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Dispositional optimism among American and Jordanian college students: Are Westerners really more upbeat than Easterners?

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The present study aimed at assessing some previous research conclusions, based primarily on comparisons of North Americans and East Asians, that Westerners tend to be optimistic while Easterners tend to be pessimistic. Two samples of European American and Jordanian college students were administered a questionnaire consisting of items measuring dispositional optimism along with items pertaining to risk and self-protective behaviors (e.g., seatbelt use, vehicular speeding, smoking) and social and demographic factors (e.g., sex, socioeconomic status, religiosity). The findings uncovered dispositional optimism to be stronger for American compared to Jordanian participants. Separate analyses of optimism versus pessimism revealed that Jordanian participants were more pessimistic, but not less optimistic than their American counterparts. No significant correlations were found between dispositional optimism and sex, socioeconomic status, or religiosity. The levels of optimism displayed by Jordanians in this study are inconsistent with previous claims of an optimistic West and a pessimistic East, and suggest that self-enhancing processes may not be confined to Western or highly individualistic groups. The findings did not uncover an association between dispositional optimism and risk or self-protective behaviors. Multiple regression analyses showed cultural background and sex to be the best predictors of these behaviors. The implications of these findings are discussed.

Keywords: Americans; Jordanians; Culture; Optimism/pessimism; Risk behaviors.

La présente étude avait pour but d'évaluer quelques conclusions de recherches passées, fondées principalement sur des comparaisons de nord-américains et d'asiatiques de l'est, indiquant que les occidentaux tendent à être optimistes alors que les orientaux tendent à être pessimistes. Deux échantillons d'étudiants américains-européens et jordaniens du collège ont rempli un questionnaire ayant des items mesurant l'optimisme dispositionnel avec d'autres items qui portent sur les comportements de risque et d'auto-protection (e.g., la ceinture de sécurité, la vitesse au volant, l'usage de tabac), sur les facteurs sociaux et démographiques (e.g., le sexe, le statut socio-économique, la religiosité). Les résultats ont indiqué que l'optimisme dispositionnel était plus fort chez les américains en comparaison aux participants jordaniens. Des analyses séparées de l'optimisme versus le pessimisme ont montré que les participants jordaniens n'étaient pas pessimistes mais pas moins optimistes que leurs homologues américains. Il n'y avait pas de corrélations significatives entre l'optimisme dispositionnel et le sexe, le statut socio-économique et la religiosité. Les niveaux d'optimisme dispositionnel affichés par les jordaniens dans cette étude sont inconsistents avec les affirmations passées d'un occident optimiste et d'un orient pessimiste et suggèrent que les processus d'auto-amélioration pourraient ne pas être restreints aux occidentaux ou aux groupes hautement individualistes. Les résultats n'ont pas dévoilé une association entre l'optimisme dispositionnel et les comportements de risque ou les comportements d'auto-protection. Des analyses de régression multiples ont indiqué que le contexte culturel et le sexe sont les meilleurs prédicteurs de ces comportements. Les implications de ces résultats sont discutées.

El presente estudio se basó en la evaluación de algunas conclusiones de investigaciones anteriores, basadas principalmente en comparaciones de habitantes de norteamericanos con habitantes del Asia del este, en las que se proponía que mientras los occidentales tienden a ser optimistas, los orientales tienden a ser pesimistas. En

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dos muestras de estudiantes de la escuela superior europeo-americanos y jordanos se administró un cuestionario que consiste en preguntas que miden el optimismo disposicional junto con preguntas que evalúan conductas de riesgo y de autoprotección (p.e., uso de cinturón de seguridad, velocidad de manejo, fumar) así como factores sociales y demográficos (p.e., sexualidad, estatus socioeconómico, religiosidad). Las conclusiones señalaron que el optimismo disposicional es más fuerte en los participantes americanos en comparación con los jordanos. Análisis separados del optimismo en relación con el pesimismo revelaron que los participantes jordanos eran más pesimistas, pero no menos optimistas que sus homólogos americanos. No se encontraron correlaciones significativas entre optimismo disposicional y sexualidad, estatus socioeconómico o religiosidad. El nivel de optimismo mostrado por los jordanos en este estudio es inconsistente con las propuestas anteriores de un Oeste optimista y un Este pesimista, y sugiere que los procesos de autodesarrollo no pueden ser limitados a grupos Occidentales o altamente individualistas. Los resultados no mostraron una asociación entre optimismo disposicional y conductas de riesgo o autoprotectoras. Los análisis de regresión múltiples mostraron que el contexto cultural y la sexualidad son los mejores predictores de estas conductas. Las implicaciones de estos hallazgos fueron discutidas.

