



Coping Behaviors as Predictors of Hedonic Well-Being in Asian Indians: Does Being Optimistic Still Make a Difference?

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Abstract

The present study examined optimism, as measured by the Life Orientation Test-Revised, and coping behaviors, as measured by the COPE scale, as predictors of hedonic well-being (viz., life satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective happiness) in a sample of 462 Asian Indians (237 women and 225 men). We hypothesized that optimism would remain an important predictor of well-being even after accounting for coping behaviors. Results of conducting hierarchical regression analyses indicated that coping behaviors, as a set, accounted for a significant amount of unique variance in each of the three measures of hedonic well-being (f^2 range = .16 to .39), after controlling for key demographic and socio-economic factors (e.g., age, sex, parent education level, and family income). Noteworthy, the use of humor was found to be the only consistent coping predictor across the three indices of hedonic well-being. Importantly, when optimism was included in the prediction model, it was consistently found to account for additional variance in hedonic well-being (f^2 range = .11 to .15), beyond coping behaviors. These findings are the first to affirm the centrality of optimism in predicting hedonic well-being in Asian Indians. Accordingly, efforts to foster hedonic well-being in Asian Indians might benefit from not only changing coping behaviors, but also from building greater optimism.

Keywords Optimism · Coping · Hedonic well-being · Asian Indians · Adults

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1 Introduction

A cardinal character strength identified across various positive psychological theories is dispositional optimism (Carver et al. 2010; Chang 2001b; Chang and Sanna 2003; Peterson 2000). According to Scheier and Carver (1985, 1992) and Carver and Scheier (2014), *optimism* is defined as a disposition to hold generalized positive outcome expectancies. As a character strength, findings from numerous studies have shown that optimism is associated with psychological adjustment in adults (see Carver et al. 2010; Scheier et al. 2001, for reviews). Indeed, findings from studies over the past three decades investigating correlates and predictors of negative psychological adjustment in adults have identified optimism to be reliably associated with less maladjustment, from less depressive symptoms (e.g., Calandri et al. 2018; Chang et al. 2013; Hirsch et al. 2014; Scheier et al. 1994) to less risk of suicide (e.g., Chang et al. 2017; Davidson and Wingate 2013; Huffman et al. 2016; Lucas et al. 2018). Alternatively, findings from past studies have shown that optimism is reliably associated with greater positive psychological adjustment, from greater self-esteem (e.g., Liu et al. 2017; Mäkikangas et al. 2004; Scheier et al. 1994; Symister and Friend 2003) to greater life satisfaction (e.g., Bailey et al. 2007; Chang et al. 2011; Chang and Sanna 2001; Heo et al. 2016; Kapikiran 2012). Indeed, with regard to findings involving the latter outcome, there is reason to believe that optimism may play a central role in hedonic well-being.

2 Optimism and Hedonic Well-Being: Is There a Need to Consider Coping Behaviors?

Broadly speaking, positive psychologists have long differentiated between hedonic well-being and eudaimonic well-being (Waterman 1993). Whereas eudaimonic well-being has often been linked by psychologists to concepts like personal meaning (Steger et al. 2008), authenticity (Waterman 1993), and psychological well-being (Ryff 1989), hedonic well-being has been linked to concepts like positive affect, the experience of positive emotions (Fredrickson 1998; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005), life satisfaction, the experience of positive feelings and attitudes about one's life in general (Diener et al. 2013; Diener et al. 2003), and happiness, the experience of joy and contentment (Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999; Myers and Diener 2018). In that regard, findings from studies have not only shown that optimism is consistently associated with greater life satisfaction, but that it is also consistently associated with greater positive affect (e.g., Calandri et al. 2018; Chang et al. 1997; Chang and Sanna 2001; Marshall et al. 1992) and greater happiness (e.g., Dember and Brooks 1989; Joshanloo et al. 2017; Warnecke et al. 2014). These associations indicate that optimism has a reliable association with hedonic well-being in adults. Yet, what is not clear from this pattern is if optimism remains an important predictor of hedonic well-being beyond the coping behaviors people engage in.

