

Should you pursue your passion as a career? Cultural differences in the emphasis on passion in career decisions

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Summary

Are there cultural differences in the extent to which people believe they should follow their passion when pursuing a career? Three experiments demonstrated that people from the United States, which is a more independent culture, evaluate pursuing a passion as a career more favorably than those from Singapore, a less independent culture. When evaluating others who decided to pursue a passion (vs. a non-passion) as a career, Americans were more likely than Singaporeans to endorse this decision, and to expect subsequent positive outcomes, such as future success and fulfillment (Studies 1–3). This difference was due to Americans' stronger belief that passions are inherently motivating (Studies 1 and 2), and to Singaporeans' stronger belief that passions can be problematic at times, such as when they conflict with obligations (Studies 2 and 3). Moreover, the extent to which participants pursued a passion as a career in their own lives predicted their life satisfaction more strongly for Americans than for Singaporeans (Study 3). These findings challenge the idea that pursuing a passion is a universally valued career philosophy and instead suggest that it is culturally constructed.

KEYWORDS

career, culture, motivation, passion, self-construals

1 | INTRODUCTION

“Your work is going to fill a large part of your life, and the only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work. And the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you haven't found it yet, keep looking. Don't settle.” —Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple (2005)

“Pursuing one's passion... how American.” —*Crazy Rich Asians* (2018)

The injunction to “follow your passion” when pursuing a career is pervasive in Western cultures. Indeed, the notion is intuitively appealing: “If you do what you love, you will never work a day in your life,” as the saying goes. This idea implies that following one's passion will

provide limitless motivation, fulfillment, and even financial success, a notion popularized by books such as *Do What You Love, The Money Will Follow* (Sinetar, 1989). Thus, from this perspective, people who pursue a passion as their career—whether in music, science, computer programming, writing, or otherwise—would be making a wise decision that would set them on a trajectory for greater personal fulfillment and success than people whose career is not their passion.

As a general concept, a *passion* reflects intense positive feelings toward an activity (e.g., Baum & Locke, 2004; X. P. Chen et al., 2009) that one is motivated to engage in (P. Chen et al., 2021; Vallerand et al., 2003) and that is personally meaningful and integrated into one's identity (Cardon et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2017). The notion of passion can also apply to one's career, such that career or work passion “not only involves positive feelings toward work but also incorporates the work into one's identity” (Pollack et al., 2020, p. 2; see also Baum & Locke, 2004; Cardon

et al., 2009; Smilor, 1997). Previous studies have found that people are strongly motivated to pursue careers that align with their passions for particular fields, such as those in the arts or sciences (see Vallerand, 2015). However, most studies on passion have been conducted in Western cultural contexts (see Curran et al., 2015), in which people tend to have an independent model of self and agency. That is, good actions are considered those that are “self-focused” and “independent from others; follow from expressions of individual's preferences, intentions, and goals” (Markus & Kitayama, 2003, p. 7). Similarly, a passion involves intense personal interest and preference (see O'Keefe & Harackiewicz, 2017). Therefore, in more independent cultures, such as the United States, people may view passions as particularly motivating and rewarding and thus deeply value the pursuit of passion in their career decisions (P. Chen et al., 2015; Vallerand et al., 2003).

By contrast, in Asian cultures, the model of self and agency tends to be *less* independent (Markus & Kitayama, 2003). People's decisions are guided less by their personal preferences (Park et al., 2013; Savani et al., 2008) and more by pragmatic concerns (Leong, 1991; Louie, 2004; Min & Jang, 2015). Although Asians also tend to be more interdependent—that is, they are more responsive to the expectations of close others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003; Savani et al., 2012)—their weaker independent self-construals may be at odds with the pursuit of a passion.

Indeed, a passion—as conceptualized in the present research—is predominantly about the self rather than relationships. Although one can experience passion in relationships (e.g., romantic or work relationships), a passion for an *activity* tends to be more internal. In the current research, we focus exclusively on passion as a general concept and its relation to careers, not passion in relationships. Therefore, we reason that cultures that differ in independent self-construals would also differ in their views of pursuing a passion as a career. To that end, in the current research, we compared people from the relatively more independent culture of the United States (predominantly of European ethnicity) to people from the relatively less independent culture of Singapore (predominantly of Chinese ethnicity).

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Despite the explosion of research in cultural psychology over the past 30 years, few studies have examined cultural differences in evaluating the pursuit of a passion as a career. However, research on choice, values, and career motivations across cultures lends credence to our central hypothesis (e.g., Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Haslett & Leidel, 2015).

In Western cultures, people tend to act according to their likes and dislikes, motivations, and goals, and their choices are often based on their personal preferences (e.g., Miller & Bersoff, 1998; Savani et al., 2008; Savani et al., 2015). Personal preferences and choices are more intrinsically motivating to people from Western backgrounds (Hernandez & Iyengar, 2001; Iyengar & Lepper, 2002; Tripathi et al., 2018). In a classic study, Iyengar and Lepper (1999) gave European-American and Asian-American children the opportunity to

work on anagram puzzles during their free time. As an experimental manipulation, children were informed that the theme of the puzzles, such as animals or food, would be chosen either by the child based on their personal preference, by the experimenter, or by the child's mother. When chosen by the child, European-American children were most motivated and spent more of their free time working on the puzzles than Asian Americans, whereas Asian Americans were most motivated when their mother chose the puzzle. In a more recent study (Tripathi et al., 2018), European-American adults were more motivated to participate in a poster-rating task when the task instructions were framed to support their sense of autonomy and choice than when instructions induced a sense of obligation or were neutral in their framing. The opposite was true for people from an Asian culture, specifically Indians.

Most relevant to the present research, studies suggest that Westerners prioritize personal interests when choosing a career, whereas Asians are more likely to emphasize pragmatic concerns. Relative to students from China, American students were more likely to indicate that they valued creativity and personal satisfaction at work (e.g., Haslett & Leidel, 2015). Furthermore, Americans, but not Chinese, rated interest in their job as the characteristic that they valued most (Elizur et al., 1991; see Tang et al., 1999). Other studies have found that Asian Americans, and East Asians in general, tend to more strongly value pragmatic, extrinsic factors than European Americans, such as job security and good pay (Leong, 1991; Leong & Gupta, 2007). Indeed, this pragmatism helps explain why Asians are overrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields and underrepresented in the humanities (e.g., Louie, 2004; Min & Jang, 2015).

Although these findings are consistent with our central hypothesis that Westerners will more favorably evaluate pursuing a passion as a career than Asians, there are critical gaps in these literatures. The above research on career preferences did not examine passion itself, but rather tangential attributes, such as interest, preferences, and job satisfaction. Although relevant, passion is distinct from interest (see O'Keefe & Harackiewicz, 2017; Vallerand, 2017; Vallerand & Houliort, 2019), as passions are more personally important than interests and are incorporated into one's identity to a greater extent; further, people are often more intensely engaged with their passions than with their interests. Indeed, even people who are not pursuing a passion as a career could find their work interesting and be relatively satisfied with their job. Thus, whether cultures differ in how favorably they evaluate the pursuit of a passion as a career remains an open question. Moreover, *why* cultures might differ in this way remains unknown—this is a question that we discuss next.

2.1 | Explanations for cultural differences in the pursuit of a passion as a career

Why might Americans' evaluate pursuing a passion as a career more favorably than Singaporeans? Although multiple factors may be at play, we propose one important, theoretically driven factor: People's

beliefs about the nature and consequences of passion—specifically, the extent to which they believe that passions are motivating or problematic. Such beliefs may help explain cultural differences in the value people place on pursuing a passion as a career; however, these beliefs have received little empirical attention.

Western cultural contexts promote the view that passions are a source of motivation, inspiration, and reward (*passions-are-motivating beliefs*), and therefore, frame passion as highly desirable. For example, this idea is part of the independent cultural themes that many students are exposed to throughout college in the United States (Stephens et al., 2012). It is also commonly conveyed to graduating students during university commencement speeches (Duckworth, 2016). An analysis of every commencement speech given at the top 100 US colleges over a recent 10-year period showed that graduating students were often urged to do what they love or what they care about (Jachimowicz et al., 2017). In fact, American undergraduates often endorse the belief that pursuing a passion yields “limitless motivation” (O’Keefe et al., 2018).

By contrast, we propose that Asian cultures promote the belief that pursuing a passion can come at a cost (*passions-are-problematic beliefs*), and therefore, Asians would evaluate the pursuit of a passion less favorably than Americans. Because following one’s passion typically entails focusing on what one enjoys, passion could conflict with values of pragmatism, which are important in Asian cultures (Leong, 1991). For example, pursuing a passion could be perceived as conflicting with practical goals or obligations, such as job security and earning a good salary. Instead, Asians may view passions as idealistic and too narrowly focused—a poor yardstick for guiding critical career decisions.

2.2 | Implications for life satisfaction across cultures

Thus far, we have focused on whether and why cultures might differ in their evaluations of pursuing a passion as a career. Importantly, this cultural difference has implications for how pursuing a passion as a career shapes people’s life outcomes, such as their general life satisfaction. The stronger emphasis Westerners place on pursuing a passion as a career would imply that pursuing a passion-based career should result in higher life satisfaction. For Asians, however, this link may be weaker (although still positive) if they place less emphasis on pursuing a passion as a career. Such a finding would be both novel and consistent with the research on cultural differences in work values reviewed earlier (e.g., Elizur et al., 1991; Haslett & Leidel, 2015; Leong & Gupta, 2007).

3 | OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT RESEARCH

Across three studies, our central hypothesis was that Americans would evaluate the pursuit of a passion as a career (as compared to pursuing a passionless career) more favorably than would

Singaporeans. Whereas most previous studies on career passion were correlational and involved reporting one’s own career decisions, our central task used an experimental design examining perceptions of another person’s career decisions. This design enabled causal inferences and stronger experimental control. Furthermore, by evaluating another person, this approach enabled participants to apply their culturally based notions of passion, whether or not they personally had a passion. Our second set of hypotheses tested whether culturally based beliefs about passions in general, including *passions-are-motivating beliefs* (Studies 1 and 2) and *passions-are-problematic beliefs* (Studies 1–3), mediate cultural differences in the evaluation of pursuing a passion as a career. Our third hypothesis tested whether having pursued one’s own passion as a career relates more strongly to life satisfaction for Americans than Singaporeans (Study 3). After reporting our three studies, we conducted an aggregated analysis (a form of internal meta-analysis) across all three studies to examine the robustness of mediation results.

