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## Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Organizations: The Role of Self- Construal in the Psychological Well-Being of Migrants

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## **Abstract**

This study attempted to highlight the role of ethnic organizations in maintaining the ethnic identity and self-construals of migrants and see whether such perpetuations were psychologically healthy or not in a contrasting culture. Two groups of migrants of Asian-Indian origin in the USA participated in the study, one group belonging to their respective ethnic organizations and the other group not belonging to any ethnic organization. Results indicated stronger ethnic identity and interdependent self-construal in members of ethnic organizations as compared to non-members. Self-construals were found to be significant moderators in the relationships between ethnic identity and well-being in members of ethnic organizations but not in non-members. Better well-being was seen in people who were engaged in their respective ethnic organizations and thereby still maintaining their home prototypical self-construal with strong ethnic identity. Non-members showed a match of self-construal to the host culture (independent) as well as weaker ethnic identity and poorer well-being, while the member group showed higher intergroup anxiety. Results were discussed in light of the debates on cultural diversity and role of ethnic organizations and social identity.

*Keywords:* migration, ethnic identity, self-construal, wellbeing, ethnic organization, Asian Indians, Mizo

## **Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Organizations: The Role of Self-Construal in the Psychological Well-Being of Migrants**

Ethnic identity and self-construal are two psychological constructs that have often been linked with intercultural adjustment and psychological well-being. Coming from the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner (1986), ethnic identity has been conceptualized (Phinney & Ong, 2007) as an aspect of social identity that is a part of an individual's self-concept, derived from a knowledge of one's membership in a social group or groups, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1981). Further conceptualizations of ethnic identity, incorporating the developmental theory of Erikson (1968) that expanded into Marcia's (1980) identity development theory, imply that strong or committed ethnic identity would be positively correlated with psychological well-being (Atkinson, Morton, & Sue, 1993; Cross, 1991; Helms, 1990; Phinney & Ganey, 2016; Umaña-Taylor, Yazedjian, & Bámaca-Gómez, 2004). Indeed, a host of studies have found the importance of positive ethnic identity for mental health (e.g., Mossakowski, 2003; Rayle & Myers, 2004; Torres, Yznaga, & Moore, 2011; Smith & Silva, 2011), psychological well-being (e.g., Jasinskaja-Lahti, Liebkind, Jaakkola, & Reuter, 2006; Phinney & Ganey, 2016), psychosocial competence, and successful adaptation for migrant populations in various countries (e.g., Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Costigan, Koryzma, Hua, & Chance, 2010; Phinney, Horenczyk, Liebkind, & Vedder, 2001), and even as a buffer against prejudice and discrimination (e.g., Cross, 1991; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Phinney, 1996; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 1999).

### **Ethnic Identity and Ethnic Organizations**

Adaptation to one's new environment is a major concern of any migrant or migrant-receiving institution or nation. Take the USA as a case in point that has often been called a nation of immigrants (National Museum of American History, n.d.). There has been a large amount of migration from India to the USA in the last few decades, mainly pulled by employment and educational opportunities. According to the United States Census of 2010, the Asian Indian population in the United States grew from almost 1,678,765 in 2000 (0.6% of U.S. population) to 2,843,391 in 2010 (0.9% of U.S. population), a growth rate of 68%, which is one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). That India is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic society is reflected in the several ethnic organizations based on ethno-linguistic affiliations that have cropped up amongst Asian-Indian migrants in the United States. For every major ethnic group in India, there is a parallel organization in the USA.

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with leaders and members of these organizations, along with a study of their by-laws and constitutions (Fente, 2015),

indicated that these associations were organized mainly for: celebrating the cultural values and traditions of origin; networking among ethnic members; organizing cultural events during the major Indian festivals and other holidays; holding annual meetings and social gatherings where its members often discuss issues relating to identity, cultural transmission, children's education, coping with cultural differences and attitudes, and generally supporting one another. Thus, be it due to the research findings or personal experiences amongst the older generation of the migrant population, strengthening and promoting ethnic identity was the core and written agenda of these ethnic organizations. Additionally, given the research results of a positive relationship between ethnic identity and well-being, it would then be expected that members of such ethnic organizations would have stronger ethnic identity and therefore better psychological well-being than non-members, one hypothesis that this study would like to examine. This occurs amidst the prevailing informal but serious debates on multiculturalism versus assimilation, or extremism and separatism for that matter, and the role that ethnic organizations might play.

### **Migration, Cultural Fit and Biculturalism**

The existence of these ethnic organizations of Indian origin further echoes the collectivistic nature of ethnic groups of India, befitting the collectivistic cultural pattern in India (Hofstede, 1980; Guess, 2004; Fente & Singh 2008; Sinha, 1999; Chadda & Deb, 2013). However, these organizations from the collectivistic culture of India could be unsuitable in an individualistic culture like the United States (Hofstede, 1980; Kapoor, Hughes, Baldwin, & Blue, 2003), considering the argument of the cultural-fit hypothesis (Ward & Chang, 1997) that suggests that adjustment in a new culture is facilitated when the migrant's personality is similar to the prototypical personalities in the host culture.

Self-construal is an aspect of self-concept that refers to an individual's sense of self in relation to others; either independence (e.g., viewing oneself as separate and distinct from others) or interdependence (e.g., viewing oneself as interconnected with other in-group members) is emphasized depending on the demands of one's social environment. Thus, although both self-construals may be used, members of individualistic cultures (e.g., USA) tend to emphasize the independent self-construal, while members of collectivistic cultures (e.g., India) emphasize the interdependent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Many researchers have developed the construct and measurements of self-construal in understanding the self within the context of culture (Cousins, 1999; Kuhnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Levine et al., 2003; Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Singelis, 1994; Singelis, Bond, Sharkey, & Lai, 1999). Further, from the perspective of intersubjective perception, self-construal is likely to be a reflection of the normative aspects of culture rather than one's own evaluative internal preferences; when people enter into a nonnative culture, they behave in ways that match the situational requirements for personal fitness rather than actually changing the self. However, an adequate self-report measurement for such a construct is yet awaited

(Bierbrauer, Heyer, & Wolfradt, 1994; Chiu, Gelfand, Yamagishi, & Wan, 2010; Zou et al., 2009).

