



Understanding the Relationship between Optimistic Personality and Anxiety among College Students: The Mediating Role of Coping Style

*Rui ZHEN, *Xiao ZHOU*

School of Psychology, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China

***Corresponding Author:** Email: zxzhouxiao111@163.com

(Received 09 Feb 2016; accepted 24 Mar 2016)

Dear Editor- in- Chief

Stressors like academic tasks, job hunting, and interpersonal interaction are exerting great pressure on Chinese senior college students that may further elicit anxiety (1). Studies that focused on influencing factors of anxiety suggested that optimism could inspire individuals to pay more efforts to deal with emotional problems and in turn reduce negative psychological reactions such as anxiety (2-4). Furthermore, optimistic ones tend to take a positive attitude to face stressors and to accept the aftereffects brought by; hence, they may relieve anxiety by utilizing positive coping strategies to handle negative consequences (5). However, the presumption has not been evaluated by empirical studies. To examine it, we proposed that optimistic personality could relieve anxiety through positive coping style as a mediator.

Totally, 213 college senior students were randomly selected in Mar. 2014 from Anhui Normal University in Anhui Province, China. These par-

ticipants were 22-26 yr of age (SD=1.16) with a range from 19 to 27 yr old; 91 (42.7%) were boys. The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Beijing Normal University and the principals of the participating schools.

This study revised the life oriented questionnaire (6), and the internal reliability for that, was acceptable ($\alpha = 0.68$). This study revised the coping style questionnaire (7). Based on our need, the subscale of positive coping was chosen, and its reliability was 0.75. The self-reported anxiety scale developed (8) was used to assess the anxiety level of college senior students, and it had an adequate reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$).

Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations were conducted for main measures. As shown in Table 1, optimistic personality was positively associated with positive coping style, but negatively associated with anxiety; correlation between positive coping style and anxiety was significantly negative.

Table 1: Means, standard deviations and correlations among optimistic personality, positive coping style and anxiety

	M±SD	1	2	3
1. Optimistic personality	3.25±0.57	1.00		
2. Positive coping style	2.50±0.60	0.26***	1.00	
3. Anxiety	1.88±0.45	-0.20***	-0.44***	1.00

*** $P < 0.001$

First, we established a direct effect model (path analysis) that demonstrated optimistic personality had a direct effect on anxiety. The direct model had a full model fit [$\chi^2/df=0.00$, CFI=1.00, TLI=1.00, RMSEA=0.00], and optimistic personality affected anxiety negatively and significantly. Second, based on the direct model, we added positive coping style to the relation between op-

timistic personality and anxiety (Fig. 1). This model demonstrated a good fit [$\chi^2/df=0.015$, CFI=1.000, TLI=1.056, RMSEA=0.00], and the direct path from optimistic personality to anxiety became insignificant, suggesting that positive coping style completely mediated the relation between optimistic personality to anxiety.

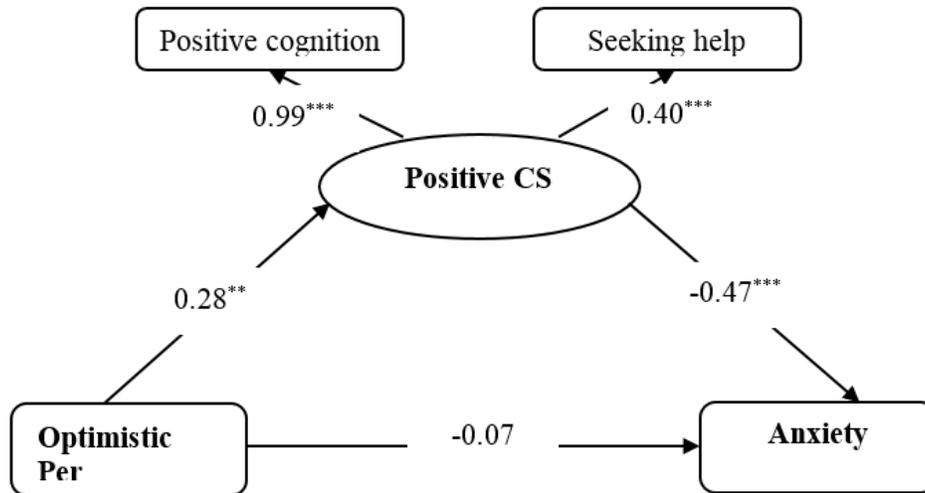


Fig. 1: The model of mediating effect. Positive CS=Positive coping style, Optimistic Per=Optimistic personality/ ** $P<0.01$, *** $P<0.001$

Consistent with previous studies (9), optimistic personality had a direct and negative prediction on anxiety. Here, optimistic college senior students may be more intended to participate in school activities and to build a social relationship of good quality, which will help relieve the negative effects of kinds of stressors.

This study also found optimistic personality relieved anxiety totally by positive coping style. To be specific, optimistic college senior students may have a positive expectancy for future and accept the real world, and they view positively on the external environment and find out their strengths and the positive aspects of life (10), enhancing their self-efficacy in solving problems and relieving anxiety.

Nevertheless, one limitation is that we did not screen out the participants that exhibited anxiety symptom to explore further the effect of optimistic personality and coping style on anxiety symp-

tom. Future study can investigate the differences in developmental mechanisms of mental problems between anxiety symptom group and non-anxiety symptom group, by including college students in different grades in the sample simultaneously.

Acknowledgements

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests.

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