The study of optimism and pessimism has been approached from a number of conceptual perspectives. One perspective, adopted by the present study, views these constructs as personality traits or dispositions involving a tendency to generally expect positive or negative outcomes in one's life (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). Another major perspective suggests that optimism and pessimism reflect an attributional style (Buchanan & Seligman, 1995), whereby an optimist may explain past negative outcomes as having been caused by transitory, specific, and external factors, as opposed to stable, more global, and internal causes, which would be invoked by a pessimist.

Investigators of optimism and pessimism have related these constructs to mental and physical health (Gilham, Shatte, Reivich, & Seligman, 2001), the tendency to engage in risk or self-protective behaviors (Chapin, 2001), social and demographic factors such as sex, socioeconomic status, and religiosity (Bunce & Peterson, 1997; Dember & Brooks, 1989; Taylor, 1998), as well as to cultural influences (Heine & Lehman, 1995).

OPTIMISM AND CULTURE

Cross-cultural studies of optimism indicate that some cultures (e.g., Western) may promote a more positive outlook on life than other cultures (e.g., Eastern). For example, when asked by Heine and Lehman (1995) to rate the likelihood of experiencing certain positive or negative events in the future, Canadian college students were more likely than their Japanese counterparts to exhibit optimistic bias (Weinstein, 1987), in that they were more inclined to believe that positive events (e.g., "You will live past the age of 80") were more likely to happen to them, whereas negative events (e.g., "Sometime in the future you will develop skin

cancer") were more likely to happen to others. The opposite pattern was found for Japanese students. These results were replicated in a second study that included events with consequences for others (e.g., "In the future, in some way, you will become a heavy burden on your family or friends"), which presumably would be more relevant to Japanese interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). A recent meta-analysis by Heine and Hamamura (2007) involving over 130 studies confirmed that Westerners were significantly more likely than East Asians to exhibit optimistic bias and other self-enhancing behaviors. Further evidence of cultural differences in optimism was provided by Lee and Seligman (1997), who reported that European Americans had a more optimistic attributional style than both Chinese Americans and mainland Chinese. They suggested that cultural (e.g., self-effacement) as well as political and economic factors might underlie such differences between individualist Western and collectivist Eastern cultures.

The general conclusion that "Westerners" tend to be more upbeat than "Easterners" has more recently been challenged by evidence indicating that the question may be more complex. For example, Ji, Zhang, Osborne, and Guan (2004) have shown that when confronting negative events in real life (e.g., the SARS epidemic) rather than merely imagining them, Chinese individuals showed stronger optimistic bias than Canadians. Moreover, there were no significant cross-cultural differences with regard to dispositional optimism. In a study more similar to Heine and Lehman's, Chang, Asakawa, & Sanna (2001) found optimistic bias for the occurrence of negative life events among both European Americans and Japanese, but pessimistic bias for positive events only among Japanese. In contrast to Heine and Lehman's (1995) findings, Chang et al. did not find

optimistic bias for positive events among European Americans. Likewise, in a study that tested dispositional optimism and pessimism as independent concepts, Chang (1996) found Asian Americans to be as optimistic as (but more pessimistic than) European Americans.

The bulk of cross-cultural research on optimism has involved comparisons of North American and East Asian groups. To my knowledge, optimism has not been studied in Arab societies. Although Jordanians (one of the two samples in the present study) belong to the part of the world commonly referred to as "Eastern," and do share certain features (e.g., collectivism; Hofstede, 1980) with other so-called Eastern societies, more recent studies point out characteristics that distinguish Arabs from other cultural groups (Khallad, 2005). For example, emphasis on extended family ties, religiosity, and distinct social roles for men versus women are salient features of Arab societies. A study by Barry, Elliott, and Evans (2000) indicates that both collectivistic and individualistic tendencies are prevalent within Arab groups. For example, an interdependent (as opposed to independent) self-construal among Arab immigrants in the United States was more characteristic of those with a strong rather than a weak sense of ethnic identity.