Be it as it may, it can then be assumed from a cultural-fit perspective that Asian-Indians migrating to the US would adjust better if they emphasized their independent self-construal rather than their interdependent self-construal (Cross, 1995; Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002; Yamaguchi & Wiseman, 2003). However, this cultural-fit hypothesis has received mixed support. For example, in the two individualistic Western cultures of Canada and the USA, some researchers (e.g., Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006) found a positive relationship between independent self-construal and socio-cultural adjustment among international students (Canada), whereas others (e.g., Cross, 1995) did not find relationships between sojourners' independent self-construal and their satisfaction with their relationships with host nationals (Americans). Nezlek, Schaafsma, Safron, and Krejtz (2012) also found that, regardless of whether individuals' self-construals matched with prevailing construals in the host society, interdependent self-construals were positively related to the quality of intra- and interethnic contact.

Further, literature pertaining to biculturalism and its impact on intercultural adaptation has been empirically inconclusive with mixed results for and against it. The recent meta-analysis (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013) of 83 studies in acculturation and intercultural adaptation indicated a strong, positive relationship between biculturalism and psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Thus, there appears to be more support for the assumption that integration (Berry, 2001) or integrated ethnic identity (Phinney et al., 2001) would be more conducive than hindering to a migrant's psychological well-being (Berry et al., 2006).

It was therefore hypothesized that self-construal would have a moderating role in the relationships between ethnic identity and psychological well-being, but only in members of ethnic organizations. Non-members were expected to show: a match of self-construal to the host culture (i.e., independent self-construal), weaker ethnic identity, and poorer psychological well-being. However, intergroup anxiety was still expected to be higher in migrant members of ethnic organizations, in line with the argument that individuals who are highly interdependent are likely to be acutely attuned to social cues (as interdependents would be expected to be) that may make them more prone to the experiences of social anxiety. People high on ethnic identity are likely to be more sensitive even to subtle prejudice, as immigrants are generally perceived as incompetent and untrustworthy (Cakal, Gausel, & Turner, 2011; Lee & Fiske, 2006; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Okazaki, 1997; Stephan & Stephan, 1985).

The study therefore aimed to elucidate: i) the self-construals (independent and interdependent) of migrants from collectivistic culture of India in individualistic USA in general; ii) the self-construals, ethnic identity, mental well-being, and intergroup anxiety of members of ethnic organizations as compared to non-members; iii) the relationships between the variables in members and non-members of ethnic organizations; iv) the predictability of ethnic organization membership on ethnic identity and self-construals; and v) the moderating role of self-construals in the relationship between ethnic identity and well-being in members and non-members of ethnic organizations.

## Method

### Sample

Two groups of participants, members and non-members of ethnic organizations in the USA, were selected for the study. The member-group was comprised of 215 participants belonging to ethnic organizations. Of these 215, 127 were Mizo (an ethnic group hailing from the North-east region of India and Indo-Myanmar border) members of the Mizo Society of America, and the 88 others came from a mix of 38 other ethnic organizations serving the Indian ethnicity in the USA including those listed below<sup>1</sup>. The Non-member group was comprised of 110 participants (10 Mizo, 100 other Asian-Indians) who were not members of any ethnic organizations.

For recruitment of the member group, known Asian-Indian ethnic organizations were first listed and grouped according to different Indian ethnicities. From each ethnic group, two organizations were selected, with consent from the executive members of the organizations if possible, to represent the different ethnic groups of India. Members of each organization were then emailed the links to the survey questionnaire for their individual consent and participation. Further, participants were recruited through friends, families, and university students who happened to be members of Asian Indian ethnic organizations. This yielded: 88 Asian-Indians (52 males and 36 females) aged 18 to 76 years (*M* age = 42.18 years) from a total of 38 Asian-Indian ethnic organizations spread across 18 states, and 127 Mizo participants (78 males and 49 females) aged 19 to 82 years (*M* age = 41.68 years) who were members of the Mizo Society of America (across 19 states). These participants originally hailed from India (58.3%) and Myanmar border (40.2%) and had been living in the United States for at least a year.

For recruitment of the non-member group, the researcher reached out to Asian-Indian friends and acquaintances from various universities and states across the US. The sample was allowed to snowball further to the friends and families of the participants, as long as they fit the criteria of being adult Asian-Indians or Mizo who had been living in the United States for at least one year, were not members of any ethnic organizations, and whose family's country of origin was India or the Indo-Myanmar border. This yielded 100

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<sup>1</sup> Active organizations in the US that served Asian-Indian ethnicity of the participants include: Cultural Association of Bengal, Association of Kannada Kootas of America (AKKA), Telugu Association of North America (TANA), Orissa Society of the Americas, Brihan Maharashtra Mandals of North America (BMM), Federation of Tamil Sangams of North America (FETNA), Boston Tamil Association, Tamil Sangam of Greater Washington Inc, New Jersey Tamil Sangam, Tamil Sangam of Carolina, Gujarati Samaj of New York, Federation of Kerala Associations of North America (FOKANA), Punjabi American Heritage Society, Punjabi-American Cultural Association, Bengali Association of Greater Rochester, Telugu Association of South Florida, Indian Association of Davis, Indian Graduate Student Association at Carnegie Mellon University, Kashmir Overseas Association, Kashmir Education Initiative, Bengali Association of Dallas Fort Worth, Indian Cultural Association of Central Jersey, Sanskriti - DC, Maharashtra Mandal Chicago, Indian Students Association of Tallahassee (INSAT), Garden State Cultural Association, North American Manipur Association, Assam Association of North America, Friends of Assam and Seven Sisters, Mizo Society of America.

