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Globalization and Identity Development among Emerging Adults from Ladakh

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### Abstract

*Objectives:* Around the world, the transformative power of globalization has increased intercultural connectivity, initiated sociocultural change, and broadened the possibilities for diverse life trajectories. These developments have increased the number of individuals within non-Western contexts who experience emerging adulthood as a developmental life stage between adolescence and adulthood. Central to this life stage is identity development, which has become increasingly challenging during times of rapid sociocultural change. The present study investigated the interplay among cultural orientation, personal identity development, and psychological well-being during the processes of globalization-based acculturation in the North Indian Himalayan region of Ladakh. *Method:* A sample of 487 Ladakhi college students studying in Leh (72.9% female) and Delhi (48.0% female), ranging in age from 17 to 28 years, completed self-report questionnaires about cultural orientation, personal identity development, and psychological well-being. *Results:* Local Ladakhi cultural endorsement was not directly associated with psychological well-being. Furthermore, both personal identity exploration and commitment appeared to mediate the relationship between cultural endorsement and psychological well-being. Endorsement of traditional Ladakhi and Indian cultural streams was related to identity commitment and indirectly to psychological well-being. Endorsement of the global Western cultural stream was associated with identity exploration and indirectly with psychological well-being. *Conclusion:* Results illustrate the key role of personal identity among indigenous non-Western emerging adults exposed to cultural globalization.

Keywords: identity, globalization, acculturation, Ladakh, emerging adulthood

### **Globalization and Identity Development among Emerging Adults from Ladakh**

Globalization has expanded the range of life possibilities through education, economic and technical advancements, and mobility in some non-Western societies – creating possibilities for a new developmental stage, *emerging adulthood*, between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2015). The conception of emerging adulthood suggests a postponement of the transition into adult roles and responsibility, introducing a life-stage characterized by change, independence, and exploration. The theory of emerging adulthood was originally introduced to refer to young people in Western countries (Arnett, 2000), but Arnett (2002) has also specified that globalization might facilitate emerging adulthood in non-Western societies (Arnett, 2002). The process of cultural globalization also further complicates personal identity development, which is central to emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2011). As globalization continues to create new cultural exposures (Chiu, Gries, Torelli, & Cheng, 2011), the process of developing a coherent and consistent sense of self has become increasingly complex. This may be especially true in non-Western countries, where young people must reconcile influences from diverse local and global cultural streams (Arnett, 2002; Berman et al., 2014). Whereas cultural identity refers to how individuals define themselves in relation to their cultural affiliation, the interrelated concept of personal identity pertains to the question of who one is in terms of goals, values and beliefs (Meca et al., 2017). Given multiple cultural exposures and an increasing lack of clear cultural guidance within globalized contexts, both cultural and personal identity development can be difficult in societies marked by rapid sociocultural change (van Meijl, 2012).

Research on emerging adulthood and personal identity development has only begun to be conducted in non-Western contexts, limiting the potential cross-cultural validity of these constructs (Arnett, 2011; Berman, You, Schwartz, Teo, & Mochizuki, 2011; Schwartz, 2016). Additionally, personal identity development has been suggested as playing a key role during acculturative processes (Meca et al., 2017; Schwartz, Montgomery, & Briones, 2006), but more research is

needed to test this proposition within globalized contexts. In line with these calls for research on emerging adulthood and personal identity development vis-à-vis globalization-based acculturation in non-Western societies, in the present study we investigated the possibly mediating role of personal identity development in the link between cultural orientations and psychological well-being in the Himalayan region of Ladakh – which has been greatly exposed to globalization-based acculturation. In addition, we sought to examine the identity processes of emerging adulthood within two dissimilar globalized contexts: Leh, the largest city in Ladakh; and Delhi, the national capital of India.

### **Acculturation and Identity Development among Globalizing Emerging Adults**

Globalization has emerged as one of the dominating forces of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, transforming everyday life within many non-Western societies. Globalization refers to complex connectedness of cultural elements across distance, transcending nation-states and cultural borders (Thomlinson, 1999). These intercultural interactions have resulted in a range of psychological effects on non-Western cultures, ranging from positive aspects such as increased creativity and intercultural understanding to negative aspects such as fear of cultural erosion and culture-centric xenophobia (Chiu et al., 2011). Globalization greatly influence emerging adults' cultural endorsement, as well as their personal sense of self, in a changing world (Arnett, 2002).

### **Globalization Facilitating Emerging Adulthood**

It has been argued that the demographic, economic, and cultural changes accompanying the process of globalization have greatly increased the number of people in non-Western countries who experience some aspects of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2011). This increase accompanies the higher prevalence in tertiary education and the weakening of traditional hierarchies, providing more freedom and control for young people to postpone the responsibilities of marriage, parenthood, finding a long-term job, and buying a house – all of which generally represent entry into adult roles (Arnett, 2002). Furthermore, the unsettled developmental period of emerging adulthood is

characterized by decreases in traditional cultural markers and standards for the life course, illustrating the individualized process of exploring multiple life paths (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Meca, & Ritchie, 2012). With increased autonomy and a de-emphasis on commitment, emerging adulthood represents a self-focused period of instability and feeling in-between, accompanied by a wide array of life possibilities and elevated identity exploration (Arnett, 2014). Furthermore, with cultural globalization accelerating and challenging the notion of monolithic cultural contexts, associated sociocultural changes have made broader identity exploration possible in many Asian countries, such as India.

