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The Western delusion? An examination of individualistic and extrinsic value systems in Western cultures and their link to young people's psychological wellbeing

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Abstract

Various sources indicate that the mental health of young people is deteriorating in Western populations. Yet, the potential contribution of prevalent Western cultural values such as individualism and extrinsic values on the psychological wellbeing of young people remains understudied. A survey of 18-25 year-olds (N=507) revealed that vertical (but not horizontal) dimensions of individualistic values were associated with poorer wellbeing in young people, while horizontal (but not vertical) collectivistic values were associated with higher levels. Responses from a subsequent qualitative study (N=50) indicated that individualistic and extrinsic values shape young people's decision-making and value orientations, and caused them significant stress. This lead to a final intervention study (N=40) whereby young people were exposed to content and activities that promoted collectivistic and intrinsic values in order to shift their focuses away from individualistic and extrinsic values which improved their wellbeing. The results of these studies highlight the importance of taking into account cultural values such as individualistic and extrinsic values when contemplating young people's mental health.

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Chapter 4: Study 2

Chapter 5: Study 3

Chapter 6: General Discussion and Conclusion

Thesis including published works declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

This thesis includes (0) original papers published in peer reviewed journals and (4) papers currently under review. The core theme of the thesis is an exploration of the role individualistic and extrinsic value systems have in influencing the psychological health of young people in Western contexts. This topic is reflected in the papers included within this thesis, with them playing a sequential role in addressing the primary research question.

The ideas, development and writing up of all the papers in the thesis were the principal responsibility of myself, the student, working within the School of Psychological Sciences under the supervision of Dr Pascal Molenberghs and Dr Ana-Maria Bliuc.

The inclusion of co-authors reflects the fact that the work came from active collaboration between researchers and acknowledges input into team-based research.

In the case of chapters, 2, 3, 4 and 5 my contribution to the work involved the following:

Thesis Chapter	Publication Title	Status *(published, in press, accepted or returned for revision)*	Nature and % of student contribution	Co-author name(s) Nature and % of Co-author's contribution*	Co-author(s), Monash student Y/N*
2	The beliefs, behaviours and wellbeing of young people living in Western cultures: a review of their associations	Under review	*80%. Concept and collecting data and writing first draft*	2) Ana-Maria Bliuc, input into manuscript 20%	No
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| 5 | Negating the negative cultural effects of extrinsic and individualistic values on young people's wellbeing: The results of a four-week pilot intervention study. | Under review | *80%. Concept and collecting data and writing first draft* | 2) Ana-Maria Bliuc, input into manuscript 10%
 3) Pascal Molenberghs, input into manuscript 10% | No |

I have / have not renumbered sections of submitted or published papers in order to generate a consistent presentation within the thesis.

Student signature: *(Ashley Humphrey)*   **Date:** 16/4/2018

The undersigned hereby certify that the above declaration correctly reflects the nature and extent of the student's and co-authors' contributions to this work. In instances where I am not the responsible author I have consulted with the responsible author to agree on the respective contributions of the authors.

Main Supervisor signature: (Pascal Molenberghs)   **Date:** 16/4/2018
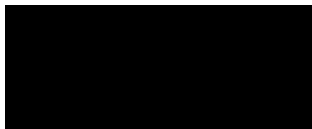
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Chapter 1 - Introduction

A selection of data reports that the health of young people living in high-income developed countries today is consistently improving (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2014; US Bureau of the Census, 2011; Office of National Statistics UK, 2017). Some evidence from Australia, US and the UK indicate that their youth are healthy, happy and optimistic about their futures (AIHW, 2014; US Bureau of the Census, 2011; Office of National Statistics UK, 2017). For example, in Australia 90% of emerging adults (aged 18-24) rate their health as excellent or very good (AIHW, 2014). Further research from the Foundation of Young Australians shows that 70% of young people say they are happy and satisfied with their lives, including their lifestyles, work or study commitments, relationships with parents and friends, accomplishments and self-perceptions (Foundation of Young Australians, 2013). American young people today enjoy more leisure time, obtain higher levels of education, enjoy longer life spans and have better physical health which suggests an increase in their quality of life when compared to past generations (National Center for Health Statistics, 2014; Oeppen & Vaupel, 2002; Robinson & Godbey, 1999; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In accordance with these figures some researchers have argued that due to rising median family incomes, greater opportunities for study and career advancement and more labor saving devices, subjective wellbeing in these contexts may be increasing compared to past generations (Diener, Tay, & Oishi, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

However, as Eckersley (2011) has previously pointed out, this discourse is disproportionately focused on the positive aspects of the life of a young person in Western society, and fails to capture key aspects surrounding life stressors and

psychological health concerns. Despite the increase in physical health and economic opportunities for young people living in contemporary English speaking Western societies, there is also mounting evidence that paints a bleaker picture – in particular relating to young people's psychological wellbeing and mental health.

Reports from the Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (2011) show that 'mental health problems and disorders account for the highest burden of disease among young people today' (p. 3). More evidence from Australia indicates that young people experience severe difficulties coping with stress, with the 2011–12 ABS Australian Health Survey showing an estimated 258,000 (12%) of young adults aged 18–24 reported experiencing 'high' or 'very high' levels of psychological distress (ABS, 2013). The 2007 Australian National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing found that an estimated 671,100 (26%) of young people aged 16–24 were suffering from some form of psychological health issue – including anxiety disorders, substance abuse or depression (ABS, 2008). These findings seem to be consistent across other Western cultures, with a UK health survey carried out between 1986 and 2006 showing that English adolescents experience considerably higher rates of psychological stress that than they did in previous generations (Collishaw, Maughan, Natarajan, & Pickles, 2010). Data from the US Bureau of Census (2011) also shows that suicide rates for young people (aged 15-24) per 100,000 population had increased from 5.2 in 1960, to 13.3 in the early 2000s.

In response to these figures, Eckersley (2007) proposes that cultural influences may be more responsible for the increase in mental health problems experienced by young people today than any other factor. Exploring generational data on mental health, Twenge (2011) echoes this view, proposing that recent

generational declines in young people's mental health are likely rooted in

cultural shifts that have led to more people suffering from mental health

problems. Specifically, Twenge identifies a shift towards extrinsic based values

and goals such as status, money and recognition, as well as an increase in

individualistic tendencies as responsible for this.

These are substantial claims, and point towards potentially underexplored and

poorly understood areas of youth wellbeing, specifically in relation to the cultural

influences that may be impacting upon this decline. Therefore, the goal of this thesis

is to examine how adherence to extrinsic and individualistic value systems influences

the psychological wellbeing of young people living in Western countries.

Individualistic and extrinsic values are acknowledged as particularly prevalent value

systems amongst young people in Western settings (Dittmar & Kapur, 2011; Smith,

Christoffersen, Davidson & Snell 2011; Twenge et al., 2012; Twenge & Kasser,

2013). This thesis will hence have a particular focus on the emerging adult

demographic. Given the increase in psychological health issues experienced by young

people in Western societies, and the underexplored role of Western value systems in

this context, exploring the way individualistic and extrinsic based values may be

impacting upon young people's psychological wellbeing is of timely importance.

1.2 Emerging Adulthood in Western contexts

To begin this analysis, it is important to first discuss the key characteristics of the

phase of life commonly referred to as emerging adulthood. This is a period of life

between adolescence and full-fledged adulthood (typically accepted as spanning from

ages 18 to 25). Arnett (2000) describes this period of development as unique to young

adults living in developed countries, who do not have children, do not live in their own home, or do not have sufficient income to become fully independent in their early to mid-twenties. Derived from a comprehensive study of young people aged 12 to 30, Arnett (2000) evaluated young peoples' views on their own levels of maturity, whilst looking also at their marital status, their parental dependence and their living arrangements. His findings indicate that the lives of those aged 18-25 are distinctly different from the adolescence years that precede the emerging adulthood period, as well as the cemented adulthood years that follow. He argues that the unique features of this age range calls for an appropriate term to confer the distinctness of this stage of life. Throughout subsequent studies on this age bracket (Arnett, 2004; 2014; Berk, 2010; Steinberg, 2011), research has outlined the significance of the emerging adulthood years as a foundational period that sets the course for the remainder of one's life in respect to behavioural patterns, beliefs and attitudes. Research has also highlighted this age bracket as an important time for interventions fostering positive development because the opportunity for change is much higher compared to older age groups (O'Connor et al., 2011). Given that these years are still considered formative, Arnett (2004) proposes that problematic behavioural patterns can be addressed and positive measures implemented. Emerging adults are consequently considered as being open and adaptable to change, whilst also focused on discovering the meaning of their lives and forming a sense of identity (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca & Ritchie, 2013).

Findings from McDonald and colleagues (2011) suggest that young people in Western contexts face more 'complex and contested' transitions to adulthood than previous generations, and they take an increasing array of 'unconventional paths' to

reach this point. They identify a 'deferment' in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, brought about in part by prolonged education and training commitments as well as insecurity in employment (p. 76). Furlong and Cartmel (1997) add that there is no longer a linear timetable to govern young people's pathway to adulthood and achieving passages such as leaving home, marriage, parenthood and entering the job market. Further research has identified, that the greater the quantity of freedom afforded to the current generations of emerging adults, the slower the path to fully fledged adulthood is compared to previous generations (Weier & Lee, 2015). Whilst this freedom has many benefits such as opportunities for extended study, self-reflection and new experiences, it is also linked to a greater level of stress and anxiety in young people's lives, by creating uncertainty, high expectations of choice, and unmet expectations (Weier & Lee, 2015). Nilan and colleagues (2007) add that this freedom creates an 'identity of choice', whereby young people increasingly create identities around consumeristic values, while also navigating their lives in highly individualised ways.

The concept of emerging adulthood is not without its critics (Coete, 2014; Hendry & Kloep, 2010). This criticism has centred around the universality of emerging adulthood, suggesting that this life stage is restricted in the most part to 'privileged' members of the upper and middle classes who reside in nations with developed economies (Bynner, 2005; Hendry & Kloep, 2010). This criticism contends that the emerging adult stage addresses only a sub group of young people, namely those who have the opportunity to be financially dependent on their parents into their twenties, are able to delay entering into full time employment – often due to study commitments.

Despite these debates, a consensus exists between both those who endorse the concept of emerging adulthood, and its critics, that contextual factors in developed Western societies do allow young people a potentially delayed transition into adulthood. Economic and social factors unique to Western contexts are key in providing young people with a unique freedom and flexibility in their lives that can permit for a deferment of traditional adult roles. Therefore, emerging adulthood is not a universal age stage for young people living in Western contexts indifferent to socio-economic, religious and ethnic demographics (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2009). However, modern Western environments are still widely acknowledged as providing a freedom for young people to enjoy greater life choices in work, relationships and leisure when compared to other cultures and generations (Nilan, 2011). These freedoms and opportunities allow for a context whereby individualistic and extrinsic values can be more freely adopted, making emerging adulthood a good demographic to focus this research on.

1.3 The wellbeing of Western youth

As noted in the first section of this introduction, there is a body of research suggesting the health of young people within Western contexts is improving (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2014; US Bureau of the Census, 2011; Office of National Statistics, 2017). Consistently across Western environments, young people today benefit from economic advantages and advancements in technology and medical care. Consequently young people experience better physical health than in past generations, which in part suggests an increase in their quality of life (National Center for Health Statistics, 2014; Oeppen & Vaupel, 2002; Robinson

& Godbey, 1999; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Despite these advantages, an array of alternative data suggests the psychological health of young people is in decline (ABS, 2013; Bor, Dean, Najman & Hayatbakhsh, 2014; Collishaw, Maughan, Natarajan & Pickles, 2010; Fombonne, 1998; Office for National Statistics, 2017; Potrebny, Wiium & Lundegard, 2017; Twenge et al., 2010; US Bureau of Census 2011). These figures suggest that while mortality rates as well as self-reported quality of life levels may have improved, there may be a declining trend specific to psychological wellbeing that misaligns with the various health related progressions in Western countries. In a comprehensive review of the literature on the time trends of psychosocial disorders in young people, Rutter and Smith (1995) show evidence of a substantial increase in psychosocial disorders, including depressive disorders, in developed countries from the 1950s to the 1990s. In a meta-analysis of statistics on the mental health of general populations of young people in the US between 1938 and 2007, Twenge and colleagues (2010) also identified a large generational increase in psychopathological symptoms, including depression. Analysing data from the 'Monitoring the Future' survey (a nationally representative sample of US 12th graders completed annually since 1976), later research from Twenge (2015) shows that American young people were more likely to report depressive symptoms, especially psychosomatic symptoms, between 2000 and 2010 (vs. 1980 and 1990) suggesting that this trend may be increasing. This confers with research from the American Psychological Association 2012 Stress in America survey, that found that Millennial's (those aged between 18-33 in 2012) reported more stress than older birth cohorts did (APA, 2013).

Collishaw (2015) argues that evidence about trends in young people's mental

health challenges (including levels of depression and anxiety) is somewhat inconclusive, due in part to few studies using comparable measures and samples at different points in time. Collishaw outlines that cross-cohort comparisons, whereby studies have used identical screens for symptoms of anxiety and depression at different time points, bring clarity to this inconclusiveness by allowing for a 'like-for-like' comparison of unselected population samples (p. 371). This methodological approach was adopted by Collishaw and colleagues in an earlier study that looked at shifts in emotional problems in two samples of English adolescents, twenty years apart (Collishaw et al., 2010). Here results showed a substantial increase in the frequency in which young people reported symptoms of anxiety and depression, conveying clarity to the view that adolescent emotional problems have shown an increase over recent decades. Other studies that have adopted this type of methodology conducted in developed nations including Iceland, the Netherlands and Norway also show an increase in the mental health issues experienced by young people, providing further substantiation for this trend (Sigfusdottir, Asgeirsdottir, Sigurdsson, & Gudjonsson, 2008; Tick, Van der Ende & Verhulst, 2008; Von Soest & Wichstrom, 2014).

Using data from the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory scores, Twenge and colleagues (2010) evaluate increases in US young people's depression scores over the previous decades to hypothesise that Western contexts have increasingly shifted towards environments in which more and more young people experience poor mental health and psychopathology. Here the researchers use deductive logic to theorise that cultural influences on psychiatric symptoms (i.e. an environmental influence outside of the individual) serve as a key influence over these

increases. They conclude that the pattern of change apparent in the data on youth mental health best fits a model of cultural change that has negatively impacted upon these statistics.

Further research from Twenge has pin-pointed 'generational shifts' in young people's values as revealing interesting data around their life goals, orientations and levels of mental health (Twenge, 2011; Twenge, Campbell & Freeman, 2012; Twenge & Kasser, 2013). These studies found a shift in the value systems and social practices of young people towards more individualistic and materialistic values that commenced in the early 1990s. Comparing generational differences in young adults' life goals Twenge, Campbell and Freeman (2012) for example showed that the millennial generation (those born between 1982 and 2003) are less caring than previous generations, and more focused on extrinsic and materialistic aims. The researchers also note that this shift corresponds with the increase in mental health issues and antisocial behaviour reported by young people in high-income countries. These findings are supported by an earlier analysis of US college and high school students' values and wellbeing, that found that depression was the most prominent in areas with a strong emphasis on money, image and fame, and a weaker emphasis on intrinsic values such as community affiliation (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). It therefore seems that the increased focus on money, appearance, and status (rather than on community and close relationships) that has accompanied these shifts could play a significant part in the observed increased levels of depression (Eckersley, 2011; 2005; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Twenge et al., 2012; Twenge & Kasser, 2013).

1.4 Analysing the influence of culture on young people's values and behaviours in a Western context

This rise in mental health problems in Western youth has led to an emerging body of research investigating young people's social practices and behaviours, as well as the effect cultural trends can have on their lives (Eckersley, 2011; Eckersley, Wierenga & Wyn, 2006; Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson & Snell, 2011; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). The culture of a society is argued to play a key role in influencing both the values and behavioural patterns of its citizens, along with their subjective wellbeing (Diener, Diener & Diener, 1995; Fulmer, et al. 2010; Hofstede, 1980). Corin (1995) argues that a nation's culture as a system shapes 'every area of life' (p. 273). She theorises that culture may also be responsible for defining a world view that gives meaning to 'personal and collective experiences', and in doing so 'frames the way people locate themselves within the world, perceive the world and behave in it' (p.273). Triandis (1995) suggests that culture is formed out of social patterns, suggesting language, historical period, and geographic region reflect specific 'subjective cultures' unique to these environments. Corin (1995) notes that cultural influences are always easier to identify in unfamiliar societies. This goes a way to suggest why most studies of culture and health have not involved broader Western populations, but have instead focussed on more remote societies, or specific sub-populations such as migrants and minority groups (Douglas, Eckersley & Dickson, 2001). Based on this line of research, the term *culture* will be used throughout this thesis to refer to the language and accumulated knowledge, beliefs, assumptions and values that are passed between individuals, groups and generations within a society.

It is important to note that in discussing the effects of modern Western

culture on the beliefs and behaviours of emerging adults, as well as how cultural factors relate to their psychological wellbeing, this research does not intend to suggest that culture exerts a uniform effect on everyone regardless of their gender, class, religious belief and ethnicity. It is also acknowledged that individuals do not passively absorb cultural influences, but rather actively interact with them. Furthermore, it is accepted there are a variety of subcultures embedded within a culture marked by sometimes very different values, meanings and beliefs. This research wishes to acknowledge these points, yet instead of focussing on demographic disparities, it seeks to address the concepts of individualistic and extrinsic values as being 'culturally eminent' for a large portion of Western young people, as has been identified by past research (Eckersley, 2011: Hofstede, 2010; Kasser, 2002; Roberts & Clement, 2007; Twenge, 2011). Therefore, just as not everyone suffers from obesity in the United States (yet it remains a prevalent health endemic) it is acknowledged that these cultural syndromes do not uniformly affect everyone the same way. Instead, we propose throughout this research that the cultural prevalence of individualistic and extrinsic value systems in Western settings indicates that they deserve consideration when broadly analysing the psychological health of high-income Western nations.

A range of studies now exist on how different cultures influence citizens' behaviours, beliefs, and indirectly their health. One of the earliest large-scale research projects investigating the effect of culture on people's values and social practices is Hofstede's *Cultural Consequences* (1980). Using a factor analysis of country-level data, Hofstede analysed data from nearly 90,000 IBM employees in the late 1960s and early 70s, representing a total of 66 countries at IBM offices around the world.

He classified countries along four major dimensions of national culture: individualism-collectivism, power distance (the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally), uncertainty avoidance (expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity around their future) and masculinity-femininity (this multi-dimensional scale classes the preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success as masculine, and a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life as feminine). From this data, Hofstede gave each country a score based on averaging the items defining each dimension, with these scores then used as the basis for the final nation ratings. This analysis revealed that high-income countries such as Australia, the US and the UK are highly individualistic in their social preferences. These findings initiated an array of inquiry scholarly interest into the role individualism plays in different societies over the following decades, inclusive of how it relates to people's behaviours, relationships and wellbeing.

In relation to cultural influences on health, Diener's studies of culture and subjective wellbeing serve as a key contribution. His various studies on the topic are collected in his work titled 'Culture and Well-Being' (2009), in which Diener examines the possible effects different cultures have on the wellbeing of people from these cultures. Using his self-developed Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985) Diener (2013) measures global cognitive judgments of satisfaction with one's life with the aim of identifying differences in various cultures that are important in optimizing people's wellbeing. His research concludes that factors associated with individualism such as higher rates of

autonomy, self-determinism and ample wealth are all connected to an increase in wellbeing amongst a society.

These are all prevailing traits within modern Western societies when compared to developing societies. Yet, despite the positive correlates these traits possess in relation to wellbeing, a range of evidence indicates that there may be hidden detriments within these factors leading Western countries to become increasingly competitive and socially isolating (Hidaka, 2012; Twenge et al., 2012). For example, the high degree of autonomy present in most Western societies is acknowledged as necessary for a society of people to achieve optimal wellbeing. However, the many choices available in Western contexts can also lead young people into 'paralytic indecision', greater expectations coupled with eventual dissatisfaction, regret and stress (Schwartz, 2000). Further, the economic advantages present in Western contexts partly responsible for these freedoms may also leave people more susceptible to depressive symptoms as a result of greater inequality, low social support and intense individual competitiveness (Gilbert, 2006).

Research on culture and wellbeing has largely funnelled these cultural disadvantages on health as stemming from the individualistic and materialistic influences that are strongly present within these societies (Collishaw, 2015; Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kasser, 2002; Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier 2002; Schyns, 1998; Triandis, 2012). These values are said to be unique to developed nations whereby consumer capitalism and modernisation are rampant, and trends surrounding work-life balance, morality and life values are potentially negatively affected (Bauman, 2000). A selection of research indicates that these values are often associated with harmful beliefs and behavioural patterns in young people that are

often detrimental to their psychological and physical wellbeing (Dittmar &

Hempstead, 1992; Kasser, 2002; Smith et al., 2011; Triandis, 1995). Individualistic

values for example have been associated with traits of competitiveness, comparisons

with others and overall feelings of having poorer social support (Triandis, 1995).

Materialistic values are also identified as having an array of negative side effects,

including alienation, envy and poor psychological needs satisfaction (Kasser, 2002).

Emerging adults living in modern Western societies are highly influenced by

the dominant Western concepts of individualism and materialism (Ahuvia & Wong,

1995; Dittmar, 2007; Dittmar & Kapur, 2011; Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Smith et al.,

2011; Twenge et al., 2012; Twenge & Kasser, 2013; Twenge, Gentile, Dewall, Ma,

Lacefield, & Schurtz, 2010). Exploring these issues, Smith and colleagues (2011)

conducted one of the most comprehensive studies undertaken on the lives and

experiences of emerging adults in a Western context. They drew on a series of in-

depth interviews with emerging American adults (aged 18-23), to assess how modern

American life influences young people's experiences and attitudes towards morality,

their goals for the future and their psychological wellbeing. By interviewing over

3000 young people over a seven-year period, the study identified five major issues

that are being faced by the current generation of young Americans including:

distorted moral reasoning, the frequent use of drugs and alcohol, materialistic life

goals, regrettable sexual experiences, and the disengagement from community and

political life. In assessing these issues, the authors examined their causes and

consequences for both individuals and American society as a whole. The study

concluded that rampant consumer capitalism, continuing failures in education, hyper-

individualism, postmodernist moral relativism, and other aspects specific to the

American culture are all contributing to the challenging environment that confronts emerging adults in today's Western world.

In an Australian context, Eckersley, Wierenga and Wyn (2006) brought together research findings across disciplines (including medicine and the social sciences) to investigate approaches to help young Australians optimise their mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. Addressing the decline of young people's self-reported levels of wellbeing in Australia (and Western society more generally) their review suggests that cultural factors such as a young person's values, worldviews, beliefs, and relationship with society all have a strong influence over this increase. As part of a suggested intervention to this problem, the authors argue that the dominant worldview of material progress as a benchmark for a nations standard of living and quality of life is problematic, and not reflective of an individual's true standard of living. Instead, they propose a new benchmark of human progress and development based on 'altruistic, cooperative individualism', which they suggest would lead to greater social cohesion, strong communities and families, a healthy natural environment, and in turn a heightened quality of life and wellbeing (p.37). Other researchers have found that mental health issues are more prevalent when people become more focused on extrinsic values such as money, fame, and image (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Twenge et al., 2010) and speculated that the growth in expectations in these contexts has led to disappointment and depression (Seligman, 1988; Twenge, 2006). This suggests that as cultures become more individualistic and materialistic in their focus, levels of depression should increase (Kasser, 2002).

It is without doubt that there are many positives associated with being a young person now living in a contemporary Western society. These include increased

economic, health, educational and employment opportunities when compared to past generations and developing cultures. This phase of life is also acknowledged as a time for fun, freedom, new growth, and promising opportunities (Smith et al., 2011). Yet, it is clear from the studies reviewed above that there are challenges and confusions in the lives of young people. With all the increased economic, social and moral freedoms afforded to young people in these contexts, there is an alarming degree of evidence to suggest that the psychological wellbeing of emerging adults in Western contexts is declining (Bor et al., 2014; Collishaw, 2015; Collishaw et al., 2010; Twenge, 2011; 2015). It is therefore the aim of this thesis to examine the influence of two potential contributors to the decline in the psychological wellbeing of young people in Western society: that of individualistic and extrinsic values.