Asian-Indians and 10 Mizo (65 males and 45 females) who were not members of any Indian ethnic or Mizo organizations, aged between 18 to 51 years ( $M$  age = 28 years) and represented 30 American states.

### Measures

After giving consent, most participants individually answered the survey questionnaire in *Qualtrics* through links that were sent to them by email. A few others (8 members and 7 non-members) answered a pen-and-paper version of the survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire set included a background demographic data sheet and scales measuring ethnic identity, intergroup anxiety, mental well-being, and self-construals.

The demographic data indicated that all Mizo were Christians (48.5% of the total sample), and the rest were either Hindus (40.5%) or others (9.7%) such as Muslim, Jain, Jewish, Sikh, and Zoroastrian. All participants were educated to at least 'some high school' level with the majority being postgraduates (43.9%) and college graduates (24.9%). Additionally, 58.1% were married, whereas 32.9% were single and 2% divorced; 62.5% were employed, 8% were unemployed, and 24% were students. Most (84.8 %) lived with their blood relatives and friends of same ethnicity, 11% lived alone, and 9.6% lived with friends of different ethnicity. The majority (57%) of the participants had been living in the US for more than 10 years, and, except for 6 persons residing in the US for 1 year, all participants had lived in the US for more than 2 years. Aside from the small sample (51 out of 325 participants) of Mizo from the Indo-Myanmar border, all other participants originally hailed from India.

To measure ethnic identity, the *Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure - Revised* (MEIM-R; Phinney & Ong, 2007) was used. The MEIM-R was designed to assess two components of ethnic identity: exploration (three items) and commitment (three items). Items were rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), with 3 as a neutral position so that high scores indicated strong ethnic identity. The scores for the Ethnic Identity total scale and Exploration and Commitment subscales were calculated as the mean of items in each subscale, or of the scale as a whole. Cronbach's alpha was .85 for the Exploration subscale, .89 for the Commitment subscale, and .90 for the full Ethnic Identity total scale in this study.

The *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale* (WEMWBS; Tennant, Fishwick, Platt, Joseph, & Stewart-Brown, 2006) was used to measure mental well-being. The WEMWBS comprises 14 items that relate to an individual's state of mental well-being (thoughts and feelings). Responses were made on a 5-point scale ranging from "*none of the time*" to "*all of the time*." Each item was worded positively, and together they covered most attributes of mental well-being including both hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .92.

Intergroup anxiety was measured by 10 items (*Intergroup Anxiety Scale*; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). For each item, the following question was asked: "If you were the only member of your ethnic group and you were interacting with people from a different racial or ethnic group (e.g., talking with them, working on a project with them), how would you feel

compared to occasions when you were interacting with people from your own ethnic group?" The items employed 7-point scales to determine if they would feel more or less *certain, awkward, self-conscious, happy, accepted, confident, irritated, impatient, defensive, suspicious, and careful* when interacting with outgroup members. The positively worded items were reverse scored. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .90 in this study.

To measure independent and interdependent self-construals, part of the *Self-Construal Scale (SCS)* (Singelis, 1994) was used. The Self-Construal Scale is a 24-item scale designed to measure levels of Independence and Interdependence in self-construal. It consists of 12 items reflecting independence and 12 items reflecting interdependence. Each item is rated on a 7-point scale, with answers ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The scores are calculated separately for each of the two dimensions. An additional 3 items in each subscale was incorporated as suggested by the author, making it a 30-item scale. Based on previous research that examined the structure of SCS (Singelis, 1994; Miramontes, 2011), four items from each of the two subscales with the highest factor loadings were selected from the full SCS for use in this study. Cronbach's alpha was .79 for Independent SC and .75 for Interdependent SC.

## Results

Besides looking at differences according to ethnic organization membership, several hierarchical multiple regression models were tested to highlight the role of ethnic identity and self-concept in the subjective well-being of Asian-Indians and the Mizo ethnic group as a function of their affiliation to their respective ethnic organizations in the US. Intergroup anxiety was taken up as a correlational variable that might throw light on the circumstances that trigger people to commit to groups.

The preliminary analyses indicated no significant gender effect except in Interdependent Self-construal,  $t(323) = 3.12, p = .002$ , where men ( $M = 20.27, SD = 4.01$ ) were found to construe their selves as significantly more interdependent than women ( $M = 18.79, SD = 4.45$ ). Nonetheless, as gender was not a major differentiating factor for all the other variables and considering the limited sample size, male and female participants were pooled within each of the groups (Organization Members and Non-members) for further analyses.



Table 1

*t* values, Means, SDs and Relationships Between Ethnic Identity, Self-Construals, Anxiety and Well-Being in Members ( $n=215$ ) and Non-Members ( $n=110$ ) of Ethnic Organizations

Scales	<i>t</i>	Members		Non-members		Correlation coefficients (Pearson's <i>r</i> )						
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Ethnic Identity Exploration	5.05**	11.91	2.19	10.52	2.65	1.00	.64**	.91**	.08	.13	-.03	.14*
2. Ethnic Identity Commitment	10.11**	12.93	2.16	10.16	2.63	.53**	1.00	.90**	.07	.19**	-.04	.09
3. Ethnic Identity Total	8.49**	24.84	3.94	20.68	4.61	.88**	.87**	1.00	.09	.18**	-.04	.13
4. Independent Self Construal	- 3.91**	22.35	3.69	23.94	2.93	.19*	.09	.17	1.00	.25**	-.26**	.29**
5. Interdependent Self Construal	2.55**	20.12	4.14	18.85	4.36	.10	.23*	.18	.25**	1.00	.06	.20**
6. Intergroup Anxiety	2.29*	26.65	10.44	23.96	8.98	-.04	-.00	-.02	-.16	.19*	1.00	-.23**
7. Well Being	3.67**	54.09	6.74	50.76	9.45	.00	.15	.09	.29**	.22*	-.13	1.00

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . Note. Coefficients above the diagonal pertain to Members; coefficients below the diagonal pertain to Non-members.

