctoral students in the Counseling/Clinical/School Psychology Program at the same university were used as counselors in this study. They had approximately 2 years of graduate counseling practica experience and had attended a quarter-long seminar on diversity issues in counseling. One counselor had completed a graduate course on career counseling. All of the counselors were trained to conduct both counseling treatments and implemented approximately the same number of individualist as collectivist sessions in a planned effort to control individual counselor effects in the present study. A post hoc analysis of the ratings counselors received in the present study demonstrated no significant differences between the four counselors in terms of effectiveness or cross-cultural competency.

*Training the counselors.* The first phase of training included a 6-hour workshop. Counselors were provided articles on collectivism and individualism to be read prior to the seminar. They also received a counseling protocol for beginning each session and suggestions for ways to respond to certain client content within each value orientation. Many examples from real-life experiences as well as hypothetical scenarios were given to illustrate the principles of individualism and collectivism. Counselors were instructed to conduct each session as though the designated value orientation were an integral part of their philosophy of career counseling. The next phase of the training involved the counselors watching videotaped role-plays between the experimenter and a research assistant. The experimenter and research assistant met with each of the counselors for individual role-playing and supervision.

*Treatment goals.* The main thrust of the present study was to conduct counseling sessions that adhered either to individualist or to collectivist values in the career exploration process with participants. Counselors received a protocol packet, including a chart highlighting expressions from an individualist or collectivist orientation. During the central portions of the counseling sessions, counselors were instructed to make at least five statements, questions, or reflections that were consistent with the designated value orientation and to minimize expressions of the nondesignated value orientation.

*Manipulation check.* Two trained undergraduate research assistants reviewed a random sample of treatment counseling sessions and rated them on compliance with the protocol. There was 100% agreement by both raters on which counseling treatment was implemented.

## PROCEDURE

The study was conducted at the university-based community clinic. Participants were recruited through introductory Asian American studies courses. Participants were informed they would receive one free career counseling session and a \$5 stipend. They were informed that if they had further questions about career-related matters or if further counseling was indicated, they would be referred to appropriate resources. Clients signed a consent form and completed the precounseling measures. Participants were grouped by 1994INDCOL score (using a median split on composite scores) and by sex (male, female), and then randomly assigned to treatment (collectivist or individualist counseling orientation). After treatment condition was determined, the researcher informed the counselor which treatment to implement. After the counseling session was concluded, participants completed the CERS and CCCI-R to assess their experience with the counselor. Participants were debriefed and given their stipend. Referrals for counseling were provided when warranted.

## results

The means and standard deviations for participant individualism, collectivism, counselor credibility ratings, and counselor cross-cultural competence ratings for each counseling treatment condition are reported in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**

**Means and Standard Deviations of 1994INDCOL Scores, Acculturation Scores, Counselor Credibility Ratings, and Cross-Cultural Competency Ratings by Counseling Treatment Condition**

Variable	Individualist Treatment (n = 52)		Collectivist Treatment (n = 51)	
	M	SD	M	SD
1994INDCOL				
Individualism	6.35	0.91	6.22	0.90
Collectivism	6.92	0.75	6.93	0.89
CERS				
Credibility	5.74	0.91	5.95	0.93
CCCI-R				
Cross-cultural competence	4.97	0.56	5.54	0.78

*Note.* 1994INDCOL = measure of individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995); CERS = Counselor Effectiveness Rating Scale (Atkinson & Wampold, 1982); CCCI-R = Cross-Cultural Counseling Inventory (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Hernandez, 1991).

## PREDICTING COUNSELOR CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE SCORES

A hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was selected using forced entry to examine the relationship between the criterion variable of perceived cross-cultural competence of counselors (score on CCCI-R) and the predictor variables of treatment (individualist or collectivist condition of 1994INDCOL, dummy coded 0 and 1, respectively), client collectivism score, client individualism score, the interaction between collectivism and treatment (score on composite collectivism by treatment), and the interaction between individualism and treatment (score on composite individualism by treatment). The order of the variables was determined on the basis of a priori hypotheses about the influence of the treatment conditions, participant value orientation scores, and the interactions thereof. Results of this regression analysis are presented in Table 2.