1.5 This thesis

To address these issues, first a systematic literature review was conducted to investigate the effects of individualistic and materialistic values on psychological wellbeing in young people (Chapter 2). This is attached as the paper submitted to the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* on 10/12/17 (under review). Based on this review, the horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualistic and collectivistic values were measured in 507 Australian emerging adults to investigate their effect on psychological wellbeing (study 1; Chapter 3). This paper is attached as it was submitted to the *Journal of Youth Studies* on 14/1/18 (second revision - minor revision received 15/4/18). Subsequently, a qualitative study was conducted among 50 young Australians to provide a deeper insight into how individualistic and extrinsic values influence psychological wellbeing (study 2; Chapter 4). This paper appears as submitted to the *Journal of Happiness Studies* on *10/4/2018* (currently

under review). Lastly, building on the findings from the first two studies, 40 participants from Australia, the US and UK participated in a four-week intervention study designed to counterbalance the negative influences of individualistic and extrinsic values and increasing the positive influence of intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic values on wellbeing (study 3; Chapter 5). This paper appears as submitted to the *Journal of Positive Psychology* on *12/4/2018* (currently under review). Each of these chapters include a brief outline section explaining their purpose in relation to the overall aims and hypotheses of this thesis, as well as some commentary on how each study flows on from the previous one. In the conclusion section of the thesis (Chapter 6), the major findings from the three studies and systematic literature review are summarised and their implications discussed.

1.6 Definitions and frameworks of key terms

Throughout this thesis, the term *individualism* is used to refer to a value system that emphasises the moral worth of the individual and promotes autonomy, independence, self-reliance and the exercise of one's own goals and desires above the goals of broader society (Komarraju & Cokley, 2008). At a societal level, individualism is responsible for promoting a social pattern that consists of 'loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives. Such individuals are 'primarily motivated by their own preferences, goals, needs, rights and the contracts they have established with others' (Triandis, 1995, p.2).

The term *collectivism* is defined here as cultures where people are interdependent within their in-groups, give priority to the goals of their in-groups, shape their behavior primarily on the basis of in-group norms, and behave in a communal way

(Mills & Clark, 1982). People in collectivistic cultures are especially concerned with maintaining their relationships with others, contrary to individualists who only do so when the costs do not outweigh the benefits. Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi (1999) showed that collectivists in conflict situations are primarily concerned with maintaining their relationship with others, whereas individualists are primarily concerned with achieving justice. Whilst the concepts of individualism and collectivism are conceptually opposed they are not mutually exclusive, it is possible for an individual to be high (or low) on both traits at the same time.

Framework for understanding Individualism, collectivism and wellbeing

In relation to the relationship between individualism and wellbeing, some research has shown a positive correlation between people living in individualistic cultures and wellbeing (e.g., Diener et al., 1995; Veenhoven, 1999), while other research has identified a range of risk factors associated with individualistic values (Twenge and Campbell, 2012; Oishi, 2000). These risk factors include traits of competitiveness, comparisons with others, narcissistic tendencies, and are associated with negative social outcomes such as alienation and loneliness, (Triandis, 1995).

Based on these studies, I argue that individualism and collectivism exist as complex and layered concepts, and have mixed effects on wellbeing. To explain this misalignment, I propose that individualism and collectivism have differing dimensions, which may be predictive of qualitatively different outcomes on a society (as also suggested by Triandis, 1995). These dimensions have been used largely in studies exploring social behaviours and customs in different cultures, and have not been specifically tested against wellbeing. According to Triandis (1995) there are

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four divergent categories of individualism and collectivism, conceptualised as horizontal and vertical dimensions. *Horizontal individualism* encourages the conception of an autonomous individual and an emphasis on equality and self-reliance. *Vertical individualism* includes the conception of an autonomous individual and acceptance of inequality, however also involves the promotion of oneself ahead of others, and a fierce sense of self-sufficiency. *Horizontal collectivism* is characterised by perceptions of self as part of the collective, and perceptions of similarity between members of the collective. *Vertical collectivism* includes perceiving the self as a part of a collective and accepting inequalities within that collective.

By measuring these differing dimensions that relate to differing social traits and relating them to wellbeing (as done in study 1; chapter 3 of this thesis) it was hypothesized that they would account for the confusion in the literature around how individualism relates to wellbeing.

Extrinsic values in this thesis refer to goals that depend on the contingent recognition of others, emphasising the acquisition of status and materialistic gain (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). They can be viewed as a value system that regards social status as being determined by affluence and social distinction, as well as the perception that happiness can be increased through buying, spending and accumulating material wealth (Kasser, 2002). Kasser and Ryan's (1996) work on extrinsic values classifies 'financial success, social recognition and an appealing image' as being key extrinsic aspirations.

Intrinsic values refer to those values inherently valuable to the individual and more conducive to enhancing psychological wellbeing (Kasser, 1996). Kasser (1996) defines intrinsic value systems as those related to internal reward, such as affiliation and relationships, helping others, physical health and personal growth.

Framework for understanding extrinsic and intrinsic values and wellbeing

There have been numerous frameworks within the social sciences to explore the concept of extrinsic based values, including Maslow's (1943) human needs theory and Wicklund and Gollwitzer's (1982) symbolic self-completion theory. Whilst drawing upon elements of these theories, this thesis will frame the concept of extrinsic values around their self-gratifying stimuli, and as largely interchangeable with materialistic values. In measuring scores of materialism, Kasser's Aspirations Index (1996) measures extrinsic values to gain an overall materialism score, suggesting that the terms are relatively transposable. Indeed the initial framework used for this thesis focused on materialistic values and their influence on wellbeing, however this terminology was then shifted to extrinsic values in order to allow for a more all-encompassing term.

In analysing the effects of extrinsic values on wellbeing, this thesis will borrow from Oleson's (2004) framing of the subject, who outlines that while humans want to love and be loved, they also have the need and desire for self-esteem, status, and respect from others. These desires are contextualised into a Western cultural setting, whereby messages promoting materialistic values are prevalent, therefore making extrinsic based values a popular choice for young people to frame their goals and lifestyles around. Extrinsic values are often born out of self-interest, a strong desire

for financial success and interpersonal styles based on competition, thus undermining goals and values concerned with the welfare of others, both in the wider community and friends or family (Kasser, 2002). Consequently, a strong body of evidence has linked extrinsic values with poorer levels of wellbeing (Kasser et al., 2014; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Sheldon, Gunz, Nichols & Ferguson, 2010). This thesis seeks to understand this relationship in greater depth by gaining a qualitative narrative on extrinsic values and how they relate to wellbeing (study 2; Chapter 4), while also taking the important step of looking at ways to moderate this relationship through an intervention processes (study 3; Chapter 5).

Psychological wellbeing is operationalized as an absence of stress, anxiety and depression (Ryff, 1989). This is distinctly different from the concept of *quality of life*, which is used here as an umbrella term capturing one's satisfaction with their physical and psychological health, their relationships, their security, their achievements and their attachment to community (International Wellbeing Group, 2013). Psychological wellbeing will be measured with the DASS21 questionnaire, which measures depression, anxiety and stress and quality of life with the self-reported life satisfaction (PWI) index. A key aim of this research is to investigate how individualistic, collectivistic, intrinsic and extrinsic values influence psychological wellbeing and quality of life.

  With previous research (Kasser and Ryan, 1996: Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, & Kasser, 2014; Sheldon & McGregor, 2000) indicating that extrinsic values, and in some cases individualistic values (Oishi, 2000; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), relate to higher instances of depression, anxiety and stress, defining psychological wellbeing

specific to these factors seemed appropriate for this research. The inclusion of the quality of life measure specific to the intervention study was also deemed relevant to analyse any shifts in participant's life satisfaction scores across the intervention period. With the intervention encouraging pro-social and community oriented behaviours and tasks, implementing self-reported measures on participant's satisfaction with their relationships, feelings of community affiliation and their overall standard of living was appropriate.

1.7 Research aims and questions

The goal of the thesis is to examine the effect of individualistic and extrinsic values on the psychological wellbeing of emerging adults in a Western context – with a specific focus on participants from Australia, the US and the UK. It also seeks to propose effective intervention strategies to counteract the negative effects these value systems can have. Key research questions include: 1) What sub-traits of individualistic values influence psychological wellbeing (study 1)?; 2) What narratives do young people provide around how individualistic and extrinsic values influence their levels of stress and in turn their psychological wellbeing (study 2)?; 3) Can exposure to content and activities critiquing individualistic and extrinsic values (and propagating intrinsic and collectivistic values) lead to increased psychological wellbeing and quality of life in young people (study 3)?

1.8 Methodology

To examine these issues a mixed methodology was adopted. That is, a survey-type methodology consisting of a questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and a four-week long intervention based study were undertaken. A mixed methods approach was

an applicable fit for this research with the initial quantitative data of study one

enabling associations to be examined across the differing dimension of individualism

and collectivism, and their respective links to psychological wellbeing. This was in

response to the review of the literature that provided conflicting results around how

individualism relates to wellbeing. Qualitative data was then sought to provide young

people the opportunity to illuminate their experiences and interpretation of being a

young person in a Western context, and within that narrative it was explored how

individualistic and extrinsic values influence their lives and wellbeing (study two).

With this thesis focusing on values, a form of inquiry that provided an open platform

for young people to share on how these values influenced their lives was an important

step in gaining a deeper insight into how this relationship worked (Attridge-Stirling,

2001; Berge, 2007). No previous qualitative study has specifically investigated how

both individualistic and extrinsic values influence wellbeing. However, more general

qualitative studies into the lives of young people have been useful in outlining some

of the detrimental effects these values can have on young people's behaviours,

morality and psychological health (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton,

1985; Smith et al., 2011; Weier & Lee, 2016). Such studies indicate the importance of

qualitative studies specific to these issues. The results of studies one and two

indicated that individualistic and extrinsic values have an effect on wellbeing and

therefore, an intervention study was developed in Chapter five to moderate the

negative effects associated with these concepts. Here participants were provided with

weekly reading material critiquing individualistic and materialistic values, as well as

activities promoting intrinsic and collectivistic and prosocial values. Interventions

specific to mediating the negative effects of extrinsic values have been seldom

conducted (Kasser et al., 2014; Lekes et al., 2012), while no intervention study has been conducted specific to individualistic values. This intervention study therefore provides an important contribution to understand how the negative influences of individualistic and extrinsic value systems on psychological wellbeing can be negated.

1.9 Significance of Research

This thesis makes a significant and timely contribution to the psychological scholarship of youth mental health and wellbeing. By exploring the influence of prevalent Western cultural values on the psychological wellbeing of young people, this research is a timely response to the increasing mental health issues faced by young people in Western contexts. By providing a more detailed understanding of how individualistic and extrinsic values influence young people's wellbeing and quality of life, this research aims to contribute to the existing literature by providing a greater understanding of how traits embedded within these concepts influence young people's psychological wellbeing. Through this increased understanding, this research also aims to investigate ways to counteract the negative effects associated with these values.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Outline

Through a comprehensive and systematic review of past research, this paper reviewed the literature relevant to the influence the constructs of individualism and materialism have on the wellbeing of young people (and general population samples) in Western societies. With individualism and materialism noted as defining cultural characteristics in Western societies, reviewing their respective effects on wellbeing in unison seemed an important step to take. Additionally, with evidence from a number of developed Western countries suggesting that the mental health of young people today might be deteriorating, a review of the literature pertaining to the role dominant cultural values could be playing in this decline is important. The aim of this review was to build an understanding of how individualistic and materialistic values relate to young peoples wellbeing in Western contexts. This chapter appears in the form of the paper we submitted to the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* on 10/12/17.

Article (as submitted to the Journal of Humanistic Psychology on the 10/12/17)

The beliefs, behaviours and wellbeing of young people living in Western cultures: a review of their associations
Ashley Humphrey, Ana-Maria-Bliuc

Abstract

Rationale: Recent evidence from Australia, UK and US suggests that the mental health of young people today might be deteriorating, with high rates of depression reported across English speaking Western populations. Some evidence has pointed towards the cultural values of individualism and materialism as having a significant

effect on this. This paper will review the literature to gain some insight into the connection between these values and mental health.

Objective: Through a systematic review of past research from the Australia, UK and US, this article aims to provide a current account on the role the value systems individualism and materialism (with their associated behaviours) have in relation to the wellbeing of emerging adults.

Methods: This systematic review includes quantitative and qualitative studies (conducted between 1980 to the present) on associations between individualism, materialism, their associated behaviours and the wellbeing of young people living in western societies. These studies were sourced and selected based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic and Methods Analysis (PRISMA) approach to conducting systematic reviews.

Results: Our search, screening and selection strategy resulted in a total of eighteen studies that were included in our review. Their findings indicate that values such as materialism and individualism are highly influential on young peoples' mental health and wellbeing (through their effects on their behavioural practices).

Conclusions: Based on the studies reviewed we propose that, whilst materialistic and individualistic values can have positive associations, there are some poorly understood aspects of these concepts, particularly in relation to the potentially harmful effects on those highly orientated towards these values.

Introduction

Despite a number of reports and popular assumptions suggesting the health of young people living in high-income developed countries is improving (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing, 2014; Foundation of Young Australians, 2013; Office of

National Statistics, 2014) there is pervasive evidence to suggest the wellbeing of young people in these contexts is on the decline. Some generational data on mental health for example point towards an increase in the amount of the psychological health issues experienced by young Western people over the preceding decades (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Collishaw, Maughan, Natarajan, & Pickles, 2010; Twenge, Gentile, Dewall, Ma, Lacefield, & Schurtz, 2010; US Bureau of Census, 2011).

In response to such data indicating a decline in young people's mental health, a selection of research has pointed towards a range of cultural influences that may be impacting upon these statistics (Collishaw, 2015; Eckersley, 2011; Kasser, 2002; Twenge, 2011). As Eckersley (2006) notes, it seems: 'plausible, if not self-evident, that cultural characteristics such as materialism or individualism can have as important an impact on psychosocial factors such as social support and personal control as socio-economic inequality' (p.4). Discussing generational shifts in the quality of mental health experienced by Western young people, Twenge (2011) reasons that cultural factors could be playing a key role, stating that 'something about modern Western life is causing more and more young people, to feel anxious and depressed' (p.469). In earlier research, Twenge and colleagues (2010) point to culture's deteriorating social connections and increased emphasis on image and competition, as two key potential influences.

Thus we argue that we need to more carefully consider the role of key Western cultural values in influencing the psychological wellbeing of young people living in these environments. In particular, the concepts of individualism and materialism seem relevant, with past research clearly indicating that these concepts

are dominant (yet not exhaustive) value systems in Western cultures (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010; Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson & Snell, 2011; Triandis, 1995; Twenge & Kasser, 2013).

Drawing on a survey examining how modern corporate marketing efforts have influenced young people's attitudes towards consumerism, Schor (2004) concludes that young people today are highly vulnerable to materialistic and individualistic ideals, as well as the associated behaviours that can accompany them. Analysing data collected over a 40-year period from US high school seniors, Twenge and Kasser's (2013) research reinforces this, showing a significant increase in materialistic associations in American 12th graders from 1976 to 2007. Comparing materialistic associations across generations, their results show that the youth of today are significantly more oriented towards materialistic values and aspirations than the youth of the 1970's. This is shown to be consistent over multiple measures of materialistic values, including the desire for expensive possessions, money and acquiring a high paying job. They point to cultural influences specific to American society (and Western society more generally) as being responsible for this, citing increasing economies, high advertising penetration and the emphasis on celebrity culture as important contributors.

Twenge, Campbell and Freeman (2012) also pin-point cultural 'generational shifts' as revealing interesting data around young people's life goals, social orientations and levels of mental health. In reviewing longitudinal data collected from American College students from 1966 to 2012, findings showed that the millennial generation (those born between 1982 and 2003) are less caring than previous

generations, and more focused on extrinsic and individualistic aims. The authors conclude that these findings correspond to an increase in the amount of mental health issues and anti-social behaviour exhibited by young people in high-income countries between the early 1990's and today.

With these results in mind, we aim throughout this review to give an updated account on the literature of how the cultural concepts of individualism and materialism relate to the wellbeing of Western young people. We chose to focus our review on Australia, US and the UK because this is where the largest body of evidence surrounding the influence of materialistic and individualistic values on wellbeing is coming from. In doing so, we acknowledge that life may be very different for a young person living in the United States versus Australia for example, however our focus is to provide an overview of these dominant cultural trends that have been shown to exist within these contexts, not to critique their influence in specific cultures. It is also important to note here that not all young people are equally affected - with different ethnicities, socio-economic circumstances important moderators - nor are all influences equally consistent across all Western populations. Indeed, as Eckersley and Dear (2002) address in their analyses of cultural influences on youth suicide - cultures are not universal, with a variety of subcultures also marked by potentially very different values and beliefs. This article wishes to acknowledge these points, yet seeks to addresses these issues from a broader cultural perspective, proposing that greater emphasis should be placed on cultural concepts such as materialism and individualism in relation to how they influence the wellbeing of young people.

Definition of Individualism

When it comes to cultural research individualism and collectivism serve as key cultural distinctions (Hofstede, 1980). Individualists are defined by Triandis and Gelfand (2012) as those who favor independence and self-reliance, pursue personal goals, maintain relationships when the costs do not outweigh the benefits, and have the freedom to express themselves. This is in contrast with the dynamics surrounding the concept of collectivism – whereby societies are oriented around shared groups, identities and goals. Oyserman and colleagues (2002) note that attaining personal goals, happiness, and personal control are assumed central to wellbeing within individualism, whereas carrying out obligations and duties are assumed central to wellbeing within collectivism.

Definition of Materialism

 Early research conducted by Belk (1985) defines materialism as a series of personality traits, which include envy, non-generosity, possessiveness and preservation. Subsequent research on materialism has shifted from this view, and instead focussed on materialism as a value system that breeds traits and behaviours, rather than the other way around. For the purposes of this review, the term materialism refers to a value system that regards social status as being determined by affluence and social distinction, and depends on the contingent recognition of others (Kasser, 2002).

Definition of general and psychological wellbeing

The concept of wellbeing is used here as an umbrella term capturing one's satisfaction with their physical, psychological and spiritual health, their relationships, their security, their achievements and their attachment to community (International Wellbeing Group, 2013). It also includes a psychological element operationalised as the absence of anxiety and depression. Research on wellbeing conceptualises *psychological wellbeing* as a dynamic notion that includes subjective, social, and psychological dimensions as well as health-related behaviors (Ryff, 1989).

Methods

The first step of the review process was a comprehensive search of past research conducted between 1980 and 2017 within the fields of sociology, psychology and more generally within the social sciences. The key words used are 'individualism', 'materialism', and 'wellbeing' (of young people). We included both quantitative and qualitative research.

The inclusion criteria that we applied to our search are: a) empirical research (purely theoretical papers were excluded); b) at least one of our two key concepts (materialism and individualism) were examined; c) include wellbeing as one of the variables of interest; d) look at these concepts in relation to young people; and d) be published in (peer-reviewed) journal articles, books or conference proceedings from 1980 to 2016.

Next, we selected those studies that met our criteria. This initial stage was followed by a second search that looked at the effect these concepts had in relation to general population groups (general population groups were to be included into this search due to the lack of specificity surrounding the effects these concepts have

explicitly on young people and to give a basic overview of the effects these concepts have on general populaces wellbeing).

Our searches were conducted in the following databases: Pro Quest, Google Scholar and the Network of Wellbeing catalogue. Once these key studies were identified the reference list of each of the articles was further examined to find other potential studies relevant to our search. In total fourteen studies that met our criteria were selected to be included in the review. These studies were reviewed and information on their theoretical approach, methodology and key findings was extracted - to provide an overview of how the concepts of individualism and materialism were researched, the potential association these concepts had with each other, as well as their effects on the wellbeing of young people - or general population groups were applicable. The flow of our process of selection of articles is represented following the recommendations of PRISMA (Moher et al., 2009) – please refer to figure 1 for more details.

Figure 1 Study selection flow chart

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┌─────────────────────────────┐        ┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ 39 potentially relevant     │        │ No studies found from       │
│ studies identified by the   │        │ additional sources          │
│ search strategy             │        │                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘        └─────────────────────────────┘
            │                                         │
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐      │
│ No duplicates found                         │──────┘
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
            │
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ 39 potentially relevant     │
│ studies                     │
└─────────────────────────────┘
            │                           ┌─────────────────────────────┐
            │──────────────────────────▶│ 11 Records excluded after   │
            │                           │ evaluating study            │
            │                           │ purpose/methodology         │
            │                           └─────────────────────────────┘
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ 28 articles found           │
│                             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
            │                           ┌─────────────────────────────┐
            │                           │ 5 Full-text articles excluded│
            │──────────────────────────▶│ after literature review.    │
            │                           │ 2 articles: not specific enough│
            │                           │ in definition of concepts been│
            │                           │ focussed on.                │
            │                           │ 2 articles: methodologically│
┌─────────────────────────────┐         │ incompatible.               │
│ 18 studies included in      │         │ 1 article: incomplete data  │
│ qualitative synthesis       │         └─────────────────────────────┘
└─────────────────────────────┘
            │
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Studies included in         │
│ quantitative synthesis      │
│ (n = 18)                    │
└─────────────────────────────┘
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Findings

Characteristics of the studies reviewed

Disciplinary focus

The vast majority of research reviewed for this paper was conducted from a psychological perspective (16), with a few additional studies based on sociological theory (2). The most prevalent research method used in examining the effects of individualism and materialism on young people's wellbeing were quantitative techniques (16), while the qualitative studies identified used discourse and thematic analyses (2). That is, from a total of ten studies identified on individualism – eight were quantitative (Arrindell et al., 1997; Diener, Diener & Diener, 1995; Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Schyns, 1998; Oishi, 2000; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) and two were qualitative (Bellah et al., 1985; Smith et al., 2011). The reviewed research on materialism again largely used quantitative research methods, with eight of the key studies used employing quantitative techniques (Dittmar et al., 2014; Dittmar & Kapur, 2011; Kasser, 2002; Kasser, Rosenblum, Sameroff, Deci, Niemiec & Ryan, 2014; Kasser & Ryan. 1996; 1993; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Vohs, Mead & Goode, 2006) and only one utilizing a qualitative approach (Smith et al., 2011).

Sample types

Of these eighteen studies, nine studies used cross-cultural population samples, eight used US population samples and one a UK sample. Where cross-cultural samples were included, we choose to focus on the results specific to Western nations within the data. Because only ten studies specifically used youth samples we also included studies using broader adult samples. Seven studies used young adult or college samples (cross cultural: 1; US: 6) with these forming the foundation for our review, while the remaining nine used general population samples (cross cultural: 7; US: 1; UK: 1), these were used to provide a broader context to the connection between

individualism, materialism and wellbeing. All this information is summarised in

Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Key literature on individualism and wellbeing

Lead author (year)	Sample type	Method	Main findings
Smith 2011	US: young adults	qualitative	American youth are highly individualistic; analysis shows a link between individualist values and poor moral decision-making, and in turn higher levels of reported stress and depression.
Eckersley 2002	cross-cultural: young adults	quantitative	Individualism associated with higher levels of wellbeing, however results also show that there is a higher suicide rate for young people living in individualistic cultures than collectivistic ones.
Oyserman 2002	cross-cultural: general	quantitative (meta-analysis)	Multinational wellbeing studies reviewed show that although wellbeing and individualism scores were moderately correlated, this relation was at least partly mediated by national wealth and civil rights factors.
Oishi 2000	cross-cultural: general	quantitative	Analysis showed horizontal individualism positively associated with wellbeing in individualistic nations (but not in the collectivistic nations), while horizontal collectivism was positively associated with wellbeing in most collectivistic nations. Vertical individualism related negatively to wellbeing in most samples.
Veenhoven 1999	cross-cultural: general	quantitative	Found that nations that score highest on individualism also score highest on quality of life, suggesting individualism is a key

			contributor to personal happiness.
Schyns 1998	cross-cultural: general	quantitative	Showed there is a positive correlation between nations' levels of individualism, and wellbeing, but only when income was not controlled for.
Triandis 1998	US: college	quantitative (introduces scale to assess cultural orientations of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism)	Results of studies 2, 3, and 4 show social isolation (as individualism) and competitiveness increase stress and decrease wellbeing in US college samples.
Arrindell 1997	cross-cultural: general	quantitative	When national wealth, civil rights, and social comparison of income were controlled for, no relation between individualism and wellbeing was found
Diener 1995	cross-cultural: general	quantitative	Individualistic cultures consistently correlated more positively with subjective wellbeing when compared with collectivist cultures.
Bellah 1985	US: general	qualitative	Showed individualism in contemporary American life manifests as emphasizing hedonism, competition and self-reliance, and in turn can lead to higher levels of anxiety.