### **Maintenance of Ethnic Identity and Self-Construals by Ethnic Organizations**

Independent sample *t* tests between groups (Members of ethnic organizations versus Non-members) indicated significant differences (see Table 1). As expected, members of ethnic organizations showed: more ethnic identity exploration,  $t(323) = 5.05, p < .001$  (Members  $M = 11.91, SD = 2.19$ , Non-members  $M = 10.52, SD = 2.65$ ); more ethnic identity commitment,  $t(323) = 10.11, p < .001$  (Members  $M = 12.93, SD = 2.16$ , Non-members  $M = 10.16, SD = 2.63$ ); stronger ethnic identity total,  $t(323) = 8.49, p < .001$  (Members  $M = 24.84, SD = 3.94$ ; Non-members  $M = 20.68, SD = 4.61$ ); more interdependent self-construal,  $t(323) = 2.55, p = .011$  (Members  $M = 20.12, SD = 4.14$ , Non-members  $M = 18.85, SD = 4.36$ ); and better well-being,  $t(323) = 3.67, p < .001$  (Members  $M = 54.09, SD = 6.74$ , Non-members  $M = 50.76, SD = 9.45$ ); but higher intergroup anxiety,  $t(323) = 2.29, p = .022$  (Members  $M = 26.65, SD = 10.44$ , Non-members  $M = 23.96, SD = 8.98$ ) than Non-members. On the other hand, Non-members were found to have stronger independent self-construal,  $t(323) = -3.91, p < .001$  ( $M = 23.94, SD = 2.93$ ) than Members ( $M = 22.35, SD = 3.69$ ).

### **Relationships Between Ethnic Identity, Self-Construals, Mental Well-Being and Intergroup Anxiety**

To study the contributions of ethnic identity in well-being among members and non-members of ethnic organizations, and to determine the moderating role of self-construals in the relationship between ethnic identity and well-being, several hierarchical multiple regression models were tested for Members and Non-members separately. First, the linearity of the relationships between the major predictor variables (ethnic identity exploration, ethnic identity commitment and ethnic identity total), potential moderators (independent and interdependent self-construals) and the criterion variable (mental well-being) were analyzed separately for Members and Non-members which are presented together in Table 1.

In both the Member and Non-member groups, Ethnic Identity subscales and full scale were significantly positively correlated with one another ( $r = .52$  to  $.91, p < .01$ ). Ethnic Identity Exploration was significantly positively correlated with Well-being ( $r = .14, p < .05$ ) in the Member group, whereas it was significantly positively correlated with Independent Self-construal ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ) in the Non-member group. Ethnic Identity Commitment was significantly positively correlated with Interdependent Self-construal in both Member and Non-member groups ( $r = .19, p < .01$  and  $.23, p < .05$ ). Ethnic Identity total was significantly positively correlated with Interdependent Self-construal in the Member group ( $r = .18, p < .01$ ). Independent Self-construal was significantly positively correlated with Interdependent Self-construal ( $r = .25$  and  $.25, p < .01$ ) and Well-being ( $r = .29$  and  $.29, p < .01$ ) in both the groups and was significantly negatively correlated with Intergroup Anxiety ( $r = -.26, p < .01$ ) in the Member group. Interdependent Self-construal was significantly positively correlated with Intergroup Anxiety in the Non-member group ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ) and also with Well-being in both the groups ( $r = .22$  and  $.20, p < .01$ ).

Intergroup Anxiety was significantly negatively correlated with Well-being only in the Member group ( $r = -.23, p < .01$ ). All other correlations were not statistically significant.

### **Moderating Role of Self-Construal Between Ethnic Identity and Mental Well-Being In Members Versus Non-Members of Ethnic Organizations**

The first hierarchical regression model was analyzed for the **Member group**. Mental Well-being was selected as the criterion variable. In Step 1, Age was entered as the control variable because it was found in the preliminary analyses that, among the demographic variables recorded, only the age factor had a significant effect ( $\beta = .253, p < .001$ ); this was needed to be separated or controlled in order to examine the moderating role of self-construals in the relationship between ethnic identity and well-being irrespective of age. Scores on measures of the main predictor (ethnic identity) and potential moderators (independent and interdependent self-construals) were centered and included in Step 2. The subscales of ethnic identity, exploration, and commitment were not taken separately as predictors due to their multicollinearity with the total ethnic identity scale score, and also because of the interest in the strength of ethnic identity *per se* and not the subscales separately. The interaction terms between the predictor and moderators were created from the centered scores and entered in Step 3. The results in Table 2 revealed that, controlling for age (which explained 4.7% of the variance in mental well-being), ethnic identity and self-construals explained 11.5% of the variance. The addition of the third block (interaction terms between ethnic identity and self-construals) in Step 3 added a significant 4.9% to the variance accounted for ( $p < .05$ ), bringing the total proportion of explained variance in mental well-being to 21% for the Member group. Significant main effects of age ( $\beta = .253, p < .001$ ) and independent self-construal ( $\beta = .208, p = .004$ ) indicated that well-being increased with an increase in independent self-construal and age among the Member group.

In Step 3, the interaction effects of 'Ethnic Identity x Independent Self-construal' and 'Ethnic Identity x Interdependent Self-construal' on Well-being were found to be significant. The pattern of the interactions (depicted in Figure 1 and Figure 2) indicates that Well-being of the Member group is affected by Ethnic Identity depending on the members' level of Independent and Interdependent Self-construal. The stronger the ethnic identity, the better the well-being at only a high level of independent ( $b = .413, 95\% \text{ CI } [.032, .793], t = 2.135, p = .034$ ) and interdependent ( $b = .465, 95\% \text{ CI } [.149, .779], t = 2.910, p = .004$ ) self-construals, not at the mean or low levels of self-construal. Thus, the relationship between ethnic identity and well-being only really emerges in organization members with high levels of both self-construals. It may be noted that the constructs of ethnic identity and mental well-being were not necessarily significantly related in the member group.