### **Globalization and Acculturation**

As a result of globalization, the proportion of Indians experiencing the characteristics of emerging adulthood is likely increasing among the urban middle class and increasingly including the complex challenge of negotiating multiculturalism, where multiculturalism reflects affiliation with various cultural streams ranging from the local to the global (Arnett, 2011; Seiter & Nelson, 2011). Although the study of acculturation – the cultural and psychological change accompanying the meeting between different cultural groups (Berry, 1997) – has primarily been utilized in studies of international migrants, acculturation has been expanded to refer to individuals exposed to new cultures through globalization (Chen, Benet-Martínez, & Bond, 2008). Globalization-based acculturation has been broadly defined as a process of both direct and mediated intercultural contact that is not caused by international migration (but rather by contact with the globalized culture within one's own homeland), leading to an integration of one's local culture with "globalized" cultures (Chen, Benet-Martínez, Wu, Lam, & Bond, 2013).

Although globalization-based acculturation conceptualizes globalization processes in a broad sense, the related conception of remote acculturation places greater emphasis on the specificity of the cultural streams influencing across distance (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). For example, in the context of Ladakh, it may be most culturally accurate to specify separate Indian and Western

cultural influences rather than examining “new cultural influences” as a single construct. Remote and globalization-based acculturation represent an emerging field of research within acculturation psychology, expanding the focus beyond international migrants (Berry, 1997) to the study of complex cultural interactions instigated through firsthand, mediated and continuous, and/or intermittent contact among individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012). The impact of cultural globalization is important vis-à-vis young people’s negotiation of multiple cultural affiliations and identity alternatives (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Jensen & Arnett, 2012).

### **Globalization and Personal Identity Development**

Just as globalization is proliferating and shaping emerging adulthood as a new developmental period of life, the influence of globalization is accentuating the role of identity as one of the most central aspects of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2002). Identity has emerged as an integral concept within contemporary psychological research, fueled in part by considerable cultural changes occurring in contemporary societies. Personal identity formation and maintenance have become increasingly challenging given decreases in culturally prescribed roles, together with increases in individual freedom to navigate through multiple identity possibilities (Côté & Levine, 2002). The impact of cultural globalization has been related to a greater range of, and increased individual freedom to make, identity choices (Arnett, 2002). Further, intercultural contact has been linked with personal identity exploration, suggesting that acculturation can represent an exploration process involving examination of various cultural choices (Schwartz et al., 2013). Still, many emerging adults in non-Western countries experience restrictions on their individualized identity exploration from strong collectivist values and family obligations (Arnett, 2011), resulting in “mixed messages” from traditional elders, globalized media, and changing cultural expectations (e.g., Tomasik & Silbereisen, 2012).

According to Erikson (1950, 1968), identity development is most critical during the adolescent and young adult years, when self-selection of identity elements first becomes possible. Although Erikson provided groundwork for conceptualizing identity, his writings were primarily theoretical and clinically oriented, leaving others to develop empirically testable operational definitions (Côté, 1993). The most prominent such model is Marcia's identity status paradigm (Kroger & Marcia, 2011), which operationalized personal identity development using the two independent dimensions of *exploration* and *commitment*. Expanding on Marcia's (1966) operationalization, Luyckx et al. (2008) unpacked identity exploration into two forms of reflective exploration (in depth and in breadth) and a ruminative (maladaptive) form of exploration; and unpacked commitment into commitment making and identification with commitment. This expanded dual-cycle model of personal identity processes is highly relevant in contexts influenced by cultural globalization. That is, this model captures reflective identity commitment processes that are not solely prescribed by cultural traditions, and it identifies ruminative exploration as maladaptive explorative identity processes that may appear in response to the many alternatives presented within globalized societies (Ozer, Meca, & Schwartz, in press).

### **Impact of Globalization and Identity Development on Psychological Well-Being**

Studies of globalization and both cultural and personal identity development during emerging adulthood have investigated how these phenomena relate to psychological well-being. For non-Western emerging adults experiencing globalization, the loosening of traditional ways of life requires active individual negotiation of identity, where such active negotiation differentiates between agentic and confused approaches to identity development (Arnett, 2002; Jensen & Arnett, 2012). Confusion in this regard can relate to experiences of conflict between local and global cultural endorsement, or to the lack of cultural rootedness (Arnett, 2002). Personal identity development occur, at least in part, through reflecting upon what is important in life – thereby providing oneself with a sense of purpose and direction. The process of developing and revising a



sense of personal identity is conceptualized as involving exploration and commitment, optimally leading to adherence to a specific set of identity choices. Although some degree of ruminative exploration and confusion is part of identity development, ruminative exploration has also been associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression (for a comprehensive review, see Schwartz et al., 2011).

### **Identity Development in the Globalization-Based Acculturative Context of Ladakh**

In the case of the formerly remote region of Ladakh, located in the North Indian Himalayas, recent globalization processes have initiated new cultural influences, primarily from other Indian regions and from Western societies. This region comprises a population of approximately 300,000 divided by religious affiliation, with half the population being Buddhist and the other half Muslim. Western cultural influences are present through the large numbers of tourists visiting the region throughout the summer and remotely through Western media, entertainment, and technology. Indian cultural elements are present through a high number of military personnel, governmental administration, tourism, and food imports, and through Ladakhis traveling to other Indian regions. These new cultural influences have been associated with sociocultural changes and a flourishing urban economy (Ozer, 2015). These new economic possibilities have led education to be stressed as pivotal for the development and future of the region and as the path to success for youth. Many students are sent to large Indian cities from an early age to prepare for and participate in the competitive tertiary education within major Indian universities (Smith & Gergan, 2015). Some of the best and most expensive education is found in the Indian capital of Delhi, where thousands of Ladakhis pursue their academic degrees. These recent changes may represent the foundation for Ladakhi emerging adulthood. Although students are away from Ladakh for several years, most of them remain connected to their home region and family (Ozer, 2015).