The coexistence of individualist and collectivist perspectives among Arabs is similarly cited by Gregg (2005), who asserts that the two perspectives merge to create an individualistic motive to achieve, tied to a collectivist sense of family loyalty, which represents "a transformation of the traditional honor-modesty system into an honor-fueled achievement motivation, [that is combined] ... with religious piety to form 'Muslim ethicist' value systems" (p. 339). Hence, a major aim of the present investigation was to see whether such a distinct cultural context would have any effect on the phenomena of optimism/pessimism.

OPTIMISM AND GENDER

Numerous studies (see Best and Williams, 2001, for a review) have highlighted the relationship between sex and various behavioral phenomena. Some of these studies show that the different socialization practices that males and females are exposed to in human societies tend to influence not only gender roles and stereotypes, but also self-concept and self-esteem. For example, whereas males tend to have an independent self-construal in Western societies, females are more likely to exhibit an interdependent sense of self (Cross & Madson, 1997).

Available evidence on the relationship between optimism and sex is scant and inconsistent, with some findings suggesting greater optimism (as measured by the optimism–pessimism scale of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI)) for males (Malinchoc, Colligan, & Offord, 1996), but with others indicating either greater optimism (as reflected in explanatory style) for females (Nolen-Hoeksema, Girgus, & Seligman, 1991), or no sex differences in this regard (Bunce & Peterson, 1997). Considering Jordanian society's clear sex role differentiations (Kawar, 2001; cited in Gimenez & Conde-Ruiz, 2004), and the common observation that females generally tend to be more collectivist, one of the aims of this study was to assess the relationship between sex and optimism, and to verify whether cultural background might mediate such a relationship.

OPTIMISM AND SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Socioeconomic status (SES) has been positively linked to a number of behavioral phenomena, including mental and physical health (see Gallo and Matthews, 2003, for a review). As in the case of sex, though, the relationship between SES and optimism has yet to be clearly established. For example, Taylor's (1998) summary of findings shows significant correlations between the negatively worded portion of the Life Orientation Test (LOT) and education, but not family income. Similarly, Updegraff, Taylor, Kemeny, & Wyatt (2002) found small (albeit significant) correlations between dispositional optimism and education, but not income, in women with HIV. In contrast, Lee and Seligman (1997) reported significant positive correlations between an optimistic attributional style and income, and negative correlations between a pessimistic attributional style and income among mainland Chinese students. The present investigation examines anew the relationship between dispositional optimism and several SES indicators to see whether it exists and, if so, whether it holds for both cultural groups.

OPTIMISM AND RELIGIOSITY

It has been suggested that findings associating religiosity with good physical and mental health may stem from the sense of hope or optimism that religion instills in many people (Miller, Richards, & Keller, 2001). However, the few attempts at assessing the relationship between religiosity and optimism more directly have produced

inconclusive results. For example, whereas a positive correlation between Dember and Brook's (1989) optimism and pessimism scales and religious commitment was found in college students, no correlations were found between dispositional optimism and church attendance and involvement in a sample of African Americans (Mattis, Fontenot, & Hatcher-Kay, 2003, 2003). These authors, though, reported positive correlations between optimism and "subjective spirituality." Similarly, Ai, Peterson, Bolling, and Koenig (2002) uncovered a link between dispositional optimism and private prayer, but not general religiosity, in older patients preparing to undergo cardiac surgery. Sethi and Seligman (1993) reported that individuals affiliated with fundamentalist religions (e.g., Calvinism, Islam, Orthodox Judaism) had a more optimistic attributional style than those affiliated with religions with more liberal views.

The present research sought to revisit the relationship between religiosity and dispositional optimism in a context involving two groups, each residing in a society that is predominantly affiliated with a different faith (Christianity and Islam), with the objective of uncovering any effects that might emanate from different religious affiliations.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the present study tested the following hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 predicted both European-American and Jordanian participants to be dispositionally optimistic, with Americans expected to show relatively higher levels of optimism than their Jordanian counterparts. Hypothesis 2 predicted that dispositionally optimistic individuals, regardless of cultural background, would be less likely to engage in such risk behaviors as smoking and vehicular speeding, and would be more likely to buckle-up when driving or riding in cars.

In addition to these hypotheses, the present study sought answers to three research questions. Question 1 was concerned with whether optimism levels would differ for males versus females and, if so, whether this would depend on being American versus Jordanian. Question 2 pertained to whether participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, regardless of culture, would exhibit a higher level of optimism than those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Question 3 sought to verify whether participants who consider themselves to be religious would be more optimistic than those who do not, and whether the pattern of relationship between religiosity and optimism would differ for Americans versus Jordanians.