Table 2  
 Linear Model of Predictors of Ethnic Organization Member's Well-Being (N =215)

Predictors		$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>	49.155		.052	.052**
Constant				
Age		.228**		
<b>Step 2</b>			.161	.110**
Constant	48.898			
Ethnic identity		.046		
Independent self-construal		.274**		
Interdepent self-construal		.114		
<b>Step 3</b>			.209	.048**
Constant	48.467			
Ethnic identity x IndpSC		.144*		
Ethnic identity x InterSC		.172**		

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

Table 3  
 Hierarchical Regression Analysis predicting Non-member Group's Well-being (N = 110)

Predictors		$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>			.074	.074**
Constant	42.492			
Age		.271**		
<b>Step 2</b>			.175	.101**
Constant	41.957			
EITT		.091		
IndpSC		.233**		
InterSC		.118		
<b>Step 3</b>			.175	.000
Constant	41.924			
EITT x IndpSC		.003		
EITT x InterSC		-.001		

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

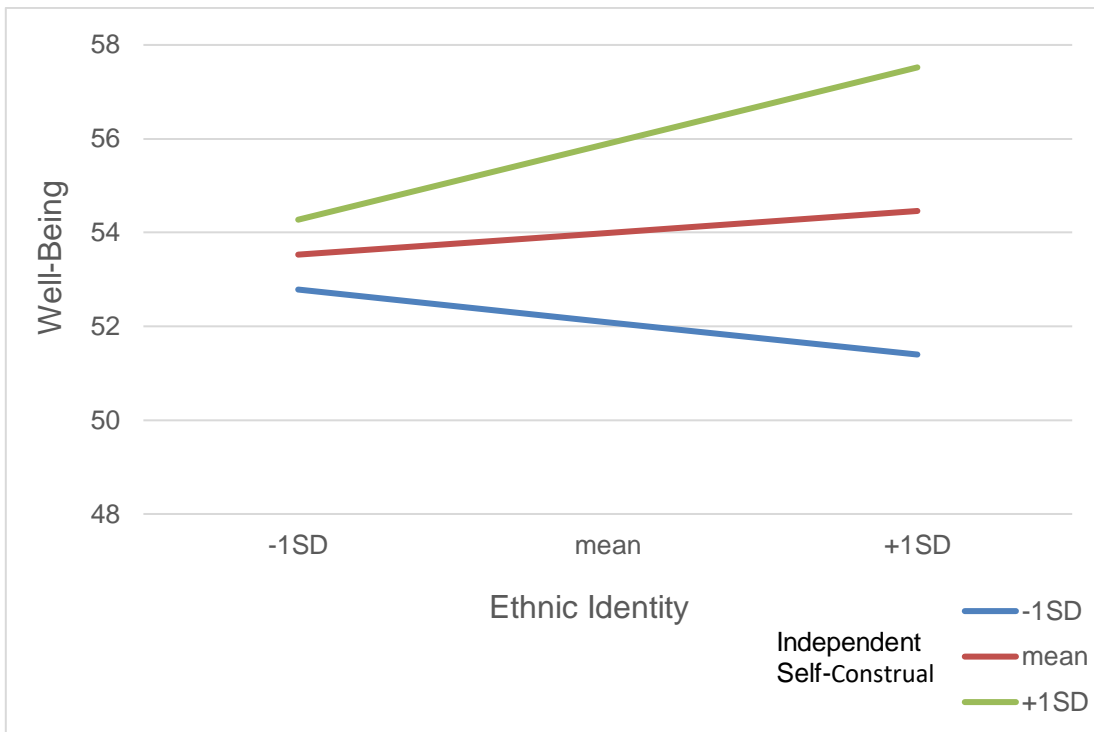


Figure 1. Moderation by independent self-construal in member group

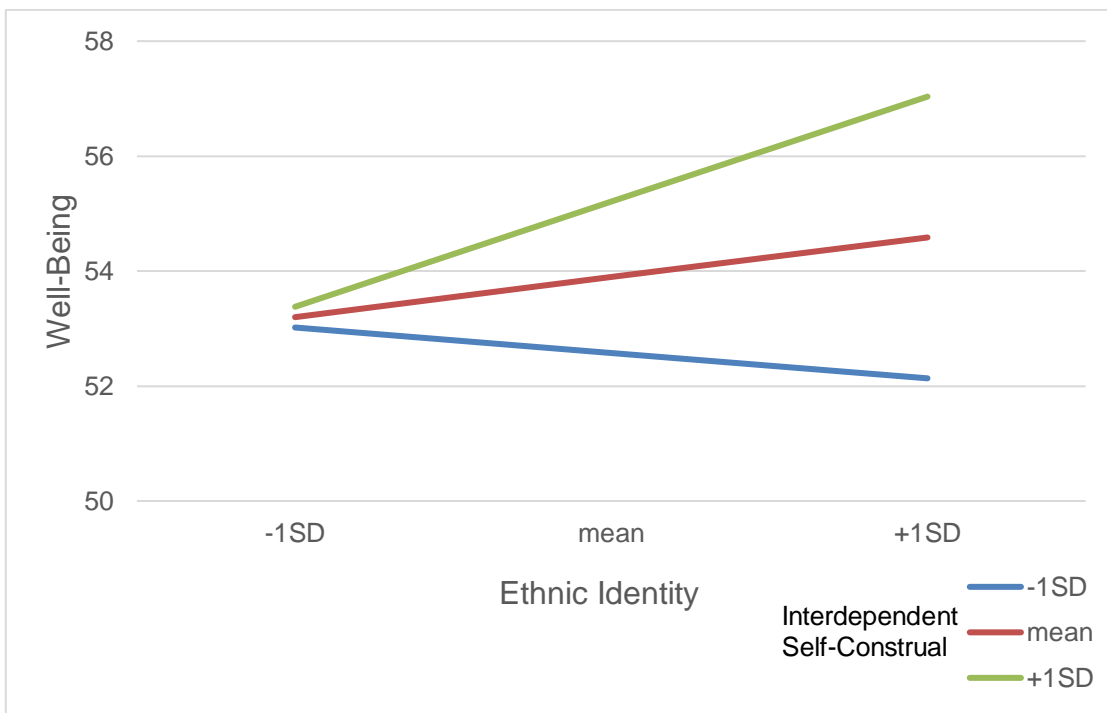


Figure 2. Moderation by interdependent self-construal in member group

### **Moderating Role of Self-Construals Between Ethnic Identity and Well-Being In Non-Member Group**

Similar analysis as was done for the Member group was carried out for the **Non-member group**. Results of the hierarchical regression analysis are given in Table 3. The results revealed that controlling for age (which explained 7.4% of the variance), ethnic identity and self-construal explained 10.1% of the variance. The addition of the third block (interaction terms between ethnic identity and self-construal) in Step 3 added no increase to the variance accounted for ( $p < .05$ ), making the total proportion of explained variance in mental well-being 17.5 % for the Non-member group, as compared to 21% for the member group. Significant main effects of age ( $\beta = .282, p = .004$ ) and independent self-construal ( $\beta = .235, p = .050$ ) indicated that well-being increases with an increase in independent self-construal and age among the Non-member group, too. However, unlike the Member group, the interaction effects of 'Ethnic Identity x Independent Self-construal' and 'Ethnic Identity x Interdependent Self-construal' on Well-being were found to be not significant in the Non-member group.

It may be noted that the Member group was comprised of members of ethnic organizations that can be distinguished into two large groups in meaningful ways: the Mizo, making up 59.07% of the Member group, and other Asian-Indians making up the remaining 40.93%. The Mizo members hailed from an ethnically distinct group of people from Mizoram in the North Eastern region of India and around the Indo-Myanmar border. The rest of the Member group was made up of migrants from other parts of India, generally sharing a typical Indian culture. Separate data analyses for these two groups may render clarity in the findings and increase power in an interpretation of the findings.