The influence of globalization within Ladakhi society has been a highly debated issue. The discussion includes perceptions presented by some religious organizations and foreign well-wishers

who lament what they see as destruction of indigenous Ladakhi culture, identity, and morality (Norberg-Hodge, 1991, 1999). Indeed, Ladakh has changed from a primary collectivistic society toward greater individualism, and the emphasis on close-knit mutual collaborations is being replaced by a competitive society where family relationships are less preserved (Ozer, 2012). Ladakhi youth are now engaging with popular entertainment and cultural elements found in Indian cities and in the Western cultural stream, including dating practices, Bollywood movies, and fashion (Aengst, 2014). Furthermore, even when Ladakhi youth are sent away for modern education, they are criticized within Ladakhi society for endorsing individualist values such as career ambition, desire for material gain, and a carefree lifestyle at the expense of traditional communally oriented values.

In sum, the sociocultural changes in Ladakh generated by the forces of globalization may have created the possibility for some Ladakhi youth to experience a period of emerging adulthood. Within the culturally diverse Indian society, emerging adulthood has been observed in limited segments of the population, with widespread gender and social class differences (Seiter & Nelson, 2011). Although globalization in Ladakh has been criticized within conservative Ladakhi societal discourses, Ladakhi emerging adults recognize both possibilities and pitfalls within these new sociocultural conditions (Ozer, 2012). The sociocultural foundation for emerging adulthood is differentiated across contexts, with a high degree of autonomy, exploration, and possibilities among students studying in major Indian cities but with a higher degree of compliance and conformity among students residing in Ladakh, especially in rural areas (Aengst, 2014; Ozer, Bertelsen, Singla, & Schwartz, 2017; Smith & Gergan, 2015).

### **The Current Study**

Previous mixed-method research by Ozer (2015) in Ladakh has found an inconclusive relationship between emerging adults' cultural orientations and adaptation to globalization-based acculturation. Within this body of research, quantitative studies have found cultural orientation to

be unrelated to depression and anxiety, whereas qualitative investigations suggested that global cultural endorsement and lack of local cultural rootedness may impair mental health. Furthermore, these qualitative results (Ozer, 2015) suggested that the relationship between cultural orientation and mental health might operate indirectly through variables such as personal identity and agency.

The aim of the present study was to test these propositions and examine the interplay among cultural orientation, personal identity development, and psychological well-being among Ladakhi emerging adults living in contexts characterized by globalization-based acculturation. Consequently, we examined the following three hypotheses (see Figure 1). First, Ladakhi cultural orientation would relate positively, both directly and indirectly to psychological well-being, given that heritage-culture retention may be adaptive (Ferguson & Bernstein, 2012; Ozer et al., 2017). Second, endorsement of Ladakhi and Indian cultural practices would be indirectly and positively associated with psychological well-being through exploration in breadth, commitment making, and identification with commitment. Specifically, endorsing culturally prescribed identities might diminish the uncertainty related to globalization (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). Third, Western cultural orientation would be indirectly and positively associated with psychological well-being through exploration in breadth and negatively through ruminative exploration (Luyckx et al., 2008). This hypothesis is consistent with discourses concerning globalization in Ladakh (Ozer, 2012) – specifically that orientation toward Western cultural elements may facilitate viable broad identity exploration as well as the risk of experiencing “overload” from the vast range of identity possibilities (i.e., ruminative exploration). Such overload may cause one to become “stuck” in the identity exploration process and to experience difficulty establishing commitments (Luyckx et al., 2008). Additionally, we examined identity processes related to emerging adulthood within (a) Ladakhis studying in Leh, the largest city in Ladakh and (b) Ladakhis studying in Delhi. Given the greater Westernization within other parts of India compared to Ladakh, Ladakhi students studying in major Indian cities outside Ladakh, such as Delhi, were expected to report higher levels of

identity exploration and lower levels of commitment making as compared to those studying within Ladakh.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 487 Ladakhi college students ranging in age from 17 to 28 years and studying in either Leh ( $n=291$ ) or Delhi ( $n=196$ ) participated in the study. Convenience sampling in these two cultural contexts allowed us to tap into important differences in both SES and exposure to new cultural influences. Students studying in Delhi had been away from Ladakh at various boarding schools for a period of time ranging from 0 to 19 years, with an average of 5.09 years ( $SD=3.64$ ) (see Table 1 for descriptive statistics).

### Procedures

Data were collected in 2014 and 2015 at Eliezer Joldan Memorial College in Leh and by executive members of the Ladakhi student organizations in Delhi through English self-report questionnaires. English is taught in primary school within Ladakh and at all universities in Delhi. In Leh, an English-proficient Ladakhi research assistant offered help with understanding the questionnaires. To reach more Ladakhi students in the extensive metropolis of Delhi, questionnaires were made available online (27 participants completed the questionnaires online).

### Measures

The following three questionnaires were completed by answering through a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (never/not different/strongly disagree) to 5 (very often/completely different/strongly agree; see Table 2 for means and comparison across group and Table 3 for bivariate correlations).

**Ladakh Acculturation Scale – Tridimensional.** As a measure of globalization-based acculturation, orientations toward three key cultural streams within the Ladakhi context were assessed using the 27-item LAS-T (Ozer & Schwartz, 2016). The scale consists of nine items asking about cultural endorsement across various domains toward Ladakhi ( $\alpha=.86$ ; sample item: “I feel

good and proud wearing Ladakhi clothes (Gonja & Sulma”)), Indian ( $\alpha=.77$ ; sample item: “I enjoy Indian food such as rice, chapatti, dal, and chicken masala”), and Western ( $\alpha=.75$ ; sample item: “I try to adjust to the Western way of living and the related Western cultural identity”) cultural streams independently.