3 Coping as an Alternative Explanatory Factor

According to Scheier and Carver (1985), optimism engenders active or approach coping, whereas pessimism (or the lack of optimism) engenders passive or avoidance coping. Consistent with this view, findings from a number of studies have generally identified a link between optimism and active coping behaviors in adults (e.g., Bryant and Cvenegros 2004; Chang 1998; Lee and Mason 2015; Perera and McIlveen 2014; Scheier et al. 1994). For example, in a large sample of college students, Chang (1998) found that optimism was associated with greater use of active coping behaviors (e.g., cognitive restructuring) and less use of avoidant coping behaviors (e.g., wishful thinking, self-criticism, and social withdrawal). That said, given that the relationship between personality and adjustment is believed to be attributed to how people cope with stressful situations in their life (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), it raises the question of whether or not optimism remains an important explanatory variable beyond coping. To date, findings from some studies have shown that even after accounting for coping behaviors, optimism remains an important predictor of psychological adjustment. For example, Chang (1998) found that even after controlling for coping behaviors, optimism remained an important predictor of life satisfaction in college students. To date however, the examination of whether optimism remains an important predictor of other measures of hedonic well-being (e.g., positive affect, happiness) remains unclear. Thus, theoretically, it would be important to determine if, beyond coping behavior, optimism is still necessary for understanding hedonic well-being. In turn, determining the role of optimism might help point to the value of using optimism training strategies to cultivate experiences of hedonic well-being (Malouff and Schutte 2017).

Beyond this question, a growing concern raised by researchers has been that much of the base making up our knowledge of psychological science, including our understanding of the role of optimism in well-being (Chang 1996), has been predicated on findings drawn from studies of Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) populations (Graham 1992; Henrich et al. 2010). Accordingly, we conducted the present study on Easterners (Markus and Kitayama 1991), specifically, Asian Indians. We selected Asian Indians because they not only represent one of the largest cultural groups in the world, but unlike other Asian groups (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, and Korean), Asian Indians have been less frequently studied in psychological research (Perera and Chang 2018). For example, of the one study we were able to locate that examined the association between optimism and happiness in Asian Indians, it was focused exclusively on female students (Vithya et al. 2015).

4 Purpose of the Present Study

Given the concerns noted above, we conducted the present study to: (1) examine the relations of optimism and coping with hedonic well-being (*viz.*, life satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective happiness) in Asian Indians; and (2) determine if after accounting for coping, optimism remains an important predictor of hedonic well-being in Asian Indians.

Consistent with the notion that optimism is a robust and important positive psychological variable (Carver et al. 2010; Scheier and Carver 1985), we expected optimism to be associated with life satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective happiness in Asian Indians.

Alternatively, consistent with the notion that coping also is involved in adjustment (e.g., Carver et al. 1989; Lazarus and Folkman 1984), we also expected coping to be associated with hedonic well-being in Asian Indians. Finally, consistent with the notion that optimism is a robust and important predictor of hedonic well-being (e.g., Chang 1998), we expected optimism to add significant incremental variance in predicting hedonic well-being in Asian Indians, even after controlling for coping behaviors.

4.1 Participants

Four hundred and sixty-two (237 women and 225 men) Asian Indian college students participated in the present study. Participants who were 18 years of age or older were recruited from across six colleges or universities located in Northern Karnataka, India. Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 25 years with a mean of 19.16 ($SD = 1.18$). One hundred and seventeen (25.3%) were freshmen, 252 (54.5%) were sophomores, and 93 (20.1%) were juniors.

4.2 Measures

4.2.1 Optimism

To measure optimism, we used the Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R; Scheier et al. 1994). The LOT-R is made up of three items that are positively worded (e.g., "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best"), and three items (reverse scored) that are negatively worded (e.g., "If something can go wrong for me, it will"). The other four items are filler items. Respondents are asked to indicate their level of agreement to each item across a 5-point Likert-type scale (0 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). In support of construct validity in Asian Indians, LOT-R scores have been found to be positively associated with scores on measures of life satisfaction and quality of life in Asian Indians aged 15 to 70 (Mishra 2013). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the LOT-R was .87. Higher scores on the LOT-R indicate greater optimism.