The overall model predicting counselor cross-cultural competence scores was significant ( $p < .01$ ); however, only two variables accounted for any meaningful change in the variance. The model in which the treatment variable was entered at Step 1 accounted for 15% of the variance in CCCI-R scores,  $F(1, 101) = 17.83$ ,  $p < .01$ . Participants rated the counselors using the collectivist treatment higher

TABLE 2

### Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Perceived Counselor Cross-Cultural Competence ( $N = 103$ )

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Step 1			
Treatment (I, C)	11.32	2.68	0.39**
Step 2			
Treatment (I, C)	11.25	2.57	0.38**
Collectivism score	0.32	0.10	0.28**
Step 3			
Treatment (I, C)	11.43	2.57	0.39**
Collectivism score	0.30	0.10	0.27**
Individualism score	0.09	0.09	0.08
Step 4			
Treatment (I, C)	11.43	2.58	0.39**
Collectivism score	0.29	0.10	0.26**
Individualism score	0.08	0.09	0.08
Interaction (Col*Tx)	0.60	1.32	0.04
Step 5			
Treatment (I, C)	11.44	2.59	0.39**
Collectivism score	0.29	0.10	0.26**
Individualism score	0.08	0.09	0.08
Interaction (Col*Tx)	0.47	1.35	0.03
Interaction (Ind*Tx)	0.77	1.34	0.05

Note. Treatment (I, C) = individualist or collectivist treatment; Interaction (Col\*Tx) = interaction of collectivism score by treatment type; Interaction (Ind\*Tx) = interaction of individualism score by treatment type.  $R^2 = .15$  for Step 1 ( $p < .01$ );  $\Delta R^2 = .08$  for Step 2 ( $p < .01$ );  $\Delta R^2 = .01$  for Step 3 ( $p < .01$ );  $\Delta R^2 = .00$  for Step 4 ( $p < .01$ );  $\Delta R^2 = .00$  for Step 5 ( $p < .01$ ).

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

on cross-cultural competence than they rated those using the individualist treatment. In Step 2 of the regression analysis, the amount of variance explained increased to 23% with the addition of client collectivism,  $F(2, 100) = 14.89, p < .01$ . Client collectivism was positively related to ratings of counselors on cross-cultural competence. In Step 3 with the addition of client individualism, the total variance explained increased to 24%; however, the individualism variable was not significant at  $p < .05$ . Although the overall model remained significant with the addition of the first interaction term (client collectivism and treatment) and the second interaction term (client individualism and treatment), neither of the specific terms was significant at  $p < .05$ . Thus, there was no significant interaction between personal value orientation and the treatment participants received relative to how they rated their counselors on cultural competence.

### PREDICTING COUNSELOR CREDIBILITY SCORES

A hierarchical multiple linear regression analysis was selected to examine the relationship between the criterion variable of perceived credibility of counselors (score on CERS) and the predictor variables of treatment (individualist or collectivist condition of 1994INDCOL, dummy coded 0 and 1, respectively), client collectivism score, client individualism score, the interaction between collectivism and treatment (score on composite collectivism by treatment), and the interaction between individualism and treatment (score on composite individualism by treatment). The model predicting counselor credibility scores was not significant at  $p < .05$  at any step. On the basis of this regression analysis, participants rated the credibility of counselors conducting collectivist and individualist sessions similarly.

## discussion

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Asian American participants rated counselors who expressed a collectivist value orientation higher on cross-cultural competence than they rated counselors who expressed an individualist value orientation. This finding lends support to Leong's (1993) theory that collectivist principles are important when counseling Asian Americans on career issues. This finding also validates the concerns of a number of mental health researchers who have urged psychologists to address Asian values in counseling and psychotherapy with Asian Americans (e.g., Kagawa-Singer & Chung, 1994). Participants whose counselors used a collectivist approach (i.e., explored family involvement in career; expectations, obligations, and sacrifices of the collective; and group decision making) rated their counselors as more culturally competent than did those whose counselors used an individualist approach. These results warrant further research in the career counseling field to examine methods and the efficacy of integrating collectivist values into the counseling dialogue with Asian American clients.



It is important to consider why collectivist counselors were rated higher on cultural competence than individualist counselors but were rated equally credible as individualist counselors. This finding diverges from Leong's (1993) theory that Asian Americans would find counselors who acknowledge collectivist values as more credible than traditional individualistically oriented counselors. On the other hand, this result is consistent with Kelly and Shilo's (1991) finding that social commitment counseling and individualist counseling were perceived as equally congruent with client welfare by participants who role-played being clients. Another possible explanation is that although counselors in both treatments were perceived as equally credible, they may have been rated as such for different reasons. For example, the individualist treatment may have seemed credible in terms of helping the client consider the individualistically oriented world of work, whereas the collectivist treatment may have seemed credible because of its cultural sensitivity.

The findings of the present study also have tentative implications for examining the role of collectivism in the lives of Asians and Asian Americans. The lack of significant interaction effects indicates that there may not be a clear relationship between personal endorsement of values (i.e., 1994INDCOL score) and the appreciation of those values being discussed as part of counseling. Regardless of scores on the measure of collectivism, the collectivist treatment was rated as more culturally sensitive perhaps because it addressed the personal experiences participants have with family obligation and cultural career influences. Anecdotally, 1 participant stated at the beginning of her session that she was "very Americanized and individualistic" but then proceeded to tell her counselor how her future career was in large part determined by her need to help her family out with their business and support her little sister through college (both highly collectivist motivations). If a client's upbringing leans toward collectivism, regardless of whether the client personally identifies as highly collectivist, a counselor who addresses relevant collectivist issues may seem more culturally in tune, and therefore more culturally competent. It would be interesting for future research to compare self-identity around these value orientations with lived experiences of them. Perhaps counseling could further address ways for Asian American clients to understand how collectivism may weave into their lives not only explicitly but also implicitly.