In all studies, we compared American citizens living in the United States to Singaporean citizens living in Singapore, a modernized Asian country where people tend to hold weaker independent self-construals than Americans (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010; Oyserman et al., 2002). We chose this comparison because, unlike Asian countries such as Japan, China, and Korea, the predominant language of Singapore is English, so our study materials would not get lost in translation. Moreover, the United States and Singapore have similar socioeconomic affordances that make it feasible to pursue a passion as a career. Both are relatively wealthy nations with strong, stable economies; thus, in general, people’s motivations for career decisions can extend beyond mere financial need. Furthermore, access to education is relatively high in both countries; education can facilitate opportunities and skills to pursue one’s chosen career path. Thus, our hypothesized cultural differences, if found, would not likely be attributable to socioeconomic differences determining the feasibility of pursuing a passion as a career.

Because we were interested in peoples’ culturally based values and lay beliefs about passion, we did not provide a definition of “passion” to participants in our studies. Importantly, however, we conducted a supplemental study that showed that Americans and Singaporeans define passion similarly—as something that a person loves, enjoys, puts energy into, considers important to their identity, and finds personally important and meaningful (see Section 2 of Supplemental Data and Analyses in the supporting information). As such, cultural differences in the emphasis on pursuing a passion as a career would not be due merely to cultural differences in how people define passion.

In all studies, the results were nearly identical with and without controlling for gender, age, or educational attainment. Therefore, we report all results without covariates.

4 | STUDY 1

We conducted an experiment in which participants evaluated a target individual who was described as either pursuing their passion as a

career or pursuing a career that did not reflect their passion. We predicted that, relative to Singaporeans, Americans would (a) more strongly endorse pursuing, and (b) expect more positive outcomes from pursuing a career that reflected their passion than a non-passion.

Furthermore, we assessed participants' general passions-are-motivating and passions-are-problematic beliefs, and tested whether these culturally based beliefs mediated the tendency for Americans to more favorably evaluate (i.e., endorse and expect positive outcomes from) a career that was a passion (vs. a non-passion) than Singaporeans. We focused on beliefs about passion in general (i.e., not career-related) as it captures the broader process by which culture likely shapes people's evaluations of pursuing a passion as a career. By shaping beliefs about passion in general (across contexts), culture might influence specific evaluations of a relevant situation, namely, passion in careers.

4.1 | Participants

To determine our sample size, and because we had not yet established an effect size, we began by assuming a small-to-medium effect size

($f = 0.175$), which is common in social psychological experiments (Richard et al., 2003). With $1-\beta = .80$ and $\alpha = .05$, a minimum of 259 participants were required to detect our central Culture \times Passion Condition effect. However, because the true effect was unknown, we recruited approximately double this amount.

Participant recruitment and survey administration was conducted by Qualtrics Panels (qualtrics.com/online-sample), a service that recruits survey respondents by partnering with major online panel providers throughout the world. Those panel providers maintain large pools of respondents who have previously agreed to be invited to complete online surveys for payment. Through this service, we obtained nationally representative samples on age and gender for both the United States and Singapore. We requested 500 participants, half from each culture, and received an additional 35 participants during the soft launch phase (i.e., test round) of data collection. After excluding 28 participants who failed the attention check (described below), the final sample comprised 507 participants (263 Americans; 50.8% female, $M = 47.38$ years old, $SD = 16.21$).

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of demographic variables (gender, age, ethnicity) as well as self-construals, broken down by culture. See Section 2 of Supplemental Data and Analyses in the supporting information for tests of cultural differences on these

TABLE 1 Self-construals and demographics broken down by culture (Studies 1–3)

	Study 1		Study 2		Study 3	
	USA	Singapore	USA	Singapore	USA	Singapore
Independent self-construals, M (SD)	5.13 (0.89)	4.90 (0.83)	5.06 (0.96)	4.82 (0.78)	5.32 (0.86)	4.82 (0.79)
Interdependent self-construals, M (SD)	4.62 (0.83)	4.70 (0.81)	4.60 (0.93)	4.63 (0.75)	4.81 (0.95)	4.69 (0.73)
Gender (%)						
Women	50.8	50.8	52.1	51.7	51.1	55.5
Men	49.2	49.2	47.4	48.3	49.2	44.5
Other	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Age, M (SD)	48.6 (16.2)	46.1 (16.1)	46.7 (15.8)	40.3 (13.7)	45.8 (17.0)	39.1 (13.1)
Education: College degree (%)						
Yes	46.8	51.6	40.6	51.0	61.7	64.0
No	53.2	48.4	59.4	49.0	38.3	36.0
Ethnicity (%)						
Black	10.3	0.0	7.8	0.5	7.2	0.5
Caucasian or White	77.6	0.8	82.3	0.5	81.8	0.0
Chinese	1.9	90.6	0.5	87.9	1.4	91.5
Indian	1.1	3.3	0.5	4.3	0.5	0.9
Japanese	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Indonesian	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5
Korean	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Latino or Hispanic	4.2	0.4	5.2	0.0	5.3	0.0
Malay	0.0	2.5	0.0	5.8	0.0	5.7
Middle Eastern	0.4	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.5
Other Asian	1.1	2.0	0.5	1.0	0.0	0.0
Other non-Asian	2.7	0.0	2.6	0.0	3.8	0.5

demographic variables for Studies 1–3. We assessed participants' self-construals primarily to ensure that our samples represented a more independent culture (United States) compared to a less independent culture (Singapore).

4.2 | Procedure

Online, participants first completed a brief prescreening questionnaire in which they reported their age, gender, country of citizenship, and confirmed their current country of residence. Those who were 21 years or older (as required by the lead author's university IRB), as well as citizens and current residents of their respective countries, met the eligibility criteria and immediately continued on to the study.

In order of presentation, the study comprised (a) assessments of passions-are-motivating beliefs and passions-are-problematic beliefs, (b) the scenario experiment in which participants were randomly assigned to evaluate an individual who was described as pursuing a career that either reflected their passion or a non-passion,

(c) assessments of independent and interdependent self-construals, and (d) demographic measures. The study was designed to address multiple research questions; we report only those measures and materials that were relevant to the present hypotheses.

4.3 | Measures and experimental materials

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations are in Table 2.

4.3.1 | Passions-are-motivating and passions-are-problematic beliefs

We designed these measures by elaborating on relevant questions from past research in which participants wrote about what happens after discovering a passion and what the experience of pursuing a new passion is like (O'Keefe et al., 2018, Study 4). Several of those questions focused on the potentially motivating and problematic nature of pursuing a passion.

TABLE 2 Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of study variables (Study 1)

	M (SD)	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Culture (1 = US, –1 = SG)	0.04 (1.00)	–										
2. Gender (1 = men, 0 = women)	0.49 (0.50)	.00	–									
3. Age	47.38 (16.21)	.08 [†]	–.10 [*]	–								
4. College education (1 = yes, 0 = no)	0.49 (0.50)	–.05	.25 ^{***}	–.11 [*]	–							
5. Passion condition (1 = with, –1 = no)	0.00 (1.00)	.03	.00	.02	.010	–						
6. Independent self-construals	5.02 (0.86)	.13 ^{**}	.17 ^{***}	.07	.12 ^{**}	.01	–					
7. Interdependent self-construals	4.66 (0.82)	–.05	.05	–.10 [*]	.04	–.01	.26 ^{***}	–				
8. Passions-are- motivating	3.52 (0.46)	.14 ^{**}	–.08	.13 ^{**}	.05	–.06	.35 ^{***}	.13 ^{**}	–			
9. Passions-are- problematic	3.25 (0.90)	–.18 ^{***}	.15 ^{**}	–.16 ^{***}	.10 [*]	.06	.09 [†]	.26 ^{***}	–.14 ^{**}	–		
10. Career endorsement	4.03 (0.62)	.13 ^{**}	–.02	.00	–.01	.29 ^{***}	.21 ^{***}	.11 [*]	.16 ^{***}	–.03	–	
11. Career expectancies	4.16 (0.72)	.06	–.03	–.07	.00	.35 ^{***}	.22 ^{***}	.25 ^{***}	.15 ^{**}	.21 ^{***}	.78 ^{***}	–

Abbreviations: SG, Singapore; US, United States.

[†] $p < .10$.

^{*} $p < .05$.

^{**} $p < .01$.

^{***} $p < .001$.

To assess passions-are-motivating beliefs, participants first rated how often, in their view, the experience of pursuing a passion feels *easy, motivating, inspiring, difficult, effortful, like a perfect fit, fulfilling, natural, and enjoyable* (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*).

To assess passions-are-problematic beliefs, participants rated their agreement with four statements: "Someone who intends to pursue their passion can be seen as too idealistic," "Pursuing one's passion conflicts with their obligations," "A passion gives people 'tunnel vision'," and "Pursuing one's passion is selfish" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*).

There was a small negative correlation between the two scales ($r(505) = -.14, p = .002$). We conducted confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) using Mplus 8.4 to further test discriminant validity of the two scales. The hypothesized 2-factor model fit the data better ($\chi^2_{(64)} = 342.77, p < .001$; RMSEA = .093, CFI = .872, SRMR = .079) compared to the 1-factor model that combined both scales ($\chi^2_{(65)} = 859.42, p < .001$; RMSEA = .155, CFI = .635, SRMR = .126), $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 516.65, p < .001$.¹ Thus, we averaged the passions-are-motivating items ($\alpha = .75$), and the passions-are-problematic items ($\alpha = .76$).

We report a supplemental study further demonstrating the discriminant validity of these measures, which are distinct from existing measures of passion, work motivation, and work beliefs (see Section 1 of Supplemental Data and Analyses in the supporting information).