4.2.2 Coping Behaviors

We used the COPE (dispositional version; Carver et al. 1989) to assess the extent to which participants generally engaged in a range of coping behaviors. The COPE consists of fifteen types of coping behaviors (e.g., venting emotions; "I get upset and let my emotions out"), and each type has four corresponding questions. Respondents are asked to rate how often they use each coping behavior using a 4-point Likert-type scale (1 = *I usually don't do this at all* to 4 = *I usually do this a lot*). In support of construct validity in Asian Indians, COPE scores have been found to be associated with scores on a measure of happiness in a sample of Asian Indians (Chang et al. 2016). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha for the fifteen COPE scales ranged from .71 (seeking emotional support) to .85 (active coping). In general, higher scores on any specific COPE scale indicate a greater tendency to use that coping behavior.

4.2.3 Hedonic Well-Being

We used three measures to assess for hedonic well-being, namely, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al. 1985), the Positive Affect (PA) scale of the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al. 1988), and the Subjective Happiness Scale (SHS; Lyubomirsky and Lepper 1999).

The SWLS assesses for global life satisfaction and consists of five items (e.g., “In most ways my life is close to my ideal”). Respondents are asked to rate their level of agreement to each item using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). In support of construct validity in Asian Indians, SWLS scores have been found to be positively associated with scores on a measure of positive emotions in a sample of Asian Indians (Mishra and Dixit 2017). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the SWLS was .90. In general, higher scores on the SWLS indicate greater life satisfaction.

The PA scale assesses for positive affect and consists of ten positive emotions (e.g., “proud”, “excited”). Respondents are asked to rate how they feel “on the average” about each item across a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *very slightly* to 5 = *extremely*). In support of construct validity in Asian Indians, PA scores have been found to be positively associated with scores on a measure of hopeful thinking in a sample of Asian Indians (Chang et al. 2018). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the PA scale was .85. In general, higher scores on the PA scale indicate greater positive affect.

The SHS assesses global happiness and consists of four items. Respondents are asked to rate each item across a 7-point Likert-type scale (e.g., “In general I consider myself”; 1 = *Not a very happy person* to 7 = *A very happy person*). In support of construct validity in Asian Indians, SHS scores have been found to be positively associated with scores on an alternative measure of happiness in sample of Asian Indians (Holder et al. 2012). In the present study, Cronbach’s alpha for the SHS was .88. In general, higher scores on the SHS indicate greater subjective happiness.

4.3 Procedure

Approval for the present research to be conducted at colleges and universities in Goa, a state located in western India near Karnataka, was obtained by the Institutional Review Board at Karnatak University. In addition, the Institutional Review Board of each of the following six colleges or universities approved the present research study: Shree Damodar College of Commerce and Economics; Parvatibai Chowgule College of Arts and Science in Margao; P.E.S’s Shri Ravi S. Naik College of Arts and Science in Ponda; Don Bosco College in Panjim; M. E. S. College of Arts and Commerce in Vasco; and Birla Institute of Technology and Science Pilani in Zuarinagar. Students from these colleges and universities located in the North and South districts of Goa participated in the present research. Participants were solicited from introductory psychology classes and obtained course credit for their participation. The survey was administered in small groups shortly after the end of class. No personal identifying information was collected. Data collection occurred between September and October of 2016.

Table 1 Correlations of coping behaviors and optimism with measures of hedonic well-being

	SWLS	PA	SHS	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Positive reinterpretation	.23***	.39***	.30***	11.65	2.95
Mental disengagement	-.19***	-.13**	-.07	10.49	2.72
Venting emotions	-.09	-.05	-.13**	10.28	2.92
Instrumental support	.17***	.24***	.16***	10.84	3.04
Active coping	.26***	.36***	.23***	10.66	2.53
Denial	-.16***	-.19***	-.19***	8.34	2.80
Religious coping	-.05	-.01	-.02	10.96	3.51
Humor	.12**	.20***	.14**	8.67	3.06
Behavioral disengagement	-.23***	-.23***	-.19***	8.28	2.73
Restraint coping	.05	.14**	.09	10.51	2.36
Seeking emotional support	-.00	.03	.01	10.28	3.40
Substance use	-.07	-.08	-.11*	5.78	3.73
Acceptance	.21***	.23***	.15***	10.57	2.59
Suppression of activities	.08	.18***	.08	10.10	2.29
Planning	.19***	.40***	.23***	11.39	2.77
Optimism	.50***	.49***	.45***	14.39	3.37
<i>M</i>	22.40	32.99	19.59		
<i>SD</i>	5.78	7.92	4.73		