Table 2. Key Literature on materialism and wellbeing

Lead author (year)	Sample type	Method	Main findings
Kasser 2014	US: general	quantitative (intervention)	Intervention process showed that when participants oriented away from materialistic values and goals over time, their

			wellbeing improved, whereas when they increased the relative priority they placed on materialistic values and goals over time, their wellbeing declined.
Dittmar 2014	cross-cultural: General	quantitative (meta-analysis)	Consistent negative association between personal wellbeing and people's belief in and prioritization of materialistic pursuits in life.
Dittmar 2011	UK: general	quantitative	Materialistic values are linked to buying motives focused on identity projection and emotion regulation, which, in turn, are linked to lower wellbeing and dysfunctional consumer behaviours in UK young people.
Smith 2011	US: young adults	qualitative	High percentage of young people surveyed believed material consumption would make them happier, and that such a mindset is directly related to behavioural attitudes around intoxication and drug use, as well as increased anxieties.
Vohs 2006	US: college	quantitative (integration of 9 studies)	Strong focus on money is strongly associated with an orientation to self-sufficiency and diminished communal relationships.
Kasser 2002	US: college	quantitative (synthesis of his own past research)	Synthesis of Kasser's own past studies again links materialistic and extrinsic based values with poorer psychological health.
Kasser 1996	US: college	Quantitative	Strong association with materialistic and extrinsic values and poorer psychological wellbeing when compared with intrinsic values.
Kasser 1993	US: college	Quantitative	When aspirations for financial success exceeded those for affiliation, self-acceptance, and community

			feeling, worse psychological wellbeing was experienced.
Richins 1992	US: college	Quantitative	Reviewing the validity of their materialism measure, results show those who score high in materialism report having poorer social relationships, engaged in fewer voluntary behaviours and were less satisfied with their lives.

Results

Individualism and wellbeing

Studies directly linking individualism and its correlates to personal wellbeing were rare. This was surprising, for as Bauman (2000) argues "modern society exists in its activity of individualizing" (p.45), suggesting that individualistic values and beliefs dominate most Western societies. In a historical context, Eckersley and Dear (2002) note that individualism has been associated with a cultural liberation from religious doctrine, class oppression and gender and ethnic discrimination. The concept has thus been celebrated for liberating the individual from the bounds of pure collectivism and class hierarchy, as well as enhancing human rights, self-determinism, and economic opportunities (Diener et al., 1995). Yet, our review showed that the concept of individualism in modern society has brought with it many challenges and misrepresentations, particularly in relation to wellbeing (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Smith et al., 2011; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). These challenges lie largely within the self-sufficient nature of individualism, with the cross-cultural studies reviewed showing the results of this extend to an isolation from civic and community life, and a resultant escalation in alienation and loneliness (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) an increase of narcissistic tendencies (Smith et al., 2011), and higher

probabilities of family conflict and divorce (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Triandis and Gelfand (1998) add that individualistic tendencies can also breed anxiety by way of social comparison theories ('am I doing well enough?') and frustration ('I am not doing well enough') in an individual, which can also lead to poorer emotional health.

Focusing on the positive aspects connected with individualism, a study conducted by Diener and colleagues (1995) for example, shows that the economic and libertarian advantages that accompany individualistic cultures lead to a positive correlation between individualistic countries and subjective wellbeing when compared with collectivist cultures. Aiming to test whether the predictors of subjective wellbeing differ in various cultures the authors assessed whether cross-cultural variations in the strength of associations were related to societal dimensions including income and individualism. According to their study, the higher income, greater human rights and social equalities that are characteristic of individualistic societies were all associated with higher wellbeing when analysed across 55 nations. Significantly however, only individualism continued to relate consistently to wellbeing after any of the other variables had been controlled. Similarly, by comparing forty-three nations on self-reported quality of life, Veenhoven (1999) found that nations that score highest on individualism, also score highest on quality of life, suggesting individualism is a key contributor to personal happiness.

Further studies however show that whilst there are positive correlates associated with individualist cultures versus collectivist ones, there are also many other influencing factors that can be detrimental to wellbeing. Drawing on data from the World Values Survey, Schyns (1998) shows that both higher levels of individualism and income positively correlated with happiness. Yet, in relation to the

earlier findings by Diener and colleagues (1995), Schyns found that the positive

effect of individualism disappeared after income had been controlled for. This is a

finding earlier replicated by Arrindell and colleagues (1997), who in analysing data

collected from 36 nations showed that when national wealth, civil rights, and social

comparison of income were controlled, no relationship between individualism and

wellbeing existed. This suggests there may be factors associated with individualism,

such as high income and greater autonomy that can account for the positive effects

that individualism seems to have on levels of wellbeing. Further research however is

necessary to more precisely identify to what degree the effects of high income and

those of individualism on wellbeing overlap.

Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier's (2002) meta-analysis of individualism

and collectivism devotes a section to reviewing key findings between individualism

and wellbeing. Their review concludes that the connectedness of individualism with

national wealth, Gross National Product, and other factors related to modernization

make its relationship with wellbeing difficult to ascertain. Their analysis does

however suggest that an association between traits of individualism and poorer

wellbeing is likely, however they deem this relationship to be culture dependent.

Drawing on Kasser and Ryan's self-determination theory (1996), Oishi's

(2000) cross-cultural analysis of data collected from 39 nations offers one possible

solution to these conflicting results. To capture specific group goals, Oishi uses the

Triandis (1995) individualism and collectivism scales that include the vertical and

horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism. Although not seeking to

specifically test the effect of cultural values, but rather goals, Oishi showed that goals

around autonomy were related to higher levels of wellbeing in most cultures. In

addition, horizontal individualism (emphasising autonomy and self-reliance) was found to be positively associated with life satisfaction in individualistic nations (but not in the collectivistic nations), while horizontal collectivism was positively associated with life satisfaction in most collectivistic nations. Vertical individualism (emphasising autonomy as well as self-sufficiency and competitiveness with others) was shown to negatively relate to life satisfaction in most individualistic nations, although very marginally and often non-significantly, whereas vertical collectivism yielded mixed results, relating both positively and negatively to life satisfaction in different nations.

By a comparison of youth suicide rates and key cultural variables in Western countries, Eckersley and Dear (2002) wrestle with the paradox that male youth suicide is more prevalent in developed countries where there are also high levels of health, optimism, trust and individualism. Their analysis found that youth suicide rates were higher in cultures that encouraged individualistic values and high expectations (this was found to be particularly the case with young males). They conclude that the culture of the Western nations investigated (particularly those of English speaking origins), are more defined by the related virtues of 'progress, individualism, materialism and mobility' and less influenced by tradition and social commitment. From this comparison they refer to the early sociological work of Durkheim (1970), who proposed more than a century ago that suicide is linked with low social attachment, and a failure of society to integrate the individual, linking this failure to the weakening influences of key social institutions such as the family and religion in binding individuals to society.

Bellah et al.'s sociological discourse on contemporary individualism in American life *Habits of the Heart* gives us some important considerations when assessing individualism (Bellah et al., 1985). Based on material derived from interviews with Americans adults, Bellah and his team's theoretical analysis compares his findings on American life with the theorising of nineteenth century political theorist Alexis De Tocqueville. From this comparison they argue that the individualism that pervaded American culture during the 19th century as described by Tocqueville was a 'milder' sort, born out of a motive to in fact strengthen the community through the freedoms it provided. Yet, based on the opinions and attitudes of the participants interviewed, Bellah suggests that these ideals still carry strong influence in contemporary American society, albeit on a larger scale, with his team concluding that the benefits to society sought by individualistic pursuits today rarely act as a motivator for the individual. This analysis leads to the classification of individualism in contemporary American life as emphasizing hedonism, competition, self-reliance, utilitarian pursuits, the desire to be distinguished, which can in turn generate greater levels of anxiety and poorer quality of life.

Based on in-depth interviews with over 3000 people over a seven-year period with American emerging adults (aged 18-23), Smith and colleagues (2011) identify five major issues that are being faced by the current generation of young Americans. These include distorted moral reasoning, materialistic values, regrettable sexual experiences, the frequent use of drugs and alcohol as well as a disengagement from community and political life. In analysing the underlying causes of these issues as well as the consequences they bear for the individual's wellbeing, the authors identify that cultural factors such as materialism, hyper-individualism, moral uncertainty and

failures in education are all responsible for contributing to the challenging environment that confronts emerging adults in today's Western world.

Through their investigation the effect of individualism on young people's behavioural choices, wellbeing and civic engagement for example is heavily touched on. Here the researchers questioned young people on their behaviours and attitudes towards engaging with the community. Based on an analysis of the participants' attitudes towards community life, the authors conclude that the individualism that pervades American culture is highly influential when it comes to assessing how young people make moral and social decisions, and that overall participants reported being largely disengaged from community life. This disengagement they suggest could be leading young people into experiencing greater levels of isolation and alienation, which in turn could be a contributor to an array of mental health issues young people suffer from today.

This reviewed evidence shows conflicting evidence as to whether individualism leads to better or worse psychological wellbeing. Whilst self-reliance and autonomy may be associated with higher levels of wellbeing, there are variables inherent in vertical individualism related to poorer social support, comparing oneself with others and competition that can lead to lower levels of psychological wellbeing. The association between individualistic values and these negative social attitudes and behaviours points towards a darker side to individualism as it is represented in the cultures been discussed that challenges its immediate advantages. In relation to young people the studies reviewed points towards individualism as being a highly influential value system at a societal and individual level, however more work is required to examine its correlates with wellbeing. Such a proposal leads into the next section

targeted by this review, that of materialistic life goals and their associations with the wellbeing of young people.

Materialism and wellbeing

Research findings regarding materialism and its effects on different aspects of people's lives are considerably more consistent than in the case of individualism and its associations to wellbeing. The reviewed research showed that those who place a high priority on achieving materialistic goals also report lower levels of personal life satisfaction, happiness, vitality, as well as higher levels of depression and anxiety (Dittmar et al., 2014; Dittmar & Kapur, 2011; Kasser, 2002; Vohs et al., 2006). A smaller portion of the literature also showed that people who prioritise materialistic values are also less likely to engage in socially cooperative behaviour, and instead are more inclined to behave in anti-social competitive ways (Dittmar et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2011; Vohs et al., 2006). The studies reviewed also indicate that materialistic values can lead to the creation of certain ideologies and behavioural patterns surrounding drug and alcohol consumption, community disengagement and moral reasoning (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser, 2002; Smith et al., 2011).

Early research by Richins and Dawson (1992) defined materialism as a value rather than a behaviour or personality variable. Their self-developed measure of materialistic values features three domains of materialism - 'acquisition centrality,' 'possession-defined success,' and 'acquisition as the pursuit of happiness.' These domains were each shown to relate negatively to all measures of life satisfaction used, and led to the conclusion that materialism can be defined as 'a value that guides people's choices and conduct in a variety of situations, including, but not limited to,

consumption arenas' (p.307). Their findings indicated that those who score highly on levels of materialism, also reported greater emphasises on financial security, less on interpersonal relationships, and were less satisfied with their lives.

Building on these results, Kasser's research on materialism highlights some key consequences that can exist within a materialistic culture (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Kasser, 2002; Kasser et al., 2014). Drawing on a decade's worth of empirical data based around his self-developed 'Aspirational Index', Kasser (2002) looks at the psychological effects of materialistic values on the American population and examines the potential consequences of organising one's life around materialistic pursuits. This index uses a series of questions separated into seven different categories to assess people's values and aspirations and where they stem from. He then correlates these with participant's level of wellbeing by associating such concerns with individual's happiness, depression and anxiety. From this data Kasser offers an explanation of how a high attachment to materialistic goals affects an individual's everyday happiness and different factors of psychological health. He again points to higher levels of depression, anxiety and poorer social relationships as some of the key consequences brought about by materialistic values. In response to these findings, Kasser and colleagues (2014) investigated materialism-reduction strategies in an in-depth intervention with adolescents and their parents. Here, participants engaged in sessions aimed at critiquing consumer culture in order to better understand the potential issues associated with highly orienting oneself towards materialistic values. Throughout, this study also attempted to activate intrinsic values by encouraging self-reflection on participants' values, by facilitating discussions about the importance of sharing one's money and by helping participants develop

value-based plans for their finances. Results showed that those in the intervention group decreased in materialistic values over time, while subsequently reporting increases in wellbeing. These longitudinal findings are significant, as they go a way to show that when participants orient away from materialistic values, their wellbeing improves, thus providing clarity to the direction of association between materialism and wellbeing. The researchers note that further longitudinal research exploring the relationship between wellbeing and materialism is important in determining whether changes in materialism result in changes in well-being, or vice versa.

Dittmar and colleagues meta-analysis (2014) examining how materialism relates to personal wellbeing bring further clarity to this question, by showing consistent negative correlates with materialism and a broad array of wellbeing. Specifically, their analyses concludes that low levels of needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness mediate the materialism and wellbeing correlation. The authors consequently argue that the link between materialistic values and poorer wellbeing can be explained by factors inherent in materialistic attitudes and lifestyles that are incompatible with psychological need satisfaction.

Dittmar and Kapur's (2011) findings show that citizens in Western nations appear increasingly vulnerable to the potentially harmful ideals of consumer culture versus those living outside such environments. The authors present a framework focusing on the way in which the endorsement of materialistic values is linked to buying motives focused on identity projection and emotion regulation, which, in turn, are linked to lower wellbeing and dysfunctional consumer behaviours. To examine these associations they surveyed 236 younger and older adults in India and the UK and concluded that the ideologies and institutions of US corporate capitalism that

exist within the UK foster and encourage 'a set of values based in self-interest, a strong desire for financial success, high levels of consumption, and interpersonal styles based on competition', and thus undermining goals and values concerned with the welfare of others, both in the wider community and friends or family (p.80).

Smith and colleagues study (2011) devote a section of their study to assessing the materialistic orientations of their participants. Their results lead to the conclusion that few emerging adults expressed concerns about the potential limits or dilemmas involved in a lifestyle devoted to boundless material consumption. Between one-half to two-thirds of emerging adults interviewed responded that their wellbeing 'can be measured by what they own, that buying more things would make them happier, and that they get a lot of pleasure simply from shopping and buying things' (p.71). They conclude that the damning consequences materialistic values can have on young people suggest that there is a confusion in American young people over 'what really is a good life? What does it consist of? And what makes a life worth living?' (p.109). It is this confusion they suggest is a likely contributor to the anxiety and distress experienced by young Americans today.

A link between materialistic associations and individualistic tendencies is discussed in the results of Vohs (2006) study investigating the social and personal consequences of a high attachment to money. Here the researchers primed participants with reminders of money by heightening the accessibility of the idea of money to participants at an unconscious level. The researchers then measured participant's behaviours around self-sufficiency, dependency and openness to helping others by providing participants with tasks whereby they could choose to work independently, or with a peer, while also putting participants in situations whereby

they had the opportunity to engage in prosocial and cooperative behaviors. Results showed that reminders of money led to reduced requests for help from others and reduced helpfulness toward others. The researchers concluded that relative to participants primed with neutral concepts, participants primed with money preferred to play alone, work alone, and put more physical distance between themselves and a new acquaintance. Results from experimental studies such as this are significant in strengthening the potential for casual inference between materialism and wellbeing, with further research into this connection required.

Based on these reviewed studies, the issue of materialistic values and their influence on young people's wellbeing seems to be a complex and established issue that goes beyond the consumption of material goods. The depth of studies detailing associations between materialism and wellbeing show that the cultural promotion of materialism is not conducive to wellbeing. Furthermore, the behaviours and social outcomes that materialistic values can drive such as competitiveness, insecurity and poor needs satisfaction are concerning, and need to be further explored (Kasser & Ryan, 1993; Smith et al., 2011; Vohs et al., 2006).

Discussion

Summary of findings

Our review focused on research that investigated the existence, prevalence and effects that two key popularised value systems can have on psychological health. Based on the analysis of the existing findings we can conclude that there is an evolving knowledge on the harmful effects individualistic and materialistic values can have on general populations.

The literature reviewed leads us to a lack of clarity around how individualism relates to wellbeing. Some studies (Deiner et al., 1995; Veenhoven, 1999) reported positive correlations between individualism and wellbeing, stemming largely from the freedom and autonomy associated with individualistic values. However, other studies suggest there is also a darker side embedded with individualism, driven by traits of competitiveness and social comparisons that can impact negatively on wellbeing (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Eckersley and Dear (2002) for example showed individualistic cultures to have higher suicide rates than collectivistic ones, while Oishi (2000) showed traits embedded in individualism related to competitiveness were marginally associated with poorer wellbeing. This negative association between individualism and wellbeing was more commonly expressed in the literature not by direct correlation between the two factors, but rather across multiple aspects of people's lives that are in turn acknowledged as relating to poorer wellbeing. This included individualism as being associated with poor social support (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Smith et al., 2012; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), increased narcissistic tendencies (Twenge et al., 2012) and competitiveness (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Oishi, 2000). These are all psychological factors that themselves have general, rather than specific, relationships with poorer wellbeing outcomes.

This analysis of the literature looking at materialism and wellbeing demonstrated a much clearer relationship, with the studies reviewed exclusively showing a negative association between materialistic values and personal wellbeing. This negative association was significant for all 8 studies we examined across a range of different measures and methodologies. Like with the case of individualism, the

review also shows associations between people's prioritization of materialistic pursuits in life and behaviours and traits not conducive to positive psychological wellbeing outcomes. These include feelings of insecurity (Kasser & Ryan, 1993; 1996;), competitiveness (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser et al., 2014) and poor psychological need satisfaction (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser, 2002; Richins & Dawson, 1992; Vohs, 2006).

Implications of findings for further research

Firstly, a greater depth of research is needed into the association between individualism and wellbeing. Specifically analysing various sub-traits of individualism could bring clarity to the conflicting results provided in this review. Further research is also required into what disparaging behaviours individualistic and materialistic values can lead to. A more elaborate and detailed description would be necessary to understand in greater depth the consequences these cultural forces can have on young people and general populations alike. Finally, further research on the way in which Western media and politics may influence young people's value systems and in turn their psychological health through the promotion of individualistic and materialistic pursuits are needed.

Limitations of the review

This review has some limitations. Most notably, due to the niche nature of the research question, it was difficult to acquire suitable literature that directly addressed the relationship(s) between individualism, materialism and their link to psychological wellbeing in young people. As such, broader results were drawn upon, with studies

that were conducted on general population samples. Second, our review included

only peer-reviewed, empirical based journal articles published in English since 1980.

This restriction regarding publication type does not meet some criteria (e.g.,

publication status, publication bias) on the Assessment of Multiple Systematic

Reviews (AMSTAR) checklist for assessing the quality of systematic reviews and

may also lead to publication bias. However, because the review's focus was on

statistical and empirical evidence that clearly addressed the association between

individualism, materialism and wellbeing, gray literature such as reviews should be

considered exclusion criteria. Lastly, when a cross-cultural sample was not used, this

report drew on research exclusively from the US, and thus does not provide specific

empirical data from other identified Western nations such as Australia and the UK.

This was strictly due to a lack of availability of such literature, and whilst a

limitation, we still see this as allowing for a clear representation of the link between

individualism, materialism and wellbeing in the context specified.

Conclusion

Returning to Eckersley's (2006) argument on the potentially distorted ideals that are

currently promoted to youth in Western societies (ideals that he labels as 'cultural

fraud') and their link to poorer psychological wellbeing, we argue that our review's

findings are supportive to this contention. Based on the studies reviewed we propose

that, whilst materialistic and individualistic values can have positive associations,

there are some poorly understood aspects, particularly in relation to the apparent

harmful effects on those individuals living exclusively according to these concepts.

While individualistic aspects related to personal development and freedom of

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expression are likely to be contributing to increased physical and psychological wellbeing, other aspects of individualism such as poor social support, competitiveness and comparisons with others are likely to be linked to a decline in the mental health and social associations of Western young people. Likewise, materialism may have some economic benefits, however here the literature reviewed provided a clear and consistent relationship between materialistic values and poorer psychological health.

When it comes to examining young people's mental health and wellbeing, the research reviewed has pointed towards dominant cultural forces, social institutions and value systems as potentially playing a key, and often detrimental, role. With the complexities of Western life ever advancing by way of technological and economical changes, these cultural values need to be not just considered when it comes to assessing young people's health and happiness, but viewed as an essential contributing factor.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Chapter 3: Study 1

Outline

The review of the literature in the previous chapter clearly identified that extrinsic values are associated with lower wellbeing. However, the association between individualistic values and wellbeing showed mixed results. Some studies associated individualistic values with higher wellbeing, while others found a negative relationship. The aim of study 1 was to therefore get a better idea as to which aspects of individualism are associated with negative wellbeing and bring clarity to these conflicting results. To do this we drew upon Triandis (1995) scale that measures both horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism in order to explore the potential influence sub-traits of these concepts may have on wellbeing (for full survey please refer to appendix one). These differing dimensions have previously been used to explore their roles in shaping cultural norms and attitudes in different cultural contexts, and have not been directly associated to wellbeing. With vertical individualism relating to traits of competitiveness and comparisons with others, we expected it to be related to lower levels of wellbeing, while we expected horizontal individualism (related to autonomy) to have no effect (H1). We also expected factors related to horizontal collectivism (factors related to community affiliation and possessing strong social support) to positively influence wellbeing, while we expected vertical collectivism to also have no effect (H2). With past research convincingly associating extrinsic values with lower wellbeing, we wanted here to get a better picture of how individualistic values relate to wellbeing.

The Social Contract Revisited: A re-examination of the influence individualistic and collectivistic value systems have on the psychological wellbeing of young people

Ashley Humphrey, Ana-Maria Bliuc, Pascal Molenberghs

Abstract

The prevalence of psychological health problems experienced by young people living in Western societies is increasing. Evidence suggests the cultural dynamism of individualism may play a role in this, but this evidence is conflicting. Here, we focus on both the concepts of individualism and collectivism, distinguishing between their horizontal and vertical dimensions. We examine the influence of these dimensions on the psychological wellbeing of a sample of 507 Australian emerging adults (aged 18-25). We found that orientations towards vertical (but not horizontal) individualism are associated with lower levels of psychological wellbeing, while orientations towards horizontal (but not vertical) collectivism are associated with higher psychological wellbeing. These findings add clarity to the way in which key Western social values play an understated role in the increasing prevalence of psychological health problems experienced by young people today. They also provide an understanding of how various traits embedded within these concepts relate to psychological wellbeing.

Introduction

There is a growing body of research linking dominant Western cultural values to the psychological wellbeing of young people (Eckersley, 2011; Fulmer, et al., 2010; Landstedt, Coffey, Wyn, Cuervo, & Woodman, 2015; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). Discussing generational shifts in the quality of mental health experienced by

Western young people, Twenge (2011) reasons that cultural values could be playing a key role, stating that 'something about modern Western life is causing more and more young people, to feel anxious and depressed' (p.469). One such value, individualism, has been shown to be one of the most influential 'global values', particularly in relation to Western countries (Pilkington & Johnson, 2003). Individualistic values refer to a preference for independence, uniqueness, maintaining relationships when the costs do not outweigh the benefits, pursuing personal goals, and resisting the pressure to conform to societal norms (Hofstede, 1980). They differ from collectivistic values, characterised by an orientation towards shared groups and goals within a community or tribe (Triandis, 1995).