4.3.2 | Scenario experiment

Participants were randomly assigned to read about someone who was pursuing a career that either reflected the target individual's passion or did not. To control for other factors that might influence career evaluations, two factors were held constant across the scenarios. First, the target in both conditions was portrayed as having just graduated from a good university, demonstrating enough competence to be gainfully employed. Second, the target was portrayed as needing income, although not financially burdened. This demonstrated that the target did not have financial disadvantages that would require them to focus solely on earning money (rendering passion irrelevant), nor major financial advantages (e.g., from parents) that would make pursuing a career, particularly a no-passion career, pointless or unnecessary. Specifically, those in the *with-passion condition* read the following description:

Imagine a person who is deeply passionate about their career field, and finds it exciting and personally fulfilling. This person just graduated from a good university with a bachelor's degree in the field they intend to pursue as a career. While this person has no student loans or dependents, they are just making ends meet.

Those in the *no-passion condition* read the following description:

Imagine a person who is not all that passionate about their career field, and does not find it exciting or

fulfilling—it's just the field in which they majored. This person just graduated from a good university with a bachelor's degree in the field they intend to pursue as a career. While this person has no student loans or dependents, they are just making ends meet.

4.3.3 | Evaluation of career pursuit in the scenario experiment

After reading the scenario, participants evaluated the target's career pursuit. Because existing measures have not examined decisions regarding pursuing a specific passion or a non-passion as a career, we designed measures for the purposes of this research by adapting and elaborating on items from research on evaluations of occupations and careers (e.g., Aiman-Smith et al., 2001; Casper & Buffardi, 2004; Yang & Barth, 2015). We assessed two types of evaluations, which used different rating scales. These were participants' endorsement of the targets' pursuit of the career (*career endorsement*) and the extent to which they expected that pursuing the career would lead to positive outcomes for the target (*career expectancies*).

For career endorsement, participants rated their agreement with four statements assessing whether the decision to pursue such a career would be *smart, wise, good, and delusional* (reverse-scored; 1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*), and a mean was calculated ($\alpha = .66$). Reliability for this composite was lower due to the *delusional* item ($\alpha = .76$ without it). However, results do not change whether the item is dropped or retained, so we retained it for completeness. For career expectancies, participants rated the likelihood that the target would feel fulfilled, be successful, feel happy in 10 years if they continued pursuing the career, and that their family would be happy with the decision to pursue this career (1 = *very unlikely*, 6 = *very likely*).² The ratings were averaged ($\alpha = .85$). CFAs showed that the a priori 2-factor model discriminating career endorsement from career expectancies fit the data better ($\chi^2_{(19)} = 85.92, p < .001$; CFI = .978, TLI = .968, RMSEA = .083, SRMR = .026) than the 1-factor model of all ratings ($\chi^2_{(20)} = 257.04, p < .001$; CFI = .922, TLI = .891, RMSEA = .153, SRMR = .039), $\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} = 171.11, p < .001$.

We note here that, to test a secondary hypothesis regarding how certainty of career success affects career decisions, participants made career-endorsement and career-expectancies ratings twice (once imagining the career pursuit with a low certainty of success and once imagining it with a high certainty). However, because this factor did not moderate our central effects, we averaged the ratings. See Section 2 of Supplemental Data and Analyses in the supporting information for details.

4.3.4 | Passion manipulation check and attention check

As a manipulation check, after participants read the scenario, we asked: "Recall the description of the person you just read. How passionate did

they seem about their career field?" (1 = *not at all passionate*, 5 = *extremely passionate*). It appeared on its own screen so that participants could not re-read the scenarios before rating. This item was also used as an attention check, such that anyone from the with-passion condition who rated the target a "1" (*not at all passionate*) would be excluded, as was anyone from the no-passion condition who rated the target a "5" (*extremely passionate*). This exclusion was implemented after data collection in Studies 1 and 2 but was done a priori in Study 3.

4.3.5 | Independent and interdependent self-construals

Participants completed an abbreviated version (due to time considerations; see Section 1 of Supplemental Materials in the supporting information) of the validated Self-Construals Scale (Singelis, 1994). We selected six independent and six interdependent items from the original scale on the basis of their relatively high factor loadings, as reported in Singelis (1994), and their face validity. Participants rated their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*) with each item for the independent scale ($\alpha = .75$) and interdependent scale ($\alpha = .68$).

4.3.6 | Demographics

Participants reported their gender (male, female, or other; no one selected 'other') and their age. For educational attainment, participants were asked whether they had a university degree (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*). Finally, participants indicated their ethnicity.

4.4 | Results

4.4.1 | Preliminary analyses

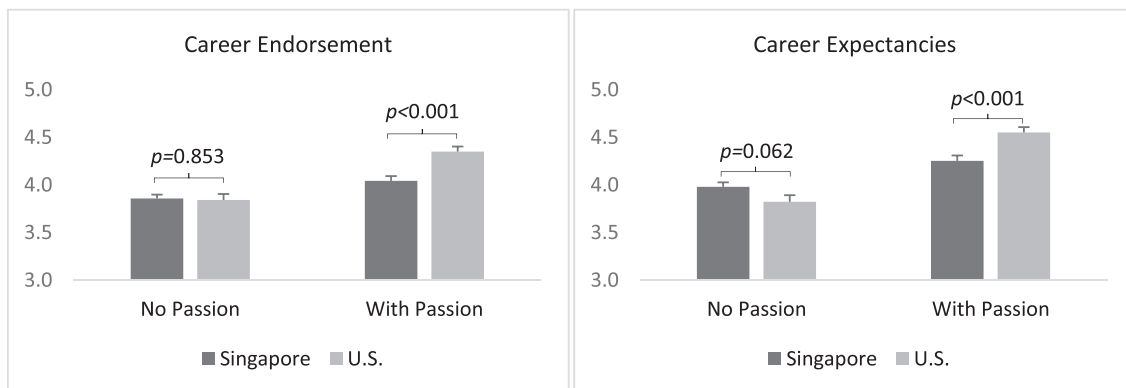
As shown in Table 1, Americans were significantly higher in independent self-construals than Singaporeans, $t(505) = 2.99$, $p = .003$,

$d = 0.27$. However, Americans did not differ from Singaporeans on interdependent self-construals, $t(505) = 1.03$, $p = .305$, consistent with some past research (Oyserman et al., 2002; see also Tsai et al., 2006). Our primary focus was on independent self-construals, as independence is particularly relevant to our hypotheses about evaluating the pursuit of a passion. We also tested condition differences on the passion manipulation check. As expected, the with-passion target was perceived as more passionate about their career ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.76$) than the no-passion target ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.12$), $t(504) = 11.82$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.06$ (one participant skipped the question).

4.4.2 | Central analysis

For our central analyses, we used moderated multiple regression to examine both outcomes. Figure 1 shows the simple effects of culture within condition and Table 3 presents results of the analysis. For the career-endorsement outcome, supporting our central hypothesis, there was a significant Culture \times Passion Condition interaction (see Table 3 and Figure 1). Tests of the simple effects showed that Americans endorsed the with-passion career ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.63$) more strongly than did Singaporeans ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 0.52$), whereas there was no difference in the no-passion condition between Americans ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.69$) and Singaporeans ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.47$). Main effects of Culture and Passion Condition showed that career endorsement was higher among Americans than among Singaporeans, and higher in the with-passion (vs. no-passion) condition.

For the career-expectancies outcome, supporting our central hypothesis, the Culture \times Passion Condition interaction was significant (see Table 3 and Figure 1). Americans had more positive expectancies for pursuing a with-passion career ($M = 4.55$, $SD = 0.68$) relative to Singaporeans ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.62$), but for the no-passion career, Americans showed marginally less positive expectancies ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.79$) than Singaporeans ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.55$). Additionally, a main effect of Passion Condition showed more positive career expectancies in the with-passion condition as compared to the no-passion condition.



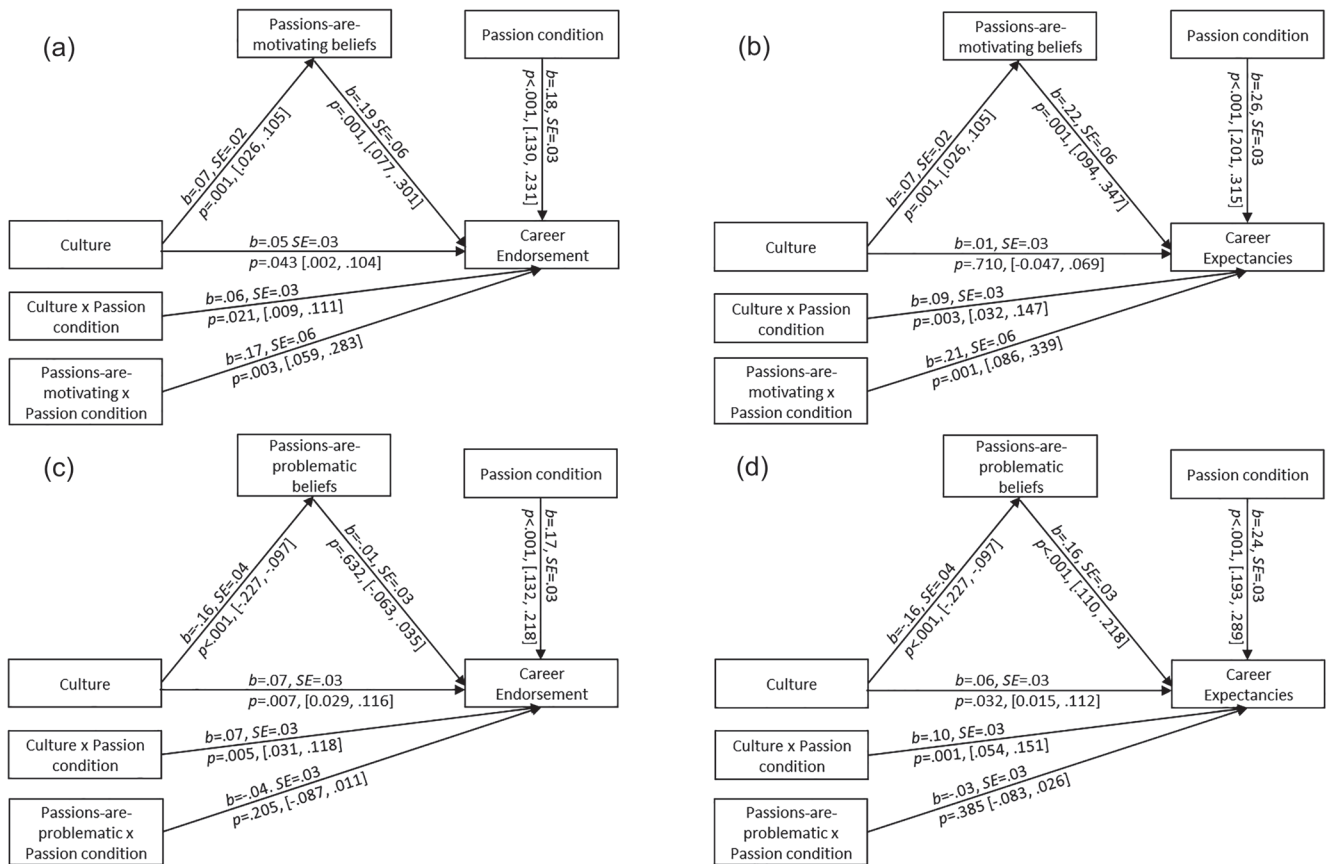
Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

