



A Cross Cultural Analysis of Academic Stress Amongst European-American, Asian-American, and African-American Students

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Introduction

Academic stress is a crucial element of a student’s well being.¹ Different students experience stress differently partially due to differences in culture. A student’s culture shapes their relationship with their community and how their community supports them which, in turn, affects how much stress they experience in school.

We hypothesized that African-American and Asian-American students, whose cultures are more collectivist, will experience more academic stress than White students whose culture is more individualist.

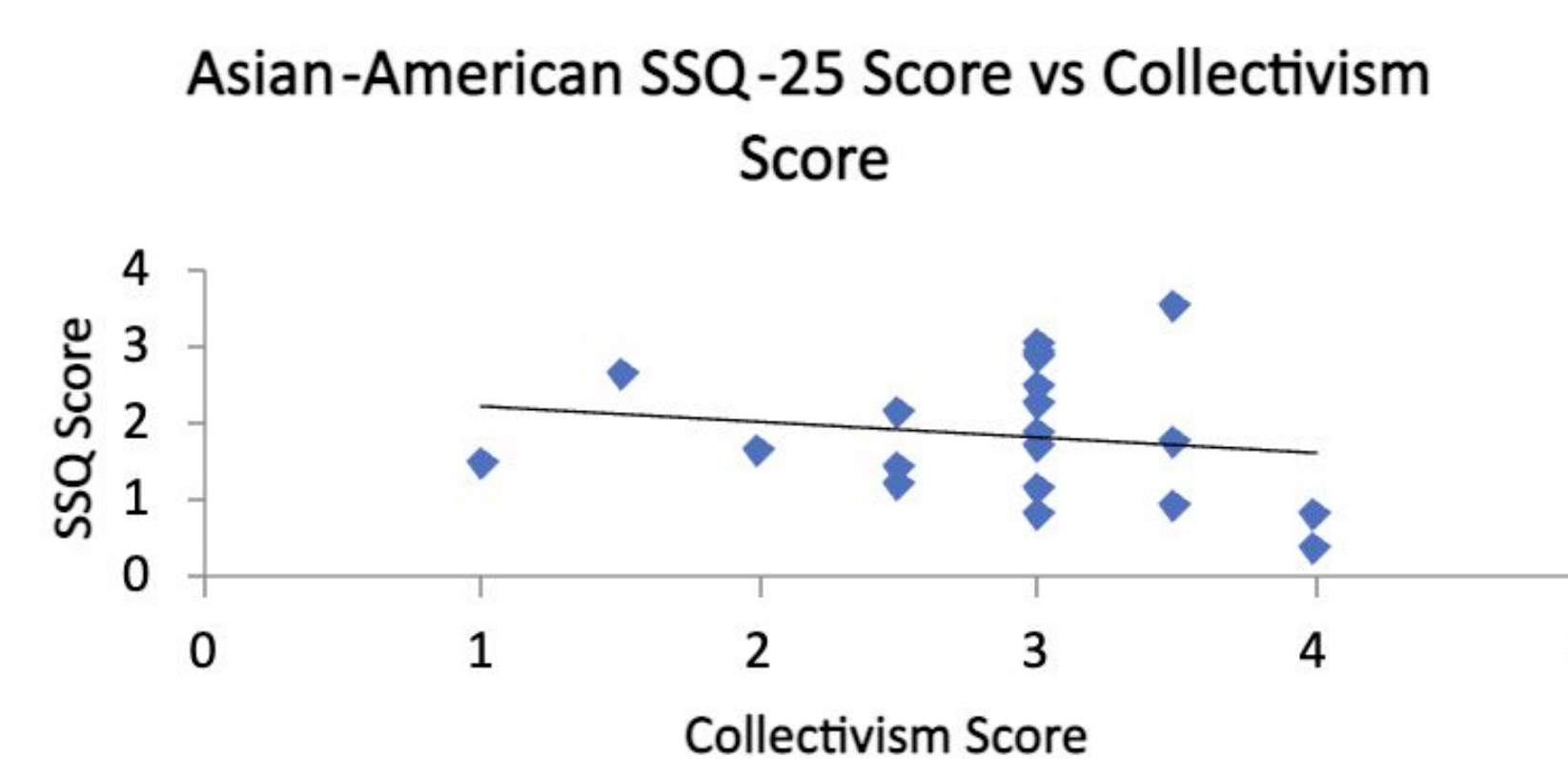
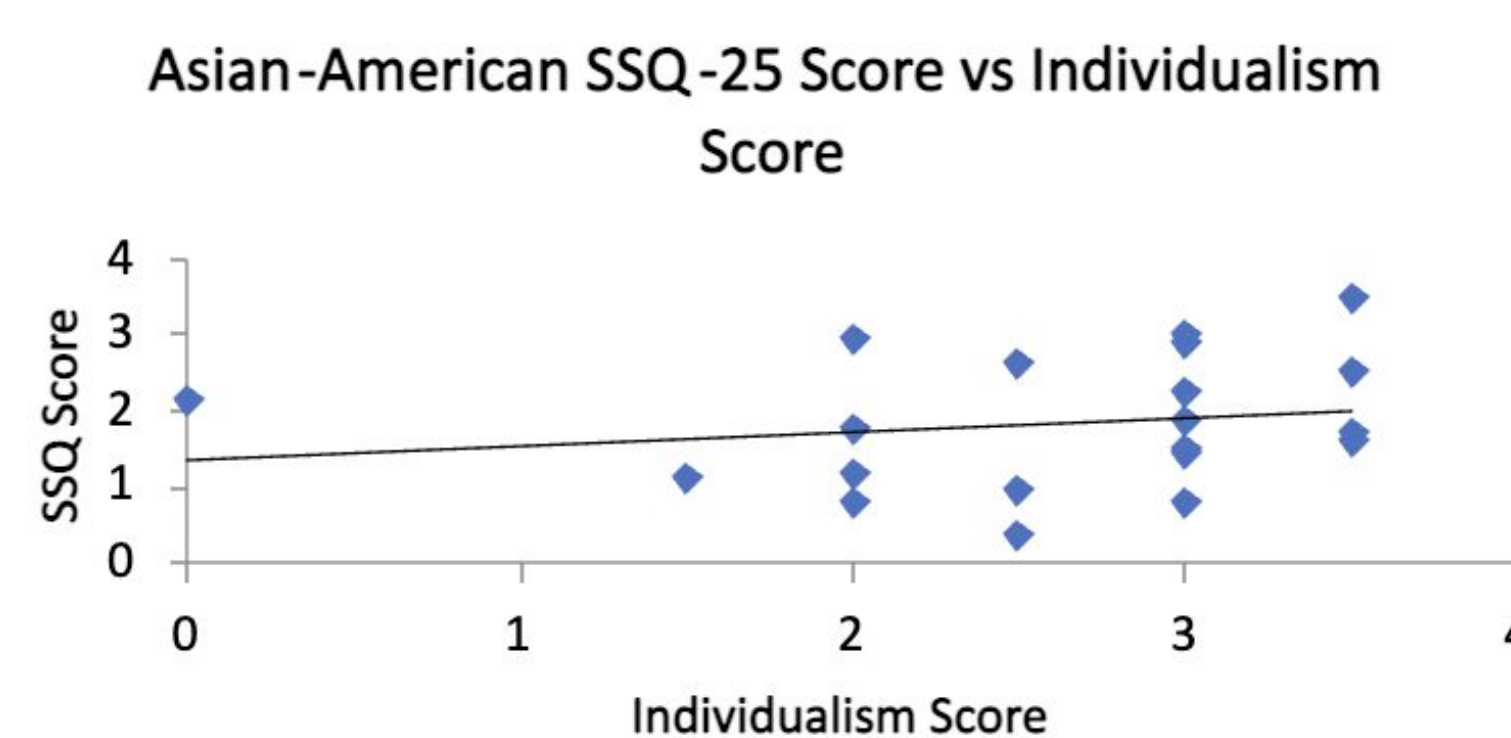