Despite evidence that Western young people are particularly likely to adopt individualistic values (Eckersley, 2011, Eckersley, Wierenga, & Wyn, 2006; Glanzer, Hill & Robinson, 2015; Twenge, Campbell & Freeman, 2012; Wyn & White, 2000), the effect of these values on their psychological wellbeing remains understudied (Collishaw, 2015). In wellbeing research, psychological wellbeing is treated as a dynamic notion that includes subjective, social, and psychological dimensions as well as health-related behaviors (McLeod & Wright, 2015). Psychological wellbeing is typically associated with the absence of depression, anxiety and chronic stress. Some data points to significant decreases in the psychological wellbeing experienced by young people living in individualistic societies such as Australia, the UK and the US (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013; Collishaw, Maughan, Natarajan & Pickles, 2010; Twenge, 2011; US Bureau of Census, 2011). In a longitudinal study investigating the mental health of young Australians, Landstedt, Coffey and Nygren (2016) for example found a negative trend in the mental health of 19-25 year old

Australian participants, albeit with a range of gender as well as socio-economic patterns identified. In response to this, the researchers propose that patterns of poor mental health should be analysed in relation to social systems and institutions. In an earlier review of the literature focusing on young people's mental health, Eckersley (2011) also points to social systems and cultural values as an important consideration, suggesting that cultural values remain under-estimated determinants of a population's health and wellbeing. We therefore propose that studies which investigate the role individualistic and collectivistic values play in affecting young people's psychological wellbeing are needed.

Previous research has found conflicting evidence as to whether individualism leads to better or worse psychological wellbeing. Looking at wellbeing scores across cultures, Diener and colleagues (1995) provide evidence into the possible influence of individualism and collectivism on the wellbeing of a society. They show that variables associated with individualism such as higher rates of autonomy, self-determinism and ample wealth are connected to increased subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction. Similarly, by comparing forty-three nations on self-reported quality of life, Veenhoven (1999) found that nations that score highest on individualism, also score highest on quality of life, suggesting individualism is a key contributor to personal happiness.

Other research, however, found a range of negative effects associated with individualism (Diener, Tay & Oishi, 2013; Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Schyns, 1998; Scott, Ciarrochi & Deane, 2004; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012; Twenge et al., 2012). For instance, in a re-analysis of the data examined by Diener and colleagues' 1995 study, Schyns (1998) found that the positive effect of individualism on wellbeing

disappeared after income had been controlled for. This suggests that there may be factors associated with individualism, such as its association with high income countries, that can account for the positive effects that individualism seems to have on levels of wellbeing. Further studies have shown that the wellbeing benefits of individualism that may exist in the liberation and autonomy it provides are also littered by disadvantages (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998; Twenge et al., 2012). These studies found associations between individualism and loneliness, poor social support and high probabilities of family conflict and divorce (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis, 1995).

Cross-cultural data on individualism and wellbeing is noted as somewhat inconclusive, due to a range of other variables present within the data that could mediate the relationship between individualism and wellbeing (Scott et al., 2004). Such research does however suggest that there are variables inherent in individualism that may lead to poorer emotional health, particularly at the individual level. Specific to Australian young people, Scott and colleagues (2004) for example showed that those who placed higher levels of importance on individualistic values also experienced a number of social and psychological disadvantages. These included poorer social support, less satisfying social networks and diminished mental health indicators. Investigating the effects of individualism and young people's mental health, Eskin (2013) found that young adults with individualistic tendencies displayed more permissive attitudes toward suicide than those with collectivistic tendencies. These findings confer with the earlier theorising of Triandis and Gelfand (1998), who argue that the autonomy found in individualistic systems can urge people to pursue

personal achievement at the cost of relationships, which in turn can create competition between individuals. This relentless competition can also breed anxiety by way of social comparisons ('am I doing well enough?') and frustration ('I am not doing well enough'), which can also lead to poor emotional health. Comparisons with others is shown to negatively affect psychological health, leading to alienation, low social support and less community involvement (Sheeran, Abrams, & Orbell, 1995).

On the other hand, collectivist societies tend to produce more stable social relationships, as well as high levels of social cooperation amongst their members by encouraging social cohesion, obligation to their social responsibilities and a shared set of goals (Ahuvia, 2002). There is strong evidence that social connectedness leads to increased psychological wellbeing (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Jetten, Haslam, & Alexander, 2012), yet research has frequently pointed to collectivist societies experiencing lower levels of wellbeing when compared with individualistic societies.

One potential reason for this, is that collectivism is generally higher in developing and third-world countries, where it is associated with 'face, honor, and public reputation' (Ahuvia, 2002). Thus, whilst collectivism supports social cohesion, it is not based on community affiliation and support so much as it is fulfilling one's social roles and meeting one's responsibilities to the in-group. So, collectivistic societies may be much higher in social connectedness, they also carry a range of other traits such as forced cooperation and dependence not conducive to better psychological wellbeing (Ahuvia, 2002). Being generally developing in nature, these countries also lack adequate support systems when it comes to mental and physical health, and have weaker economies more generally, which could further explain their association with poorer wellbeing.

Based on these studies, we argue that individualism and collectivism exist as complex and layered concepts, and have mixed effects on wellbeing. To explain this misalignment, we propose that individualism and collectivism have differing dimensions which may be predictive of qualitatively different outcomes (as also suggested by Triandis, 1995). According to Triandis (1995) there are four divergent categories, conceptualised as horizontal and vertical dimensions, that is:

- *horizontal individualism*: which encourages the conception of an autonomous individual and an emphasis on equality and self-reliance;

- *vertical individualism*: which includes the conception of an autonomous individual and acceptance of inequality, however also involves the promotion of oneself ahead of others, and a fierce sense of self-sufficiency.

These dimensions also apply to collectivism:

- *horizontal collectivism*: characterised by perceptions of self as part of the collective, and perceptions of similarity between members of the collective;

- *vertical collectivism*, which includes perceiving the self as a part of a collective and accepting inequalities within the collective.

The studies that have used this distinction have not investigated their direct effects on wellbeing. Research has, instead, focused on the vertical and horizontal distinctions in relation to their role in shaping cultural norms and attitudes in different cultural contexts. For example, Nelson and Shavitt (2002) propose that in cultures oriented towards vertical individualism, people tend to be more concerned with improving their image and standing out, and separating themselves from others via competition, achievement and power. This is in contrast to orientations towards

horizontal individualism, whereby people tend to view themselves as more equal, and rather than aspiring to stand out, the focus is on becoming self-reliant (Triandis & Singleis, 1998).

Drawing on Kasser and Ryan's self-determination theory (1996), Oishi's (2000) analysis of data collected from 39 nations investigated the effect of intrinsic or extrinsic goals on wellbeing. To capture specific group goals, Oishi uses the Triandis (1995) individualism and collectivism scales that include the vertical and horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism. Although not seeking to specifically test the effect of cultural values, but rather goals, Oishi showed that goals around autonomy were related to higher levels of wellbeing in most cultures. In addition, horizontal individualism was found to be positively associated with life satisfaction in individualistic nations (but not in the collectivistic nations), while horizontal collectivism was positively associated with life satisfaction in most collectivistic nations. Vertical individualism was shown to negatively relate to life satisfaction in most individualistic nations, although very marginally and often non-significantly, whereas vertical collectivism yielded mixed results, relating both positively and negatively to life satisfaction in different nations. In the current study, we seek to build on these results by investigating how cultural values reflected in the horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism affect the personal wellbeing of young people living in a developed Western society.

The current study

We base this study on the theoretical argument that variables embedded within individualism around competitiveness and comparisons with others (variables present in vertical individualism) relate negatively to wellbeing (hypothesis 1/H1). Indeed,

past research has shown that comparing one-self with others relates negatively to wellbeing (Sheeran, Abrams, & Orbell, 1995). For horizontal individualism, on the other hand, we expect no such negative relation with wellbeing because it is related to autonomy, an association that can even relate positively to wellbeing (Diener et al., 1995, Oishi, 2000).

Factors related to horizontal collectivism such as community affiliation and possessing strong social support networks should relate positively to wellbeing (hypothesis 2/H2). We frame this hypothesis around research pointing to the importance of social connections for positive psychological wellbeing (Haslam, Jetten, Postmes, & Haslam, 2009; Jetten et al., 2012). We expect vertical collectivism to have no influence on wellbeing because it is not related to social connectedness, but rather submission to ingroup decisions and family values. We choose to focus our study on youth, as past research has indicated that Western young people are increasingly prone to adopting individualistic values (Twenge et al., 2012). Also, according to some research this demographic has shown a progressive decrease in wellbeing over the past decades (Collishaw, 2015; Twenge, 2011).

Method

Participants

Participants were 507 University students recruited from a variety of disciplines studying full-time at a major metropolitan University in Australia. All participants were aged between 18 and 25 (*M*=19.6, SD =1.6; range 18-25; 384 women). Participants were recruited through a research participation pool whereby no compensation was offered to participants, however they received course credit for

their completion. Respondents completed a questionnaire online, containing the core measures for the present research: 1. Psychological wellbeing; and 2. individualistic and collectivistic values. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Measures

Psychological wellbeing. The 21 item Depression Anxiety Stress Scales Survey was used to assess participant's psychological wellbeing (DASS21, 2010). Participants rated how much each statement applied to them over the past week on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (Did not apply to me at all) to 3 (Applied to me very much, or most of the time). The DASS 21 has three subscales measuring stress (e.g., *I found it hard to wind down*), anxiety (e.g., *I felt scared without any good reason*) and depression (e.g., *I felt that I had nothing to look forward to).* A principal components analysis using varimax rotation revealed that the sub-scales of depression, anxiety and stress all loaded onto one factor (depression r= .88, anxiety r= .91, stress r= .94) which explained 82.85% of the variance and therefore all scores were combined into one overall score of psychological wellbeing by averaging the score of all 21 items. Higher scores indicated poorer psychological wellbeing. A reliability test yielded a Cronbach's α = .94 inferring a very high level of reliability. Various studies have confirmed the DASS21 survey as possessing high validity and reliability and consequently it is noted as an efficient instrument to assess emotional states (Brown, Korotitsch, Chorpita & Barlow, 1997).

Individualism & Collectivism. Triandis and Gelfand (1998) Individualism and Collectivism 16-item Scale was used to measure participant's attitudes towards

individualism and collectivism. Participants answered four questions related to: 1. *horizontal individualism* (e.g., I'd rather depend on myself than others); 2. *vertical individualism* (e.g., It is important that I do my job better than others); 3. *horizontal collectivism* (e.g., If a co-worker gets a prize, I would feel proud); and 4. *vertical collectivism* (e.g., Parents and children must stay together as much as possible). Participants rated these items on a 10 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1= never or not at all to 10 = always or definitely yes. Sub-scale reliability scores were as follows: horizontal individualism (α = .86), vertical individualism (α = .86), horizontal collectivism (α = .82), vertical collectivism (α = .83).

Results

A multiple regression was run to investigate if psychological wellbeing was predicted by horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism and vertical collectivism. A significant amount of the variance of psychological wellbeing was explained by the independent variables, ($F(4, 502) = 8.76$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .065$, $R^2_{Adjusted} = .058$). The analysis revealed that vertical individualism predicted lower psychological wellbeing (Beta = .160, $t(506) = 3.46$, $p = .001$) and horizontal collectivism predicted higher psychological wellbeing (Beta = -.149, $t(506) = -2.94$, $p = .003$), while the results from horizontal individualism (Beta = .016, $t(506) = 0.35$, $p = .72$) and vertical collectivism (Beta = -.076, $t(506) = -1.51$, $p = .13$) were non-significant

Discussion

Previous research has shown conflicting evidence regarding the effects of individualism and collectivism on wellbeing (Diener et al., 1995; Eckersley & Dear,

2002; Oishi, 2000; Twenge et al., 2012; Schyns, 1998; Veenhoven, 1999). By focusing specifically on the vertical and horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism, we give a clearer articulation of how these factors relate to wellbeing and bring clarity to our understanding of these seemingly conflicting results. In line with our hypotheses, our results show that vertical (but not horizontal) individualism is associated with poorer psychological wellbeing (H1), while horizontal (but not vertical) collectivism is associated with higher psychological wellbeing (H2).

This suggests that there are variables inherent in vertical individualism related to comparing oneself with others and competition that lead to lower levels of psychological wellbeing. Contrastingly, traits associated with horizontal individualism around self-reliance and autonomy were not related to changes in wellbeing. Indeed, a range of past research has shown that comparing oneself with others can lead to poorer psychological health as well as poorer social relationships (Kasser, 2002; Kasser, Cohn, Kanner & Ryan, 2007; Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Our results confirm the importance of using items that can capture the 'darker side' of individualism, with these different aspects of individualism helping explain past conflicting results in relation to the effects of individualism on wellbeing (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Diener & Suh, 1997; Deiner et al. 1995; Veenhoven, 1999). As individualistic values continue to be predominant in Western young peoples, more studies need to be conducted on the potential risks of values based around the vertical component of individualism.

Collectivism scores showed that traits associated with horizontal collectivism such as being connected with others were correlated with an increase in psychological wellbeing. Horizontal collectivism measures items such as attitudes towards spending

time with others, concern for the welfare of one's community group and cooperating within a social network. Our results that showed those who value these items more than others experience better wellbeing is in line with past research showing a positive relationship between social connectedness and wellbeing (Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2012).

In contrast, traits associated with vertical collectivism – traits centered around duty to others and compliance with authority – were not associated with influencing psychological wellbeing. Triandis and Gelfand (1998) note that the traits embedded in vertical collectivism are traits highly symptomatic of lower socio-economic groups. These include the sharing of resources and the mutual need to look after each other which in third world demographics can be critical for survival, however in Western environments like Australia are unlikely to have any influence on wellbeing. Ahuvia (2002) suggests that due to the importance collectivist customs hold in third world countries, they often rely on social coercion via threats and rewards to one's public reputation to ensure compliance with group norms. These extrinsic motivations for social connection could exist as the basis of low wellbeing in vertical collectivism environments. Whilst collectivistic attitudes around valuing social cohesion and networking can be understood to have positive connotations to wellbeing as they exist within horizontal collectivism, when these social connections are extrinsically forced, the positive effects may disappear.

Our findings suggest that, in similar ways as with individualism, there are traits embedded within (horizontal) collectivism that impact wellbeing. Western nations generally score low on collectivism scores, which is reflected in citizens having smaller social networks (Scott et al., 2004). Adopting the autonomy that exists

within individualistic nations, people in these environments tend to prioritise their own goals and interests to the detriment of their social networks. Based on the understanding provided by our results, we argue that this autonomy granted by individualistic cultures should not just be used towards pursuing personal goals, but instead as an outlet to build greater social relationships.

Limitations and future directions

A number of limitations of this study warrant discussion. First, the current sample was made up exclusively of Australian University students from the emerging adult age bracket. Future research should look if similar results can be found in other non-student based populations in Western (and non-Western) countries. Additionally, due to this studies correlational design, potential confounders may be overlooked. Future studies should therefore investigate further the role wellbeing may play in priming values associated with individualism and collectivism. Such information could lead to better informing how social values and behaviours influence wellbeing, and vice-versa. Lastly, studies should look into more depth how competiveness and comparisons with others can negatively impact wellbeing. Such information could lead to better informing young people on what social values and behaviours are best conducive to positive wellbeing outcomes.

Conclusion

These results provide evidence that specific dimensions within the constructs of individualism and collectivism need to be more strongly considered as influencers over the rising depression statistics experienced in Western cultures. These results

shed important insights into how dimensions embedded within individualism and collectivism relate to the psychological wellbeing of young people. Specifically, our results expand upon prior knowledge of the effects these values have on wellbeing by identifying traits specific to competitiveness and comparisons with others as negatively impacting wellbeing, while traits around social connectedness can have positive effects on wellbeing.

Based on these results, we propose that young people living in individualistic societies need to be further educated on the importance of building strong social support networks necessary to improve their psychological wellbeing. Such increased social networks could serve as protection against the hierarchical and competitive ethos encouraged by vertical individualism. Understanding the role of these cultural factors and their relationship with wellbeing within specific demographic groups is an essential requirement for future research on these concepts.

Whilst there are many positives associated with living in an individualistic society, our results suggest there is also a darker side associated with individualism, driven by competitiveness and social comparisons which can impact negatively on wellbeing. Individualistic tendencies are consistently increasing in young people in Western societies (Twenge et al., 2012), it is therefore important that specific collectivist values and behaviours are better integrated into the lives of future generations to counteract this bleaker side of an individualistic lifestyle. Unless more attention is paid to the contribution of dominant cultural concepts such as individualism to the increasing negative decline in mental health among young people within Western nations, this unfortunate trend is unlikely to subside.

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Chapter 4: Study 2

Outline

The results of study one showed that traits specific to the vertical (but not horizontal) dimensions of individualism are associated with lower wellbeing, thus providing a more in depth understanding of how Western values influence psychological wellbeing. Combining this with the knowledge that extrinsic based values relate to poorer wellbeing, we aimed throughout this study to drive this understanding further by providing an in-depth investigation into this topic through the mode of qualitative analysis. The way in which these cultural values synergistically influence young peoples psyche and in turn their wellbeing is not yet well understood. By using a form of thematic analysis, we aimed here to investigate whether the concepts of individualistic and extrinsic life goals and values are consistent in the narratives of participants, particularly around the stressors and anxieties they experience in their lives (for full interview guide used please refer to appendix two). This chapter appears in the form it was submitted to the *Journal of Happiness Studies* (submitted 10/4/2018).

"I just want to be happy": An exploration of how individualistic and extrinsic value systems influence the lives and wellbeing of young people

Ashley Humphrey, Ana-Maria Bliuc, Pascal Molenberghs

Abstract

Young people's wellbeing in Western societies is highly influenced by the cultural dynamisms of individualistic and extrinsic values. To better understand how this

influence works, we conducted fifty semi-structured interviews with young Australians. Participant's information on their values, life goals, social orientations and perceived stress were captured. Results show that participants seem to recognise that intrinsic values are important associates to happiness, yet their ambitions are centred around pursuing extrinsic values in their daily life. Participants also associate individualistic and extrinsic factors (including poor social support, competitiveness and the uncertainty they face regarding their future) as key contributors to the stress they experience in their lives. Results point towards the dominant Western cultural value systems of individualism and extrinsically focused values as having an understated role in the increasing prevalence of psychological health problems in young people.

Introduction

There is growing evidence supporting significant 'generational shifts' of young people's life goals, value orientations and levels of mental health within Western societies (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson & Snell, 2011; Twenge, 2011; Twenge, Campbell & Freeman, 2012; Weier & Lee, 2016; Wyn & Woodman, 2006). These studies show that modern life in many developed Western nations leads young people into feeling more overwhelmed and anxious when compared with previous generations. For example, a UK health survey carried out between 1986 and 2006 showed that young people experience considerably higher rates of psychological stress compared to previous generations (Collishaw, Maughan, Natarajan & Pickles, 2010). Similarly, data from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health in the US shows that depression prevalence has increased substantially over the past decade,

with this rise especially significant amongst young people (Weinberger, Gbedemah, Martinez, Nash, Galea & Goodwin, 2017).

Twenge (2011) proposes that deteriorating social connections and an increasing emphasis on materialistic values in Western contexts, have played a large role in influencing young people to feel this way. In an analysis of data collected over a forty-year period on young people's social preferences and aspirations for the future, Twenge, Campbell and Freeman (2012) revealed that millennials (those born between 1982 and 2003) are less caring than previous generations and more focused on extrinsic and individualistic aims, which they theorise is likely responsible for them experiencing higher levels of depression and anxiety. These findings are supported by an earlier analysis of US college students conducted by Kasser & Ryan (1996), who showed that depression was most prominent in cultures that strongly emphasis the pursuit of money, image and fame.

Indeed, past research has pointed to emerging adults living in modern Western societies as being highly influenced by value systems centered around individualistic and extrinsic principles (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Dittmar, 2007; Dittmar & Kapur, 2007; McDonald et al., 2011; Sheldon, Gunz, Nichols & Ferguson, 2010; Schor, 2004; Twenge et al., 2012). This research has indicated that these values are often associated with harmful beliefs and behavioural patterns in young people that are often detrimental to their psychological and physical wellbeing (Dittmar, Bond, Hurst, & Kasser, 2014; Kasser, 2002; Smith et al., 2011; Triandis & Gelfand, 2012).

Individualists are defined here as those who favor independence and self-reliance, pursue personal goals, maintain relationships when the costs do not

outweigh the benefits, and have the freedom to make independent life decisions (Triandis, 1995). These aspects differ from the dynamics surrounding the concept of collectivism – whereby societies are oriented around shared groups, identities and goals – and the individual forms a sense of self from belonging to a community. The concept of individualism has been intermittently celebrated for liberating the individual from the bounds of pure collectivism, religious oppression and class hierarchy, as well as enhancing human rights, self-determinism, and economic opportunities (Infamantio, 1998). As such, early studies on individualism showed positive correlates with wellbeing (Diener, 1995; Veenhoven, 1999). However, subsequent research has shown that the concept of individualism in modern society has brought with it many challenges and misrepresentations, and can leave those who highly orient towards individualistic values suffering from feelings of isolation, loneliness and uncertainty (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Eckersley, 2002; Schyns, 1998; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). It is true that positive associations exist between individualism and wellbeing by way of the increased opportunities that allow for stronger freedom and flexibility when it comes to making life decisions. Yet this freedom has also been shown to promote uncertainty and confusion about what values and behaviours will lead to a satisfying life, which can lead to poorer psychological health (Eckersley, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Twenge et al., 2012).

The results of these studies comparing individualism and wellbeing are largely drawn from large cross-cultural analyses, and thus only provide a very general cultural understanding of how individualism influences wellbeing. Deeper and more personal narratives investigating this phenomenon are scarce throughout the literature, with a study conducted by Smith and colleagues (2011) providing one

exception. Here, the researchers performed in-depth interviews with American

emerging adults (aged 18-23) to provide a deeper understanding of the influence

individualistic values can have on a young person's wellbeing and behaviour. They

found that the individualism that pervades American culture has a strong influence on

how young people make moral and social decisions. This influence is manifested in

decisions centred around their own view points and interests rather than those

reflective of the greater good of society. In consequence, young people were likely to

adopt greater levels of risk taking behaviours and have higher levels of extrinsic

orientations, and increasing levels of depression and anxiety.

According to Twenge and Kasser (2013), extrinsic and materialistic values

also serve as a key value system for Western young people in the 21st century. Kasser

(2002) defines extrinsic values as the acquisition of status and materialistic goals that

depend on the contingent recognition of others. Kasser and Ryan's (1996) work on

extrinsic values classifies 'financial success, social recognition and an appealing

image' as key extrinsic aspirations. These values are shown to provide minimal

personal satisfaction in and of themselves, and thus relate negatively to wellbeing

(Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Sheldon & McGregor, 2000). Contrastingly, intrinsic value

systems are noted as those related to internal reward, such as affiliation and

relationships, helping others, physical health and personal growth (Kasser & Ryan,

1996). These values are inherently valuable to the individual, and therefore more

conducive to enhancing psychological wellbeing (Kasser, 2002). Basic need theories

of personality would support the hypothesis that extrinsic and materialistic goals are

associated with lower wellbeing. Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs for example

theorises that distress occurs when people behave to obtain the approval of others rather than on the basis of their own inherent needs and wants.

Although this reviewed research has revealed a negative association between individualistic and extrinsic values and psychological wellbeing in young people, it is not yet well understood how this influence works. The aim of this study is to drive this understanding further by exploring how these value systems influence young people and their mental health in their own words. Rather than focusing exclusively on demography and statistics, we seek to understand the values, goals, social preferences, and levels of stress young people experience as Western citizens through a qualitative analysis. In doing so, we aim to investigate whether the concepts of individualistic and extrinsic life goals and values are consistent in the narratives of participants. By examining the reports of participants around their social preferences, hopes for the future and stress levels, we then aim to extend the existing literature on how these factors relate to the wellbeing of young people.

Methods

Fifty semi-structured interviews were conducted with emerging adult participants who were either Australian citizens or permanent residents. Twenty-one participants were male (42%) and twenty-nine female (58%), with the ages of participants ranging from 18 to 25 (M= 21.60; SD=2.21). six participants lived in rural locations across the country (12%), and 44 in major cities (88%). Twenty-eight participants were studying as undergraduate students full time at universities (56%), while five (10%) were studying as postgraduate students. Eleven were working full time (22%), and six were neither employed nor studying (12%). A total of thirty-six participants (72%)

lived at home with their parent/s or guardian, while the remaining fourteen (28%) lived out of home.