**Dimensions of Identity Development Scale – Ladakh.** Personal identity development was measured using the 15-items DIDS-Ladakh (Ozer et al., in press) which is an adapted version of the original DIDS (Luyckx et al., 2008). In its original version, the DIDS was subdivided into five 5-item subscales assessing (1) commitment making, (2) identification with commitment, (3) exploration in breadth, (4), exploration in depth, and (5) ruminative exploration. However, based on a validation study in the Ladakhi context (Ozer et al. in press), the DIDS-Ladakh consists of four items referring to identity commitment ( $\alpha=.78$ ; sample item: “I know which direction I am going to follow in my life”), four items assessing exploration in breadth ( $\alpha=.71$ ; sample item “I think about different goals that I might pursue”), three items concerning identification with commitment ( $\alpha=.71$ ; sample item “My future plans give me self-confidence”), two items referring to ruminative exploration – future achievement ( $r=.62$ ; sample item: “I worry about what I want to do with my future”), and two items assessing ruminative exploration – direction in life ( $r=.37$ ; sample item: “I keep looking for the direction I want to take in my life”).

**Scales of Psychological Well-being.** Multiple facets of psychological well-being were assessed using the 18-item version of the Scales of Psychological Well-Being ( $\alpha=.86$ ; Ryff, 1989). A sample item was “In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.” Three items tap into each of the following dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance.

All scales were examined for metric invariance (comparing an unconstrained model with parameters freely estimated for both groups against a constrained model with factor loadings constrained to be equal and intercepts free to vary across both groups) and scalar invariance

(comparing the constrained model with factor loadings constrained to be equal and intercepts free to vary across both groups against a constrained model with both factor loadings and intercepts constrained to be equal across both groups) using total or partial disaggregation and the  $\Delta CFI$  ( $\geq .010$ ) and  $\Delta RMSEA$  ( $\geq .010$ ) criteria (Little, 2013). The Dimensions of Identity Development – Ladakh passed both the metric and scalar test of invariance. Both the Ladakh Acculturation Scale and the Scales of Psychological Well-being passed the metric invariance test but not the omnibus scalar invariance tests. However, with more than two indicators passing the scalar invariance test, the scales did yield partial invariance in our sample which is enough for using the latent mean in further analysis (Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998).

### **Analytic Overview**

All analyses were conducted in SPSS or Mplus 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2011) employing maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors. As guidelines for evaluating model fit, as suggested by Kline (2015), the chi-square statistic should be non-significant ( $p > .05$ ), and the following fit index cutoffs should be satisfied: Comparative Fit Index ( $CFI \geq .90$ ), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual ( $SRMR \leq .08$ ), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ( $RMSEA \leq .08$ ). First, we compared means for identity processes across the two contexts using *t*-tests. Second, structural equation modeling was used to test a model whereby personal identity development mediated the association of cultural orientation with psychological well-being, and to compare this model against an alternative mediation model<sup>1</sup>. Third, using multigroup structural equation modeling, we examined the equivalence of the best-fitting model between the Leh and Delhi subsamples by comparing an unconstrained model (with all paths free to vary between contexts) against a constrained model (with each path constrained to be equal across context) using the  $\Delta CFI$  ( $\geq .010$ ) and  $\Delta RMSEA$  ( $\geq .010$ ) criteria (Little, 2013). Finally, we calculated indirect (mediated) path coefficients.

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<sup>1</sup>Kraemer et al. (2000) contend that mediation models with cross-sectional data should be compared against alternative mediation models to provide more confidence in the direction of effects.

## Results

### Personal Identity Processes across Contexts

Comparing identity processes across the two student groups (see Table 2 for means) indicated that Ladakhis studying in Leh reported higher levels of identification with commitment,  $t(477)=5.64, p<.001, d=.53$ , and commitment making,  $t(348.30)=6.17, p<.001, d=.60$ . Students in Leh also reported higher levels of ruminative identity exploration vis-à-vis both future achievements,  $t(439.45)=3.36, p=.001, d=.31$  and direction in life,  $t(366.30)=5.40, p<.001, d=.52$ . There was no significant difference between the two student groups regarding exploration in breadth,  $t(476)=1.35, p=.177, d=.13$ .

### Structural Equation Model

The hypothesized model (Figure 1) was estimated controlling for age, gender, SES, time away from Ladakh, and year of college vis-à-vis their effects on the mediating and outcome variables. These covariates were included to control for their effects on differences in observed means across contexts. The model provided adequate fit to the data,  $\chi^2(184)=316.76, p<.001$ ; CFI=.92; SRMR=.06; RMSEA=.04, 90%CI=.04 to .05. In this model, commitment making was allowed to covary with identification with commitment ( $r=.75$ ), and exploration in breadth was allowed to covary with both ruminative exploration–direction in life ( $r=.44$ ) and with ruminative exploration–future achievement ( $r=.42$ ). Additionally, the two aspects of ruminative exploration were allowed to covary ( $r=.49$ ). Multigroup SEM was then conducted to examine equivalence across the two contexts by comparing constrained versus unconstrained models. Results did not yield significant differences across the two contexts,  $\Delta\chi^2(69)=-83.32, p=.12$ ;  $\Delta$ CFI=.009;  $\Delta$ RMSEA=.003 when comparing the unconstrained (parameters freely estimated for both groups) and the constrained model (parameters constrained to be equal across both groups). We therefore concluded that the relationships among cultural orientation, personal identity, and psychological well-being were equivalent across Ladakhi students residing in Leh versus Delhi (see Tables 1 and 2).