FIGURE 1 Cultural Differences in Career Evaluations as a Function of Passion Condition (Study 1)

TABLE 3 Analysis of career evaluation composites (Study 1)

	Career endorsement				Career expectancies			
	b	SE	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	b	SE	p	95% CI [LL, UL]
Culture	.07	.03	.005	[.022, .125]	.04	.03	.231	[-.023, .094]
Passion condition	.17	.03	<.001	[.123, .225]	.25	.03	<.001	[.192, .308]
Culture × Passion condition	.08	.03	.002	[.029, .132]	.11	.03	<.001	[.056, .172]
Simple effects of culture within condition:								
With passion	.15	.04	<.001	[.081, .226]	.15	.04	<.001	[.067, .231]
No passion	-.01	.04	.853	[-.079, .066]	-.08	.04	.062	[-.160, .004]

Note: Culture was coded as -1 = Singapore, 1 = US. Passion condition was coded as -1 = No passion, 1 = With passion. *bs* are unstandardized regression coefficients. *SE* is standard error. 95% CI [LL, UL] is 95% confidence interval [lower limit, upper limit].



Note. Culture was coded as -1=Singapore, 1=U.S. Passion condition was coded as -1=No passion, 1=With passion. *bs* are unstandardized regression coefficients. *SE*=standard error. Bracketed numbers are 95% confidence intervals. Passions-are-motivating and passions-are-problematic beliefs were centered prior to analysis.

FIGURE 2 Moderated mediation of career evaluations by passions-are-motivating beliefs and passions-are-problematic beliefs (Study 1)

4.4.3 | Mediators of cultural differences

As predicted, Americans were significantly higher on passions-are-motivating beliefs ($M = 3.58, SD = 0.45$) than Singaporeans ($M = 3.45, SD = 0.46$), $t(505) = 3.25, p = .001, d = 0.29$. Also as predicted, Singaporeans were higher on passions-are-problematic beliefs ($M = 3.42, SD = 0.83$) than Americans ($M = 3.09, SD = 0.94$), $t(505) = 4.09, p < .001, d = 0.36$. Because these two beliefs

(negatively) correlated with each other (Table 2), we tested them in separate mediation models to avoid multicollinearity.

First, did higher passions-are-motivating beliefs mediate the tendency for Americans to more favorably evaluate a with-passion over a no-passion career, relative to Singaporeans? We conducted a moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 15 in SPSS.

Figure 2 presents the results of the analysis. As shown in panels (a) and (b), Americans held stronger passions-are-motivating beliefs

than Singaporeans, which, in turn, predicted more positive career evaluations of a with-passion career over a no-passion career (i.e., significant Passions-are-Motivating \times Passion Condition interactions). The index of moderated mediation was significant for both career endorsement, 95% CI [0.005, 0.046] and career expectancies, 95% CI [0.007, 0.054]. Thus, as expected, stronger passions-are-motivating beliefs helped explain why Americans evaluated pursuing a with-passion (vs. no-passion) career more favorably than Singaporeans.

Second, did Singaporeans' higher passions-are-problematic beliefs mediate their tendency to evaluate a with-passion over a no-passion career less favorably, relative to Americans? Contrary to predictions, the indirect effect was not significant (see panels (c) and (d) of Figure 2). Thus, in this study, viewing passions as problematic did not help explain cultural differences in career evaluations.

Finally, given that self-construals are known to underlie cultural variation in motivation and cognition (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2003), do independent self-construals help explain cultural differences in beliefs about passion and, in turn, career evaluations? (As reported above, interdependent self-construals were not examined here because they did not differ by culture.) Supplemental analyses showed that, as expected, Americans' stronger independent self-construals predicted higher passions-are-motivating beliefs, which, in turn, helped explain their greater endorsement and expectancies for the with-passion (vs. no-passion) career, relative to Singaporeans (see Section 2 of Supporting Data and Analyses in the supporting information for results). However, the pathway through independent self-construals, and then through passions-are-problematic beliefs, was not significant.

4.5 | Discussion

Study 1 found that Americans both endorsed pursuing a passion as a career more than Singaporeans, and that they expected better outcomes, such as happiness and success. We also tested potential explanations for these cultural differences. Americans viewed passions as more motivating than Singaporeans, whereas Singaporeans viewed passions as more problematic. These differences are interesting in their own right, pointing to the diverging ways Americans and Singaporeans perceive passions in general. However, only higher passions-are-motivating beliefs emerged as a significant mediator of cultural differences in career evaluations. Finally, supplemental analyses showed that higher independent self-construals helped explain why Americans had stronger passions-are-motivating beliefs and, therefore, evaluated pursuing a passion as a career more favorably than Singaporeans.

5 | STUDY 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate Study 1 with a more precise control condition. This improved precision was intended to reduce

error variance, increasing power to detect mediation through passions-are-problematic beliefs, which was not found in Study 1.

5.1 | Participants and procedure

The average effect size for our central effect of Culture \times Passion Condition on career evaluations was $f = 0.154$, which requires a minimum of 333 participants to detect ($1 - \beta = .80$ and $\alpha = .05$). We requested 400 participants from Qualtrics and received 419 (including the soft-launch), none of whom had participated in Study 1. After excluding 20 participants who failed the attention check, the final sample was 399 (192 Americans; 52.0% female, $M = 43.40$ years old). See Table 1 for demographics and self-construals broken down by culture.

The prescreening procedure was identical to Study 1 and the main study contained the same assessments from Study 1 with minor clarifications (see below).

5.2 | Measures and experimental materials

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of measures appear in Table 4.

5.2.1 | Passions-are-motivating and passions-are-problematic beliefs

Passions-are-motivating beliefs were the same as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .73$). Passions-are-problematic beliefs were also the same as in Study 1, except that we simplified the idealism item to "Someone who pursues their passion is too idealistic" ($\alpha = .77$).

5.2.2 | Scenario experiment

The descriptions of the target individual in the with-passion and no-passion conditions were nearly identical to Study 1 except that in the no-passion condition, the target was described as feeling "neutral" rather than "not all that passionate" about their career. Clarifying the target's feelings more precisely provided a better control condition, as being "not all that passionate" could be perceived as a range of feelings from neutral to somewhat positive.

5.2.3 | Evaluation of career pursuit in the scenario experiment

The career-endorsement scale was simplified to include only the *smart* and *wise* items from Study 1 (the *good* and *delusional* items from Study 1 were not assessed as they were less central to the construct). The items were averaged ($\alpha = .82$). Participants then rated the same career-

TABLE 4 Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of study variables (Study 2)

	<i>M (SD)</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Culture (1 = US, -1 = SG)	-0.04 (1.00)	—										
2. Gender (1 = men, 0 = women)	0.48 (0.50)	-.01	—									
3. Age	43.40 (15.05)	.21***	.01	—								
4. Education (1 = college, 0 = no college)	0.46 (0.50)	-.10*	.13*	-.03	—							
5. Passion condition (1 = with, -1 = no)	0.01 (1.00)	.00	-.04	.04	.05	—						
6. Independent self-construals	4.94 (0.88)	.13**	.11*	.12*	.09†	.03	—					
7. Interdependent self-construals	4.62 (0.84)	-.02	.10*	.03	.11*	.06	.24***	—				
8. Passions-are-motivating	3.56 (0.47)	.12*	-.09†	.11*	.04	-.01	.40***	.18***	—			
9. Passions-are-problematic	3.15 (0.95)	-.12*	.20***	-.11*	.20***	.04	-.03	.24***	-.11†	—		
10. Career endorsement	4.19 (0.87)	.05	.10†	-.01	.04	.46***	.21***	.33***	.17***	.08	—	
11. Career expectancies	4.09 (0.86)	-.01	.05	-.01	.04	.48***	.16**	.32***	.18***	.11*	.83***	—

Abbreviations: SG, Singapore; US, United States.

† $p < .10$.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

expectancies items assessed in Study 1, which were averaged ($\alpha = .85$). As in Study 1, participants rated the careers twice (under conditions of low- and high-certainty of success), but we once again averaged across ratings because certainty-of-success did not moderate the effects.

5.2.4 | Passion manipulation check and attention check

We used the same measures as in Study 1.

5.2.5 | Independent and interdependent self-construals

We used the same measures as in Study 1 (independent scale: $\alpha = .74$; interdependent scale: $\alpha = .71$).

5.3 | Results

5.3.1 | Preliminary analyses

As in Study 1, Americans were significantly higher in independent self-construals than Singaporeans, $t(397) = 2.65$, $p = .008$, $d = 0.26$,

whereas the cultures did not differ on interdependent self-construals, $t < 1$.