Participants were recruited via an advertisement posted on an online message board, as well as by implementing the 'snowballing' method of participant recruitment. The criteria for inclusion in this study were to be between 18 and 25 years of age, and living in Australia as a permanent resident or citizen. Questions were broadly framed, seeking information on participant's values, their views and attitudes towards themselves, the broader community, intrinsic and extrinsic notions, their opinions on certain behaviours, as well as their self-perceived levels of psychological stress and health. These questions were grouped into four categories to gain a comprehensive overview of participants' thoughts, feelings and opinions. The groups included: (1) values; (2) life goals and personal image; (3) social connectedness, and (4) perceived stress (for a full list of questions please refer to table 1).

Procedure

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the commencement of the interviews and the study was approved by a University Human Research Ethics Committee. The researcher conducted 34 face-to-face private interviews, as well as 16 telephone interviews in order to gain a more geographically representative sample. All interviews were audiotaped and took around 20 minutes to complete. The interview questions were semi-structured and followed an interview guide.

Analysis process

All interviews were conducted and transcribed by the first author, with the transcribed data then read and re-read several times to gain a comprehensive understanding. In the initial stage of our analysis, we used an approach derived from thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Our approach for data analysis can be summarised into four stages.

1) We first read and familiarised ourselves with all the data (which was already categorised by questions into the four domains: values, life goals and personal image, social connectedness, and perceived stress).

2) Then we looked at each of the four domains in all responses starting with the first domain - i.e. values.

3) Within these domains we identified themes that we classified into different categories (e.g. family, friends, health etc.).

4) Finally within these categories we then coded the data – when relevant - into two sets of categorical dimensions: intrinsic vs. extrinsic responses and collectivistic vs. individualistic responses. The illustration of the distribution of the codes across the four domains is presented in table 1.

Results

The results of the analysis are structured into four domains (see table 1 for a full list of questions and their corresponding themes). Section one focuses on what the participants value and view as important in their everyday lives. Section two focuses

on what people strive and care for. Section three looks at participants' quality of relationships and section four looks at what causes participants stress. In all sections, the overall thematic outline is presented first, followed by detailed descriptions of each theme and its sub-themes, which are supported by representative quotes and interpretations.

Domain 1 - Values

Two questions were used to capture participants' perceptions around the most important values in their lives. First we asked participants to name 'the things they hold most important to them in their lives' (Q1A), and second we asked 'what do you want out of life?' (Q1B). When asked to list the things they hold most important to them, most participants' priorities seemed to be driven by intrinsic factors. These factors included their relationships with family and friends, as well as their health and wellbeing. Of the 50 participants, 92% mentioned family, friends or relationships with other people as being important to them. 'Health and wellbeing' was also a relatively frequent response, with 36% of participants reporting that their personal wellbeing, typically alongside their relationships, were amongst the most important things in their lives. A smaller portion (14%) mentioned money, with this the only other significant category in the participants responses: 'I think a fair number one would be family, I reckon number two would be personal success, and number three, I guess something financially related'.

In response to the question 'what do you want out of life?' 88% of participants mentioned intrinsic or collectivistic values as underpinning key aspirations for their lives. Of these intrinsic responses, 'happiness' served as a dominant objective, with 46% of participants mentioning 'happiness', 'being happy'

or 'personal fulfillment' amongst their responses. For example a 22-year-old female responded: 'I just want to be happy, that's pretty much it, I want to be happy when I wake up everyday, and get up and be happy in everything I do'. Relationships were also reported as significant drivers, with 30% of participants mentioning prospering relationship and family life as important aims for their future. A smaller portion (18%) of participants identified extrinsic factors as important drivers for their future, with respondents sharing: 'It might sound superficial, but success, I want to be successful' and 'I just want to make sure I have everything I want'.

Domain 2 - Life Goals and Personal Image

The next set of questions focussed on how participants define success in the context of their lives (Q2A), as well as the importance they place on self-image and status (Q2B). Here we looked at how extrinsic and intrinsic focuses influenced participant's values, life goals and personal image.

Interestingly, definitions of success were predominately based on extrinsic and individualistic values. Here there seemed to be a disconnection between findings from the previous domain around life goals and values, whereby reports of intrinsic and collectivist values were prevalent. Sixty-four percent of participants identified extrinsic success as being of high importance when it came to thinking about success in their life. Typical responses here pointed to financial or achievement oriented career success as key to classifying how success would look to them. As one 19-year-old male responded: 'Having a really good job that earns you like 200,000 plus per year, that's what I think success looks like. So I can support myself well'. Another

respondent said: 'I immediately jump to work success, how successful you are in your career, I have a very superficial idea of success'. Another elaborated further, outlining the lifestyle benefits bought about by career success in justifying why it was so important to them: 'For me flexibility means so much, for example if you're in a consultant or management type position and your good at it, you'd have the opportunity and options to do similar work for many different organisations, and I suppose I'm focusing on a career in that, but I think success goes hand in hand with career, as I think career is a massive part of your identity'.

Other participants also elaborated further on financial success and the flexibility and freedom it bought with it in outlining their hopes for the future: 'To me success looks like feeling free, you know, not having to worry about money, not having to always look at the price tag, like it's a monetary thing, so success looks like I've worked hard to get here, and I feel good about what I did, and now I can do what I want, I can choose to buy the things that I want I can choose to go to the places that I want'.

Only a handful listed more intrinsic motives for success, with just six participants (12%) listing personal fulfillment and five (10%) their relationships, as important factors within their definitions of success. This extrinsic focus continued when participants were asked about the importance they placed on personal image and status in their lives, with 84% of participants identifying personal image and status to be of significant importance. A typical response to this question included: 'Image to me is very important, I don't really consider status that much but image is very, very important', another added: 'It's pretty important. If you want to get somewhere in life, you need status, you are not going to get that top paying job

without it'. Several participants pointed towards social media and its role in one's image as the reason behind this: 'In our day and age, status is very important. You want to be liked. It's the image, how you portray yourself and your status is so important in being liked by others, especially in social media. You kind of get that feeling that your image is related to being liked by others'. The importance of social media was further highlighted by a 19-year-old female participant, who said: 'As a young person, I would say it's quite important. Image wise, I do definitely chase those 'likes' on social media. I think social media is the future of image, so I think social media presence is really important for my image and for people's first impression of me'.

There was a degree of remorse that participants expressed in relation to their attitudes towards the importance of image and status. This was consistent amongst a significant number (32%) of respondents, with another sharing their views with similar undertones of regret for why they feel that way: 'Unfortunately pretty important, I think it influences a lot, image, as in getting a job, like you've got to look a certain type, and status in society is like a hierarchy, and you don't want to be in that bottom type area so yeah I'm going to say very important unfortunately'.

Some participants identified Western social constructs as responsible for this push, with one respondent reporting: 'I'd say that this is a common trend with a lot of people in this modern age, as it's something that's pushed with what we see around us, and how our society is structured'. Another added: 'It is fairly important as narcissistic as that may sound, I think it's just ingrained in us and embedded into first world western culture in which we grow up in'. The importance of status in participants' lives has been attributed to other people's influence:

'I would like to say status is not important to me, and I'd like to believe it's not, but I think subconsciously there is an ideal image and status that's really important to me. It just differs a lot, I like to be my own person and make my own decisions, but I still get swayed by what other people think'.

Domain 3 - Social Connectedness

Here participants were first asked to describe their relationship with their friends and family (Q3A), and then also with the broader community (Q3B). The questions intended to gauge how engaged the young people interviewed were with their immediate circle of family and friends versus how involved they were with their wider community. The aim here was to examine participants' orientation towards individualism (i.e., focus on immediate family and friends) versus collectivism (i.e., focus on the broader community).

The responses participants gave around their social networks were consistent with living in a predominantly individualistic society such as Australia. Participants maintained a number of close personal relationships with their friends and family, yet they were largely disengaged with the broader community. Most participants interviewed viewed their relationships with their friends and family to be very good (88%). Throughout the discourse, phrases like 'close knit', and 'very close' were prevalent.

When it came to the participant's involvement with the broader community however, the overriding response to this question was that participants were 'not engaged at all'. Eighty-percent of participants held very individualistic orientations, stating they had no direct involvement in the community beyond their immediate

circle of family and friends. One participant responding as bluntly as: 'I don't really do anything for the community', while another reported: 'I wouldn't say so. I don't think I am. I think that's because I've never been interested in the broader community'.

Some participants gave a more in -depth justification for their lack of involvement with the community, with one twenty-two-year-old female sharing: 'My work place is pretty big and I feel like that's a community in itself, but other than that no. I think when you come home now the focus is on yourself and relaxing. And it's possibly more isolating with social media and all that stuff as well. So, in general I don't have much interaction with my community outside my immediate circles'. Another 19-year-old male pointed towards technology as the reason behind his lack of involvement: 'I think in modern society it's much easier to live in isolation because of the availability of technology, and being able to communicate with others without leaving your lounge room. I mean you don't need to go down to the local butcher and say hello to him when you buy your meat, you can just buy it online. Ultimately I don't really want to be involved in the community'.

Domain 4 - Perceived stress

The last set of questions sought information on participants stress levels. Here participants were first asked about how often they felt highly stressed and anxious throughout any given period (Q4A), and were then given a follow up question about the major causes of these stressors (Q4B). The aim here was to investigate what potential contribution individualistic and extrinsic factors have on young people's psychological health.

When asked about the frequency to which they experience high levels of stress in their lives (if at all), many participants (60%) reported that they get 'highly stressed' on a weekly basis or more frequently. For example a 19-year-old male student responded: 'There are times in my life when I get very highly stressed, it happens fairly regularly I suppose. If I'm being honest it can lead to breakdowns. At some points, it can be quite overwhelming'. Another participant hinted at what contributes to these feelings, sharing: 'I guess it depends on what I'm doing, but I'd say on average probably once a week, typically on the weekend when I'm on my own and reflect on my life and what's ahead'.

When asked the follow-up question about what was the major cause of their stressors, 44% of participants spoke of the stress they experience chasing extrinsic factors as a key contributor. They did so by bringing up factors around their image, financial aspirations and how they compare with others around them as key to their levels of stress. For example a 24-year-old female talked about the sense of competitiveness felt in relation to others around them: 'Um, probably, just a bit of anxiety worrying about what others are doing and thinking. It wouldn't really be anything to do with family or friends just more an internal stress about how I stack up with those around me'. Another 22-year-old male said: 'I think for me I've always been quite stubborn in setting out to achieve what I set out to achieve, so I guess like achieving success financially is very important to me. And then my career as well, like taking that more seriously has caused me to experience a lot of stress, like where is that going etc.'.

Some participants (42%) also reported that uncertainties about their future significantly affects their stress levels. A typical response along these lines included

participants stating: 'I regularly freak about the direction of where my life is going. I know it sounds stupid but it really does cause me a lot of anxiety', and another 'Primarily thinking about were the future is leading me, you know, I've got this plan in my head of where this University course is leading, where I want to go, but what happens if that doesn't happen'.

This uncertainty also extended to one's current situation in life, with 24% of participants sharing that worrying about what they should be doing with their lives, was causing them a significant amount of stress. As one 22-year-old female participant explains: 'uncertainty around that I don't know what I'm doing with my career, I have no idea what job I'm going to do, that causes big meltdowns'. Another 19-year-old female said: 'I definitely stress about really illogical things. I stress about the future a lot. I stress about what Uni I want to go to and if I want to go overseas and things like that, that makes me very stressed'.

A 22-year-old male participant further elaborates this point: 'The biggest stressor for me is what I'm going to do with my life. I think that's really common for people in this age group where people have this angst about feeling aimless, and I definitely do. That's why I like to keep myself busy, I like to distract myself from decisions that I don't have to make now. That's definitely the foundation of my stress, just feeling like you don't know where you're going. Because I think there's this massive pressure. I'm not sure if this has been in society in previous generations but there's definitely a huge pressure the way our education system is set up. The way social discourse is, you should know what you want to do with your life, like you should know where you belong'.

Lastly, 16% of participants stated that a lack of social support or feelings of isolation was a major cause of stress in their lives. One such response from a 20-year old female pointed towards the potential withdrawal of social support in their future as a key point of stress: 'I stress about my support network in the future and I think of some foreseeable time when there won't be that much support in my life and I can get really worked up about that, like I stress about what happens if I move overseas and I don't have support networks'. Another 23-year-old male touched on this lack of support they experience as a young person: 'The biggest stressor for me is not having people to turn when I have serious questions about my life, and I think that's a really common one for people in this age group where people can feel so isolated'.

Table 1. Distribution of coded responses across the domains

Question 1A. What things do you hold most important to you in your life?	Number of participants	%
Intrinsic factors	46	92
Extrinsic factors	8	16
Family*	42	82
Friends*	30	60
Health/wellbeing*	18	36
Education*	12	24
Relationships with others*	12	24
Money**	7	14

Question 1B. What do you want out of life?		
Intrinsic factors	44	88
Extrinsic factors	9	18
Happiness*	23	46
Maintaining good relationships*	15	30
Achievement/career success**	9	18
Personal fulfilment*	8	16
Helping others*	6	12

Question 2A. How would you define success in your own life?

Extrinsic definition	32	64
Intrinsic definition	15	30
Career success**	18	36
Financial achievement**	11	22
Fulfilment*	6	12
Maintaining good relationships*	5	10
Inner happiness*	2	4

Question 2B. How important would you say is image or status to you?

Very important**	42	84
Not very important/indifferent*	8	16

Question 3A. How would you describe your relationships with your friends and family?

Very good/healthy/happy	44	88
Ok/Not great	6	12

Question 3B. How would you describe your relationships with your broader community?

Not engaged^	40	80
Semi engaged	6	12
Highly engaged^^	4	8

Question 4A. How often, if at all, do you get highly stressed?

Often (classified by responses stating they do so more than once a week, or by using the terms 'often', 'a lot' and 'regularly')	30	60
Not very often (classified by responses stating they do so less than every few weeks)	6	12
Occasionally (once a weeks or fewer)	14	28

Question 4B. What factors are most likely to cause you stress?

Extrinsic concerns (included comparisons with others, financial/career aspirations and image related concerns)	22	44
Thoughts about the future	21	42
Uncertainty around what I should be doing	12	24
Feelings of isolation/relational conflict	8	16

* = Intrinsic factor, ** = Extrinsic factor, ^ = Individualistic factor, ^^ = Collectivistic factor

Discussion

Overall our results support the argument that extrinsic values are dominant drivers for young people within Western cultures (Dittmar et al., 2014; Eckersley, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Twenge, 2011; Twenge et al., 2012). Our findings from the first two domains regarding values, aspirations and personal image revealed a discrepancy between what young people say they value and want out of life (goals based around intrinsic goals), versus what they think is important and are actually striving for (aspirations based around extrinsic goals). What young people valued most in life was their family, friends, health and happiness, with the majority of participants mentioning intrinsic based factors as their key values in life. When asked a follow up question to describe what they want out of life, again the majority of participants mentioned intrinsic factors as of key importance. However, participants largely reported extrinsic drivers as underpinning their ideas of success, their goals and aspirations for the future and their personal image. It therefore seems that there is a disconnection between what these young people deem as contributors to happiness and positive psychological health, and their behaviours and ambitions for their lives.

The next domain focused on participants' social preferences to examine the potential influence of individualistic and collectivistic values. Here the results

showed that people report their relationships with their family and immediate circle of friends, as healthy and generally quite good. This response is consistent with the response given earlier by participants around what they value, whereby family and friends served as a prominent response. However this does not mean that their orientations are collectivistic. As the literature points out, individualists are acknowledged as maintaining close personal relationships that benefit them (Triandis, 1995). However, what distinguish them from collectivists is their orientations and attitudes around the broader community at large. According to this definition the young people interviewed can be classified as highly individualistic, with participants reporting minimal engagement or interest with the broader community. From this we can conclude that young people in this context value and rely on 'individualistic' rather than 'collectivistic' relationships for their social support.

The last domain focused on participant's relationship with stress, as well as any potential contributors to this stress. Participants' responses around how frequently they get highly stressed were surprisingly high, and of particular concern was the contribution of extrinsic factors to these stress levels. The majority of participants cited extrinsic based factors such as how they compare to others, their image, and achievement-oriented concerns as contributors to their high stress levels. Individualistic factors also played a role, with participants' lack of social support as well as their uncertainty about the future as other key contributors.

Differing from collectivistic societies, whereby people's futures are often pre-determined and career paths are provided by the community, in individualistic societies people are afforded the opportunity to choose their own career path and 'make it on their own' (Triandis, 1995). With more choice comes increased

uncertainty. The uncertainty around what to do with this freedom – a freedom unique to the past century - seems to be a cause of stress within itself for Western young people.

Our results also show that despite participants generally reporting good connections with their close friends and family members, they lack connections with the broader community. This then seems to turn into a point of worry and stress, leading to feelings of isolation when it comes to young people thinking about their uncertain future. As Jetten et al. (2012) notes, without a connection with the broader community, people can become isolated very quickly which can easily lead to increased levels of stress and unhappiness.

A body of research shows that when people focus less on intrinsic values like pursing personal fulfillment, and are instead more focused on extrinsic values such as money and status, mental health issues may follow (Dittmar et al., 2014; Eckersley, 2006; Twenge and Kasser, 2013). Kasser and Ryan (1996) speculated that this might occur because extrinsic values are contingent on outside forces that may be uncontrollable, whereas intrinsic values are more under the control of the self. Our analysis, which showed that participants report increased anxiety and stress because of potential unmet financial ambitions, supports this view.

As previously proposed by Eckersley (2011), our results show that extrinsic and individualistic values in Western society have an understated influence in the rising levels of psychological distress experienced by young people today. Past research has noted extrinsic value orientations as adding to the apprehension young people face when thinking about the future as well as their current situation in life. For example, Triandis (1995) suggests both individualistic and extrinsic values can

lead those who engage highly in them into feeling a tension and angst around the questions of 'am I doing well enough?' and 'am I going to be as successful as I desire to be?' Our results are in line with these observations and suggest that an alarming number of young people in Western society feel lost and uncertain about their future, and that these feelings are a key contributor to the stress they experience.

Study limitations and future directions

Our sample was exclusively made up of Australian participants, and future studies should examine whether similar results are found in other Western countries. These findings could be further explored in future studies by prompting greater in depth conversations about how extrinsic and individualistic values more specifically influence young peoples behaviours and mental health.

Future studies on this topic should focus on the dichotomy between what young people seemingly value, and the lifestyles they are actually leading. Particular attention should be paid to educational and policy factors that may contribute to this discrepancy. From this information, interventions should be aimed at educating young people on what values and behaviours lead to positive wellbeing outcomes. Such interventions could be of substantial benefit to future generations of young people in navigating the challenges that exist whilst growing up in the developed world.

Conclusion

The research gives a qualitative insight into how Western cultural influences such as individualistic and extrinsic values are leading to more stress, anxiety and poorer psychological wellbeing amongst young people. Our analysis sheds light into some of

the thought patterns young people engage in relevant to individualistic and extrinsic values that seem to be directly associated with poorer wellbeing. Firstly the extrinsic hopes participants have for the future seems to serve as a significant driver of stress in the lives of these young people. Past research has pinpointed a number of extrinsic traits as largely responsible for leading to stress and in turn lower wellbeing (Dittmar, et al., 2014; Kasser, 2002). Our analysis provides a nuanced description on how extrinsic traits centered on materialistic ambitions, comparisons with others, and image related concerns plague the thinking of young people, and account for a substantial portion of the stress they experience.

Our results also show that young people are highly individualistic in their attitudes towards the broader community and their place in it. This individualistic focus is a source of confusion and uncertainty in their lives. Indeed Eckersley (2011) notes that Western individualism confuses autonomy (the ability to act according to our internalized values and beliefs) with independence (not being reliant on or influenced by others), which can be a source of confusion and uncertainty in people's lives. Our results support this notion, and resonant with past qualitative studies conducted on youth from Western countries, which have also showed a level of confusion and uncertainty in emerging adults about their identities and futures (McDonald, Pini, Bailey & Price, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Weier & Lee, 2016).

The current findings demonstrate the importance of considering the role dominant value systems play in relation to the psychological health of young people. Our analysis shows that this sample of emerging adults seem to understand what values are most important for them, however their goals and hopes for the future are seemingly far removed from these values. Exactly why young people feel so drawn to

extrinsic and materialistic aims when they seem to possess contrasting values is a key point for future analysis. These results show a potential failure of our modern society to educate young people on what values and lifestyles are most conducive to happiness, and highlight the importance of listening to young people's stories in relation to how they are coping with the environment around them.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Chapter 5: Study 3

Outline

This chapter will give an overview of the third empirical study conducted for this thesis. The two previous studies have shown how individualistic and extrinsic values can negatively impact psychological health. To a lesser extent, these studies, as well as past research, have also shown how intrinsic and collectivistic values can positively impact psychological health. Despite this association, no previous intervention has combined these two concepts with an intention to increase people's attachment to them, while also aiming to decrease attachment to extrinsic and individualistic values, in order to promote wellbeing. In this study, forty participants completed a four-week long intervention aimed at decreasing the negative influence of extrinsic and individualistic values, and increasing the positive influence of intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic values, on wellbeing. During the intervention, participants were required to engage with reading content and activities that critiqued individualistic and extrinsic values and promoted intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic behaviours (for full reading material and homework activities, please refer to appendix four). Changes in participant's levels of wellbeing, as well as individualistic, collectivistic, intrinsic and extrinsic values were then analysed during the intervention across 5 different time points (for survey used please refer to appendix three). Participants aged within the emerging adulthood bracket (between 18-25) were recruited online, from Australia, the US and the UK. These nations were selected because they are English speaking Western cultures where extrinsic and individualistic values prevail over intrinsic and collectivistic values.

Negating the negative cultural effects of extrinsic and individualistic values on young people's wellbeing: The results of a four-week pilot intervention study

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Abstract

Previous research has shown a negative association between extrinsic and individualistic values and wellbeing. With these values prevalent among young people in Western contexts, and also often associated with poorer psychological health, the aim of this study is to negate the negative effects associated with them. To do this, forty emerging adults participated in a four-week intervention study where they engaged with content and activities promoting intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic values. The goal was to decrease participant's focus on individualistic and extrinsic values and increase their wellbeing. Changes in participants' levels of wellbeing were analysed across the intervention period, as were participants' associations to individualistic, collectivistic, intrinsic and extrinsic values. Results showed an increase in psychological wellbeing and quality of life over the intervention period. Implications of the results for understanding the critical factors involved in negating negative cultural influences on young people's wellbeing are discussed.

Introduction

Cultural influences on wellbeing are underestimated determinants of a populations' health and wellbeing (Eckersley, 2006). This is particularly true of modern Western

culture, where materialism and individualism are defining cultural characteristics (Eckersley, 2011). Studies have repeatedly shown negative correlations between extrinsic and individualistic cultural values and psychological wellbeing (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Kasser, 2002; Sheldon, Gunz, Nichols & Ferguson, 2010B). Pursuing extrinsic values (defined here as attaching importance or priority to money, image, status and other factors dependent on the external recognition of others) is one of the perennial ways in which Western citizens pursue happiness (Kasser, Ryan, Couchman & Sheldon, 2004). However, chasing extrinsic based goals to increase happiness often leaves people unfulfilled when compared with intrinsic pursuits (Sheldon et al., 2010B). Individualism (defined here as a preference for independence, uniqueness, maintaining relationships when the costs do not outweigh the benefits, pursuing personal goals, and resisting the pressure to conform to norms) is also associated with poorer wellbeing (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Oishi, 2000; Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson & Snell, 2011; Triandis, 1995). However, here the evidence is less clear compared with extrinsic values, because some aspects of individualism such as autonomy and freedom of expression are not negatively associated with wellbeing, while other inherent traits such as competitiveness, comparisons with others and poor social support can be (Ahuvia, 2002; Oishi, 2000).

