



Optimism, pessimism, affectivity, and psychological adjustment in US and Korea: a test of a mediation model

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Abstract

Previous research has indicated that cognitive and affective variables play an important role in models of psychological adjustment. However, the examination of such variables across different cultural groups has remained a neglected issue. Accordingly, this study assessed the role of outcome expectancies (optimism and pessimism) and affectivity (positive and negative affect) as predictors of psychological adjustment (life satisfaction and depressive symptoms) in a sample of 294 South Korean and 320 European American college students. Consistent with the mapping of self-criticism and self-enhancement to Easterners and Westerners, respectively, Koreans compared to European Americans were found to report greater negative affectivity and depressive symptoms. In contrast, European Americans compared to Koreans were found to report greater positive affectivity and life satisfaction. Moreover, results of path analyses examining a model of affectivity as a mediator of the link between outcome expectancies and psychological adjustment provided additional evidence for cultural differences. Implications of the present findings for understanding psychological adjustment in Easterners versus Westerners are discussed. © 2002 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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Over the past several decades, researchers, scholars, and practitioners have become increasingly interested in studying optimism and pessimism. According to Scheier and Carver (1985), *optimism* and *pessimism*, defined as generalized positive and negative outcome expectancies, respectively, are believed to represent important predictors of adjustment. Specifically, these investigators have argued that optimism is associated with and leads to securing positive outcomes, whereas pessimism

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is associated with and leads to incurring negative outcomes (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Consistent with this view, numerous studies have found that optimism is associated with greater positive psychological outcomes, whereas pessimism is associated with greater negative psychological outcomes. For example, optimism has been found to be associated with greater life satisfaction (Chang, Maydeu-Olivares, & D’Zurilla, 1997), whereas pessimism has been found to be associated with greater depressive symptoms (Chang et al., 1997). Accordingly, there has been growing interest in examining the influence of optimism and pessimism on psychological adjustment.

1. Optimism, affectivity, and psychological adjustment

Some studies have shown that expressions of pessimism are not equivalent to expressions of the lack of optimism. Recent factor-analytic findings examining the structure of the LOT and other measures of outcome expectancies have indicated that optimism and pessimism emerge as two distinguishable factors (e.g. Chang, D’Zurilla, & Maydeu-Olivares, 1994; Chang et al., 1997; Marshall, Wortman, Kusulas, Hervig, & Vickers, 1992; Scheier & Carver, 1985; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). Moreover, recent studies looking at cultural influences have shown that there is considerable value in examining optimistic and pessimistic processes separately (e.g. Chang, 1996, 2002; Chang, Asakawa, & Sanna, 2001). However, recent findings have made clear that the study of cognitive concomitants of psychological adjustment must also consider the role of mood. According to Watson and Clark (1984; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), mood is also composed of two distinguishable dimensions, namely positive and negative affect. Whereas *positive affectivity* reflects the extent to which individuals generally feel active, alert, and enthusiastic, *negative affectivity* reflects the extent to which individuals generally feel upset or unpleasantly aroused (Watson et al., 1988). Noteworthy, findings from recent studies have shown that measures of psychological adjustment (e.g. depression and life satisfaction) are strongly associated with both negative and positive affectivity (e.g. Chang et al., 1997). As a result, when considering cognitive models of psychological adjustment, it has become crucial to show that beyond affectivity, cognitive factors remain significantly associated with measures of psychological adjustment. Such efforts may be particularly meaningful when considering the role of outcome expectancies given that optimism and pessimism have been found to map onto positive and negative affectivity, respectively (Marshall et al., 1992). For example, in considering a mediation model, it would be important to show that the influence of cognitive variables such as optimism and pessimism on psychological adjustment is not fully mediated by affectivity. A representation of a model for predicting depressive symptoms and life satisfaction is presented in Fig. 1.

2. Cultural differences in Easterners and Westerners: self-enhancement versus self-criticism

Another crucial, but often neglected concern in studying psychological models of adjustment is the examination of such models across different cultural groups. For example, it is important to recognize that Eastern cultures have historically fostered a view of the person that maintains a fundamental relatedness of individuals to each other (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Attending to others, harmonious interdependence with them, and fitting in are not only valued but also are

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