N = 462. SWLS Satisfaction with Life Scale, PA positive affect, SHS Subjective Happiness Scale

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p \leq .001$

5 Results

Correlations, means, and standard deviations for study measures are presented in Table 1. As the table shows, coping behaviors and optimism generally had similar associations with the three hedonic well-being measures. For example, positive reinterpretation, instrumental support, active coping, humor, acceptance, and planning were found to be significantly and positively related to all three indices of hedonic well-being. Similarly, denial and behavioral disengagement were found to be negatively related to hedonic well-being. However, restraint coping and suppression of activities were found to be positively related to positive affect only. Mental disengagement was found to be negatively related to life satisfaction and positive affect, while venting emotions and substance use were found to be negatively related to subjective happiness only. Consistent with the contention that optimism has beneficial effects on psychological adjustment, optimism was found to be positively related to all three measures of hedonic well-being.

5.1 Coping Behaviors as Predictors of Hedonic Well-Being in Asian Indians: Does Optimism Still Matter?

To examine if coping behaviors are important predictors of hedonic well-being in Asian Indians, and if the inclusion of optimism would further predict additional variance in well-being, we conducted a series of hierarchical regression analyses in predicting life satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective happiness. For all analyses, we firstly controlled for demographic factors (viz., age and gender) in Step 1, followed by controlling for socioeconomic factors (viz., education levels of parents and family income) in Step 2. In Step 3, all fifteen coping behaviors were entered, followed by optimism in Step 4. To determine whether the predictors accounted for a small, medium, or large amount of variance in well-being, we used Cohen's (1977) convention for small ($f^2 = .02$), medium ($f^2 = .15$), and large effects ($f^2 = .35$) as a standard.

Results for predicting life satisfaction are presented in Table 2. As the table shows, demographic factors as a set was not found to account for a significant amount of variance, $F(2, 459) = 1.02$, *n.s.* However, socioeconomic factors as a set was found to account for a small ($f^2 = .04$) 4% of additional variance in life satisfaction, $F(3, 456) = 6.51$, $p < .001$. Within the set, only father's education level ($\beta = .14$, $p < .05$) was found to be a significant predictor. Importantly, the inclusion of coping behaviors as a set was found to account for a medium ($f^2 = .19$) 16% of additional variance in life satisfaction, $F(15, 441) = 5.97$, $p < .001$. Within the set, instrumental support ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), active coping ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$), humor ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$), (lack of) mental disengagement ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .001$), and (lack of) behavioral disengagement ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .05$) emerged as significant unique predictors. Finally, when optimism was entered in Step 4, it was found to account for a medium ($f^2 = .15$) 13% of additional variance in life satisfaction, $F(1, 440) = 88.23$, $p < .001$. The total prediction model was found to account for a large ($f^2 = .45$) 31% of the variance in life satisfaction, $F(21, 440) = 10.74$, $p < .001$.

Results for predicting positive affect are presented in Table 3. In predicting positive affect, demographic factors as a set was again not found to account for any significant amount of variance, $F(2, 459) = 1.16$, *n.s.* However, socioeconomic factors as a set was found to account for a small ($f^2 = .03$) 3% of additional variance in positive affect, $F(3, 456) = 4.33$, $p < .01$. Within the set, only monthly income ($\beta = .11$, $p < .05$) emerged as a significant predictor. Furthermore, the inclusion of coping behaviors as a set was found to account for a large ($f^2 = .39$) 28% of additional variance in positive affect, $F(15, 441) = 12.17$, $p < .001$. Within the set, positive reinterpretation ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$), humor ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), planning ($\beta = .22$, $p < .001$), (lack of) mental disengagement ($\beta = -.12$, $p < .01$), (lack of) denial ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$), and (lack of) behavioral disengagement ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$) were found to be significant unique predictors. Lastly, when optimism was entered in Step 4, it was found to account for a small-medium ($f^2 = .11$) 10% of additional variance in positive affect, $F(1, 440) = 73.56$, $p < .001$. The total prediction model was found to account for a large ($f^2 = .45$) 31% of the variance in positive affect, $F(21, 440) = 14.79$, $p < .001$.