Furthermore, as in Study 1, our passion manipulation was effective. The with-passion target was perceived as more passionate about their career ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.85$) than the no-passion target ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 0.97$), $t(397) = 14.06$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.41$.

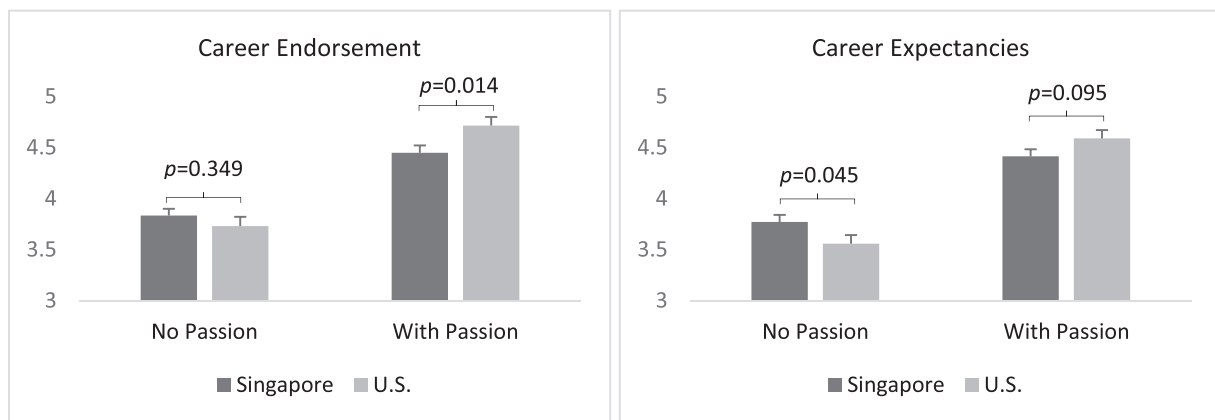
5.3.2 | Central analysis

We tested our central hypotheses in the same way as Study 1. Supporting our predictions, there was a significant Culture \times Passion Condition interaction for career endorsement and career expectancies (see Table 5). Figure 3 illustrates that, in the with-passion condition, Americans reported stronger career endorsement ($M = 4.72$, $SD = 0.81$) than Singaporeans ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.74$), and Americans reported marginally higher career expectancies ($M = 4.59$, $SD = 0.81$) than Singaporeans ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.69$). For the no-passion condition, there was no difference between Americans ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.86$) and Singaporeans ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.65$) on career endorsement. However, Americans had significantly less favorable expectancies ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.80$) than Singaporeans ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.69$). Finally, the main effect of passion condition

TABLE 5 Analysis of career evaluation composites (Study 2)

	Career endorsement				Career expectancies			
	b	SE	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	b	SE	p	95% CI [LL, UL]
Culture	.04	.04	.286	[−.035, .117]	−.01	.04	.805	[−.083, .064]
Passion condition	.40	.04	<.001	[.324, .475]	.42	.04	<.001	[.345, .492]
Culture × Passion condition	.09	.04	.017	[.017, .168]	.10	.04	.010	[.024, .171]
Simple effects of culture within condition:								
With passion	.13	.05	.014	[.027, .240]	.09	.05	.095	[−.015, .192]
No passion	−.05	.05	.349	[−.159, .056]	−.11	.05	.045	[−.212, −.002]

Note: Culture was coded as $-1 =$ Singapore, $1 =$ US. Passion condition was coded as $-1 =$ No passion, $1 =$ With passion. *bs* are unstandardized regression coefficients. *SE* is standard error. 95% CI [LL, UL] is 95% confidence interval [lower limit, upper limit].



Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

FIGURE 3 Cultural differences in career evaluations as a function of passion condition (Study 2)

showed that career endorsement and career expectancies were higher overall in the with-passion than in the no-passion condition.

5.3.3 | Mediators of cultural differences

Consistent with Study 1, passions-are-motivating beliefs were significantly higher among Americans ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.52$) than Singaporeans ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.42$, $t(397) = 2.47$, $p = .014$, $d = 0.25$). By contrast, passions-are-problematic beliefs were higher among Singaporeans ($M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.82$) than Americans ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.06$), $t(397) = 2.50$, $p = .013$, $d = 0.25$).

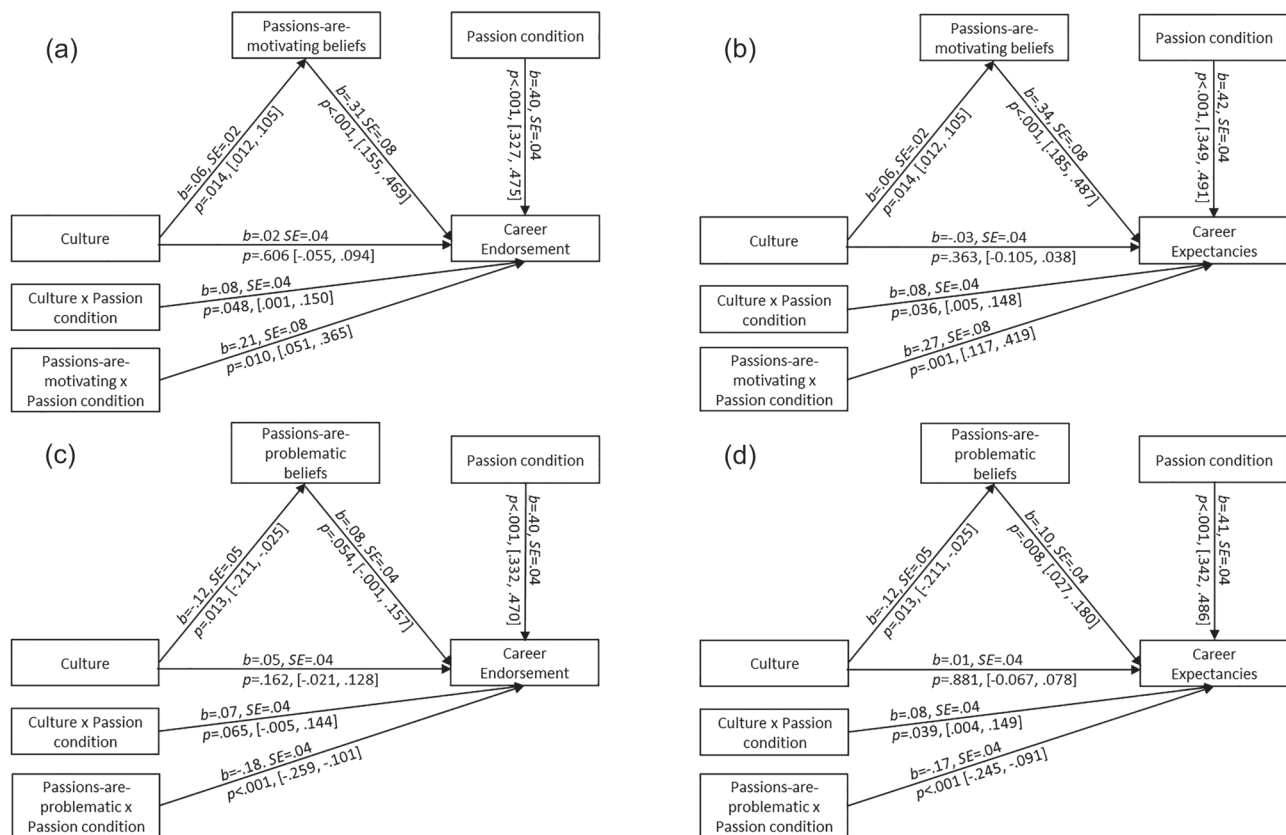
We performed the same moderated mediation analysis as in Study 1. As shown in Figure 4, and replicating Study 1, Americans held stronger passions-are-motivating beliefs than Singaporeans, and those stronger beliefs predicted more favorable career evaluations of a with-passion career over a no-passion career. The index of moderated mediation was significant for career endorsement, 95% CI [0.002, 0.053] and for career expectancies, 95% CI [0.005, 0.064]. Thus, believing that passions are more motivating helped explain why, compared to Singaporeans, Americans had more favorable evaluations for pursuing a with-passion (vs. no passion) career.

As shown in Figure 4, Singaporeans held stronger passions-are-problematic beliefs than Americans did, and those beliefs predicted less favorable evaluations of pursuing a with-passion (vs. no-passion) career. The index of moderated mediation was significant for both career endorsement, 95% CI [0.007, 0.088], and career expectancies, 95% CI [0.007, 0.084].

We tested the same moderated serial mediation with self-construals as described in Study 1, and replicated the results and patterns (see Section 2 of Supplemental Data and Analyses in the supporting information). Once again, stronger independent self-construals explained why Americans held higher passions-are-motivating beliefs and, therefore, greater endorsement and expectancies for the with-passion (vs. no-passion) career, relative to Singaporeans. Consistent with Study 1, the pathway through independent self-construals, and then through passions-are-problematic beliefs was not significant.

5.4 | Discussion

In Study 2, we once again found that, relative to Singaporeans, Americans more strongly endorsed pursuing, and expected better outcomes



Note. Culture was coded as -1=Singapore, 1=U.S. Passion condition was coded as -1=No passion, 1=With passion. *bs* are unstandardized regression coefficients. *SE*=standard error. Bracketed numbers are 95% confidence intervals. Passions-are-motivating and passions-are-problematic beliefs were centered prior to analysis.

FIGURE 4 Moderated mediation of career evaluations by passions-are-motivating beliefs and passions-are-problematic beliefs (Study 2)

for, a career for which a passion was pursued over one where there was no passion. Moreover, stronger passions-are-motivating beliefs helped explain why Americans more favorably evaluated pursuing a passion as a career, while stronger passions-are-problematic beliefs helped explain why Singaporeans evaluated pursuing a passion as a career less favorably. In Study 1, we did not find mediation via passions-are-problematic beliefs; however, the greater precision of our control condition may have accounted for why we detected it in Study 2. To support this mediation, we sought to replicate it in Study 3. Furthermore, supplemental analyses again showed that independent self-construals helped explain the tendency for Americans to believe passions are more motivating than Singaporeans, and in turn, American's more favorable evaluations of pursuing a passion.