METHOD

Participants

The participants consisted of 167 European-Americans (55 males and 112 females; $M = 19.59$, $SD = 1.74$), and 260 Jordanians (100 males and 160 females; $M = 20.37$, $SD = 1.41$) enrolled in introductory psychology classes at two major public universities in the northwestern USA and Jordan respectively during Spring 2004. Participation was voluntary.

Measurement and procedures

The questionnaire designed for this study consisted of 30 items, 10 of which constituted the revised LOT (LOT-R; Scheier et al., 1994), used to measure dispositional optimism. Three of the items on the LOT-R were positively phrased, describing optimism (e.g., "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best") and three were negatively phrased, depicting pessimism (e.g., "I hardly ever expect things to go my way"); the remaining four were filler items. Participants indicated their agreement (or lack of) with each item, using a five-point scale, ranging from 0 (= strongly disagree) to 4 (= strongly agree). The scores for the negatively worded items were reverse coded. Cronbach's alpha was .66 for the American sample and .71 for the Jordanian sample. Participants were also asked to estimate the chances that they would achieve their life goals in comparison with an average person their age. This item, used by Chapin (2001) to assess optimistic bias in a sample of American adults, was added as an extra check on the level of optimism among American and Jordanian participants. The seven-point response scale for this item ranged from -3 ("much below average") to $+3$ ("much above average"). Optimistic bias was inferred when a group mean significantly exceeded zero.

In addition, religiosity, and the frequency of four risk or self-protective behaviors (e.g., smoking, vehicular speeding, and seatbelt use) were assessed. Religiosity was determined based on responses to the statement "I consider myself to be ..." which ranged from 1 (= not religious at all) to 4 (= highly religious). Smoking was measured by asking participants: "Do you smoke cigarettes?" with 1 (= no) or 2 (= yes). Seatbelt use was evaluated based on responses to the two statements "I buckle-up when driving," and "I buckle-up when riding in the front seat of a car," ranging from 0 (= never) to 4 (= always).

Vehicular speeding was judged based on answers to the question "If you drive, have you ever been ticketed for speeding?" with 1 (= no) or 2 (= yes). The questionnaire was translated into Arabic and then back-translated into English by another person fluent in both languages to ensure equivalence in meaning (Brislin, 1970). Participants completed the questionnaire in small groups, which required 15–20 minutes.

RESULTS

As predicted by Hypothesis 1, both European American and Jordanian participants exhibited optimism levels comparable to or higher than those reported by Scheier et al. (1994) for their normative sample of male ($M = 14.28$, $SD = 4.33$) and female ($M = 14.24$, $SD = 4.12$) college students. A two-way ANOVA (sex \times group) revealed a cross-cultural difference, $F(1, 423) = 18.67$, $p < .001$, but no significant sex, $F(1, 423) = 2.00$, ns , or interaction effect, $F(1, 423) = 0.28$, ns , with Americans showing greater optimism than Jordanians (see Table 1). In line with Hypothesis 1, a MANOVA with culture as between-subject factor and optimism/pessimism as within-subject factor uncovered a significant interaction, $F(1, 425) = 41.28$, $p < .000$, indicating that although American respondents expected fewer negative outcomes ($M = 8.05$, $SD = 2.03$) than Jordanians ($M = 6.37$, $SD = 2.57$), the two groups were similar, M (Americans) = 7.74, $SD = 2.12$; M (Jordanians) = 7.54, $SD = 2.44$, with regard to their expectations of positive outcomes.

Further support of Hypothesis 1 comes from a single t -test performed on the life goal item, which

showed that both American participants, $t(165) = 21.50$, $p < .000$, and their Jordanian counterparts, $t(259) = 11.90$, $p < .000$, provided significantly inflated estimates of the likelihood that they would achieve their life goals compared to average individuals their age, with Americans exhibiting significantly higher levels of optimistic bias than Jordanians, $t(424) = 4.79$, $p < .000$. Statistically significant correlations were observed between expectations of goal achievement and dispositional optimism for both the American ($r = .25$, $p < .001$) and Jordanian ($r = .48$, $p < .000$) samples.