Given the prevalence of these values in Western society, the negative relationship between extrinsic and individualistic values and wellbeing is concerning. This study therefore aims to look at possible antidotes by running a four-week intervention targeted at decreasing participants' attachment to these values, while also aiming to increase their orientation towards intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic values and behaviours. We choose to focus our study on young people (aged 18-25),

because they are particularly vulnerable to adopting individualistic and extrinsic based value systems (Dittmar & Kapur, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Twenge, Campbell & Freeman, 2012; Twenge & Kasser, 2013; Twenge, Gentile, Dewall, Ma, Lacefield, & Schurtz, 2010). In addition, a range of research shows that the mental health of young people in Western contexts is in decline (Bor, Dean, Najman & Hayatbakhsh, 2014; Collishaw, Maughan, Goodman, & Pickles, 2004; Twenge, 2011), suggesting the importance of investigating and moderating the potential influence of cultural factors on these statistics. Finally, research on the emerging adult period of life has highlighted this age bracket as an important time for interventions fostering positive development because the opportunity for change is much higher compared to older people (O'Connor et al., 2011).

Extrinsic values

Young people living in Western societies are highly exposed to messages promoting extrinsic and materialistic values (Eckersley, 2011; Kasser, Cohn, Kanner & Ryan, 2007). These messages encourage the prioritization of attaining money, possessions and status as idealized goals (Kasser et al., 2014). According to Kasser and colleagues (2004), these messages can come from everyday sources such as parents, peers, and commercial television, as well as broader cultural influences such as educational authorities. These broader cultural influences underpin consumption based economies, suggesting that corporate capitalist economic organizations (such as those found in developed Western societies) require citizens to place a relatively high priority on materialistic aspirations for their survival (see also Kasser et al., 2007). Given the cultural prevalence of extrinsic and materialistic values, a

substantial body of research has explored how these factors relate to wellbeing (Eckersley, 2011; Dittmar Bond, Hurst & Kasser, 2014; Kasser, 2002; Richens & Dawson, 1992). This research has consistently shown a negative association between placing a high priority on achieving extrinsic goals and poorer psychological wellbeing (Eckersley, 2011; Kasser, 2002; Sheldon et al., 2010B).

For example, a study by Bauer and colleagues (2012) showed how materialistic stimuli influences young people's thinking and behaviour. Here, participants were put into a materialistic frame of mind by completing tasks that exposed them to images of luxury goods or words mobilizing consumerist values. Results showed that those who looked at the images of cars, electronics, and jewelry rated themselves as more depressed and anxious, and less interested in social interactions. Those primed with materialistic words also showed more competitiveness and less desire to invest their time in prosocial activities like working for a good cause. These results show that materialistic values are not just localized in individuals highly oriented towards these values, but can also be found in individuals who happen to be exposed to environmental cues that activate materialistic values, as is commonplace in contemporary Western society.

A small number of studies have shown that when people are led to focus more on intrinsic values and goals, their orientation towards extrinsic values decreases. For example, Lekes and colleagues (2012) conducted a four-week experimental study to examine the effect of intrinsic value reflection exercises on wellbeing. Here participants were presented with a range of intrinsic values, and were then required to identify which of these were the most important to them. Participants were then encouraged to write brief essays about the importance of these values in their lives on

a weekly basis, while also being encouraged to reflect on these chosen values. Results showed that those who engaged deeply with the intrinsic reflection exercise showed a significant increase in prioritizing intrinsic values over extrinsic values, and also showed increases in wellbeing after the intervention.

Kasser and colleagues (2014) conducted a further intervention based study aimed at encouraging participants to better understand the potential issues associated with highly orienting oneself towards materialistic values. In doing so this study also attempted to activate intrinsic values by encouraging participants to reflect on the values most important to them, and by leading discussions around the importance of generosity and charity. Results showed that those in the intervention group decreased in materialistic values over time and showed increases in wellbeing and self-esteem over time.

Individualistic values

Like materialism, individualism is a defining quality of Western culture. Western institutions and social constructs promote individualistic values by offering freedom and flexibility when it comes to social preferences and making key life choices. Individualism is increasingly emphasized in neoliberal politics and changes patterns of consumption (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Despite being associated with many positive outcomes, including higher rates of autonomy and flexibility when it comes to making life decisions, individualism also carries traits that can negatively influence wellbeing. Numerous studies have shown that while some aspects associated with individualism such as liberty and autonomy may sometimes lead to increases in wellbeing, individualism is also littered by disadvantages (Eckersley &

Dear, 2002; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998; Twenge et al., 2012). These studies found that increased individualism is associated with more loneliness, less social support and increased levels of family conflict and divorce. Triandis and Gelfand (1998) argue that the autonomy found in individualistic systems can urge people to pursue personal achievement at the cost of relationships, which in turn can create competition between individuals. This competitiveness as well as making frequent comparisons with others often leads to poorer wellbeing (Triandis, 1995).

An increasing body of research has shown that the increasing prevalence of individualistic values is correlated with a decline in civic engagement over the past decades (McPherson, Smith-Lovin & Brashears 2006; Putnam, 2000; Smith et al., 2011; Twenge, Campbell & Freeman, 2012). For example, Smith and colleagues (2011) argue that 'almost all emerging adults today are either apathetic, uninformed, distrustful, disempowered, or, at most only marginally interested when it comes to politics and public life' (p. 224). They go on to suggest that this finding is highly concerning for future generations and speaks 'poorly' of the condition of modern day Western culture and society. Twenge and colleagues (2012) also report a bleak picture of young adults community participation within modern Western societies. Through an analysis of data collected over a forty-year period, they revealed that US millennials (those born between 1982 and 2003) are less caring than previous generations and more focused on extrinsic and individualistic aims, which corresponds to an increase in depressive symptoms amongst young people during this time period.

Whilst a relatively substantial body of work has been done in undertaking interventions aimed at decreasing loneliness in young people (Boomsma et al., 2005;

Conoley & Garber 1985; McWhirter & Horan, 1996), no such intervention has specifically targeted the competitive, self-seeking and socially selective traits embedded within individualism.

The Present Study

Despite the promising results of a few select intervention-based studies aimed at negating the effects of extrinsic based values, this research is still very much in its infancy. Given that previous research has shown significant negative effects of both extrinsic and individualistic values on wellbeing, it is the goal of this study to provide a framework for an intervention that could be used to target the negative effects associated with both of these concepts. Whilst previous intervention studies have looked at negating extrinsic values on wellbeing, no such research has looked at targeting the negative effects of individualism - nor combining these concepts together in the same study. Given the importance of both these values in Western society and their significant negative associations with wellbeing, we decided to target them in unison in this study. We did this by providing material and activities that critique individualistic and extrinsic values, whilst also promoting intrinsic and collectivistic values and behaviours, with the aim of increasing wellbeing.

Given the lack of research within this realm, this study will serve as a pilot study for the purposes of assessing whether an intervention such as this can be effective. As such, we did not employ a control group, instead choosing to focus on testing whether the intervention would have a positive effect and measuring how significant this effect is. Paulus and colleagues (2014) note that single group linear trend studies can provide information on before and after effects as a proxy for an

ideal comparison group. We therefore choose to focus on the single group effect of our intervention, which enabled us to allocate all participants and resources into this one group. Throughout this intervention process, participants completed an online survey at five different time points measuring their wellbeing, quality of life and orientations towards individualistic, collectivistic, extrinsic and intrinsic values. Simultaneously, participants engaged with reading content and activities promoting intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic behaviours while at the same time reading about the negative effects of individualistic and extrinsic values.

We designed this intervention process in part around Kassers (2002) theorizing that individuals first make changes to their values by contemplating the research findings that link value priorities to wellbeing. Thus, participants were exposed to readings that drew on the substantial body of research indicating a link between individualistic and extrinsic values and poorer wellbeing, as well as research showing a positive link between intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic values and wellbeing. This is a method that has proven to be successful within an intervention study by Lekes and colleagues (2012). The results from their study showed an increase in participants' wellbeing when participants reflected on materials promoting intrinsic based values.

Participants in our study were also required to engage in homework activities which included writing and reflecting on intrinsic goals. This method has been shown to decrease orientations towards extrinsic values in past research (King, 2001; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006; Sheldon et al., 2010A). The aim of the intervention was to test whether these readings and activities focused on collectivistic and intrinsic values (and which also critiqued individualistic and extrinsic values) would lead to

increased psychological wellbeing (H1) and quality of life (H2).

Methods

Forty participants, who were recruited through the online recruitment website

Findparticpants.com (https://www.findparticipants.com), participated in this study.

Inclusion criteria for this study were aged between 18 and 25 years of age and living

in Australia, the US or the UK. Participants were reimbursed $20US for their time.

The mean age was 21.8 years (SD =2.07; range 18-25; 32 females), and the

geographical breakdown was: 7 Australian citizens (17.5%), 25 US citizens (62.5%)

and 8 UK citizens (20%). Participants were required to complete an online survey

totalling 87 questions assessing participant's psychological wellbeing, satisfaction

with life and association with individualistic, collectivistic, extrinsic and intrinsic

values. These measures were:

Psychological wellbeing: The 21 item Depression Anxiety Stress Scales Survey was

used to assess participant's psychological wellbeing (DASS21, 2010). Participants

rated how much each statement applied to them over the past week on a 4-point

Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (Did not apply to me at all) to 3 (Applied to me very

much, or most of the time). The DASS 21 has three subscales measuring stress (e.g., *I*

found it hard to wind down), anxiety (e.g., *I felt scared without any good reason*) and

depression (e.g., *I felt that I had nothing to look forward to).* Higher scores indicate

poorer psychological wellbeing. A principal components analysis using varimax

rotation revealed that the sub-scales of depression, anxiety and stress all loaded onto

one factor (depression r= .917, anxiety r= .933, stress r= .936) which explained

86.27% of the variance and therefore all scores were combined into one overall score of psychological wellbeing by averaging the score of all 21 items. Higher scores indicated poorer psychological wellbeing. A reliability test yielded a Cronbach's α = .954, inferring a very high level of reliability.

Quality of life: To measure participant's subjective wellbeing, the 5th edition of the *Personal Wellbeing Index – Adult* was used (PWI; International Wellbeing Group, 2013). Here, participants rated 7 items on a 10 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Not satisfied at all, to 10 = Very Satisfied. Scores were averaged across the 7 items, with higher scores indicating higher quality of life. Quality of life is noted in social psychology research as an important construct, revealing useful data around factors that may lead to depression or social isolation. In this regard, identification of factors that maintain high levels of subjective wellbeing (defined here as how people experience their quality of life inclusive of emotional factors and cognitive judgments) such as community connectedness are important for developing strategies to prevent problems associated with low levels of personal wellbeing. This test also returned good internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .913).

Individualism and collectivism: Triandis and Gelfand (1998) Individualism and Collectivism 16-item Scale was used to measure participant's attitudes towards individualism and collectivism. Participants answered 4 questions related to: 1. *horizontal individualism* (e.g., I'd rather depend on myself than others); 2. *vertical individualism* (e.g., It is important that I do my job better than others); 3. *horizontal collectivism* (e.g., If a co-worker gets a prize, I would feel proud); and 4. *vertical*

collectivism (e.g., Parents and children must stay together as much as possible).

Participants rated these items on a 10 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1= never

or not at all to 10 = always or definitely yes. Higher scores indicated a stronger

orientation towards individualistic/collectivistic values. A reliability test returned a

Cronbach's α = .783, inferring good internal reliability.

Intrinsic and extrinsic values: Kasser and Ryan's Aspiration Index Attitudes towards

intrinsic and extrinsic values were measured by Kasser and Ryan's Aspiration Index

(Kasser & Ryan, 1996). The Aspiration Index has been used in several studies,

demonstrating adequate internal reliability (Kasser & Ryan, 1996) and test-retest

stability (Ryan, 1997). An internal reliability test yielded a Cronbach's α =.862,

inferring a very high level of reliability. The Aspiration Index yields importance and

likelihood ratings for seven different types of goals: (1) self-acceptance (e.g., you will

be the one in charge of your life), (2) affiliation (e.g., you will have good friends you

can count on), (3) community feeling (e.g., you will donate time and money to

charity), (4) physical fitness (e.g., you will be physically healthy), (5) financial

success (e.g., you will have a lot of expensive possessions), (6) attractive appearance

(e.g., you will have people comment on how attractive you look), and (7) social

recognition (e.g., your name will be known by many people). These goals are

categorised into extrinsic and intrinsic based goals. Self-acceptance, affiliation,

community feeling and physical fitness fall under intrinsic values, and financial

successes, attractive appearance and social recognition are under extrinsic values. For

this analysis, the questions asked were grouped into these two categories, those that

sought a response around an attachment to extrinsic values, and those that sought a

response to intrinsic values. We did not use the sub-factors in our analysis as our hypotheses here only concerned with the influence of extrinsic and intrinsic values on young people's psychological health. It is reported in the instructions for the Aspirations Index (1996) that this is an acceptable way of measuring extrinsic and intrinsic value associations.

Participants undertook this same survey over five different time points (one each week), and were required to email through a unique completion code once they had completed each survey. Participants completed the first survey before they started the intervention, and then each week they were required to complete another survey upon completion of their weekly reading and homework activity (to access these materials, please refer to appendix 1 of this article). Once the completion code was received, participants were sent out a copy of their weekly reading and homework activity that they were required to complete before receiving the next survey. At the end of the intervention, they completed the final survey once they had completed their final reading and homework task. Readings were typically 2-3 pages in length, and consisted of two readings propagating the importance of prosocial collectivistic values and behaviours to a person's wellbeing, as well as two readings detailing the importance of intrinsic values to a person's wellbeing.

Each reading shared past research indicating the positive effects collectivistic and intrinsic behaviours can have on one's wellbeing, as well information on the dangers of self-focussed and materialistic lifestyles. These readings ended with a specific task related to that particular reading that participants were required to complete before they could receive the next survey. Prosocial collectivistic tasks included asking participants to do something for others, (e.g. donate a sum of money

to charity, commit to an hour of charitable work) as well as join a community group and document your experiences. Intrinsic tasks included asking participants to give something of worth away (be it to a charity or someone in need) as well as write down two key intrinsic goals you would like to be remembered for. This process was repeated four times until all five surveys and all four lots of reading content had been completed.

Once data collection was completed, changes in participants' psychological wellbeing and quality of life were looked at across the five time points, as were shifts in associations to individualistic, collectivistic extrinsic and intrinsic values. We distinguish between psychological wellbeing and quality of life here as distinct concepts. The concept of quality of life is used here as an umbrella term capturing one's satisfaction with their physical, psychological and spiritual health, their relationships, their security, their achievements and their attachment to community (International Wellbeing Group, 2013). Psychological wellbeing conversely is seen here as the absence of depression, anxiety and stress. Psychological wellbeing is measured with the DASS 21 (2010) survey and quality of life with the Personal Wellbeing index (PWI; 2013) with the understanding that these are distinct concepts.

Participants were split into two groups - intervention group A and intervention group B, who each received the same content but in reverse order. Group A received messages and homework tasks based around collectivistic values in weeks 1 and 2 and intrinsic values in weeks 3 and 4, Group B received the same content but with the content order reversed.

Procedure

Online recruitment for this study commenced in late January of 2017 and concluded in July of the same year. Once participants were accepted into the study they would receive an explanatory statement as well as a link to the first survey totalling 87 questions. Once this initial survey was completed, participants were emailed their first lot of reading content inclusive of a homework assignment. They had a full week to complete this before they were required to submit their responses to the homework task back to the researcher, who would then reply with the next survey. The total intervention contained five surveys and four lots of reading content in total (one each week). The breakdown of the readings and homework activities for group A can be seen below:

Time point 1:
1. Fill out survey 1.
2. Complete prosocial collectivistic values reading 1.
3. Complete homework task: Do something for others and document this experience. Provide a photo as proof of you completing the task.
4. Send details of the homework task to the investigator (who then responded with a link to the next survey).

Time point 2:
1. Fill out survey 2.
2. Complete prosocial collectivistic values reading 2.
3. Complete homework task: Join a community group. Document your experiences.
4. Send details of the homework task to the investigator (who then responded with a link to the next survey).

Time point 3:
1. Fill out survey 3.
2. Complete intrinsic values reading 1.

3. Complete homework task: Write about how you can be less focussed on materialistic gains, and more focussed on intrinsic goals.

4. Send details of the homework task to the investigator (who then responded with a link to the next survey).

Time point 4:

1. Fill out survey 4.

2. Complete intrinsic values reading 2.

3. Complete homework task: Give something of value to you away – be it a nice piece of clothing, a book etc. Write about how you felt during this experience, and provide photographic evidence.

4. Send details of the homework task to the investigator (who then responded with a link to the next survey).

Time point 5:

1. Complete survey 5 (link sent out immediately post the completion of the final homework task).

Group 1B received the same content but with the order reversed (that is they received the intrinsic based content in weeks 1 and 2, and the collectivistic content in weeks 3 and 4).

Analysis process

Responses were checked to ensure full participation across the five surveys. Responses from participants that did not complete the full four weeks of the intervention were then deleted (n=67) from the online survey platform. Complete results were then downloaded and uploaded to SPSS. We then followed the following steps:

1. Undertook a visual inspection of the data whereby responses that were incomplete from participants that completed the full intervention were identified.

2. A missing value analysis was then conducted.

3. Little MCAR test conducted showed non-significance on the data missing and therefore regression replacement was undertaken according to Tabachnick and Fidell (2013).

4. Scores were calculated for each of the 5 time points for each participant for each variable (DASS21, PWI, horizontal collectivism, vertical collectivism, horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, intrinsic values and extrinsic values).

5. Ten paired t-tests were undertaken to assess any differences in results between group A and group B for each of the 5 different time points (5 t-tests for psychological wellbeing and 5 t-tests for quality of life). With no difference (all p>.05) observed between the different orders, both groups were combined into one.

6. Linear trend analyses were then conducted across all five time points for each of the variables to detect any changes over time.

Results

Dependent variables: DASS21 and PWI

Two separate linear trend analyses with the DASS21 and PWI as dependent variables across the 5 different time points revealed significant changes throughout the intervention process. In support of hypothesis 1, DASS21 scores decreased ($F_{(1, 39)}$ = 24.52, $p < .001$, $\eta p2 = .386$) over time, indicating an increase in psychological wellbeing during the intervention (Table 1, Figure 1). In support of hypothesis 2, PWI scores increased ($F_{(1, 39)} = 8.643$, $p = .005$ $\eta p2 = .181$) over time, indicating an increase in quality of life during the intervention (Table 1, Figure 2).

Table 1.
DASS21 and PWI scores across the 5 different time points

	Time point 1	TP 2	TP 3	TP 4	TP 5
DASS Mean	13.00	11.63	10.40	7.98	7.40
Standard deviation	11.33	11.86	11.14	10.10	10.07
PWI Mean	60.50	61.25	62.65	63.43	65.88
Standard deviation	12.15	14.07	12.77	13.94	13.88
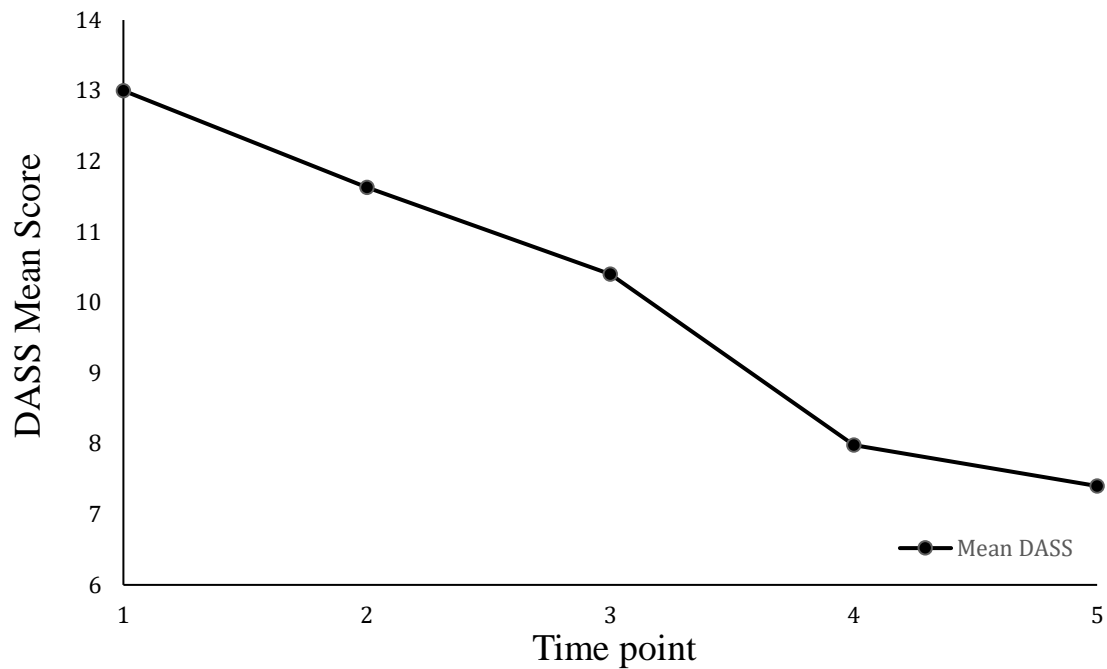
Figure 1.
Linear trend for DASS21 across the 5 time points

Independent Variables

Four separate linear trends were run to measure changes in individualism and collectivism across the five different time points. Vertical individualism significantly decreased $(F (1, 39) = 41.887, p < .001, \eta p2 = .518)$ over time, as did scores
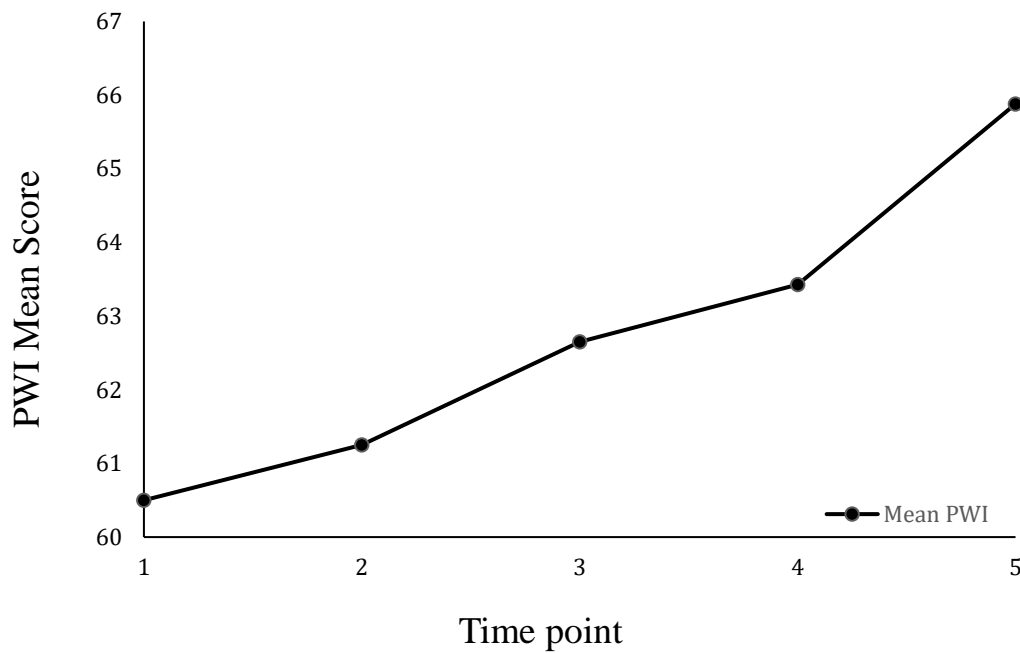
Figure 2.
Linear trend for PWI across the 5 time points

of horizontal individualism ($F(1, 39) = 19.750$, $p < .001$, $\eta p2 = .336$). Horizontal

collectivism ($F(1, 39) = 11.304$, $p = .002$, $\eta p2 = .225$) and vertical collectivism ($F(1,$

$39) = 7.868$, $p = .008$ $\eta p2 = .168$) both increased over time (Table 2).