6 | STUDY 3

Study 3 extends Studies 1 and 2 in several ways. First, in seeking to replicate our central experimental findings, we performed an a priori, rather than post hoc, exclusion of participants who failed the attention check in the scenario experiment (see below). A priori exclusions are more scientifically rigorous because they remove the

possibility that researchers selectively exclude participants in order to report more desirable results (see Simmons et al., 2011).

Moreover, we addressed a potential confound in the scenario experiment; that the tendency for Americans to evaluate the pursuit of with-passion careers more favorably than Singaporeans was due merely to elevated judgments of the target's competence rather than the target's level of passion. Therefore, we assessed perceptions of the target's competence and tested whether cultural differences remained when controlling for perceived competence.

Finally, we extended our investigation to participants' own careers, rather than only a hypothetical person. If pursuing a passion as a career is considered better and more fulfilling for Americans (vs. Singaporeans), then their own life satisfaction may depend more on whether they are personally pursuing a passion in their careers.³ We asked currently employed participants to report the degree to which they were pursuing their passion as a career and, in a separate questionnaire, to rate their current life satisfaction. This enabled us to test two additional hypotheses: (a) whether the degree to which employed participants pursue their passion as a career more strongly predicts life satisfaction for Americans than for Singaporeans, and (b) whether Americans are more likely to pursue their passion as a career in the first place (P. Chen et al., 2020).

TABLE 6 Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of study variables (Study 3)

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Culture (1 = US, -1 = SG)	0.00 (1.00)	—									
2. Gender (1 = men, 0 = women)	.02	—									
3. Age	42.43 (15.51)	.22**	—								
4. Education (1 = college, 0 = no college)	0.63 (0.48)	-.02	.12*	—							
5. Passion condition (1 = with, -1 = no)	0.00 (1.00)	-.01	.05	.02	—						
6. Independent self-construals	5.07 (0.86)	.29***	.14**	.09†	.05	—					
7. Interdependent self-construals	4.75 (0.85)	.07	.15**	-.05	-.03	.24***	—				
8. Passions-are-problematic	3.30 (0.92)	-.19***	.19**	-.25***	.04	-.04	.29***	—			
9. Career endorsement	4.10 (1.11)	.06	.15**	-.01	.41***	.21***	.12*	.18***	—		
10. Career expectancies	3.96 (1.03)	.01	.15**	-.05	.44***	.21***	.13*	.21***	.74***	—	
11. Level of own career passion	3.33 (1.12)	.18***	.19**	.07	-.02	.33***	.32***	.11*	.14*	.15**	—
12. Satisfaction with life scale	4.58 (1.35)	.28***	.11*	.14*	.22***	.49***	.41***	.18**	.26***	.32***	.54***

Abbreviations: SG, Singapore; US, United States.

* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.*** $p < .001$.

6.1 | Participants and procedure

Following Study 2, we requested 400 participants from Qualtrics Online Panel Service, and received a total of 420 with the soft-launch (209 Americans; 54.5% female, $M = 42.43$ years old; see Table 1). None had participated in Studies 1 or 2.

The assessments and procedure were similar to Studies 1 and 2 with a few exceptions. First, we did not assess passions-are-motivating beliefs. Its significant mediating role had been supported in both Studies 1 and 2, so we freed space for new assessments (see below).

Second, the a priori exclusion of participants who failed the attention check was implemented during the scenario experiment, using the same criteria as Studies 1 and 2. Those who failed the check were automatically terminated from the study at that point and replaced by new participants. This was followed by the new perceived competence measure.

Subsequently, employed participants completed measures that, together, assessed the extent to which pursuing their passion as a career predicted their life satisfaction. Finally, participants completed the same demographic items as in Studies 1 and 2.

6.2 | Measures and experimental materials

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations appear in Table 6.

6.2.1 | Independent and interdependent self-construals

We used the same measures as in Studies 1 and 2 (independent scale: $\alpha = .70$; interdependent scale: $\alpha = .75$).

6.2.2 | Passions-are-problematic beliefs

We used the same measures as in Study 2 ($\alpha = .79$), except for minor revisions to clarify the obligations item, which became "Pursuing one's passion causes people to neglect their obligations."

6.2.3 | Scenario experiment

The materials were virtually identical to those used in Study 2 except that participants only evaluated the low-certainty version of the career. This was done because the certainty-of-success factor did not emerge as a moderator in Studies 1 and 2, and the low-certainty framing was most relevant to our primary hypotheses.

6.2.4 | Evaluation of career pursuit in the scenario experiment

We used the same two career-endorsement items, $r(418) = .85$, $p < .001$, and four career-expectancies items ($\alpha = .84$) as in Study 2.

6.2.5 | Passion manipulation check

We used the same measures as in Studies 1 and 2.

6.2.6 | Perceived competence

Participants rated "Recall the description of the person you just read. How competent did they seem?" (1 = *slightly or not at all competent*, 5 = *extremely competent*).

6.2.7 | Life satisfaction as predicted by pursuing one's passion as a career

Three-hundred-eighteen participants who indicated that they were currently employed (272 full-time, 46 part-time; 63.6% of Americans, 87.7% of Singaporeans) completed this assessment. They rated "In taking your current job, to what extent were you following your passion?" and "Overall, how passionate are you about your job?" (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*). The items were highly correlated, $r(316) = .74$, $p < .001$, and averaged into a composite.

They also completed the 5-item Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), rating statements such as "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life" and "I am satisfied with my life" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*). The items were averaged ($\alpha = .92$).

6.3 | Results

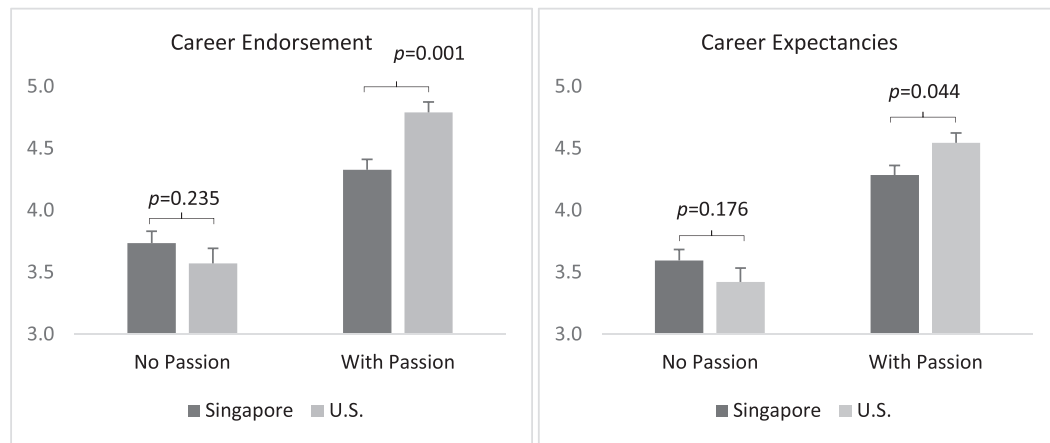
6.3.1 | Preliminary analyses

As in Studies 1 and 2, Americans had significantly stronger independent self-construals than Singaporeans, $t(418) = 6.17$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.60$, whereas the cultures did not differ on interdependent self-construals, $t(418) = 1.38$, $p = .170$, $d = 0.13$.

Furthermore, as in Studies 1 and 2, our passion manipulation was effective. The with-passion target was perceived as more passionate about their career field ($M = 4.28$, $SD = 0.73$) than the no-passion target ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 1.09$), $t(418) = 20.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.05$.

6.3.2 | Central analysis

Our central hypothesis was tested the same way as in Studies 1 and 2. Replicating Studies 1 and 2, there was a significant Culture \times Passion Condition interaction for both the career-endorsement and career-expectancies outcomes (see Figure 5 and Table 7). In the with-passion condition, Americans showed stronger career endorsement ($M = 4.79$, $SD = 0.85$) than Singaporeans ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.87$) and Americans had more favorable career expectancies ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.82$) than Singaporeans ($M = 4.29$,



Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

FIGURE 5 Cultural differences in career evaluations as a function of passion condition (Study 3)

TABLE 7 Analysis of career evaluation composites (Study 3)

	Career endorsement				Career expectancies			
	b	SE	p	95% CI [LL, UL]	b	SE	p	95% CI [LL, UL]
Culture	.07	.05	.128	[-.022, .171]	.02	.05	.637	[-.068, .110]
Passion condition	.45	.05	<.001	[.357, .549]	.45	.05	<.001	[.364, .542]
Culture × passion condition	.16	.05	.001	[.061, .254]	.11	.05	.017	[.019, .197]
Simple effects of culture within condition:								
With passion	.23	.07	.001	[.096, .368]	.13	.06	.044	[.004, .255]
No passion	-.08	.07	.235	[-.219, .054]	-.09	.06	.176	[-.212, .039]

Note: Culture was coded as $-1 =$ Singapore, $1 =$ US. Passion condition was coded as $-1 =$ No passion, $1 =$ With passion. *bs* are unstandardized regression coefficients. *SE* is standard error. 95% CI [LL, UL] is 95% confidence interval [lower limit, upper limit].

$SD = 0.79$). In the no-passion condition, Americans did not differ on career endorsement ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.26$) from Singaporeans ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.98$), nor did Americans differ on career expectancies ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.15$) from Singaporeans ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.90$). Finally, there were main effects of condition, such that both career evaluations were higher in the with-passion (vs. no-passion) condition.

Were these patterns due to inferences of greater competence in the with-passion targets instead of greater passion as we intended? To test this, we conducted our central analysis while controlling for perceived competence and its interaction with culture. As expected, the central Culture × Passion Condition effect remained for both the career endorsement ($p < .001$) and the career expectancies ($p = .006$) outcomes. The Culture × Perceived Competence interaction was non-significant for both outcomes, $ps > .250$.