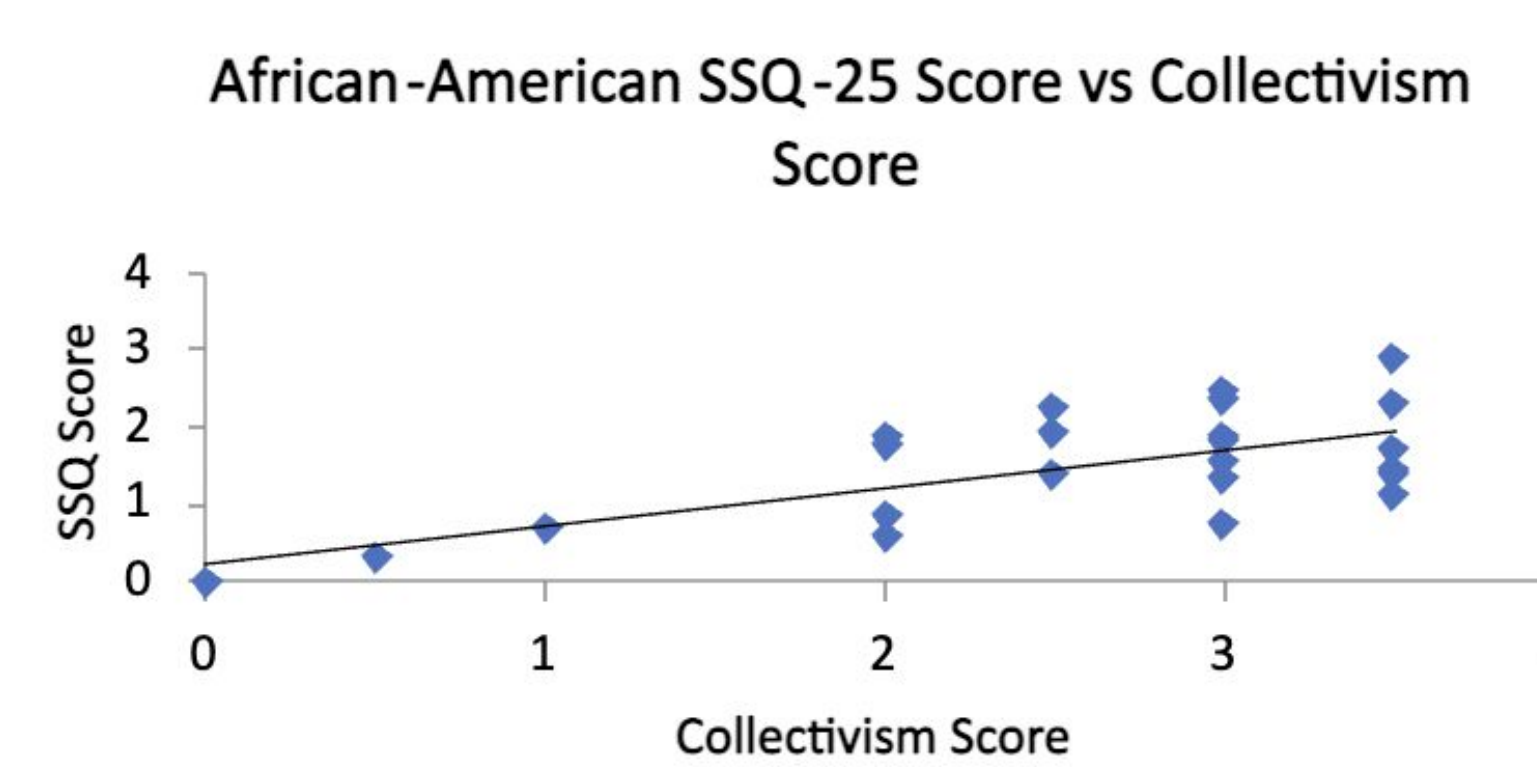
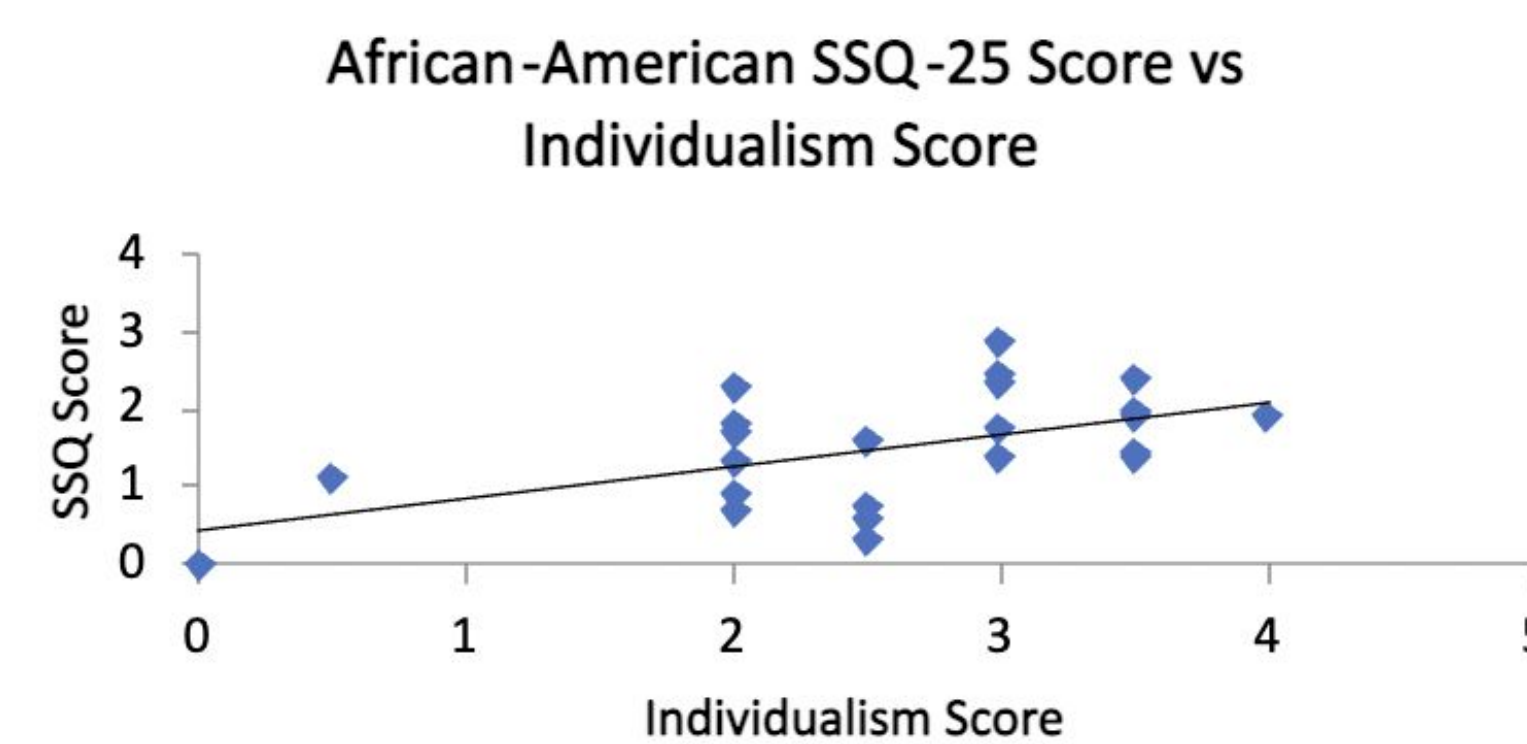
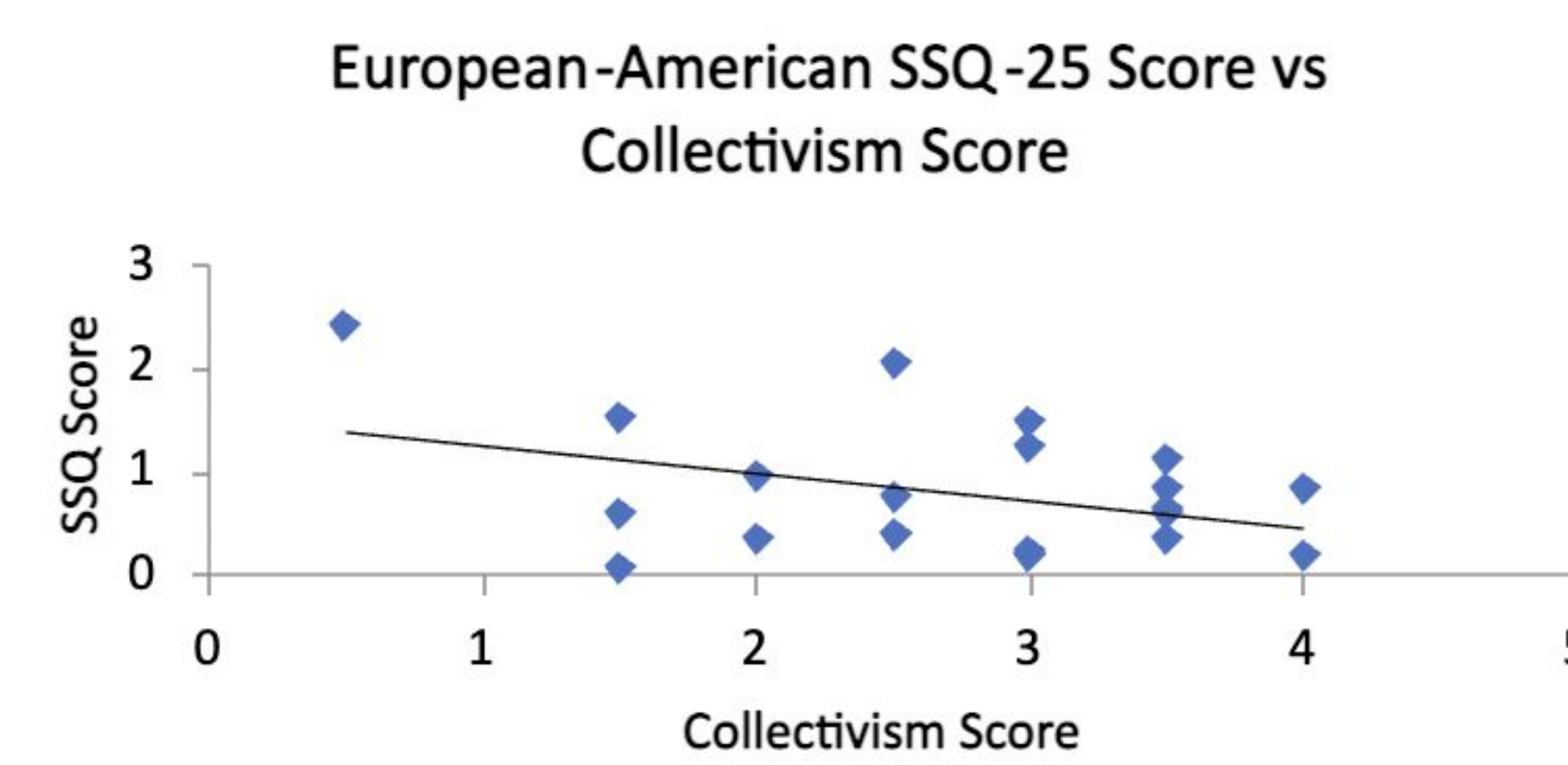
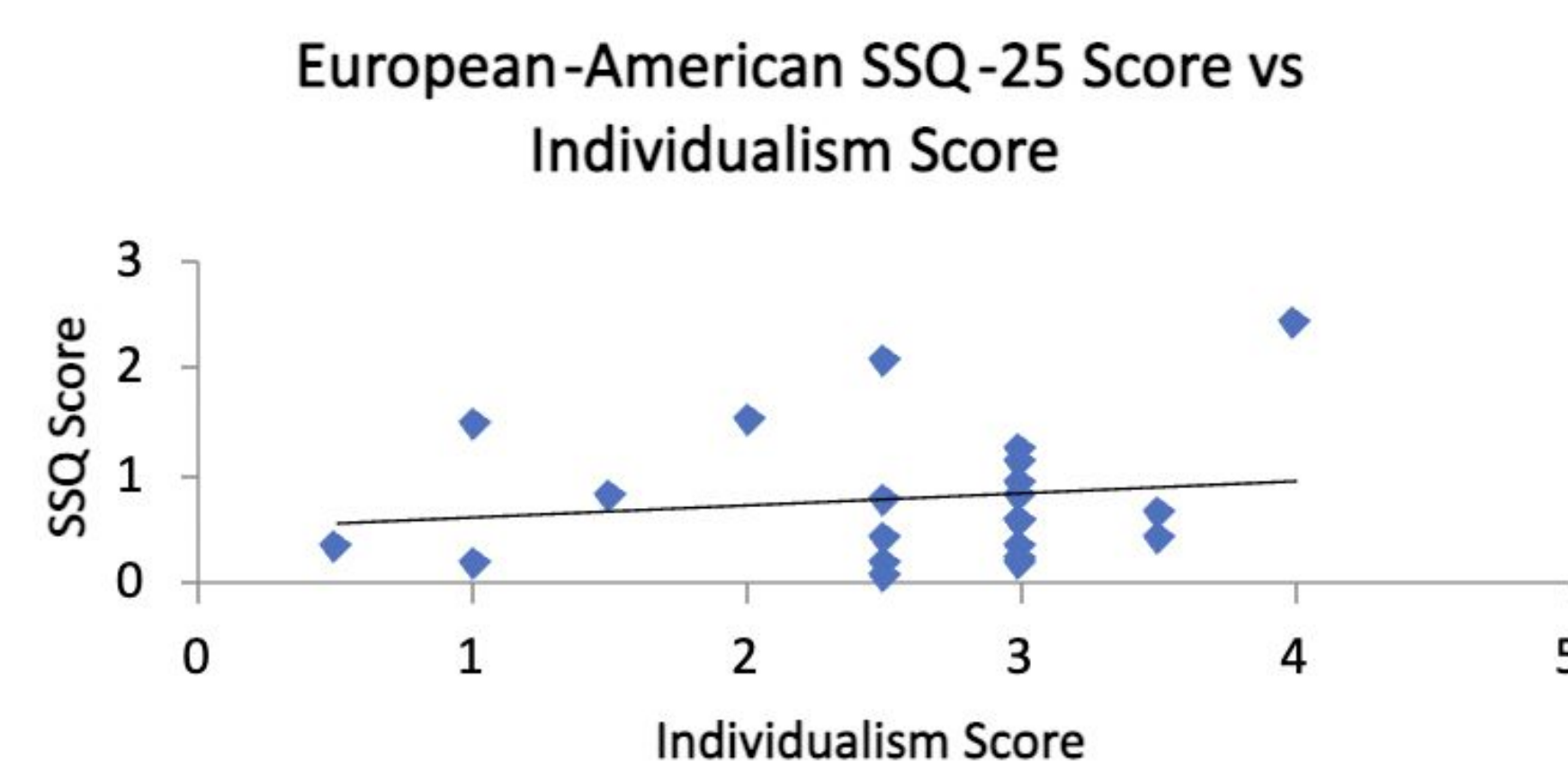
Methodology