Table 4 shows results of analyses predicting subjective happiness. As the table shows, demographic factors as a set was not found to account for any significant amount of variance in subjective happiness, $F(2, 459) = .59$, *n.s.* However, socioeconomic factors as a set was found to account for a small-medium ($f^2 = .10$) 9% of additional variance in subjective happiness, $F(3, 456) = 14.31$, $p < .001$. Within the set, both father's education level ($\beta = .25$, $p < .001$) and monthly income ($\beta = .15$, $p < .01$) emerged as significant predictors.

Table 2 Results of hierarchical regression analyses showing amount of variance in life satisfaction accounted for by coping behaviors and optimism in Asian Indian college students, controlling for demographic and socioeconomic factors

Outcome and predictor	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F	p
Life satisfaction					
Step 1: Demographic variables		.00	–	1.02	<i>n.s.</i>
Age	.02				
Gender	.07				
Step 2: Socioeconomic variables		.05	.04	6.51	<.001
Father's education level	.14*				
Mother's education level	.07				
Monthly income	.01				
Step 3: Coping behaviors		.21	.16	5.97	<.001
Positive reinterpretation	.02				
Mental disengagement	–.17***				
Venting emotions	–.09				
Instrumental support	.12*				
Active coping	.13*				
Denial	–.04				
Religious coping	.04				
Humor	.15***				
Behavioral disengagement	–.12*				
Restraint coping	–.03				
Seeking emotional support	–.01				
Substance use	.03				
Acceptance	.10				
Suppression of activities	–.01				
Planning	.02				
Step 4: Optimism	.41***	.31	.13	88.23	<.001

$N=462$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p \leq .001$

Furthermore, the inclusion of coping behaviors as a set was found to account for a medium ($f^2 = .16$) 14% of additional variance in subjective happiness, $F(15, 441) = 5.52$, $p < .001$. Within the set, positive reinterpretation ($\beta = .12$, $p < .05$), humor ($\beta = .15$, $p < .001$), (lack of) venting emotions ($\beta = -.17$, $p < .01$), and (lack of) denial ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .05$) were found to be significant unique predictors. Lastly, when optimism was included in the model, it was found to account for a small-medium ($f^2 = .12$) 11% of additional variance in subjective happiness, $F(1, 440) = 69.47$, $p < .001$. The total prediction model was found to account for a large ($f^2 = .52$) 34% of the variance in subjective happiness, $F(21, 440) = 10.65$, $p < .001$.

Table 3 Results of hierarchical regression analyses showing amount of variance in positive affect accounted for by coping behaviors and optimism in Asian Indian college students, controlling for demographic and socioeconomic factors

Outcome and predictor	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F	p
Positive affect					
Step 1: Demographic variables		.01	–	1.16	<i>n.s.</i>
Age	.05				
Gender	.06				
Step 2: Socioeconomic variables		.03	.03	4.33	< .01
Father's education level	.09				
Mother's education level	.00				
Monthly income	.11*				
Step 3: Coping behaviors		.32	.28	12.17	< .001
Positive reinterpretation	.15**				
Mental disengagement	–.12**				
Venting emotions	–.05				
Instrumental support	.09				
Active coping	.08				
Denial	–.11*				
Religious coping	.01				
Humor	.22***				
Behavioral disengagement	–.11*				
Restraint coping	.02				
Seeking emotional support	.00				
Substance use	.04				
Acceptance	–.04				
Suppression of activities	.02				
Planning	.22***				
Step 4: Optimism	.35***	.41	.10	73.56	< .001

$N=462$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

6 Discussion

In the present study, we examined the relations between optimism, coping, and hedonic well-being, as measured by life satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective well-being. Moreover, we focused on a relatively neglected population, namely, Asian Indians, given that the predominance of research in psychology has been based on the study of Westerners (e.g., White/European Americans; Henrich et al. 2010). We hypothesized that both optimism and coping would be significantly associated with hedonic well-being in Asian Indians. Furthermore, we hypothesized that even after taking into account the role of coping, optimism would remain an important predictor of hedonic well-being in Asian Indians. Overall, findings from the present study indicated support for both of these hypotheses.