Table 1 shows that there were no statistically significant correlations between optimism and any of the four risk or self-protective behaviors (Hypothesis 2), nor between optimism and any of the demographic variables or religiosity for either of the two groups. To test for possible interactions between the socio-demographic factors and culture, separate multiple regression analyses from the four risk behaviors on dispositional optimism, sex, SES, religiosity, and cultural background as predictor variables were performed on data for both groups combined. In addition to these predictor variables, the product terms for interactions between cultural background and sex, cultural background and SES, and cultural background and religiosity were included in the regression analysis. The predictor variables were centered before being entered in the regression equation. The predictor variables representing the main effects were entered in a first block; the interaction terms were entered in a second block. The results are given in Table 2. For seatbelt use while driving, the main effects of cultural background ($p = .001$) and sex ($p = .004$) became significant in the first block, but were qualified by

TABLE 1

Pearson correlations, means and standard deviations of study variables for American (above diagonal) and Jordanian (below diagonal) participants

	Americans		Jordanians		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>									
1. Optimism	15.82**	3.67	13.95	4.34	–	.25**	– .05	.03	.07	.02	– .02	– .01	– .09
2. Life goals	1.73**	1.04	1.10	1.09	.48**	–	– .12	.16*	.05	.17*	.13	– .03	– .02
3. Sex	1.67	0.47	1.62	0.49	– .09	– .05	–	– .09	.03	.06	.06	– .17*	.11
4. SES	1.59**	0.49	1.40	0.49	.07	.20**	– .12*	–	.00	.04	– .03	– .02	.04
5. Religiosity	2.18	0.96	2.30	0.68	.09	.14*	.15*	– .17**	–	– .04	– .07	.09	.07
6. Buckle-up while driving	3.88**	0.39	3.25	1.08	.10	.13	.21**	.11	.01	–	.81**	– .24**	.03
7. Buckle-up while riding	3.84**	0.50	2.19	1.35	.05	.14*	.04	.18**	.05	.63**	–	– .30**	– .09
8. Vehicular speeding	1.43**	0.57	1.26	0.47	.01	– .02	– .30**	– .04	– .09	– .11	– .08	–	.05
9. Smoking	1.05	0.23	1.18**	.38	– .01	.04	– .38**	.15*	– .22**	– .14	.01	.19*	–

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 2

Multiple regressions of risk behaviors among American and Jordanian participants on optimism, culture and sociodemographic factors.

Predictors	Buckle up while driving		Buckle up while riding		Vehicular speeding		Smoking	
	B	ΔR^2	B	ΔR^2	B	ΔR^2	B	ΔR^2
<i>Block 1</i>		.17		.37		.08		.11
Constant	3.51		2.83		1.30		1.13	
Optimism	.07		.04		-.02		-.02	
Culture	-.26**		-.77**		-.12**		-.06**	
Sex	.13**		.07		-.12**		-.08**	
SES	.06		.15**		-.02		.03	
Religiosity	-.02		.02		.02		-.03	
<i>Block 2</i>		.19		.38		.09		.18
Constant	3.54		2.85		1.30		1.13	
Optimism	.08		.03		-.02		-.02	
Culture	-.25		-.78		-.12		.06	
Sex	.15		.06		-.12		-.07	
SES	.07		.16		-.02		.03	
Religiosity	-.03		.06		.01		-.04	
Culture \times Sex	.10*		.03		-.02		-.08**	
Culture \times SES	.04		.14		.01		.01	
Culture \times Religiosity	-.01		.07		-.03		-.04*	

For culture, American was coded 1 and Jordanian was coded 2; for sex, male was coded 1 and female was coded 2; for SES, 1 means low and 2 means high; for religiosity, 1 means not religious at all, 2 means not religious, 3 means religious, and 4 means highly religious. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

their interaction ($p = .02$) in the second block. Specifically, Jordanian females were more likely than Jordanian males to buckle-up while driving. There were no significant differences between American males and females in this regard. Table 2 also shows that culture ($p = .001$) and SES ($p = .001$) significantly explained seatbelt use while riding. Americans were significantly more likely than Jordanians to buckle up when riding in the front seat of a car, and participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, regardless of culture, were more likely to buckle up as passengers than those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Sex ($p = .001$) and cultural background ($p = .001$) were also the best predictors of vehicular speeding. Female participants were significantly less likely than their male counterparts to engage in vehicular speeding, and American participants, overall, were significantly more likely than Jordanian participants to engage in this behavior. Sex ($p = .001$), culture ($p = .001$), and their interaction ($p = .001$) significantly explained smoking. Specifically, female participants were less likely to smoke than male participants, and Americans, overall, were less likely to smoke than Jordanians. The significant interaction indicated that Jordanian males were more likely to smoke than Jordanian females. There were no significant differences between American males and females in this regard. A statistically significant interaction ($p =$

.01) between cultural background and religiosity in relation to smoking behavior suggested that those who considered themselves to be religious among Jordanians, but not Americans, were less likely to smoke than those who did not.