6.3.3 | Mediation via passions-are-problematic beliefs

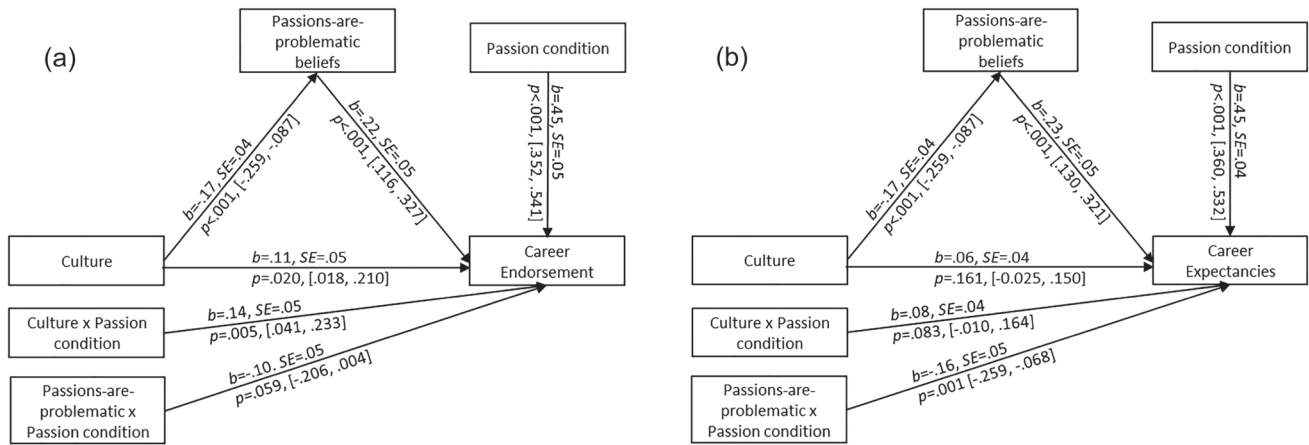
Replicating Studies 1 and 2, Singaporeans held stronger passions-are-problematic beliefs ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.66$) than Americans did ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.09$), $t(418) = 3.94$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.38$. We then performed the same moderated mediation analysis as in Studies 1 and 2.

As shown in Figure 6, for career endorsement, relative to the no-passion career, stronger passions-are-problematic beliefs marginally predicted weaker endorsement for pursuing a passion as a career ($p = .059$). The index of moderated mediation was marginal, 90% CI [0.002, 0.075]. With regard to career expectancies, relative to the no-passion career, stronger passions-are-problematic beliefs significantly predicted worse career expectancies for a with-passion career. The index of moderated mediation was significant, 95% CI [0.015, 0.110]. These results generally demonstrate mediation, replicating Study 2 but not Study 1. We, therefore, examined the reliability of this mediation across studies in the aggregated analysis below.

Finally, consistent with Studies 1 and 2, the serial pathway from culture to career evaluations through independent self-construals then passions-are-problematic beliefs was not significant (see Section 2 of Supplemental Data and Analyses in the supporting information).

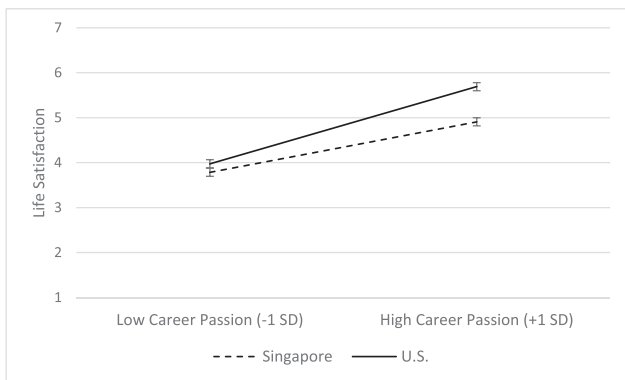
6.3.4 | Implications for life satisfaction

Were Americans more likely to have actually pursued their passion as a career in their current employment? Indeed, Americans reported that they were pursuing their passion as a career ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.12$)



Note. Culture was coded as -1=Singapore, 1=U.S. Passion condition was coded as -1=No passion, 1=With passion. *bs* are unstandardized regression coefficients. SE=standard error. Bracketed numbers are 95% confidence intervals. Passions-are-problematic beliefs were centered prior to analysis.

FIGURE 6 Moderated mediation of career evaluations by passions-are-problematic beliefs (Study 3)



Note. Error bars represent standard errors.

FIGURE 7 Life satisfaction as a function of pursuing passion as a career in the US versus Singapore (Study 3)

more so than Singaporeans ($M = 3.16, SD = 1.09, t(317) = 3.29, p = .001, d = .37$, consistent with recent findings (P. Chen et al., 2020). Next, to test our main hypothesis, we regressed life satisfaction onto culture (1 = United States, -1 = Singapore), reported level of career passion, and the Culture \times Career Passion interaction (see Figure 7). Supporting our hypothesis, the Culture \times Career Passion interaction was significant, $b = 0.13, t(315) = 2.34, p = .020$. Simple effects tests showed that career passion was more strongly predictive of life satisfaction among Americans, $b = 0.77, t(315) = 8.96, p < .001$, than among Singaporeans, $b = 0.50, t(315) = 6.72, p < .001$.⁴ Finally, significant main effects of culture and career passion indicated that, on average, Americans reported higher life satisfaction than Singaporeans, $b = 0.24, t(315) = 3.80, p < .001$, and that, overall, higher career passion predicted greater life satisfaction, $b = 0.63, t(315) = 11.17, p < .001$.

6.4 | Discussion

Study 3 once again showed that Americans evaluated pursuing a passion as a career more favorably than did Singaporeans, and that

passions-are-problematic beliefs mediated this effect. We also ruled out the possibility that these findings were merely due to perceived competence of the target. Finally, having pursued one's own passion as a career more strongly predicted life satisfaction for Americans than for Singaporeans, demonstrating that our theorizing extends to people's lived experiences, not only evaluations of other people.

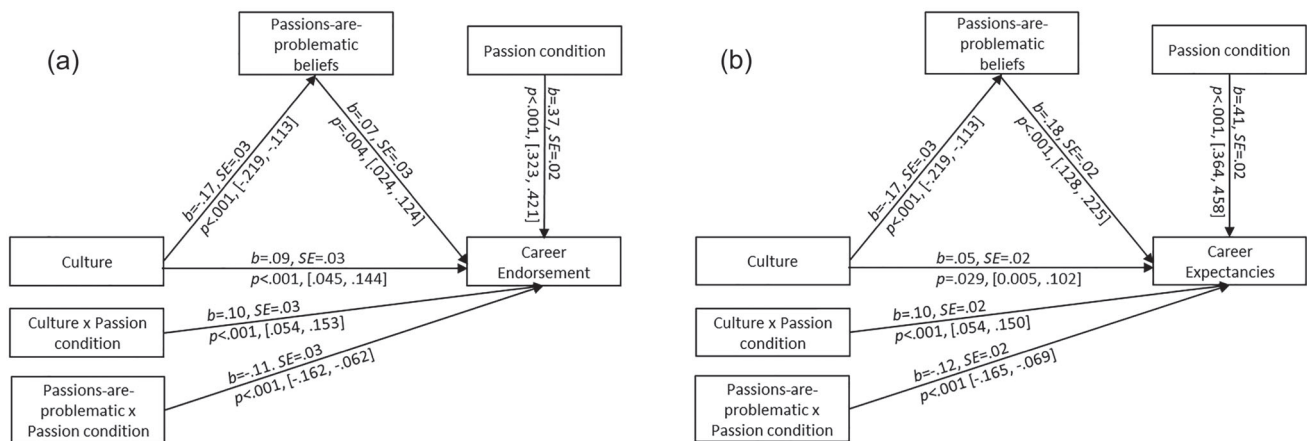
7 | AGGREGATED ANALYSIS OF DATA FROM STUDIES 1-3

Although the majority of our results replicated across studies, here we examine the reliability of the moderated mediation via passions-are-problematic beliefs, which did not emerge in Study 1 but did in Studies 2 and 3 (one effect was marginal in Study 3). To that end, we conducted a mini-meta analysis aggregating the data across our three studies. Although researchers have argued that internal meta-analyses are invalid in the presence of a “file drawer” of similar unreported studies (Vosgerau et al., 2019), we have reported all studies conducted for this project, thus those criticisms do not apply.

Given that our analysis tests moderated mediation across three similar experiments, the method we used followed past studies in which data points were converted to z-scores (within study), then analyzed as a combined dataset (e.g., Horberg et al., 2009; Schnall et al., 2008). Additionally, because participants were nested within study, we included two dummy variables (dummy codes for study) as covariates—an effective method for accounting for clustered data when there are few clusters (McNeish & Stapleton, 2016).

Our combined dataset included 1,326 participants (52.3% women; 664 Americans, 662 Singaporeans). Culture (1 = United States, -1 = Singapore) and Passion Condition (1 = with-passion, -1 = no-passion) were coded the same as in the Studies 1-3.

Figure 8 presents the results of the analysis. As in Studies 1-3, Singaporeans held stronger passions-are-problematic beliefs than Americans ($p < .001$). In turn, stronger passions-are-problematic



Note. Culture was coded as -1=Singapore, 1=U.S. Passion condition was coded as -1=No passion, 1=With passion. *bs* are unstandardized regression coefficients. *SE*=standard error. 95% CI [LL, UL]=95% confidence interval [lower limit, upper limit]. Passions-are-problematic beliefs, career endorsement, and career expectancies composites were z-scored within their respective studies prior to analysis. Because participants were nested within study for this analysis, two dummy variables coding for participation in Studies 1–3 were included in the analysis; for clarity, however they are omitted from the graphs.

FIGURE 8 Moderated mediation of career evaluations by passions-are-problematic beliefs (aggregated analysis)

beliefs predicted weaker endorsement of pursuing a passion (vs. a non-passion) as a career ($p < .001$). The index of moderated mediation was significant, 95% CI [0.018, 0.062]. The same pattern emerged for the career-expectancies outcome, and the index of moderated mediation was again significant, 95% CI [0.019, 0.063]. Thus, the aggregated analysis supported the hypothesis that believing that passions are problematic helped explain why Singaporeans evaluated pursuing a passion (vs. a non-passion) as a career less favorably, relative to Americans.