Table 4 Results of hierarchical regression analyses showing amount of variance in happiness accounted for by coping behaviors and optimism in Asian Indian college students, controlling for demographic and socioeconomic factors

Outcome and predictor	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F	p
Happiness					
Step 1: Demographic variables		.00	–	.59	<i>n.s.</i>
Age	.03				
Gender	.05				
Step 2: Socioeconomic variables		.09	.09	14.31	< .001
Father's education level	.25***				
Mother's education level	–.10				
Monthly income	.15**				
Step 3: Coping behaviors		.23	.14	5.52	< .001
Positive reinterpretation	.12*				
Mental disengagement	–.05				
Venting emotions	–.17**				
Instrumental support	.07				
Active coping	.03				
Denial	–.11*				
Religious coping	.06				
Humor	.15***				
Behavioral disengagement	–.05				
Restraint coping	.02				
Seeking emotional support	.04				
Substance use	–.04				
Acceptance	.01				
Suppression of activities	–.04				
Planning	.11				
Step 4: Optimism	.37***	.34	.11	69.47	< .001

$N=462$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p \leq .001$

We provide a greater discussion of our findings for coping and optimism below, as well as mention some possible implications for future research and intervention.

7 Useful Coping Behaviors of Asian Indian Adults: Finding Humor in All Things?

Relative to the number of studies published on coping involving Westerners, studies involving Asian Indians has been more scarce and difficult to interpret. For example, in one study, Antaramian et al. (2016) found that problem-solving coping and (lack of) externalizing coping were unique predictors of life satisfaction in a sample of Asian Indian

adolescents. In another study, Nadimpalli et al. (2016) found that less active coping was uniquely associated with greater anxiety in a sample of middle-aged Asian Indians. Thus, the use of different measures of coping by researchers that are then linked to different psychological outcomes in different Asian Indian populations (e.g., adolescents, middle-aged adults) have made it difficult, if not impossible, to discern any reliable coping patterns that might be involved in predicting adjustment in Asian Indians based on the small extant literature. Accordingly, a key benefit of conducting the present study is the ability to identify reliable patterns of coping (based on using a more comprehensive measure of coping; Carver et al. 1989) used by Asian Indian adults that might be associated with three related indices of hedonic well-being.

Noteworthy, the most reliable coping pattern to emerge from our findings in predicting life satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective well-being was humor. Specifically, greater use of humor was found in the present study to be the only unique coping behavior to predict each of the three indices of hedonic well-being among Asian Indians. That is, Asian Indians who are able to typically find humor and laugh when faced with stressful situations in their lives were more likely to achieve a higher level of hedonic well-being, regardless of whether that positive outcome is measured in terms of life satisfaction, positive affect, or subjective well-being. As some researchers have long noted, the use of humor as a coping behavior represents a powerful way in which individuals are sometimes able to minimize the negative effects of being exposed to adverse events and situations in their lives (Nezu et al. 1988). Interestingly, in a recent study of humor in Asian Indian and Chinese college students, Hiranandani and Yu (2014) found that Indians, compared to Chinese, reported greater value in having a personal sense of humor. Noteworthy, these researchers found that certain types of humor (e.g., affiliative and self-enhancing humor) were positively associated with greater self-esteem in Asian Indians. Therefore, future studies should build on the present findings to identify if there are specific types of humor behaviors that are associated with hedonic well-being in Asian Indian adults. Additionally, it would be useful to determine if positive psychological interventions focused on teaching humor-based coping behaviors might actually be effective in promoting or sustaining hedonic well-being among Asian Indian adults.

8 When It Comes to Hedonic Well-Being in Asian Indians: It's Optimism, Optimism, and Optimism!

Consistent with the contention that dispositional optimism is an important predictor of psychological adjustment (Carver and Scheier 2014; Scheier and Carver 1985, 1992), the present study was conducted to determine if optimism represents an important explanatory variable in accounting for adjustment even after controlling for variations in coping behaviors in Asian Indian adults. In that regard, we found that optimism was a significant positive predictor of all three measures of hedonic well-being examined in the present study. Specifically, after taking coping behaviors into account, optimism was found to account for additional unique variance in life satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective happiness in Asian Indians. As mentioned previously, much of the research on optimism conducted over the past three decades have been based on the study of Westerners (e.g., European Americans; Henrich et al. 2010). Thus, our findings for Asian Indians not only add to the small, but growing body of research findings involving optimism in Asian Indians (Vithya et al.