The results of the hierarchical regression analyses for other **Asian Indian Members** (N = 88) are given in Table 4. The results revealed that, controlling for age (which explained 7.3% of the variance), ethnic identity and self-construal explained 15% of the variance. The addition of the third block (interaction terms between ethnic identity and self-construal) in Step 3 added a significant 7.9% to the variance accounted for ( $p < .05$ ), bringing the total proportion of explained variance in mental Well-being to 30.2%, a substantial increase as compared to the pooled data. Significant main effects of age ( $\beta = .243, p = .014$ ) and independent self-construal ( $\beta = .212, p = .041$ ) indicated that Well-being increases with an increase in independent self-construal and age among the Asian-Indian Member group. In Step 3, only Independent Self-construal was observed to be a moderating variable between Ethnic Identity and Well-being, unlike the pooled data. The pattern of the interaction is depicted in Figure 3, which reveals that Well-being of the Asian-Indian Member group was affected by Ethnic Identity depending on their level of Independent Self-construal only. At a high level of independent self-construal, there is a positive relationship between ethnic identity and Well-being ( $b = .674, 95\% \text{ CI } [.148, 1.199], t = 2.548, p = .013$ ) but not at low or medium levels.

Separate similar analyses for the **Mizo Member** group (results given Table 5) revealed that, controlling for age (which explained 3.2 % of the variance), ethnic identity and self-construal explained 8% of the variance. The addition of the third block (interaction

Table 4  
*Hierarchical Regression Analysis predicting Asian Indian Member's Well-being (N=88)*

Predictors	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		.073	.073*
Constant	50.543		
Age	.270*		
<b>Step 2</b>		.223	.150**
Constant	50.773		
EITT	.125		
IndpSC	.295**		
InterSC	.132		
<b>Step 3</b>		.302	.079*
Constant	50.240		
EITT x IndpSC	.277**		
EITT x InterSC	.102		

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

Table 5  
*Hierarchical Regression Analysis predicting Mizo Member's Well-being (N=127)*

Predictors	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>Step 1</b>		.032	.032*
Constant	48.688		
Age	.179*		
<b>Step 2</b>		.112	.080*
Constant	47.817		
EITT	.011		
IndpSC	.218**		
InterSC	.127		
<b>Step 3</b>		.168	.056*
Constant	47.159		
EITT x IndpSC	.063		
EITT x InterSC	.263**		