The lack of significant relationships found among participant value orientation, treatment orientation, and credibility scores diverges from Sodowsky's (1991) results, in which Asian Indian clients rated culturally consistent counselors as more expertlike and trustworthy (two aspects of credibility) than culturally discrepant counselors. Differences in terms of measurement of the collectivism construct may help explain the lack of interaction effect. The present study examined within-group differences of Asian Americans, whereas Sodowsky determined collectivist orientation by cultural background. In addition, the present sample was arguably more acculturated than the sample in Sodowsky's study, further reducing chances of detecting a significant interaction effect.

That counselors were rated as equally credible regardless of value orientation may bode well for cross-cultural career counseling between European American counselors and Asian American clients. Counselor credibility has been linked to a decrease in premature termination of therapy as well as increased willingness to use counseling services among Asian American clients (Akutsu, Lin, & Zane, 1990; Sue, Zane, & Young, 1994). Western counselors who currently operate from an individualist perspective with their Asian American clients may not be jeopardizing their credibility, as Leong (1993) suggested.

Future research that examines the integration of collectivist values in career counseling with Asian Americans, European Americans, and other ethnic Americans is warranted. As Markus and Kitayama (1991) commented, "even within highly individualist Western culture, most people are still much less self-reliant, self-contained, or self-sufficient than the prevailing cultural ideology suggests that they should be" (p. 247). Counseling orientations that integrate collectivist viewpoints could appeal to clients who have other than Asian roots, including clients from rural areas in the United States and Latin America, who are more likely to be collectivist (Triandis, 1995).

Future studies should consider using multiple methods of measuring individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1996). The problem with relying on self-report is that people do not always endorse what they do. For example, even though an Asian American participant may personally place a low value on hierarchical collectivism, he or she may behave in a manner that conforms to the social order of his or her in-group (e.g., obeying parents, refraining from confronting authority figures). In fact, from a collectivist perspective, when proper behavior conflicts with individual preference, engaging in behaviors that are not necessarily consonant with one's personal desires or values is commonplace (Hui, 1988).

A limitation in the design of the study is that only one session of career counseling was conducted with each client, limiting the type of measures that could be used to evaluate outcome. Ponterotto and Furlong (1985) expressed a concern about a ceiling effect on the CERS, which may have limited the present study's ability to detect differences in client perceptions of counselor credibility. Other measurement limitations include the fact that the 1994 INDCOL contained questions that were phrased generally, rather than providing specific contexts and specific circumstances. Individualists are expected to behave in congruence with their personality style regardless of the context, whereas collectivists behave in seemingly incongruent ways because collectivism dictates that people behave according to the demands of the social situation (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, this method of questioning contains an inherent bias toward individualism.

The results of this study are fairly generalizable to career counseling with Asian Americans in large, West Coast, ethnically diverse, public university settings. Although students with career issues or questions were recruited to participate, they were not seeking out career counseling of their own accord. Also, the counselors in the study were master's-level counselors with a moderate amount of counseling experience (minimal experience in career counseling), whereas col-

lege students generally get career counseling from doctoral-level psychologists or master's-level counselors with a strong background in career counseling and development. Given the single-session approach, the artificial nature in which counseling took place, and the limited experience of the counselors, the possibility of Type I errors was increased.

The salience of collectivist issues for Asians may change not only with acculturation to the United States but also as Asian societies become more industrialized and individualist. As the cultures within Asia change, the dispositions of new Asian immigrants may be very different from those who immigrated several generations ago. Similarly, the values of the descendants of newer Asian immigrants may be different from those of older Asian immigrants. Thus, one must be careful in generalizing the results of this study too far into the future.

These limitations notwithstanding, the main contributions of this study to the literature on Asian American mental health and counseling process are threefold. First, the study demonstrated a method by which a culturally relevant construct for Asian Americans (i.e., collectivism) could be operationalized for a career counseling approach. Second, the study also demonstrated that European American female counselors could be successfully trained to implement a one-session career counseling treatment using a collectivist value orientation with Asian American clients. Finally, the study demonstrated that when compared with an individualist approach, a collectivist approach to career counseling had a more positive impact on Asian American clients' perceptions of counselor cultural competence. This is encouraging news for cross-cultural counseling researchers who desire to build bridges between theory and practice.

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