DISCUSSION

As expected, both American and Jordanian participants displayed dispositional optimism, with Americans exhibiting a greater degree of it. Interestingly, the difference in the level of optimism between the two groups was limited to the negative portion of the LOT-R. In other words, this finding, which is similar to one reported by Chang (1996) for Asian Americans, indicates that although Jordanians may be more pessimistic than Americans, that does not mean that they are less optimistic. These findings, coupled with the data from the single-item measure of optimistic bias, suggest that previous conclusions indicating that Westerners tend to be optimistic and Easterners pessimistic may be simplistic, and that dispositional optimism and pessimism may be more appropriately treated as two independent constructs (Chang, 1996).

Although the present study obviously reveals similarities between Jordanian and American participants in terms of general outlook, and possibly self-enhancing biases, one must be cautious in generalizing from samples of college

students to the general population (see Weinstein, 1987). In Jordan, college students are exposed to Western ideas and behaviors, which may contribute to the formation of attitudes and expectations that are not typical of other Jordanians. On the other hand, some reports (Gregg, 2005) point to the confluence of individualistic and collectivistic value systems among Arabs, which may account for present Jordanians' optimism levels lying between those typically reported for largely individualistic versus largely collectivistic groups.

It was surprising not to find the predicted correlations between dispositional optimism and any of the risk and self-protective behaviors, although the bulk of evidence on this issue does come from investigations of optimistic bias. It may be that dispositional optimism is not as directly related to risk behaviors as optimistic bias. In fact, investigators of this issue (Peterson & Bossio, 2001) often draw clear distinctions between these two types of optimism and their impact on behavior. Another possibility is that the single items used in measuring each of the risk and self-protective behaviors were inadequate in eliciting appropriate responses from participants (i.e., demand characteristics).

The results of multiple regression analyses showed cultural background and sex to be the best predictors of various risk behaviors. For example, American participants were significantly more likely than Jordanians to buckle-up as both drivers and passengers, and less likely to smoke. A likely aspect of cultural background that could explain these cross-cultural differences may concern pertinent laws and their enforcement in each of the two cultures. For example, due to a relatively new and poorly enforced seatbelt law, Jordanians still do not tend to buckle-up as drivers, and even less so as passengers (CDC, 2006). Similarly, the lack of health education, and the lack of enforcement of laws that prohibit smoking in public places, might have contributed to maintaining smoking behavior among a large segment of Jordanian society, especially among young men. Cultural influences were also evident in the finding that among Jordanian participants, those who considered themselves to be religious were less likely to smoke than those who did not.

Effects of sex (or, perhaps more accurately, sex-role stereotypes) on risk behavior are reflected in the findings showing that female participants overall were less likely to engage in vehicular speeding, and in the case of the Jordanian sample were less likely to smoke, and more likely to buckle-up as drivers. Also, participants from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, regardless of

culture, were more likely to buckle-up as passengers, which suggests that a higher SES may make people more aware of the benefits of wearing seatbelts and/or the need to abide by the law, even in the absence of law enforcement.

It is not clear why no relationship was found between optimism and SES. Considering the tentativeness of previous evidence on this issue, however, it is possible that the frequently cited link between SES and other mental and physical health indices (Gallo & Matthews, 2003) does not exist with dispositional optimism, at least not as directly.

In view of the varied procedures and the conflicting findings of previous studies, the lack of a statistically significant correlation between dispositional optimism and religiosity was not entirely unexpected. It is, nonetheless, reasonable to suspect that the item used to assess religiosity may have been insufficient to tap into aspects of religiosity that may be of relevance to participants, and which may be associated more strongly with optimism.

Taken together, the findings of this study suggest that the question of whether a particular cultural group is optimistic or pessimistic is a complex one, and call for caution in describing Westerners in general as optimists and non-Westerners as pessimists. More broadly, the present pattern of results for the Jordanian sample highlights the need to view Arabs as a distinct cultural group that blends individualistic and collectivistic attributes, whose effects on behavioral and psychological phenomena warrant exploration.

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