

Do Cultural Orientations Moderate the Relations between Adolescents' Social Withdrawal and Psychological Adjustment?

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background

- **Social withdrawal is the voluntary removal of oneself from social interactions.**
 - Often believed to negatively affect children's adjustment, but the effect depends on its subtype and context
- **A comparison of social withdrawal subtypes in previous studies (e.g., Chen & French, 2008; Liu et al., 2015)**

	Shyness	Unsociability
Definitions	Interested in social interactions, but anxious/fearful	Not interested in social interactions
Relatively problematic in	United States/Canada, urban China	China (especially rural)
Relatively benign in	China (especially rural)	United States/Canada

- **Cross-contexts differences in withdrawn children/adolescents adjustment are often attributed to collectivistic and individualistic cultural orientations**
 - In collectivistic cultures (e.g., traditional Chinese society), shy children may be considered harmonious because they do not "stand out," whereas unsociable children may be viewed as selfish because they lack interest in others
- **However**
 - Nobody has measured cultural orientations in social withdrawal subtypes research
 - Cultural values in China are becoming increasingly individualistic and diverse. There may be individual differences in cultural orientations and mixed findings about shy/unsociable children's adjustment in China

aims and hypotheses

- **Aim**
 - Examine the role of cultural orientations in shy and unsociable Chinese adolescents' psychological adjustment
- **Hypotheses**
 - The relations between Chinese adolescents' shyness/unsociability and depression/loneliness will be moderated by cultural orientations
 - High collectivism serves as a protective factor for shy adolescents
 - High individualism serves as a protective factor for unsociable adolescents

method

- **Participants**
 - Grade 7 students ($N = 318$, 53% girls; $M_{age} = 12.8$ years, $SD = 0.5$) from an urban middle school in northeastern China
- **Measures**
 - Unsociability: Child Social Preference Questionnaire (CSPQ; Coplan et al., 2013), 7 items, $\alpha = .90$
 - Shyness: Children's Shyness Questionnaire (CSQ; Crozier, 1995), 25 items, $\alpha = .81$
 - Cultural Orientations: The Horizontal and Vertical Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Li, M. Wang, C. Wang, & Shi, 2010; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), 8 items for individualism, $\alpha = .69$; 8 items for collectivism, $\alpha = .78$
 - Depression: Children's Depressive Inventory (CDI; Kovac, 1980), 10 items, $\alpha = .83$
 - Loneliness: Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980), 20 items, $\alpha = .87$

results

Table 1
Regressions Predicting Depression and Loneliness from Social Withdrawal Subtypes and Cultural Orientations

Model	Dependent Variable	Predictor	R ²	B
1	Depression (N = 314)	Shyness	0.44**	0.51**
		Individualism		0.01
		Collectivism		-0.18**
		Shyness × Individualism		-0.07
		Shyness × Collectivism		-0.12* ^a
2	Depression (N = 315)	Unsociability	0.37**	0.17**
		Individualism		-0.04
		Collectivism		-0.14**
		Unsociability × Individualism		-0.05*
		Unsociability × Collectivism		-0.02
3	Loneliness (N = 309)	Shyness	0.45**	0.64**
		Individualism		0.05
		Collectivism		-0.28**
		Shyness × Individualism		-0.14
		Shyness × Collectivism		-0.1
4	Loneliness (N = 310)	Unsociability	0.37**	0.19**
		Individualism		-0.006
		Collectivism		-0.25**
		Unsociability × Individualism		-0.04
		Unsociability × Collectivism		0.002

Notes. R² = R-squared. B = unstandardized regression coefficient. Gender was controlled.
^a No longer significant when items with low factor loadings were omitted from the measure.
 * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

results (continued)

