

Introduction

Self-construal is conceptualized as a constellation of thoughts, feelings and actions with respect to one's relationship to others and to the self, as distinct from others. Individualism is defined as a bounded and stable self, which is separate from social context. Collectivism is concerned with belonging and fitting in with others such that the self and others are not separate from situations, but are molded by them (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994).

Evidence suggests that self-construal can influence a person's response to authority and perception of fairness.

Individuals are less socially active in later life and the frequency of their social interactions reduces (Field & Minkler, 1988).

We hypothesized that self-construal and age would impact how people perceive and follow social distancing recommendations.

Methods

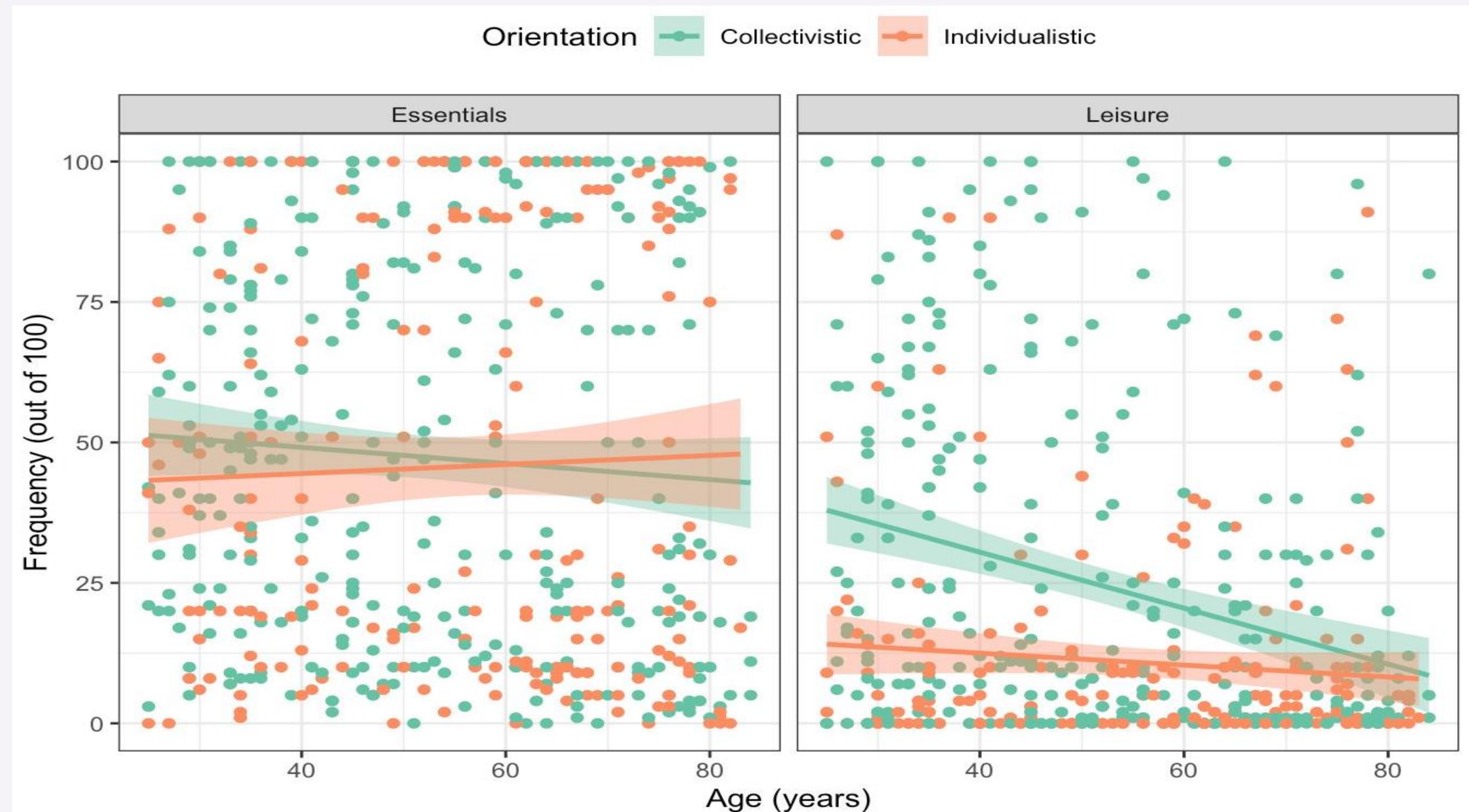
A sample of 525 participants between ages 25 and 84 was collected ($M = 53.8$ years old, $SD = 16.95$).

Participants completed an online survey early in the pandemic (April/May 2020). They were asked what percentage of the time they left their house for essential needs and for leisure activities.

They completed the 30-item Singelis self-construal scale to measure how they view themselves in relation to others (more individualistic or more collectivistic).

Linear regressions were used to test the impact of age, self-construal, and their interaction on social distancing behaviors.

Results



- There were no effects of age or self-construal on the percentage of time people left their homes for essential needs ($M = 46.74\%$ of the time).
- People left their homes less for leisure activities ($M = 19.02\%$ of the time), but this was influenced by age and self-construal.
- Interaction between age and self-construal shows that individualistic people are not likely to leave their house for leisure activities regardless of age; Those with more of a collectivistic self-construal were *more* likely to leave for leisure activities, but this tendency decreased significantly with age.

Conclusion

Contrary to the belief that people with a collectivistic self-construal will abide by the rules and follow social distancing recommendations, our results suggest that collectivistic individuals may prioritize social interactions and interdependence with others, at least early in the pandemic.

Future studies could benefit from using Singelis et al. scale (1995), who makes subdivisions of the Self-Construal scale adding vertical and horizontal components that emphasize equality and hierarchy, and could provide a more detailed insight into why collectivistic people prioritize social interactions and interdependence with others over following social distancing recommendations.