Table 2.
Individualism and collectivism scores across the 5 different time points

	Time point 1	TP 2	TP 3	TP 4	TP 5
VI Mean	20.48	19.10	16.95	16.25	14.73
Standard deviation	6.26	7.17	7.44	7.35	7.72
HI Mean	30.45	29.85	28.48	26.80	26.08
Standard deviation	6.34	6.38	5.75	6.14	7.99
VC Mean	28.25	28.13	29.50	30.58	29.83
Standard deviation	7.04	7.02	7.89	7.39	7.84
HC Mean	29.25	29.93	30.80	31.28	31.88

Table 2 Cont.

Standard deviation	4.99	5.15	5.20	4.60	5.12

*VI = Vertical Individualism, HI = Horizontal Individualism, VC = Vertical Collectivism, HC = Horizontal Collectivism.

Lastly, two separate linear trends were run with the extrinsic and intrinsic variables across the five different time points. Extrinsic value scores showed a significant decline across the five time points ($F_{(1, 39)}$=17.638, $p < .001$, $\eta p2$=.311), while intrinsic values showed no significant shift ($F_{(1, 39)}$=3.808, p=.058, $\eta p2$=.089) over time (Table 3).

Table 3.

Intrinsic and extrinsic scores across the 5 different time points

	Time point 1	TP 2	TP 3	TP 4	TP 5
Intrinsic Mean	69.400	68.000	67.525	67.300	67.175
Standard deviation	6.830	7.520	7.645	6.817	7.355
Extrinsic Mean	47.725	46.600	45.625	45.600	44.875
Standard deviation	6.084	6.632	6.091	5.207	4.941

Discussion

Previous research has shown a negative effect of individualistic and extrinsic values on wellbeing (Dittmar et al., 2014; Kasser, 2002; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Despite these findings, as well as the prevalent role individualistic and extrinsic values play in Western contexts, no previous intervention has focussed on targeting these concepts in unison with an aim of improving wellbeing. Consistent with the hypotheses, results show that as people focus less on individualistic and extrinsic values, their wellbeing and quality of life improves. This demonstrates that this type of intervention can be a

an effective tool to improve the quality of life in young people and help counter the rising levels of depression in this population demographic.

The study extends beyond previous research in several ways. First, we integrated different methods used by previous intervention studies (e.g., Lekes et al. 2012; Kasser et al., 2014), including providing reading content critiquing extrinsic values and activities promoting intrinsic values. This provided a more detailed and engaging intervention process than has been conducted before. Second, the study included content focused both on negating individualistic values and activities promoting acts of prosocial collectivistic behavior. This provided a path forward for countering both extrinsic and individualistic values in unison. Third, by including practical homework tasks in which participants engage with the community and use their possessions to benefit the needy, our intervention expanded upon previous intervention processes that have largely focused on intrinsic goal setting and the writing of personal reflections.

Implications

Our findings are in line with those of previous research, which showed that reflecting on intrinsic life goals can lead to greater wellbeing (Lekes et al., 2012; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006). As Lekes and colleagues (2012) note, presenting young people with the research on the benefits of prioritizing intrinsic values and encouraging them to reflect on their intrinsic values may help counter extrinsic values espoused by others and society, and in turn increase wellbeing. Our results also build upon the findings of Kasser and colleagues (2014) who showed an increase in participants' wellbeing when they were encouraged to critique materialistic messages and practices

in their lives.

DASS scores reduced from 13.0 during baseline to 7.4 at the conclusion of the intervention, which corresponded with a medium effect size (d: 0.523). Quality of life scores also showed a medium effect size (d: - 0.413) improvement across the five time points. These results show that targeting both the negative effects of individualistic and extrinsic values within the same intervention can lead to significant improvements in wellbeing and quality of life. Individualistic and extrinsic values are 'prevalent' cultural values for young people in Western contexts (Kasser et al., 2007; Twenge et al., 2012), thus working towards negating the negative effects of these concepts in unison could be a viable strategy in increasing young adults' psychological wellbeing. Such results are particularly promising given the relatively simple and cost-effective online platform this intervention used that has the potential to be implemented on a larger scale to include greater number of people.

These results highlight the significance of investigating cultural effects on wellbeing, and specifically the potentially negative effects of living in cultures that highly value individualism and materialism. There is a lack of research that investigates the relationship between cultural values and how people feel, and yet more and more evidence points towards cultural factors as having a profound influence on psychological wellbeing (Eckersley, 2011; Kasser et al. 2007; Twenge, 2011). With depression levels in young people living in Western cultures increasing (Collishaw, Maughan, Natarajan, Pickles, 2010; Twenge, 2011), educating future generations on how individualistic and extrinsic based values can negatively influence mental health could be a significant strategy in reducing this trend.

As Eckersley (2011) suggests, many factors are in place to maintain existing

economic organizations and practices in Western cultures, which suggests the influence of extrinsic messages will most likely remain strong for the foreseeable future. Together with the noted decline in civic engagement by young people (Twenge et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2011), clinicians, educational institutions and policy makers should encourage greater levels of intrinsic goal setting and prosocial community involvement in young people going forward. Interventions that can educate young people on the negative consequences of purely individualistic and extrinsic lifestyles could be supportive of these aims.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of the study is the lack of a control group. Given the limited amount of research within this domain, we chose to run this as a 'pilot study' to see if an online intervention like this would lead to significant improvements in wellbeing and quality of life. Given the promising results in this study, future studies should explore this type of intervention further and incorporate a control group to more accurately ascertain the effect of the intervention group.

A second limitation of the intervention is the lack of a long-term follow up of the improvements in wellbeing and quality of life. Given the enduring nature of values and their installment as consistent behaviors, studies that allow for follow up measures to be taking at a 6 and 12-month time frame are needed to observe to what level of effectiveness changes in value priorities and wellbeing are maintained.

Conclusion

 The aim of this study was to decrease young people's orientation towards individualistic and extrinsic values in order to increase their wellbeing and quality of

life. The findings provide evidence for the effectiveness of our intervention. Given the online nature of the intervention, these exercises could easily be incorporated into different educational settings to combat rising depression levels amongst young people in western settings, as well as to promote greater levels of community involvement and affiliation. Cultural voices are increasingly promoting extrinsic and individualistic ideals. Educating future generations on the potential dangers of heavily subscribing to these value sets, as well as the importance of adopting intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic values will be essential for the wellbeing of future generations.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Chapter 6: Conclusion

In response to the increasing mental health issues faced by young people in Western societies, this thesis has explored the influence prevalent Western cultural values can have on the psychological wellbeing of young people living in these environments. Specifically, it explored the role individualistic and extrinsic value systems have on the wellbeing of young people (aged 18 to 25) from Australia, the US and the UK.

Research points towards the pervasiveness of individualistic and extrinsic values in young people's lives within western contexts (Dittmar, 2007; Eckersley, 2011; Kasser, 2002; Twenge, 2011; Twenge & Kasser, 2013). The existing literature details a clear and consistent negative association between those that associate highly with extrinsic and materialistic values, and wellbeing (Kasser & Ahuvia, 2002; Kasser, Ryan, Couchman, & Sheldon, 2004; Richins & Dawson, 1992). The literature on individualism also shows a link between individualistic values and poorer wellbeing, however this link was a little less clear with past evidence providing conflicting results (Deiner et al., 1995; Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Veenhoven, 1999). With depression levels rising amongst young people, our results share an important deeper understanding on how the cultural concepts of individualistic and extrinsic values influence the lives and wellbeing of young people.

This thesis first addressed the shortcomings of the literature on individualism and wellbeing. Much theorizing has been done surrounding how individualistic values relate to the wellbeing of citizens living in individualistic countries (Ahuvia, 2002; Eckersley, 2006; 2011; Twenge et al., 2012), however this thesis aimed to empirically test more precisely how this relationship worked. This was done by measuring horizontal and vertical dimensions of individualism and collectivism and

their influence on wellbeing in a quantitative survey of 18-25 year-olds. By focusing specifically on the vertical and horizontal dimensions of individualism and collectivism, the results of study 1 gives a clearer articulation of how these factors relate to wellbeing. In doing so they bring clarity to the understanding of the seemingly conflicting effects of individualism on wellbeing in the broader literature.

Results showed that vertical (but not horizontal) individualism predicts poorer psychological wellbeing (H1), while horizontal (but not vertical) collectivism predicts higher psychological wellbeing (H2). This suggests that there are variables inherent in vertical individualism related to comparing oneself with others and competition that lead to lower levels of psychological wellbeing. Contrastingly, traits associated with horizontal individualism around self-reliance and autonomy were not related to changes in wellbeing.

Building on this finding that vertical individualism relates negatively to wellbeing, and the pre-existing knowledge that extrinsic values are also associated with poorer wellbeing, it was the aim of the second study conducted for this thesis to gain a deeper narrative into how this influence worked. Specifically, study 2 aimed to explore how individualistic and extrinsic values influence the behaviours, goals and wellbeing of young people in Western contexts. Despite numerous studies having investigating the quantitative relationship between extrinsic and individualistic values and their relationship with wellbeing, deeper understandings of how these values influence young people's thought patterns, behaviours, and in turn wellbeing were lacking. Qualitative analysis is a method that has been seldom used to investigate these issues, and sheds important light into some of the thought patterns young people engage in relevant to these concepts that seem to be directly associated with

poorer wellbeing.

Results from study 2 supported the consensus in the literature that individualistic and extrinsic values are dominant drivers for young people within Western cultures (Dittmar et al., 2014; Eckersley, 2011; Smith et al., 2011; Twenge, 2011; Twenge et al., 2012). This study built on these results, as well as the results of study 1 by providing a qualitative insight into how the Western cultural influences of individualistic and extrinsic values permeate the lives of young people, and as a result lead them into experiencing greater levels of stress and anxiety. Specifically, the extrinsic hopes participants have for the future seem to serve as a significant driver of stress in the lives of the young people interviewed. Past research has pinpointed a number of extrinsic traits as responsible for leading to stress and in turn lower wellbeing (Kasser and Ryan, 1996; Dittmar, 2007). Our analysis here provided a nuanced description on how extrinsic traits centered on comparisons with others, materialistic aspirations, and image related concerns occupy the thinking of young people, and account for a substantial portion of the stress they experience. Additionally, despite participants generally reporting good connections with their close friends and family members, they cited isolation and a lack of social support as a key cause of worry and stress in their lives. This is likely due to the lack of broader social support structures they have in place outside their immediate circles of family and friends, as evidenced by their individualistic approach to broader community life.

Together, the results from study 1 and 2 lead to an intervention study (study 3) whereby participants engaged with online content and activities aimed at negating the negative influences of individualistic and extrinsic values in order to promote wellbeing. Very little research has tried to investigate possible antidotes to the

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negative factors associated with these value systems. Therefore, this thesis explored an intervention strategy to negate the negative traits associated with individualistic and extrinsic values. In line with expectations, results across the four-week intervention showed that as people focus more on intrinsic and collectivistic values (and less on individualistic and extrinsic values), their wellbeing and quality of life improved. With the evidence from this thesis as well as from past research supporting a negative association between individualistic and extrinsic based values and young peoples psychological wellbeing, interventions such as this are an important step forward in negating these issues and broadening the understanding of how these concepts relate to mental health.

Implications for understanding the influence of individualistic values on wellbeing

This thesis contributes to the literature on understanding the concepts of individualism and collectivism in Western contexts by expanding the body of knowledge on how these values influence the wellbeing of young people. Despite the significant role individualism and collectivism play in cultural research, there is a distinct lack of literature directly linking these concepts to wellbeing. Prior research into individualism and collectivism has largely focused on their roles in shaping cultural norms and attitudes in different cultural contexts (Oyserman & Lee, 2008; Oyserman, Coon & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Triandis, 1989). Such research has investigated the social effects of individualism across large cross-cultural studies, whilst also exploring how individualistic and collectivistic values manifest themselves as behaviours and morals in different societal contexts. A few of these

studies (Diener et al., 1995; Oishi, 2000; Schyns, 1998; Veenhoven, 1999) have investigated associations between individualism, collectivism and wellbeing, yet by looking at large cross-cultural effects combined with large quantities of variables such results are quite diluted.

As noted throughout this thesis, this previous research has shown conflicting evidence regarding the effects of individualism and collectivism on wellbeing (Diener et al., 1995; Oishi, 2000; Twenge et al., 2012; Schyns, 1998; Veenhoven, 1999). Ahuvia (2002) theorizes that this inconsistency may be related to the distinction between 'individualistic', meaning free from social coercion, and 'individualistic', meaning self-interested and socially competitive. In a review of the literature surrounding individualism and wellbeing, he suggests that while individualistic aspects related to personal development and freedom of expression are likely to be contributing to increased physical and psychological wellbeing, other aspects of individualism such as the competitiveness it breeds are likely to be detrimental to wellbeing. Indeed, with individualism theorized as a value system that leads to poorer social support (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk & Gelfand, 1995), competitiveness (Triandis, 1995; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai & Lucca, 1988) and narcissistic tendencies (Twenge, 2014; Twenge & Campbell, 2009), empirical examinations directly linking the concept to personal wellbeing are important. The results of study 1 showed that there are indeed variables inherent in vertical individualism related to comparing oneself with others and competition that lead to lower levels of psychological wellbeing. These results confirm the importance of using items such as Triandis (1995) multi-dimensional individualism and collectivism scale that can capture the 'darker side' of individualism. By measuring these different aspects of

individualism in association with wellbeing, our results add clarity to the conflicting results prior research has shown in relation to the differing effects individualism has on wellbeing (Eckersley & Dear, 2002; Diener & Suh, 1997; Deiner et al., 1995; Veenhoven, 1999).

Study 2 built on this understanding by providing a qualitative insight into how this relationship works. Consistent with the literature that has explored young Western people's social values (Smith et al., 2011; Twenge et al., 2012), here participants reported having minimal engagement or interest with the broader community. From this finding our analysis concluded that young people in this context value and rely on 'individualistic' rather than 'collectivistic' relationships for their social support. This then seems to turn into a point of worry and stress in their lives, leading to feelings of isolation and 'aloneness'. Without a connection with the broader community, people can become isolated very quickly which can consequently lead to increased levels of stress and unhappiness (Jetten et al., 2012).

People in individualistic societies are afforded the opportunity to choose their own career path and 'make it on their own' (Triandis et al., 1988). This is a factor of individualism largely acknowledged as having positive connotations when it comes to wellbeing, especially in comparison with collectivistic societies (whereby people's futures are often pre-determined and career paths are provided by the community). Whilst this may be true to an extent, the results of study 2 suggest that young people's uncertainty about the future serves a key contributor to their levels of stress. It therefore seems that Western young people are yet to truly grasp how to best utilise this freedom provided to them, and this can result as a cause of stress within itself.

The results of study 3 show that orientations towards the pre-identified

negative traits associated with individualism can be diminished through education and intervention processes. Results of our intervention showed that by promoting collectivistic and prosocial values, along with intrinsic values, participants' wellbeing can be increased. With the literature pointing towards a strong decline in civic engagement by young people (Twenge et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2011), clinicians, educational institutions and policy makers should encourage greater levels of prosocial community involvement in young people going forward to increase their psychological wellbeing. Interventions that can educate young people on the negative consequences of purely individualistic lifestyles could play a significant role in diminishing the negative aspects associated with individualistic tendencies. With individualism a highly valued and embedded concept within developed Western societies (Hofstede et al., 2010; Oyserman et al., 2002; Triandis, 1995), this thesis highlights the importance of educating people on the darker sides of individualism such as poor social support, competitiveness and comparisons with others.

Implications for understanding the influence of extrinsic values on wellbeing

The literature on extrinsic and materialistic values and wellbeing consistently points towards these values as having a negative effect. This thesis aimed to build upon this knowledge by first providing a qualitative account on how extrinsic values manifest themselves in young people's thought patterns, behaviours and psychological health. Second, it aimed at testing the effectiveness of an intervention critiquing extrinsic values, while also promoting intrinsic values. This is noted as a critical step for future research on extrinsic and materialistic values and wellbeing (Kasser et al., 2014).

The results of study 2 support the literature in showing that extrinsic values are prevalent amongst young people in Western societies (Dittmar, 1995; Eckersley,

2011; Kasser, et al., 2004; Schor, 2004). The analysis showed participants frequently report extrinsic drivers as underpinning their ideas of success, their goals and aspirations for the future and their personal image. A body of research shows that when people focus less on intrinsic values like pursing personal fulfillment, and are instead more focused on extrinsic values such as money and status, psychological wellbeing may suffer (Dittmar et al., 2014; Eckersley, 2006; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Kasser and Ryan (1996) speculated that this might occur because extrinsic values are contingent on outside forces that may be uncontrollable, whereas intrinsic values are more under the control of the self. Our analysis, which also showed that participants report increased anxiety and stress because of potential of unmet future financial ambitions, supports this view. Results showed that a large percentage of participants cited extrinsic based factors such as how they compare to others, their image, and achievement-oriented concerns as contributors to their high levels of stress.

With many factors in place to support existing economic organizations and practices in Western cultures, Eckersley (2011) suggests the influence of extrinsic and materialistic messages will most likely remain strong for the foreseeable future. Strategies to negate the negative influence of these messages therefore seem highly relevant. The results of this thesis add significantly to the small body of literature looking at possible intervention strategies to negate the negative effects extrinsic values can have on wellbeing. Our findings are partially in line with those of previous research, which showed that reflecting on intrinsic life goals can lead to greater wellbeing (Lekes et al., 2012; Kasser et al., 2014). Presenting young people with research findings on the benefits of prioritizing intrinsic values and encouraging them to reflect on their intrinsic values has been shown to help counter extrinsic values

espoused by others and society, and in turn increase wellbeing (Lekes et al., 2012).

Our results build upon these past findings, as well as those of Kasser and colleagues

(2014) who showed an increase in participants' wellbeing when they were

encouraged to critique materialistic messages and practices in their lives.

Interventions exploring ways to decrease young people's attachment to extrinsic and

materialistic values are an important step forward in research investigating the effects

of cultural influences on health.

Potential ways to counter the negative effects of individualistic and extrinsic values

Research indicates a consistent increase in the cultural promotion of extrinsic and

individualistic values in Western societies (Dittmar et al., 2014; Eckersley, 2011;

Kasser et al., 2014; Twenge, et al., 2012; Twenge & Kasser, 2013). Therefore,

educating future generations on the potential dangers of heavily subscribing to these

value sets, as well as the importance of adopting intrinsic and prosocial collectivistic

values will be essential for the wellbeing of future generations. Future research into

these areas is needed for cultural values such as these to be more widely

acknowledged by clinicians, educators and policy makers as key detractors of mental

health within Western contexts.

Individualistic tendencies are consistently increasing in young people in

Western societies (Twenge et al., 2012), and it is therefore important that values and

behaviours specific to social cohesion and support are better integrated into the lives

of future generations to counteract this bleaker side of an individualistic lifestyle.

Based on the results of this thesis, we propose that young people living in

individualistic societies need to be further educated on the importance of building strong social support networks necessary to optimize their psychological wellbeing. These increased social networks could serve as protection against the hierarchical and competitive ethos encouraged by vertical individualism.

In relation to extrinsic values and their negative effect on wellbeing, a small body of research suggests that materialistic values and goals can become less important when people orient their lives around intrinsic and self-transcendent values/goals (Kasser, et al., 2014; Lekes et al., 2012). The results of our intervention attest to this, showing a decrease in extrinsic orientations and an increase in wellbeing when participants engaged with literature and activities condemning extrinsic values, while also promoting intrinsic values. Future intervention based studies should build on these findings to further this line of inquiry. Results from these studies could then inform educational sectors, who could then potentially implement these interventions.

The results of this thesis offer some insight into potential ways interventions could be used to negate the negative effect individualistic and extrinsic values can have on young people's psychological wellbeing. Our findings provide evidence for the effectiveness of interventions as a viable medium to reduce the negative influence the concepts of individualistic and extrinsic values can have on young people's psychological health. Exercises such as those we distributed online could easily be incorporated into different educational settings to combat rising depression levels amongst young people in western settings, as well as to promote greater levels of community involvement and affiliation.

Whilst our intervention was successful in reducing participant's attachment to

individualistic and extrinsic values, Kasser and colleagues (2014) suggest that individual-level attempts to orient people away from these values and goals over a limited time frame may be hampered by other external influences. They note that people living in materialistic environments are frequently encouraged by their peers, employers and the media to focus on materialistic values, as far as governing economic systems suggest that possessions, profit, and economic growth are crucially important aims. Thus, one further possible intervention would be to limit advertising targeted at young people that encourages extrinsic ideals. Such advertising appears frequently on television, online and in other popular media outlets in Western settings. As Kasser and colleagues (2014) notes, this is a strategy that has been carried out in Brazil, Sweden, Norway, and Quebec. The effect of this change would be a decrease in the prevalence of materialistic messages promoted at young people, and lead to a likely reduction in them forming extrinsic values and goals. Such an intervention could also potentially limit the insecurity brought about in young people as a result of these factors, thus curbing the negative effects these values have on wellbeing.

With individualistic and extrinsic values deemed 'dominant' cultural influences over the lives of young people (Dittmar, 2007; Eckersley, 2006; Twenge et al., 2012), investigating their effect in unison on psychological wellbeing as key cultural phenomena is important. As Kasser (2002) states, psychologists rarely examine the effects of economic and sociocultural, systems on people's everyday lives. As a result clinical practices have largely focused on treating symptoms of depression and anxiety at an individual level with anti-depressants and psychotherapy. This assumes treatment lies in correcting individual biological and

psychological imbalances. Whilst this may be the right path at times, addressing the issue at a broader societal level could be an effective method for stemming the increasing instances of depression, anxiety and stress experienced by young people in Western contexts on a more global level.

Future research direction

Aside from the future research directions already mentioned within this chapter, there are several others that need to be highlighted. One example is related to the concepts of individualism and collectivism, and how they relate to wellbeing of other specific demographic groups and cultures. Understanding the role of these cultural factors and their relationship with wellbeing within specific demographic groups is an important requirement for future research on these concepts. Such information could lead to a deeper understanding of how people from differing socio-economic, religious and ethnic backgrounds are differently affected by social values, and how these values could be best nurtured to create positive wellbeing outcomes in these contexts.

Future research should also look at running interventions such as the one conducted within this thesis aimed at targeting the negative effects of individualistic and extrinsic value systems. The results of our intervention show that targeting these concepts in unison is a viable strategy to increase wellbeing. Given the noted inter-connected nature of these concepts in terms of the social outcomes they produce, a greater depth of research could help build on this knowledge in terms of how to effectively target the negative effects of these concepts in unison. Finally, future research could further explore the findings reported in this thesis by conducting intervention studies aimed at negating the negative influence of these concepts

inclusive of a control group. Such research could then assess whether manipulations aimed at decreasing participant's level of orientation towards these values, and in turn increasing their wellbeing, are entirely effective, or whether other mediating factors need to be taken into account.

Concluding thoughts

Returning to the evidence reported in the introduction section of this thesis (chapter 1) around the rise of mental health issues in young Western people, the results of this thesis point to dominant cultural values and social institutions as playing a key and understated role in this increase. Based on the findings of the three studies conducted for this thesis, the results show firstly that the cultural values embedded within a society are an underestimated determinant of population health. Secondly, results show that individualistic and extrinsic values influence young people's mental health, with this thesis providing a greater understanding of specifically how these traits negatively influence young people's psychological wellbeing. Lastly, this thesis has explored the possibility of interventions as a means to decrease attachment to these values and in turn increase wellbeing.

Despite possessing some limitations as documented throughout, this thesis has contributed significantly to the understanding of how individualistic and extrinsic values relate to the psychological wellbeing of young people in Western contexts. It has been able to provide empirical evidence of the specific links these concepts have with wellbeing beyond what is present in previous research. Additionally, it has provided a possible template for how interventions could be used to target the negative influence these cultural concepts can have in unions on young people's

psychological health and quality of life.

With the complexities of Western life ever advancing by way of technological and economical changes, these social forces need to be regarded as a critical contributing factor to young people's health and happiness. It is crucial for society to more strongly consider these factors as detrimental to mental health, and for further educational institutions to implement interventions to negate the negative effects of these cultural values on wellbeing.

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Appendix 1

Online survey used in study 1

Participants are to answer all questions they feel comfortable with answering by circling the answer most applicable to them.