Results (Figure 2 and Table 4) indicated that Ladakhi cultural orientation was not directly associated with psychological well-being [ $\beta=.08$ ,  $p=.121$ , 95%CI=-.02 to .17]. However, Ladakhi cultural endorsement was positively associated with identification with commitment [ $\beta=.23$ ,  $p=.001$ , 95%CI=.09 to .36], commitment making [ $\beta=.26$ ,  $p<.001$ , 95%CI=.14 to .38], and exploration in breadth [ $\beta=.14$ ,  $p=.021$ , 95%CI=.02 to .26]. Indian cultural orientation was positively linked with identification with commitment [ $\beta=.27$ ,  $p<.001$ , 95%CI=.14 to .39], commitment making [ $\beta=.15$ ,  $p=.014$ , 95%CI=.03 to .27], but not with exploration in breadth [ $\beta=.01$ ,  $p=.893$ , 95%CI=-.12 to .14]. Western cultural orientation was significantly associated with exploration in breadth [ $\beta=.26$ ,  $p<.001$ , 95%CI=.15 to .37] and ruminative exploration – life direction [ $\beta=.14$ ,  $p=.027$ , 95%CI=.02 to .27], but not with ruminative exploration – future achievement [ $\beta=-.00$ ,  $p=.957$ , 95%CI=-.11 to .11]. Finally, identification with commitment [ $\beta=.49$ ,  $p<.001$ , 95%CI=.28 to .71] and exploration in breadth [ $\beta=.33$ ,  $p<.001$ , 95%CI=.19 to .46] were both positively related to psychological well-being.

Our hypothesized mediation model was then compared, using the Akaike (AIC) and Bayesian (BIC) Information Criteria against an alternative model examining the cultural orientations as the mediating variables. Lower AIC and BIC values supported our hypothesized model (Kline, 2015),  $AIC_{\text{proposed model}}=14655.99$  and  $AIC_{\text{alternative model}}= 16607.55$ ;  $BIC_{\text{proposed model}}=15035.25$  and  $BIC_{\text{alternative model}}= 17015.00$ .

### Indirect Effects

Evaluating the indirect effects within the hypothesized mediation model yielded four significant indirect paths. Ladakhi [ $\beta=.08$ ,  $p=.013$ , 95%CI=.03 to .20] and Indian [ $\beta=.11$ ,  $p=.003$ , 95%CI=.05 to .22] cultural orientations were indirectly and positively associated with psychological well-being through identification with commitment. Additionally, Western [ $\beta=.07$ ,  $p=.001$ , 95%CI=.03 to .14] and Ladakhi [ $\beta=.04$ ,  $p=.040$ , 95%CI=.00 to .09] cultural orientation were indirectly and positively related to psychological well-being through identity exploration in breadth.



## Discussion

The Ladakhi context represents a highly diverse and complex setting for studying the relationship between globalization-based acculturation and identity development (Ozer, 2015; Ozer et al., 2017). In our study, we examined the mediating role of personal identity development in the association between cultural orientation and psychological well-being. Contrary to our hypothesis, endorsement of the Ladakhi cultural stream was not directly associated with psychological well-being. However, the relationships of Ladakhi, Indian, and Western cultural orientation with psychological well-being emerged through indirect effects via dimensions of identity development. Contrary to our hypotheses, we found that endorsement of traditional Ladakhi and Indian cultural streams was not positively related to psychological well-being through identity commitment – rather, identification with one’s current commitments appeared to mediate this association. Western cultural endorsement was not negatively related to psychological well-being through ruminative identity exploration as hypothesized, but instead Ladakhi and Western cultural endorsement were positively related to well-being through exploration in breadth. Finally, only the site difference regarding identity commitment supported the hypothesis concerning differences across the two groups (Table 2). These findings are discussed in the following sections with regard to (a) characteristics of emerging adulthood in specific contexts of globalization, (b) the function of personal identity during times of sociocultural transition, (c) globalization and the identity-based challenges, and (d) the importance of cultural affiliations during the experience of globalization.

### **Betwixt and Between: Approaching Adulthood within Multiple Cultural Affiliations**

Whether the phenomenon of emerging adulthood is evolving among Ladakhis is difficult to evaluate based solely on our findings. However, research has linked many of the characteristics of emerging adulthood with the sociocultural changes occurring in Ladakh through globalization – specifically increases in tertiary education, extensive access to new cultural elements through media, and economic growth in the region (Aengst, 2014; Ozer, 2012, 2013, 2015). One of the

defining features of emerging adulthood is identity exploration (Arnett, 2000, 2007). In the present study, surprisingly, identity exploration in breadth was not significantly higher among Ladakhi students studying outside Ladakh compared to those studying within Ladakh. Apparently, the highly globalized context of Delhi did not appear to stimulate higher degrees of identity exploration – or, rather, globalization may have affected the Delhi and Leh samples similarly with regard to identity exploration. Previous qualitative studies have associated life outside Ladakh with greater experimentation and life possibilities (Ozer, 2012, 2015), and the lack of differences in exploration across locations could reflect an increase in globalization in Leh, which is the largest town in Ladakh. This increase began with the opening of the region to tourism in 1974 and has continued through more recent access to global media. Furthermore, the majority (80.7%) of the students in Leh came from small villages or Kargil (a small town in Ladakh) and thus experienced urban migration into an increasingly globalized context – albeit not to the same degree as the students in Delhi did.

It is worth noting that many Leh students commute from their village on a daily basis, thereby maintaining connectivity with family and cultural traditions within Ladakh. Such close family ties could, to some extent, explain the higher identity commitment among this sample as hypothesized. Strong family influences can reinforce traditional identity choices, whereas students living away from home report more freedom to live as they prefer (Ozer, 2012). Traditional social constraints remain strong within Ladakh, limiting the actualization of certain life choices (Aengst, 2014; Ozer et al., 2017). The awareness of social constraints, combined with lower SES, could perhaps explain the greater levels of ruminative exploration among the Leh students, where some students might feel excluded from the life possibilities afforded by globalized Western culture.

### **A Sense of Stability and Direction in Contexts of Change**

Successfully developing a sense of who one is and which direction one wishes to take in one's life could emerge as a stabilizing factor in sociocultural contexts that are rapidly changing as a

consequence of globalization and intercultural contact (Schwartz et al., 2006). Because identity development occurs through the intersection of multiple cultural streams, the contextual changes influencing Ladakhis could lead to revisions not only to their cultural orientation but to their personal identity as well. Additionally, it might be important for acculturating individuals to maintain a sense of self-consistency during the process of cultural change (Meca et al., 2017; Schwartz et al., 2006) – and not experiencing such consistency might lead to a sense of confusion and rumination.