We created a questionnaire on Qualtrics. We included 17 questions from the Subclinical Stressympton Questionnaire (SSQ-25) that assesses different stress symptoms. We asked students to rate their stress right before their last exam. We also included 4 questions from Triandis and Gelfand’s survey (1998) that was used to assess individualism and collectivism in a culture; two of the questions assessed individualism and two assessed collectivism. Each question was on a scale from “not at all” (which we counted as 0) to “very strong” (which we counted as 4).

We gave the questionnaire to African-American, Asian-American, and European-American students at Pitzer, Pomona, and Harvey Mudd College. We asked them to fill the questionnaire out in context of preparing for the most recent exam they took. From their results Then, we calculated the stress score (from SSQ-25), the individualism score, and collectivism score, all of which were out of 4. To calculate each score, we took the average of their answers with our scale.

	Average Individualism Score	Average Collectivism Score	Individualism Correlation Score	Collectivism Correlation Score	Average SSQ-25 Score
European - American	2.59	2.76	0.18	-0.15	1.17
African - American	2.54	2.54	0.56	0.65	1.51
Asian- American	2.52	2.86	0.27	-0.11	1.78

Table 1: Score from each cultural group



Results

From the results in Table 1, we have the average SSQ-25, Individualism, and Collectivism scores on a scale from 0 to 4. We also have the scores that correlate Individualism to SSQ-25 and Collectivism to SSQ-25 on a scale from -1.0 to 1.0.

Since all three Individualism Correlation scores are positive, that means there was a proportional relationship between Stress and Individualism for the students of all three cultural groups. This means that as a student scores higher on individualism, they also experience more stress before taking an exam. The Collectivism Correlation Score was also positive, which means that there was a proportional relationship between Stress and Collectivism for students of the African-American cultural group. However, the Collectivism Correlation Score for students of the European-American and Asian-American cultural groups was negative; this means that as a student from one of these cultures scores higher on collectivism, they score lower on stress.

Discussion

Our hypothesis was that African-American and Asian-American students, whose cultures are more collectivist will experience more stress than European-American students whose culture is more individualist due to the increased pressure of representing their communities and seeking their validation, pride, and approval.

Our results confirmed our hypothesis but disputed our assumptions related to which cultures were collectivist or individualist. Our assumption that because African-American students are from collectivist cultures, and would therefore score higher than White students from an individualist culture on collectivism, was not supported by the data. Not all students from collectivist communities reported a higher collectivism score relative to students from more individualist communities. African-American students had the lowest collectivism score out of the three culture groups while European-American students reported the second highest collectivism score. This could be two to the fact we did not include enough questions from the Triandis and Gelfand survey to accurately assess their collectivism and individualism, or Black students at a predominately white institution (PWI) or just Pomona College may lean away from their communities while White students are more communal.

Our hypothesis that students from the collectivist African-American and Asian-American cultures will score higher on the SSQ-25 than European-American students from individualist cultures was supported by the data, with collectivist students having significantly higher SSQ-25 scores than individualist ones. This suggests that our hypothesis of collectivist students feeling more pressures from carrying community pride and seeking it’s validation could be a factor that leads to higher academic stress. Both of these groups are also communities of color that face racial discrimination at PWIs, which could also play a factor in the higher SSQ scores.

Acknowledgements

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References ¹ <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634520500442236>