2015), but they also go further to highlight the consistent role that optimism plays in the hedonic well-being of Asian Indians.

Thus, beyond the potential value of cultivating a sense of humor, our findings indicate that strategies which help foster or build optimism in Asian Indians can also help sustain or elevate experiences of hedonic well-being in this group. In that regard, based on their meta-analysis of optimism training studies, Malouff and Schutte (2017) found that interventions that included a component that helped individuals develop future goals and visualize a best possible future self (“Best Possible Self” intervention) was most common among those found to increase optimism in adults. Thus, positive psychological training focused on helping Asian Indian adults identify important goals and imagine an idealized personal future might prove useful in building greater optimism in this group. However, given that the majority of the optimism training studies examined have been based on interventions conducted on Westerners who may differ in personal motivation and values from Easterners (Markus and Kitayama 1991), it is not clear if such an approach might be effective in increasing optimism in Asian Indians. In that regard, it is clear that more research is needed to better understand the complex factors and conditions that might be uniquely involved in the development of optimism in Asian Indians, and in Easterners, more broadly (e.g., a focus on achieving collective goals; Chang 2001a). By understanding the cultural context of optimism, researchers might be able to better identify cultural nuances in how optimism develops and how it confers benefits across diverse groups.

Finally, although the present findings for optimism in Asian Indians might be taken to imply support for the general contention that optimism is good for all (Scheier and Carver 1985, 1992), it is important to keep in mind that our findings are limited to hedonic well-being. Whether optimism in Asian Indians is “good” in relation to other indices of psychological adjustment (e.g., meaning in life, personal growth, depression, and suicide risk) and of physical adjustment (e.g., physical illness, vitality, and health habits) remains to be determined. As noted earlier, despite more than three decades of research pointing to the fundamental importance of optimism as a positive psychological construct for humans, only a small percentage of the extant studies have been based on Easterners, and among those, just a handful have studied Asian Indians. Thus, for these reasons, we conducted the present study in Asian Indians to participate in making the world of optimism research a little less WEIRD (Henrich et al. 2010).

9 Some Limitations of the Present Study

Despite the importance of the present findings, it is worth mentioning a few limitations to the present study. First, our study focused on young adult Asian Indian college students. Whether our findings can be generalized to younger Asian Indian adolescents or older Asian Indian adults remains to be determined. Relatedly, although we controlled for major demographic and socioeconomic factors, future studies might consider how other factors (e.g., occupation of parents, number of siblings, and religious beliefs) might impact hedonic well-being in Asian Indians. Second, we focused on the prediction of hedonic well-being in Asian Indians. Because hedonic and eudaimonic well-being are not identical (Waterman 1993), it would be important to determine if optimism, independent of coping behaviors, is a significant predictor of important indices of eudaimonic well-being (e.g., meaning in life, relations with others) in Asian Indians. Third, although we tried to control for potential within-group variations on several key variables (e.g., age, sex, education

level of parents, and family income), other factors should be considered in future research (e.g., religious affiliation, regional differences, and self-construal). Relatedly, it would be useful to determine if the present set of findings are generalizable to other Eastern groups (e.g., Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese). Finally, given the cross-sectional nature of the present study, it is not possible to clarify causal directionality among the variables examined. Therefore, it would be important in future studies to investigate the extent to which optimism and coping behaviors predict changes in hedonic well-being in Asian Indians across time.

10 Concluding Thoughts

The present study was conducted to examine the importance of optimism, beyond coping behaviors, in predicting three central indices of hedonic well-being, namely, life satisfaction, positive affect, and subjective happiness in Asian Indians. Our findings indicated that although coping behaviors were important predictors of hedonic well-being, especially the use of humor, optimism accounted for additional unique variance in each of the three measures of well-being examined in the present study. Overall, the present findings are the first to consistently affirm the positive role of optimism across diverse measures of hedonic well-being in Asian Indian adults.

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