With greater autonomy and fewer limitations on identity exploration, contemporary emerging adults play a more active role in their own identity formation. This sense of agency is accompanied by decreased societal guidance regarding default identity options and greater pressure toward individualized decision making (Côté & Levine, 2002). As hypothesized, personal identity processes appeared to mediate the relationships of cultural orientations with psychological well-being. Specifically, exploration in breadth and identification with commitment significantly mediated the links between cultural orientations and psychological well-being, reflecting the locally and globally based process – both personal and cultural – of sorting through identity possibilities and integrating identity commitments into one's overall sense of self. Identification with commitment appeared to be especially central as a mediator between (a) local and national cultural endorsement and (b) psychological well-being, suggesting that it is not merely identity commitments per se (e.g., assigned identities), but rather the reflective process of internalizing one's identity commitments, that in the Ladakhi context is associated with self-discovery and with feelings of certainty, happiness, and completeness (Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, & Beyers, 2006; Luyckx et al., 2008). Furthermore, reflective consideration of identity alternatives was associated with Ladakhi, and especially Western, cultural endorsement – suggesting that the dynamics of globalization and localization could facilitate adaptive identity exploration and integration among Ladakhi emerging adults.

### **Globalization and the Challenge of Identity Development**

The process of identity development can be challenging due to the influences of globalization (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). Emerging adulthood, the time when people in non-Western societies are especially engaged with cultural globalization (Jensen & Arnett, 2012), has been related to increased life possibilities as well as identity confusion and worries concerning one's future (Schwartz, 2016). Additionally, identity confusion could further complicate the challenge of reconciling various cultural streams present in the context of globalization (Arnett, 2002). Discourses have framed the dangers of globalization in Ladakh as a process of deculturalization through assimilation into a global monoculture and modern consumer society (Bano & Aalam, 2014; Norberg-Hodge, 2012). The process of globalization has been proposed as associated with identity confusion and poor psychological well-being through loss of traditional culture and downward self-comparisons to perceptions of popular Western lifestyles (Norberg-Hodge, 1999).

Furthermore, the increased individualization, competition, and potential psychopathology has been recognized by many Ladakhis as related to the process of "modernization" (Ozer, 2012). These developments can reflect some of the pitfalls of emerging adulthood as an age of instability and life possibilities (Schwartz, 2016). Interestingly, the Western cultural stream was indirectly and positively related to psychological well-being through personal identity exploration in breadth. This finding suggests that broad identity exploration is generally a positive experience for Ladakhis in Ladakh as well as those in Delhi, and that this exploration is facilitated by engagement with both Western and Ladakhi cultural elements. Such engagement may increase one's range of potential identity choices in a psychologically positive manner, at least with regard to how well-being is conceptualized in the West. The increased numbers of identity paths appears adaptive through reflective exploration: ruminative aspects of exploration were essentially unrelated to both Western cultural endorsement and psychological well-being.

### **Triculturalism, Identity, and Adaptation**

Emerging adults are thought to maintain a pronounced openness to various cultural beliefs and behaviors (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). Research has found that multicultural attitudes, such as global orientations in response to globalization, may facilitate psychological well-being (Chen et al., 2016). Among Ladakhi emerging adults both in Ladakh and in Delhi, gravitating toward multiple cultural streams appears indirectly associated with psychological well-being through personal identity processes. Multiple cultural endorsements could reflect integrative responses to cultural globalization, including ideas for using new cultural elements as resources (Chiu et al., 2011) and may facilitate viable identity processes through both exploration in breadth and identification with commitment. In particular, endorsement of Ladakhi and Indian cultural streams appeared to support identity commitment processes, accentuating the importance of cultural tradition in local and national cultural streams among Ladakhi emerging adults – regardless of whether they stay in Ladakh or study elsewhere.

The importance of rootedness in a changing world suggests that those emerging adults who experience difficulties and identity confusion vis-à-vis the process of globalization-based acculturation are likely those with the weakest cultural affiliations. Within a globalizing context, multiple cultural affiliations may be needed to support personal identity exploration and identification with commitment. Feelings of marginalization that underlie weak cultural endorsement could relate to losing one's connection with the ever-changing local culture and simultaneously not being able to find a place in the global culture (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). The connections between cultural endorsement and personal identity process could indicate that cultural frames might suggest and provide viable life paths.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The present study holds both limitations and directions for future research. First, examining the culturally shaped character of emerging adulthood within the Ladakhi context requires future qualitative research to more clearly elucidate the specificity of a possible Ladakhi emerging

adulthood and how this might appear across regional sociodemographic differences (Arnett, 2015). Second, we do not know the extent to which emerging adulthood is applicable to non-students (Mitchell & Syed, 2015). Because the present sample consists only of college students, we do not know whether these findings would have emerged for non-students. Even though non-students are likely influenced by cultural globalization, they might endorse fewer features of emerging adulthood as compared to students and, thus, their identity processes might be different from those of students. Third, convenience sampling and data collection through student organizations and online questionnaires could have limited the representativeness of the sample. Less resourceful youth without access to the Internet, and socially marginalized students without contact with student organizations, may have been less likely to participate.