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

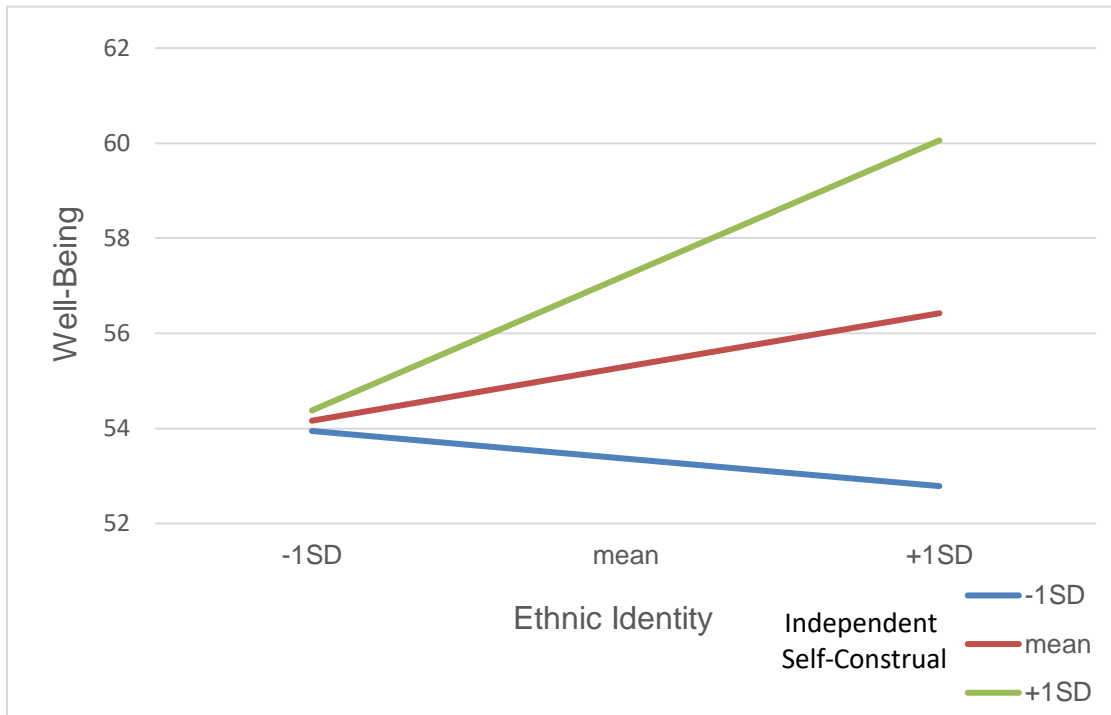


Figure 3. Moderation by independent self-construal in Asian Indian member group

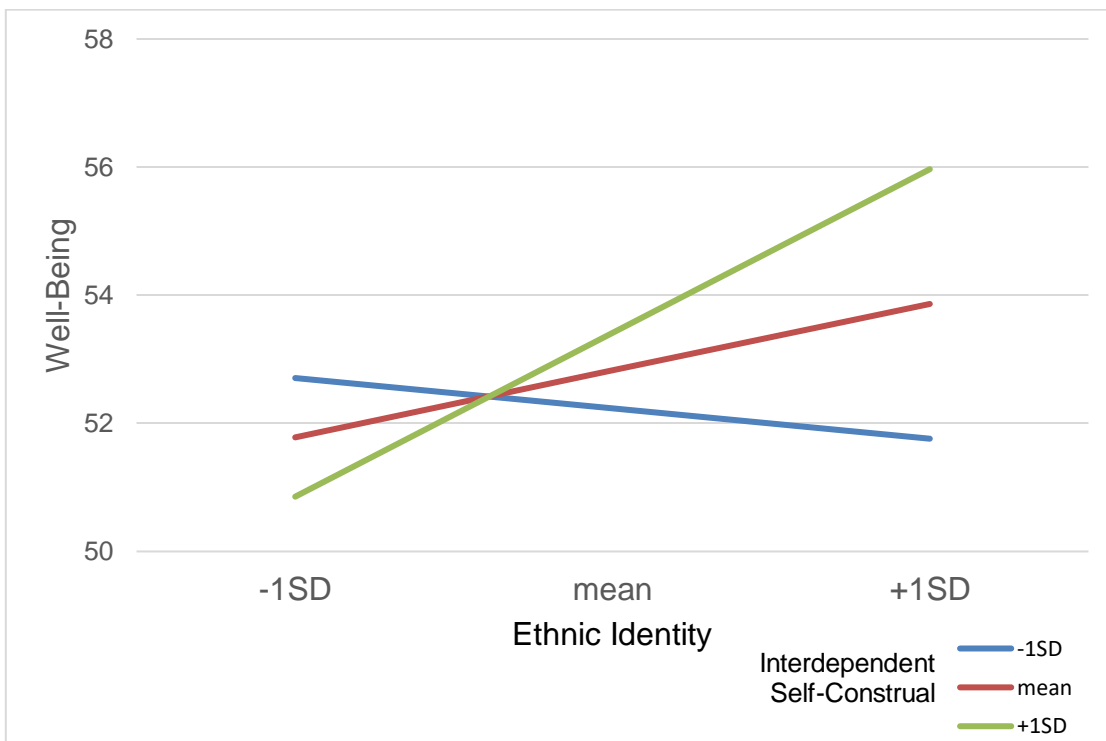


Figure 4. Moderation by interdependent self-construal in Mizo member group



terms between ethnic identity and self-construal) in Step 3 added a significant 5.6% to the variance accounted for ( $p < .05$ ), bringing the total proportion of explained variance in mental well-being to 17% for this group, a slight decrease as compared to the pooled data. Significant main effects of age ( $\beta = .253$ ,  $p < .001$ ) only indicated that well-being increases with an increase in age among the Mizo Member group. In Step 3, only Interdependent Self-construal was found to be a moderator in the relationship between Ethnic Identity and Well-being. The pattern of the interaction is depicted in Figure 4, which revealed that Well-being of the Mizo Member group was affected by Ethnic Identity depending on their level of Interdependent Self-construal only. At a high level of interdependent self-construal, there is a positive relationship between ethnic identity and well-being ( $b = .567$ , 95% CI [.130, 1.003],  $t = 2.570$ ,  $p = .011$ ), but not at low or medium levels of interdependent self-construal.

## Discussion

The theoretical foundations pertaining to ethnic identity (Mossakowski, 2003; Nesdale, Rooney, & Smith, 1997; Phinney, 1992; Santos & Umana-Taylor, 2015; Verkuyten, 2014), self-construal (Hyun, 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Singelis, 1994; Yamada & Singelis, 1999), and psychological well-being and adjustment (Costigan et al., 2010; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Williams, 2001; Major, Quinton, & McCoy, 2002) lend support for various assumptions regarding the adjustment and adaptation of migrants to a new cultural milieu. This study aimed to highlight the role of ethnic organizations in maintaining the ethnic identity and self-construal of migrants and see whether such perpetuations were psychologically healthy or not in a culture that contrasts one's own heritage. Two groups of migrants of Asian-Indian origin in the USA, one group belonging to their respective ethnic organizations and the other group not belonging to any ethnic organization, participated in the study. The member-group was comprised of two sub-groups: the Mizo ethnic group hailing from the North-eastern region of India and Indo-Myanmar border, who were members of the Mizo Society of America; and migrants from the rest of India belonging to their respective ethnic organizations of Indian origin (such as the Tamil sangams, Bengali cultural associations, etc.).