Q1. What is your age?

	18 (1)	19 (2)	20 (3)	21 (4)	22 (5)	23 (6)	24 (7)	25 (8)
Age (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q2. Gender

○ Male (1)
○ Female (2)

Q3. Are you (please select)

○ Australian Citizen (1)
○ Permanent Resident (2)
○ Neither (3)

Q4. Is your country of residence Australia

○ Yes (1)
○ No (2)

Q5. Who lives in your current household?

○ No one, I live by myself (1)
○ I live with my partner/wife/husband (2)
○ With one or both of my parents (3)
○ With one or more adults who are neither my partner or parent (4)

Q6. Please indicate whether any of the following occupational categories apply to you at the present time.

○ Full-time student (1)
○ Full time work (2)
○ Full time volunteer (3)

Q7. What is your ethnic background?

○ Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (1)
○ African (2)
○ Asian (4)
○ European (5)
○ Indian (6)
○ Maori (7)
○ Middle Eastern (8)
○ Other (9)

Q8. In terms of your personal or household income (whichever is most relevant you) would you say it was:

○ Well above the average Australian income (1)
○ Above the average Australian income (2)
○ Around the same as the average Australians income (3)
○ Below the average Australians income (4)
○ Well below the average Australians income (5)

Q9. Do you have a religion?

○ Yes (1)
○ No (2)

Q10. If yes, what religious denomination would you say you belong to?

Wellbeing

The following questions relate to your psychological wellbeing.

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past week*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0 Did not apply to me at all
1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time
2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time
3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time

1. I found it hard to wind down	0 1 2 3		
2. I was aware of dryness in my mouth	0 1 2 3		
3. I couldn't seem to experience any positive feelings at all	0 1 2 3		

4. I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)   0   1   2   3
5. I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things   0   1   2   3
6. I tended to over-react to situations   0   1   2   3
7. I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands)   0   1   2   3
8. I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy   0   1   2   3
9. I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself   0   1   2   3
10. I felt I had nothing to look forward to   0   1   2   3
11. I found myself getting agitated   0   1   2   3
12. I found it difficult to relax   0   1   2   3
13. I felt downhearted and blue   0   1   2   3
14. I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing   0   1   2   3
15. I felt I was close to panic   0   1   2   3
16. I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything   0   1   2   3
17. I felt I wasn't worth much as a person   0   1   2   3
18. I felt that I was rather touchy   0   1   2   3
19. I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)   0   1   2   3
20. I felt scared without any good reason   0   1   2   3
21. I felt that life was meaningless   0   1   2   3

Social Attitudes

The next set of questions relate to your social attitudes. As above, please circle a rating between 1 and 10 for each question. **10 = always or definitely yes; 1 = never or not at all.**

1. I'd rather depend on myself than others.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

2. I rely on myself most of the time; I rarely rely on others.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

3. I often do "my own thing."
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

4. My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

5. It is important that I do my job better than others.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

6. Winning is everything.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

7. Competition is the law of nature.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

8. When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

9. If a coworker gets a prize, I would feel proud.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

10. The well-being of my coworkers is important to me.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

11. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

12. I feel good when I cooperate with others.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

13. Parents and children must stay together as much as possible.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

14. It is my duty to take care of my family, even when 1 have to sacrifice what I want.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

15. Family members should stick together, no matter what sacrifices are required.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

16. It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by my groups.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Survey complete, thanks for your time!

Interview Guide

To be completed face-to-face. Participants to read through and sign the explanatory statement before interview questions commence. Details of counsellors as listed in the explanatory statement will be readily available if participants require to talk to somebody. Participant is free not to respond to any questions, as some might be sensitive in their nature.

Steps to take: Ensure participant is sitting down and comfortable, explain the course of the questions to be asked, and that they can withdraw their participation at any time, and then commence audio/visual recording.

- What things do you hold most important to you in your life?

- What do you want out of life?

- How would you define success?

- How important is image or status to you?

- How would you describe your relationships with your friends and family?

- How would you describe your relationship with your broader community?

- How often (if ever) do you get highly stressed?

- What causes you the most stress?

Appendix 3

Repeated measures used in study 3

Participants are to answer all questions they feel comfortable with answering by circling the answer most applicable to them.

Q1. What is your age?

	18 (1)	19 (2)	20 (3)	21 (4)	22 (5)	23 (6)	24 (7)	25 (8)
Age (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q2. Gender

○ Male (1)
○ Female (2)

Q3. Are you (please select)

○ Australian Citizen (1)
○ Australian Permanent Resident (2)
○ UK Citizen (1)
○ UK Permanent Resident (2)
○ US Citizen (1)
○ US Permanent Resident (2)

Q5. Who lives in your current household?

○ No one, I live by myself (1)
○ I live with my partner/wife/husband (2)
○ With one or both of my parents (3)
○ With one or more adults who are neither my partner or parent (4)

Q6. Please indicate whether any of the following occupational categories apply to you at the present time.

○ Full-time student (1)
○ Full time work (2)
○ Full time volunteer (3)

Q7. What is your ethnic background?

○ Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (1)
○ African (2)
○ Asian (4)
○ European (5)
○ Indian (6)
○ Maori (7)
○ Middle Eastern (8)
○ Other (9)

Q8. In terms of your personal or household income (whichever is most relevant you) would you say it was:

○ Well above the average income (1)
○ Above the average income (2)
○ Around the same as the average income (3)
○ Below the average income (4)
○ Well below the average income (5)

Well Being

The following questions relate to your psychological well-being.

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you *over the past week*. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0 Did not apply to me at all
1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time
2 Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a good part of time
3 Applied to me very much, or most of the time

1.	I found it hard to wind down	0	1	2	3
2.	I was aware of dryness in my mouth	0	1	2	3
3.	I couldn't seem to experience any positive feelings at all	0	1	2	3
4.	I experienced breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)	0	1	2	3
5.	I found it difficult to work up the initiative to do things	0	1	2	3
6.	I tended to over-react to situations	0	1	2	3
7.	I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands)	0	1	2	3
8.	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy	0	1	2	3

9. I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of
   myself   0 1 2 3
10. I felt I had nothing to look forward to   0 1 2 3
11. I found myself getting agitated   0 1 2 3
12. I found it difficult to relax   0 1 2 3
13. I felt downhearted and blue   0 1 2 3
14. I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was
    doing   0 1 2 3
15. I felt I was close to panic   0 1 2 3
16. I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything   0 1 2 3
17. I felt I wasn't worth much as a person   0 1 2 3
18. I felt that I was rather touchy   0 1 2 3
19. I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical exertion (e.g.
    sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)   0 1 2 3
20. I felt scared without any good reason   0 1 2 3
21. I felt that life was meaningless   0 1 2 3

The next set of questions relate to your perceived quality of life. Please Respond to
the below questions by giving a rating between 1 and 10. **10 = Very Satisfied, 1 =
Not satisfied at all**

Part I (Optional item]: Satisfaction with Life as a Whole

Thinking about your own life and personal circumstances, how satisfied are you with
your life as a whole ? 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Part II: Personal Wellbeing Index
How satisfied are you with…… ?

1. Your standard of living?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

2. Your health?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

3. What you are achieving in life?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

4. Your personal relationships?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

5. How safe you feel?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

6. Feeling part of your community?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

7. Your future security?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

8. Your life as a whole?   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Social Attitudes

The next set of questions relate to your social attitudes. As above, please circle a rating between 1 and 10 for each question. **10 = always or definitely yes; 1 = never or not at all.**

1. I'd rather depend on myself than others.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

2. I rely on myself most of the time; I rarely rely on others.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

3. I often do "my own thing."
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

4. My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

5. It is important that I do my job better than others.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

6. Winning is everything.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

7. Competition is the law of nature.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

8. When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

9. If a coworker gets a prize, I would feel proud.
   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

10. The well-being of my coworkers is important to me.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

11. To me, pleasure is spending time with others.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

12. I feel good when I cooperate with others.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

13. Parents and children must stay together as much as possible.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

14. It is my duty to take care of my family, even when 1 have to sacrifice what I want.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

15. Family members should stick together, no matter what sacrifices are required.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

16. It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by my groups.
    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Values

This next set of questions asks you about your future and your hopes for it. Rate each item by circling how important it is to you that it happens in the future.

IN THE FUTURE...

1. In the future you will be physically healthy.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

2. Your name will be known by many people.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

3. You will have people comment often about how attractive you look.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

4. You will have a lot of expensive possessions.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

5. You will be famous
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

6. You will donate time or money to charity.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

7. You will feel good about your level of physical fitness.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

8. You will be the one in charge of your life.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

9. You will have good friends that you can count on.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

10. You will keep up with fashions in hair and clothing.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

11. You will teach others the things that you know.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

12. You will have a job that pays well.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

13. You will exercise regularly.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

14. You will share your life with someone you love.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

15. You will be admired by many people.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

16. At the end of your life, you will look back on your life as meaningful and complete.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

17. You will avoid things bad for your health (such as smoking, excessive alcohol, etc.)
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

18. You will have people who care about you and are supportive.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

19. You will work for the betterment of society.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

20. You will be married to one person for life.

not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

21. You will be your own boss.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

22. You will achieve the "look" you've been after.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

23. You will deal effectively with problems that come up in your life.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

24. You will feel energetic and full of life.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

25. You will have a job with high social status.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

26. You will have good, open relationships with your children.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

27. You will work to make the world a better place.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

28. You will successfully hide the signs of aging.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

29. Your name will appear frequently in the media.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

30. You will know people that you can have fun with.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

31. You will be relatively free from sickness.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
  1   2   3   4   5

32. You will help others improve their lives.

not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

33. Your body shape and type will be fairly close to ideal.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

34. You will buy things just because you want them.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

35. You will know and accept who you really are.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

36. You will eat healthfully and moderately.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

37. You will be financially successful.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

38. You will do something that brings you much recognition.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

39. You will help people in need.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

40. You will have a couple of good friends that you can talk to about personal things.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

41. You will be talked about years after your death.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

42. Your image will be one others find appealing.
not impt.   a little impt.   so/so   pretty impt.   very impt.
   1   2   3   4   5

Survey complete, thanks for your time!

Appendix 4

Intervention reading content and homework activities

<div align="center">

Goal Setting and Self-Engagement Workshop

Social goals (prosocial-collectivistic values) reading 1

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For this week we aim to focus on pro-social behaviour and involvement, and look at the advantages of living a life that is community oriented to our wellbeing and quality of life.

The benefits of engaging with others

Once upon a time people lived in communities built around common goals as well as the engagement with others. This environment wasn't perfect by any means, as there were a range of prejudices, oppressions and class systems that existed within it. However this semblance of community these societies fostered saw a stronger level of social support between community members, a shared set of values and goals and a sense of identity for its members. Fortunately as a result of the industrial revolution and the evolution of capitalism we are no longer bound to the fortunes of our parents and their previous generations, nor the various restrictions and oppressions that existed within these more collectivist bound societies that existed in days gone by. However by the same token we are now faced with a range of challenges around our

place in the community, our involvement in it, and our willingness to engage with those around us.

A number of studies attest to the positive influence that pro-social involvement - the tendency for people to act voluntarily to benefit others - exerts on individuals interpersonal relations and psychological health. Yet in modern life we seem to have forgotten this important truth, and instead live lives geared around self-interest and the promotion of 'me'. Interestingly enough though, studies have shown that this way of thinking and this withdrawal from community life is actually very detrimental to our health, and we experience a poorer quality of life as a result of it. It is this idea we want to focus on this week, and in doing so it is the aim of this week to set some goals around engaging with the community around us, and engaging in pro-social behaviour.

Homework assignment: You the participant are encouraged to engage in one act of pro-social behaviour. Do something for others, be it donate a sum of money to charity, commit to an hour of charitable work, or attend a community meeting of some description. Once this is completed you will be required to send through a short paragraph of around 100-200 words outlining what you did, and how it made you feel. Please send this through to: achum1@student.monash.edu

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Goal setting and self-engagement workshop

Social Goals prosocial-collectivistic values reading 2

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Last week we focused on pro-social behaviour and engaging with the community around us, this week we wish to explore these ideas further by a deeper inquiry into the benefits of engaging with others, building strong social networks and setting goals around these factors. There is strong evidence showing a negative relationship between social isolation and health. Additionally, research has shown that people who are members of local sporting teams, churches, cultural groups and community organisations are happier and more satisfied with their lives, regardless of how financially wealthy they are.
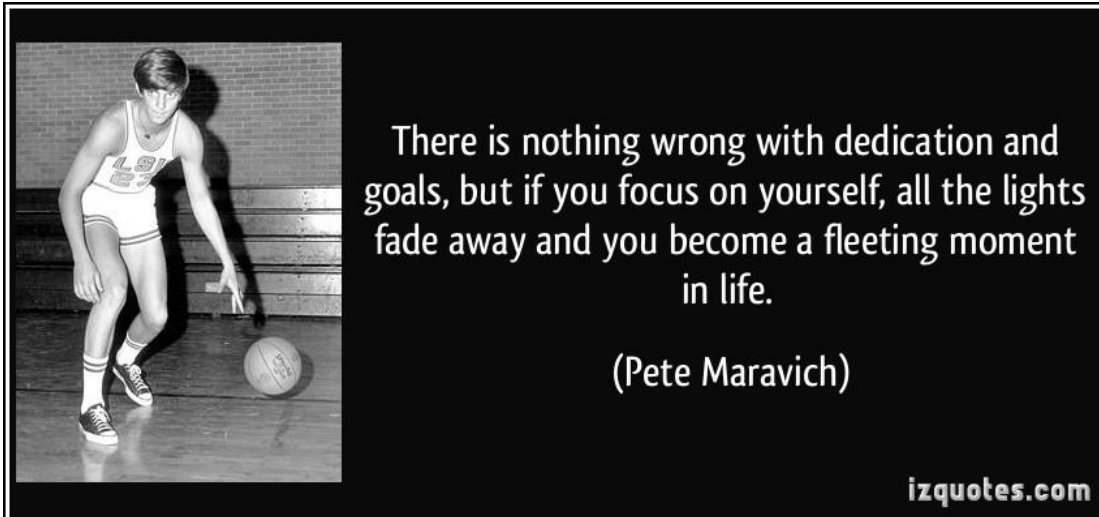
The individualistic society

The concept of individualism is a psychological construct used to explain how societies emphasise the moral worth and freedom of the individual. Historically the individualisation has been associated with a loosening of the chains of religious dogma, class oppression and gender and ethnic discrimination, and has thus been celebrated for liberating the individual from the bounds of pure collectivism and class hierarchy, as well as enhancing human rights, self-determinism, and economic opportunities. Yet research also shows that the concept of individualism in modern society has brought with it many challenges and misrepresentations, which are generally accepted as including an isolation from civic and community life, a resultant escalation in alienation and loneliness, and the encouragement of an 'every man for themselves' mentality, an idea that has negative effects for society.

Why are community associations important?

In modern society, where we are not obliged to contribute or interact with the community in any way it can be a far easier and more realistic option to choose to disengage from community life, and instead focus on yourself, your career and your network of social supports. However doing this has strong implications for you the individual, as well as society at large. As discussed last week a vast array of studies attest to the positive influence that pro-social involvement exerts on an individual's interpersonal relations and psychological health. Additionally focusing purely on your self and acting out of self-interest is a sure way to a dissatisfied life. With more and more people feeling isolated and finding themselves without people to talk to, this week's focus centers around engaging with the community, to broadening your social networks and supports, and in turn increasing your social health and ability to live a meaningful and content life.

There is nothing wrong with dedication and goals, but if you focus on yourself, all the lights fade away and you become a fleeting moment in life.

(Pete Maravich)

izquotes.com

But I already have friends?

Sure you may already have a good network of friends, however interacting beyond this network and into the community is important for a number of reasons. Firstly it provides a greater support network when something goes wrong in your life. Secondly it gives you access to people whom you can turn to when you really need help, as well as people to mentor you as you grow and develop, and people who can support you in engaging in the dreams and real passions you have for your life. Community involvement and giving of yourself to others is said to be essential in achieving optimal life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing as it affords us a stronger level of social support, enables us to feel less isolated and more supported, and takes us away from a life devoted to ourselves – a reality that is sure to lead to a greater level of dissatisfaction in our lives.

Homework activity:

With this been said, you are this week encouraged to go out and join or engage with a social/community group. It could be a University club or society you already belong to, a local sports team, an arts organisation, a religious association/church etc. In doing this you are then requested to document your experiences with a brief paragraph of around 100-200 words sharing your experiences, and how it made you

feel. Also be encouraged to write some goals for the future around how you perhaps wish to further engage with the community, and best use your talents and passions to benefit the community.

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Goal Setting and Self-Engagement Workshop
Intrinsic Goal setting reading 1

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Our task for this week is to focus on the shifting values of modern society, and the materialistic driven lives that we often live.

It is certainly true that you the reader live in a fortuitous time. Never before have people had more opportunities for the attainment of wealth and the lifestyles they desire. Throughout the following weeks readings we are going to explore this truth as well as some of the misunderstandings that exist within it, and work towards setting some goals that go against the materialistic pushes of Western society, and instead focus on pursuing self-fulfilment and contentment.

Modern Western life

We in the West are now financially, materially and technologically better off than we ever have been, with increasing access to education, resources and material items. Based on this truth, you would think that we should be happier today than ever before, right? Apparently, that doesn't seem to be the case. Large quantities of

research over the past few decades has shown that despite increasing levels of economic wealth people have become unhappier.

One possible rationale

One possible explanation for this lies in the values that drive our lives in modern life, typically identified as being materialistic in nature. Indeed past studies have shown that those people who put a high priority on achieving materialistic life goals such as the attainment of wealth, status and material goods also report lower levels of personal life satisfaction, happiness, vitality, as well as higher levels of depression and anxiety. This can be due to a range of factors, but certainly the stressors brought about by attaining these desired goods, statuses and identities are deemed as strong contributing factors, as is the time spent pursuing these goals versus the time that could be better spent engaging with friends, family or hobbies. A **materialistic person** is said to be someone who has **a preoccupation with the owning of material possessions, especially luxury goods and wealth, and equates them to happiness and fulfilment**.

Material Goals: Artificial Symbols of Happiness

If you probe deep into our desires toward material possessions, achievements and identities, you will find we have come to hold many illusionary beliefs about these ideals. We look at them as necessary acquisitions for us to live our idealized lives, helping to increase our happiness, to improve our satisfaction of life, to increase our self esteem, to boost our confidence, to make us feel more worthy and more attractive. However in seeing material goods as tools that will help us improve our quality and experience of life we miss the point, and actually experience poorer wellbeing as a result. Yet material pursuits have evolved into the holy grail of modern life, representing symbols of hope, happiness, success and joy. However as we will see, these symbols are no more than just artificial creations by people.

Linking Happiness with Material Ideals

Modern marketing has a large role to play in all this. Corporations invest billions of dollars every year into advertising and marketing campaigns that create and enforce linkages between materialistic possessions and lifestyles in our mind. So how exactly does this happen? Firstly marketers develop an understanding **of the dissatisfactions you are facing in life,** which can be low self-esteem, loneliness, dissatisfaction with work, dissatisfaction with life, etc. From there, they create an imagery that will be aspired by you on the whole – promising love, happiness, acceptance, worthiness, etc. They then design marketing strategies that link their products with this aspired image.

This product-image linkage is conveyed from the marketing campaign, product design, packaging, to advertising. In advertisements, the visual, audio and sensory cues and messaging you see are all consciously crafted stimuli that establishes this link. As people start getting exposed to these marketing stimuli, these products begin to represent a certain image in their minds. People who have aspirations similar to what the product represents start to want to own it. These people work toward achieving these possessions and identities because having them makes them feel like they have addressed that particular desire. When they eventually acquire it, they feel satisfied/happy, albeit for a brief period of time.

The Continuous Cycle of Materialism

When you probe deeply, these materialistic desires and goals prevent people from ever truly fulfilling their deepest needs. It is like a catch-22 situation, where the very reason that created the situation prevents it from being resolved. When we achieve the goals we set for ourselves and acquire the goods and status we desire, a new bar is set and we continue to be dissatisfied with what you have. These new goals bring with them the new promise of happiness/joy/satisfaction with taking the next step. The end result? You become dissatisfied with the material goods you have and seek to get the new ones. This leads to the continuous cycle of materialism.

While all this is taking place, **the issues you face in your life never get addressed nor healed.** They just remain there, untouched. When you strive toward material possessions to make yourself happy, it keeps you from working on those inner issues you are facing in your life and yourself. This is why **materialism breeds discontentment.** Materialism prevents you from pursuing goals in your life that will lead to actual, real happiness. When you are materialistic, you start seeking your satisfaction in your material possessions, your achievements and your image. However, these things can only act as a temporary, artificial placeholder to cover up your gaps. They are impermanent and external. They are not who you are. While the physical goods will change and will be discarded over time, you don't. You are the constant that will always remain. **The issues inside of you will always be there unless you address them.** Instead of looking outwards toward material goods, you need to address these issues from the inside out.

Summary

The 'if I just had X syndrome is a massive lie'. Indeed science has time and time again shown those who pursue materialistic life goals to experience poorer quality of life and lower levels of psychological health. Today you are encouraged to break out of this, with the desires of this program been that you will come to see what truly matters in life – relationships, inner peace and joy – and experience a better quality of life as a result. It is this idea that is the basis for our homework activity for this week…

Homework assignment:

With this in mind, the homework task for this week is to write a few paragraphs of around 100-200 words about how you can be less focussed on materialistic stuff, and more focussed on intrinsic goals. Within it you should include information around two key intrinsic goals you wish to be remembered for (i.e. practice kindness towards others, pursue a hobby you love)

Goal Setting and Self-Engagement Workshop
Intrinsic Goals reading 2

Last week we discussed the delusions that exist within setting materialistic based goals in place of 'intrinsic' goals that fulfil our deeper needs and desires. This week we want to further delve into this topic, whilst encouraging you to completely break free from materialistic pursuits and ways of thinking, and instead live a life more focussed on achieving intrinsic goals.

Breaking Out Of Materialism

By hinging on material possessions to make yourself happy, you prevent yourself from getting out of the loop of materialism. It can be quite a sticky situation to be in, because you are always gratified with this false sense of joy whenever you get something new or acquire more wealth, especially so if your reason for acquiring it was more for emotional than functional reasons. The false sense of joy you get reinforces your desire to get more of it. It becomes sort of a subconscious conditioning in your mind, where the positive reinforcement you get triggers you to continue on the behaviour to receive more of the 'reward'. Material possessions and achievements thus becomes your reliable, go-to solution to solve satisfactions, problems or fill up gaps in life. The only way materialistic people can break through the cycle of materialism is when they step outside of their belief system that material goods bring happiness, and start examining the notion itself and move towards pursuing more intrinsic pleasures and desires. These may include your relationships with other people, personal growth or physical fitness.

So ask yourself this – Are there any material possessions or achievements you look to have (more of) to make you happy? What are the possessions/accomplishments that will make you unhappy if you do not have them? Why do you need them to be happy?

Our homework activity for this week to be addressed later on centres around these questions, as here we are required to think away from materialistic pursuits, and focus on more intrinsic goals.

The importance of setting 'intrinsic' goals
Stemming from the Latin for 'inward', intrinsic goals relate to yourself; your personal growth, health and relationships with yourself and others. Contrary, extrinsic goals relate to external influences such as money, fame, status or anything that requires validation from others. As we have discussed, life goals based around extrinsic or materialistic goals such as these can't make us happy – as happiness has to come from within. To be truly happy you don't need money, fame or status and you don't need validation from other people. Anything that goes towards your personal development permeates you and changes your being, your thoughts and your mindset. This is why choosing goals that are centered on your growth and what truly makes your heart happy will create the fundamental basis for a happy life. This week you are challenged to give away something of worth to you and in doing so be pushed into truly breaking out of this pattern of materialism. This step we hope will lead you into a future focused on inner contentment, peace and prosperity, regardless of the circumstance that takes place around you.

Homework assignment: Give something of value to you away – be it a nice piece of clothing, a book etc. Provide photographic evidence if you can of this, and then write a brief paragraph of around 100-200 words about how you felt during this experience.