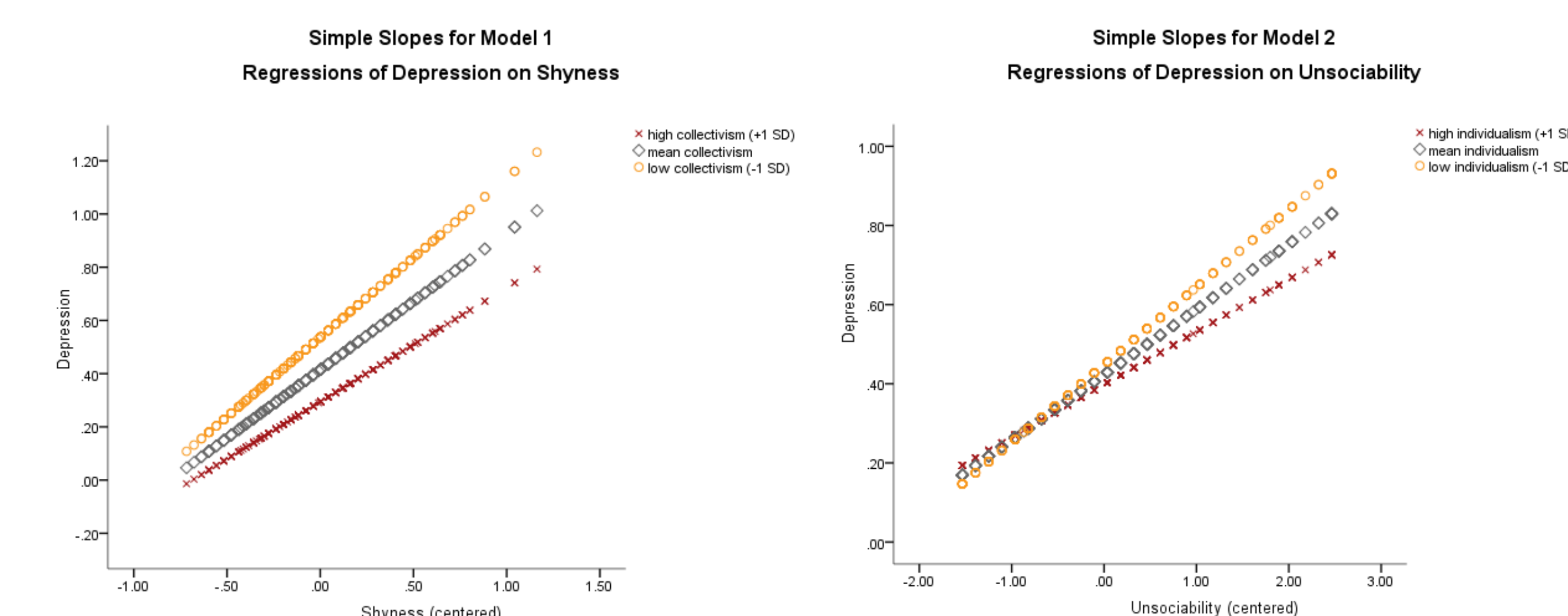


Figure 1. The moderating effects of cultural orientations on the relations between depression and social withdrawal subtypes. All simple slopes were significant at .05 level.

discussion

- **Shyness and unsociability positively predicted depression and loneliness.**
 - Adolescents' withdrawal was associated with poor adjustment, regardless of subtype.
- **Collectivism negatively predicted depression and loneliness.**
 - Adolescents' collectivistic cultural orientations may serve as a protective factor in collectivistic cultures like China
- **Higher collectivism attenuated the association between shyness and depression, and higher individualism attenuated the association between unsociability and depression (Figure 1).**
 - Corresponds with literature of social withdrawal subtypes
 - It is possible that shy/unsociable adolescents who held cultural values consistent with their social behavior had higher self-esteem and were less prone to develop depressive symptoms.
- **Such moderating effects were not replicated for loneliness**
 - Loneliness is closely related to the ability to make friends and seek support. Such abilities may be less influenced by cultural orientation.
- **Limitations and future directions**
 - Cross-sectional and self-reported data
 - Generalizability is limited to urban Chinese schools
 - Does the effect of cultural orientations take place at individual level, peer/group level, or both?

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