Fourth, two of the assessment instruments employed in this study were developed in Western contexts. Even though the DIDS-Ladakh was adapted for the Ladakhi context, the use of such a measure might cause us to overlook identity processes specific to this context (see Berman et al., 2011; Cheng & Berman, 2012). For example, our assessment did not capture the detrimental aspects of identity exploration and confusion in the Ladakhi context, as ruminative exploration – surprisingly – was not related to psychological well-being. It may therefore be necessary to conduct qualitative studies to identify identity-related challenges that occur as Ladakh is transformed by globalization (Ozer, 2017). Indeed, both etic (Western) and emic (indigenous) perspectives are necessary to understand how our present theoretical and measurement constructs interact and align with local views. Additionally, although the current study provided a theoretical rationale for the hypothesized directionality and tested our hypothesized model against an alternative model, experimental or longitudinal data are needed to establish causal mediation (Pek & Hoyle, 2016). Finally, both individualization and agency appear to be theoretically important aspects of the globalization-based acculturation process as well as of identity development (Côté, 2006; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Additionally, we included only a positive measure of adaptation; other

aspects such as anxiety and depression might provide additional valuable information about the globalization process in Ladakh. Future research should include these variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of various ways of sorting through identity alternatives and adapting to globalization-based acculturation. Finally, although we used Kline's (2015) commonly utilized criteria for evaluating model fit, other guidelines suggest stricter criteria for model fit. Additionally, the partial scalar invariance of the Ladakh Acculturation Scale and the Scales of Psychological Well-being calls for caution in the interpretation of cross-contextual comparisons.

### **Conclusion**

Among Ladakhi emerging adults studying in either Leh or Delhi, being rooted in one's local cultural stream represents an indirectly adaptive way of navigating cultural globalization. Furthermore, personal identity development processes appeared to mediate the relationships between cultural orientations and psychological well-being. Endorsement of traditional Ladakhi and Indian cultural streams was related to identification with identity commitments and with psychological well-being. Globalized Western and local Ladakhi cultural endorsement were both associated with psychological well-being through broad identity exploration. This finding of personal identity development mediating cultural orientation and psychological well-being was consistent across settings (Leh and Delhi). These results suggest that identity development represents an important aspect of local adaptation to globalization-based acculturation. They also underscore the importance of cultural affiliation during the period of emerging adulthood and suggest different paths to psychological well-being (especially in non-Western settings exposed to globalization). Consequently, diverse cultural affiliation facilitate different types of adaptive exploration and commitment processes during the globalization process. We hope that these results inspire further work on cultural and personal identity development in the context of globalization.

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Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the Leh and Delhi sample

	Leh sample	Delhi sample	Statistical comparison
Participants:	291	196	
Gender:			$\chi^2(1)=31.08, p<.001,$ Cramer's $V=.25$
Female	72.9%	48%	
Religion:			$\chi^2(3)=5.09, p=.165,$ Cramer's $V=.10$
Buddhist	74.2%	70.4%	
Muslim	25.1%	28.6%	
Hindu	0.7%	0%	
Christian	0%	1%	
Origin:			$\chi^2(3)=77.90, p<.001,$ Cramer's $V=.40$
Kargil town	1%	11.2%	
Village in Kargil district	4.1%	16.3%	
Leh town	19.3%	33.2%	
Village in Leh district	75.5%	38.8%	
Year of college:			$\chi^2(2)=17.68, p<.001,$ Cramer's $V=.40$
First	50.5%	31.1%	
Second	22.6%	30.5%	
Third	26.9%	38.4%	
SES:			$\chi^2(2)=127.83, p<.001,$ Cramer's $V=.55$
Low	94.1%	45%	
Medium	4.2%	41.8%	
High	1.7%	13.2%	
Age	Range: 17–26 years, $M$ = 20.47, $SD = 1.67$	Range: 17-28 years, $M =$ 21.00, $SD = 2.61$	$t(475)=-2.70, p = .007,$ $d=0.24$

Note. SES = socioeconomic status assessed through yearly household income: low = below 160000 rupees (2466 US dollars), medium = 160000 to 320000 rupees (4932 US dollars), and high = 320000 rupees and above.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, and statistical comparisons for the measures divided by the two Ladakhi student samples

	Leh <i>M (SD)</i>	Delhi <i>M (SD)</i>	Statistical comparison
LAS-T Ladakhi Dimension	4.36 (0.55)	4.07 (0.72)	$p < .001^*$ , $d = 0.45$
LAS-T Indian Dimension	3.90 (0.45)	3.40 (0.57)	$p < .001^*$ , $d = 0.97$
LAS-T Western Dimension	3.28 (0.61)	3.52 (0.58)	$p < .001^*$ , $d = 0.40$
DIDS-Ladakh identification with commitment	4.04 (0.74)	3.65 (0.76)	$p < .001^*$ , $d = 0.53$
DIDS-Ladakh Identity commitment	4.07 (0.55)	3.70 (0.69)	$p < .001^*$ , $d = 0.60$
DIDS-Ladakh Identity exploration	3.71 (0.69)	3.61 (0.71)	$p = .177$ , $d = 0.13$
DIDS-Ladakh Ruminative exploration: future achievement	3.40 (1.11)	3.07 (1.00)	$p < .001^*$ , $d = 0.31$
DIDS-Ladakh Ruminative exploration: life direction	3.74 (0.77)	3.32 (0.90)	$p = .001^*$ , $d = 0.52$
Psychological well-being	3.90 (0.40)	3.65 (0.55)	$p < .001^*$ , $d = 0.52$

Note. \*marking statistical significance controlling for familywise error rate employing Bonferroni corrections.