A significant gender (male - female) effect in interdependent self-construal indicated that men construe their selves as significantly more interdependent than women. Earlier studies in India indicated no gender differences in interdependent self-construal (Ghosh, 2008), whereas among the Mizo in India females showed stronger interdependence than males (Ralte, 2017). Although literature suggests that women generally score higher than men on scales assessing emotional relatedness of the self with significant others (interdependence), the finding of this study suggests that gender differences across cultures in interdependence may not be as ubiquitous as initially thought (Kashima et al., 1995), especially with regard to the migrant population.

A significant independent effect of age in this study indicated that mental well-being of the migrants increases with an increase in age. Although not many studies have looked

at the impact of migration on the well-being of individual migrants disaggregated by age (Birchall, 2016), some studies do support the finding; for example, studies where older migrants showed better mental health than younger migrants (Li et al., 2014), where significant subjective well-being gap between migrants and non-migrants diminished with increasing age (Sand & Gruber, 2016), and where older immigrant males were found to be less likely to report emotional problems than younger immigrant males (Robert & Gilkinson, 2012).

A significant main effect of independent self-construal on well-being indicated that mental well-being increases with an increase in independent self-construal irrespective of groups, generally conforming to the assumptions from a cultural-fit perspective that Asian-Indians migrating to the US would adjust better if they emphasize their independent self-construal rather than their interdependent self-construal (Cross, 1995; Oguri & Gudykunst, 2002; Yamaguchi & Wiseman, 2003; Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006).

Given these findings of a cultural fitting of self-construal as called for by the individualistic pattern of the host culture, which appears to be conducive to mental well-being, and, given that ethnic identity was not significantly positively correlated with well-being in this population, the question arose as to how ethnic organizations that may help perpetuate immigrants' self-construal would impact mental well-being and adjustment amidst concerns relating to multiculturalism and cultural diversity (e.g., Citrin, Sears, Muste, & Wong, 2001; Correll, Park, & Smith, 2008; Ginges & Cairns, 2000; Morrison, Plaut, & Ybarra, 2010; Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009; Todd, Galinsky, & Bodenhausen, 2012; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). This also questions the role of ethnic organizations within the trepidations leading to separation and threat to national identity on the one hand or integration and diversity on the other (D'Souza, 1991; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Sidanius, van Laar, Levin, & Sinclair, 2004; Sidanius, Levin, van Laar, & Sears, 2010).

These concerns were addressed in this study, as results indicated that a substantial proportion of variance in ethnic identity and self-construal could be explained by membership in ethnic organizations. Comparisons also revealed that members of ethnic organizations as compared to non-members showed stronger ethnic identity, better mental well-being, and more interdependent self-construal; non-members showed a stronger match of self-construal to the host culture (i.e. independent self-construal) but weaker ethnic identity and poorer mental well-being. Intergroup anxiety was higher in migrant members of ethnic organizations. This is in line with the rationale that individuals who are highly interdependent are likely to be acutely attuned to social cues (as interdependents would be expected to be) that may make them more prone to the experiences of social anxiety. People high on ethnic identity are also likely to be more sensitive even to subtle prejudice, as immigrants are generally perceived as incompetent and untrustworthy (Cakal et al., 2011; Lee & Fiske, 2006; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Okazaki, 1997; Stephan & Stephan, 1985). However, the fact that members of ethnic organizations had better well-being seems to have attenuated the negative effect of intergroup anxiety, but it could be that it was this anxiety that triggered them to be active in their respective ethnic groups in the first place.

The findings of this study were further clarified by looking at the moderating role of self-construal between ethnic identity and mental well-being given that ethnic identity was not necessarily positively correlated with well-being in the migrant population under study. Independent and interdependent self-construals were found to be significant moderators in the relationships between ethnic identity and well-being in members of ethnic organizations but not in non-members; well-being of the member group was affected by ethnic identity depending on the level of independent and interdependent self-construal. The stronger the ethnic identity, the better the well-being at only high level of independent and interdependent self-construals but not at the Mean or low levels of self-construals. Thus, the relationship between ethnic identity and well-being only really emerges in organization members with high levels of both self-construals.

It may be noted that the member group was composed of members of ethnic organizations that could be disaggregated into two meaningful ethnic groups of India: the Mizo tribe from Northeastern India and Indo-Myanmar border, and other Asian Indians hailing from other parts of India. Separate moderation analyses indicated that only interdependent self-construal was a moderating variable for the Mizo, whereas it was only independent self-construal for other Indians. The pattern of the interaction revealed that well-being of the Asian-Indian member group was positively related to ethnic identity at a high level of independent self-construal only, whereas only at a high level of interdependent self-construal was the well-being of the Mizo member group positively affected by ethnic identity.

In summary, it may be said that strong ethnic identity coupled with clear self-concept, of whatever kind, is good for members of ethnic organizations. For Asian-Indians, the interaction was in independent self-construal, whereas for the Mizo the interaction was in interdependence. Better well-being was seen in people who were engaged in their respective ethnic organizations, and thereby still maintaining their home prototypical self-construal with strong ethnic identity, supporting the role of ethnic organizations in contributing to biculturalism, integration, or integrated ethnic identity (Phinney et al., 2001), which was found to be most adaptive for migrants (Berry et al., 2006; Yamada & Singelis, 1999).

To better understand the adaptability of migrants in a new cultural milieu, the cultural pattern from where the migrants migrated, the changes in cultural behavior from the standpoint of intersubjective perception, and the measurement of such a construct may be some important factors to be considered in future research. It would also be desirable to glean out whether a strong ethnic identity in members of ethnic organizations coupled with poor self-concept would predict maladjustments given the negative slope of the interaction results, though statistically non-significant in this study. Nations may also like to monitor and acknowledge the perpetuation of cultural heritage through ethnic organizations, but at the same time encourage inculcation of a clear self-concept that likely buffers even perception of discrimination and threat in migrants (e.g., Cross, 1991; Operario & Fiske, 2001; Phinney, 1996; Torres, Yznaga, & Moore, 2011; Verkuyten & Nekuee, 1999).

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