8 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

Should a passion be pursued as a career? In the present research, we demonstrated that people from Western and Asian cultures may differ in how they answer this question. Across three studies, we found that, although both cultures were overall more favorable toward a career that reflected one's passion than a career without passion, Americans evaluated them significantly more favorably than Singaporeans. These patterns emerged when making judgments about hypothetical career pursuits and about participants' own careers.

First, Americans were more likely than Singaporeans to endorse pursuing, and to expect positive outcomes (e.g., happiness and success), from a career in which someone was pursuing a passion rather than a non-passion. These effects did not change when controlling for gender, age, and educational attainment, and in Study 3, we ruled out the alternative explanation that the effect was due to inferences about greater competence from passion. Moreover, beliefs that passions are motivating helped explain (i.e., mediated) Americans' more favorable evaluations of pursuing a passion as a career. By contrast, beliefs about the problematic consequences of passions helped explain Singaporeans' less favorable evaluations.

Second, turning to participants' personal experiences, we found that, while pursuing a passion as a career held personal value in the lives of both Americans and Singaporeans, that value was even stronger among Americans. Study 3 showed that among employed participants, the extent to which they had pursued a passion as a career predicted life satisfaction in both cultures, but that association was even stronger for Americans. Those same measures showed that Americans were more likely to have actually pursued a passion as their career in the first place, as would be expected given our theorizing. These findings are critical because they show that cultural differences reflect people's actual lived experiences.

What do these findings teach us about the pursuit of career and work passion? Most critically, the importance of passion in the career domain is culturally constructed. Beliefs about what passion entails (the extent to which it is motivating and problematic), the value of pursuing a passion as a career, and its impact on life satisfaction, are shaped by one's culture.

8.1 | Links to related research

The present findings invite us to reconsider the widely held assumption that pursuing passion is universally valued. Certainly, people prefer vocations that they are passionate about rather than not; however, our results underscore that some people (those from less independent Asian cultures, such as Singapore) also believe that pursuing passion can have downsides—and may, therefore, value it less in career decisions and well-being (Kim et al., 2020). This research fruitfully extends prior work on passion, which has focused largely on the effects of passion on work outcomes (e.g., Cardon et al., 2009; P. Chen et al., 2020; X. P. Chen et al., 2009; Vallerand et al., 2014; Vallerand & Houliort, 2003), expectations for passion (O'Keefe et al., 2018), and individual differences in the implications of experiencing harmonious

versus obsessive passion toward various activities (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2014; Vallerand & Houlfort, 2003). The present studies introduce the perspective that culture can fundamentally shape people's values and beliefs about pursuing a passion as a career to begin with—even before questions about what form passion takes or its implications for work outcomes become relevant.

Second, our studies dovetail with research on culture and ideal affect. Culture shapes the emotional states that people wish and strive to experience—their ideal affect (Tsai, 2017; Tsai et al., 2006). People from Western backgrounds, such as European Americans, tend to seek high-arousal positive emotions like enthusiasm and elation whereas people from Asian backgrounds tend to seek low-arousal positive emotions like contentment and serenity. This influences behavior, such that members of different cultures engage in behaviors that promote their ideal affect, for example, choosing high-energy versus low-energy leisure activities (Tsai, 2017). To the extent that pursuing a passion engenders high-arousal positive emotions, it is fitting that those from Western cultures would particularly endorse and hold favorable expectancies for pursuing a passion as a career. Indeed, the desire for high-arousal positive emotions in their career may be one reason why Westerners more strongly endorse pursuing a passion as a career. Moreover, when people pursue a passion as a career, Westerners and Asians may differ in the emotional states they hope to experience, with Westerners striving for thrills and excitement and Asians striving for contentment and peacefulness. Linking ideal affect with passion and career pursuit across cultures will be fruitful avenues for future research.

8.2 | Limitations

Several limitations are worth noting. First, we focused on two specific countries, the United States and Singapore. Although the comparison had distinct and meaningful advantages, to assess the generalizability of our findings, future research could investigate these patterns in other countries in Asia and North America, and countries outside these two continents. Given that passion was endorsed by both cultures in the present research, it also remains an intriguing open question whether some cultures *oppose* pursuing a career based on passion, perhaps due to particularly strong beliefs that passions are problematic or costly.

Second, because our intention was to establish the basic cultural differences in views of pursuing a passion as a career, our central task involved judging the hypothetical career decisions of others. This was critical for experimental control, as we could systematically manipulate the presence or absence of pursuing a passion while limiting confounds and controlling extraneous factors (such as career field, qualifications, and level of financial need). However, these patterns also need to be explored in real-world settings, for example, by examining people's real career trajectories over time. As young adults prepare to enter the workforce, does “follow your passion” figure more prominently in the advice Americans receive from others and in their own career directions, relative to Singaporeans? How does following

one's passion relate to career success and satisfaction over time across cultures? Understanding the various expressions of our central findings in the field will be essential next steps in this line of inquiry.

Finally, the present research examined passion as a singular construct. However, passion can take different forms. The dualistic model of passion (e.g., Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2015, 2017) distinguishes harmonious passion for work (and other activities), which is adaptive and feels freely chosen, from obsessive passion, which is largely maladaptive and is perceived to control the self. In the present research, we did not specify the form of passion—harmonious or obsessive—because our goal was to understand participants' culturally based lay conceptions of passion and their expectancies for passions in a career. However, research shows that harmonious but not obsessive passion predicts greater life satisfaction (Curran et al., 2015; Pollack et al., 2020). Given our finding that career passion predicted life satisfaction in both cultures (albeit more strongly in the United States), one might speculate that participants defaulted to defining passion as harmonious rather than obsessive. So, while we found differences in how these cultures perceive and evaluate passion, broadly construed, it remains an open question whether these differences apply equally to harmonious and obsessive passion. Along these lines, while obsessive passion has generally been linked to maladaptive psychological outcomes at work (Pollack et al., 2020), some research shows that these effects can be attenuated, or even reversed, in interdependent cultures (Burke et al., 2015; Curran et al., 2015; also see Ho et al., 2011, 2018, for research in Singapore). Thus, while Americans and Singaporeans might both endorse pursuing a harmonious over an obsessive passion, it is possible that Singaporeans would be more supportive than Americans of pursuing an obsessive passion as a career. Future research could investigate this matter.

8.3 | Implications and future research

The present research has several interesting implications for future research and application. With respect to our serial mediations in Studies 1 and 2 (fully reported in the supporting information), we found that independent self-construals consistently emerged as a distal antecedent to evaluations of pursuing a passion as a career though passions-are-motivating beliefs. Yet, across all three studies, a similar pattern did not emerge through passions-are-problematic beliefs. This suggests that low independent self-construals are not a reason why Singaporeans view passions as having downsides. Thus, future research should examine potential antecedents to passions-are-problematic beliefs, such as other aspects of the self or values shaped by one's culture.

Some of the most intriguing implications involve the potential dark side of Americans' embrace of the injunction to follow their passion (e.g., Kim et al., 2020). Relative to Singaporeans, Americans might hold sky-high expectations that pursuing their passion will guarantee endless fulfillment at work. Should they find that passion-driven jobs can be rife with mundanity and frustration, Americans may be more negatively affected than the less-idealistic Singaporeans.

Similarly, future research should explore how social and economic conditions affect attitudes toward pursuing a passion as a career across different cultures. In the United States, the strong emphasis on pursuing a career rooted in passion may lead to a clash with the realities of the economy and job market. This is the dilemma confronting those entering the workforce today, many of whom are strapped with student debt, high housing and living expenses, and who struggle to find relevant, well-paid work. Such people may discover that pursuing their passion failed to yield the success and happiness it promised. Over time, this could backfire, amplifying their passions-are-problematic beliefs and reducing their value for pursuing a passion as a career.

With respect to application and practice, our findings demonstrate that vocational counselors—or anyone dispensing career advice—should consider that the pursuit of a passion as a career may not be the right advice for some people. To be sure, our results suggest that passion can benefit both people of Western and Asian backgrounds and could therefore be part of any career guidance discussion. At the same time, the emphasis on passion varies systematically across cultures. People of Western and Asian backgrounds may approach career decisions with different goals, motivations, and decision-making styles, including their emphasis on passion, as we have shown, and career guidance should be shaped accordingly.

To conclude, for many, “follow your passion” is the guiding principle behind an ideal career and a life well-lived. But, as our research shows, beliefs about passion and the emphasis on pursuing a passion as a career are shaped by culture. Those from Asian cultures like Singapore may not embrace this adage quite as deeply nor may they believe that passions are as uniformly beneficial as those from Western cultures like the United States.

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ENDNOTES

¹ As is common with reverse-keyed items (Weijtjens et al., 2013), the 2-factor model fit improved when the reverse-keyed items of “difficult” and “effortful” were not included ($\chi^2_{(43)} = 183.37, p < .001$; RMSEA = .08, CFI = .93, SRMR = .065). However, we retained these items because of their face validity and relevance to the construct, and the results of the studies do not change whether they are retained or excluded.

² We considered that the “family” item might operate differently than the other expectancies items, especially given the special significance of family in interdependent cultures. However, when analyzed alone, or when omitting the item from the expectancies composite, our Culture \times Passion Condition effect remained significant. We therefore retained the item in the composite for completeness.

³ A preliminary test of this hypothesis (collected from the Study 2 sample) showed that Americans were significantly more likely to endorse statements like “If my career were my passion, I would have gotten the important things I want in life” than Singaporeans (see Section 1 of the Supplemental Data and Analyses in supporting information). Thus, the finding provided initial support of this hypothesis.

⁴ The career passion and life satisfaction measures used similar survey methods, raising the possibility of common-method-bias (CMB) in which relations between variables can be spuriously inflated due to similar methods of measurement. However, CMB would not account for our result—which focuses on the interaction of culture and career passion—as CMB tends to weaken rather than inflate interaction effects (Siemsen et al., 2010).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this research are available at <https://osf.io/6wcbd/>.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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