Table 3. Correlation matrix

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Ladakhi cultural orientation	.42**	.16**	.33**	.28**	.23**	.17**	.23**	.39**
2. Indian cultural orientation		.31**	.32**	.29**	.20**	.10*	.22**	.33**
3. Western cultural orientation			.07	.10*	.27**	-.02	.09*	.17**
4. Identification with commitment				.56**	.26**	-.06	.13**	.56**
5. Commitment making					.25**	-.10*	.18**	.54**
6. Exploration in breadth						.27**	.26**	.38**
7. Ruminative exploration – future achievement							.36**	.02
8. Ruminative exploration – life direction								.15**

Note. \* marks  $p < .05$  and \*\* marks  $p < .001$

Table 4. Path estimates and confidence intervals for the mediation model

	Identification with commitment		Commitment making		Exploration in breadth		Ruminative exploration – future achievement		Ruminative exploration – life direction		Psychological well-being	
	$\beta$	95% CI	$\beta$	95% CI	$\beta$	95% CI	$\beta$	95% CI	$\beta$	95% CI	$B$	95% CI
Age	.05	-.06–.16	-.15*	-.25–.04	.02	-.10–.14	-.06	-.17–.06	-.13*	-.26–.00	-.11*	-.20–.03
Gender	-.12*	-.23–.00	-.07	-.18–.04	.11	-.01–.24	.17*	.06–.29	.03	-.10–.16	-.02	-.10–.06
SES	-.02	-.15–.11	.06	-.09–.20	-.02	-.16–.12	-.13	-.26–.00	-.23*	-.38–.08	.07	-.03–.17
Time away from Ladakh	-.14	-.29–.01	-.18*	-.33–.03	.01	-.05–.22	.02	-.12–.17	-.13	-.29–.04	-.06	-.16–.04
Year of college	-.09	-.21–.03	-.06	-.12–.03	-.12	-.25–.01	-.05	-.18–.08	-.06	-.21–.09	.00	-.09–.09
Ladakhi cultural orientation	.23*	.09–.36	.26**	.14–.38	.14*	.02–.26					.08	-.02–.17
Indian cultural orientation	.27**	.14–.39	.15*	.03–.27	.01	-.12–.14						
Western cultural orientation					.26**	.15–.37	-.00	-.11–.11	.14*	.02–.27		
Identification with commitment											.49**	.28–.71
Commitment making											.14	-.09–.41
Exploration in breadth											.33**	.19–.46
Ruminative exploration – future achievement											-.02	-.14–.10
Ruminative exploration – life direction											-.12	-.29–.04

Note. \* marks  $p < .05$  and \*\* marks  $p < .001$

Figure 1. The hypothesized mediation model

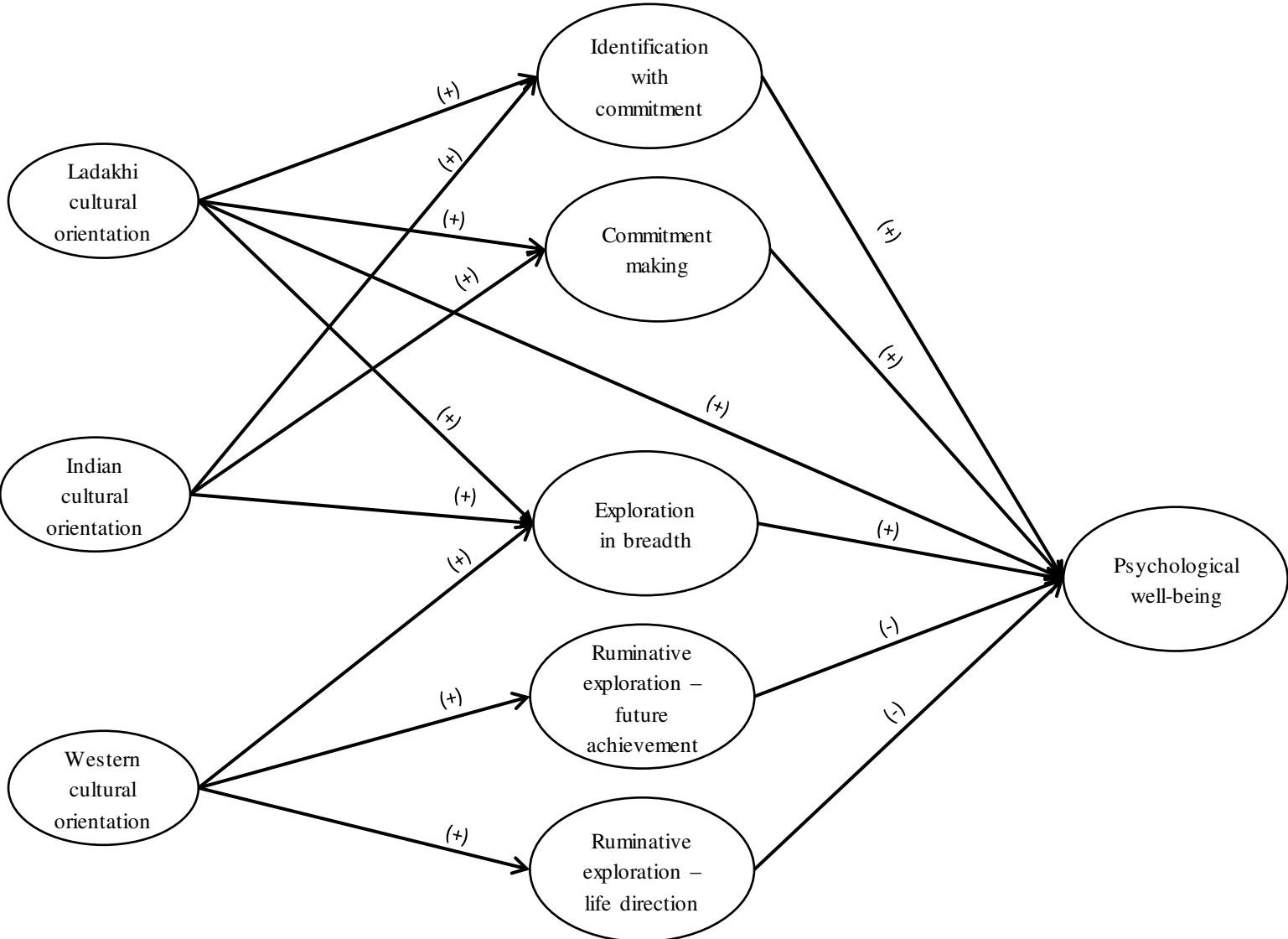
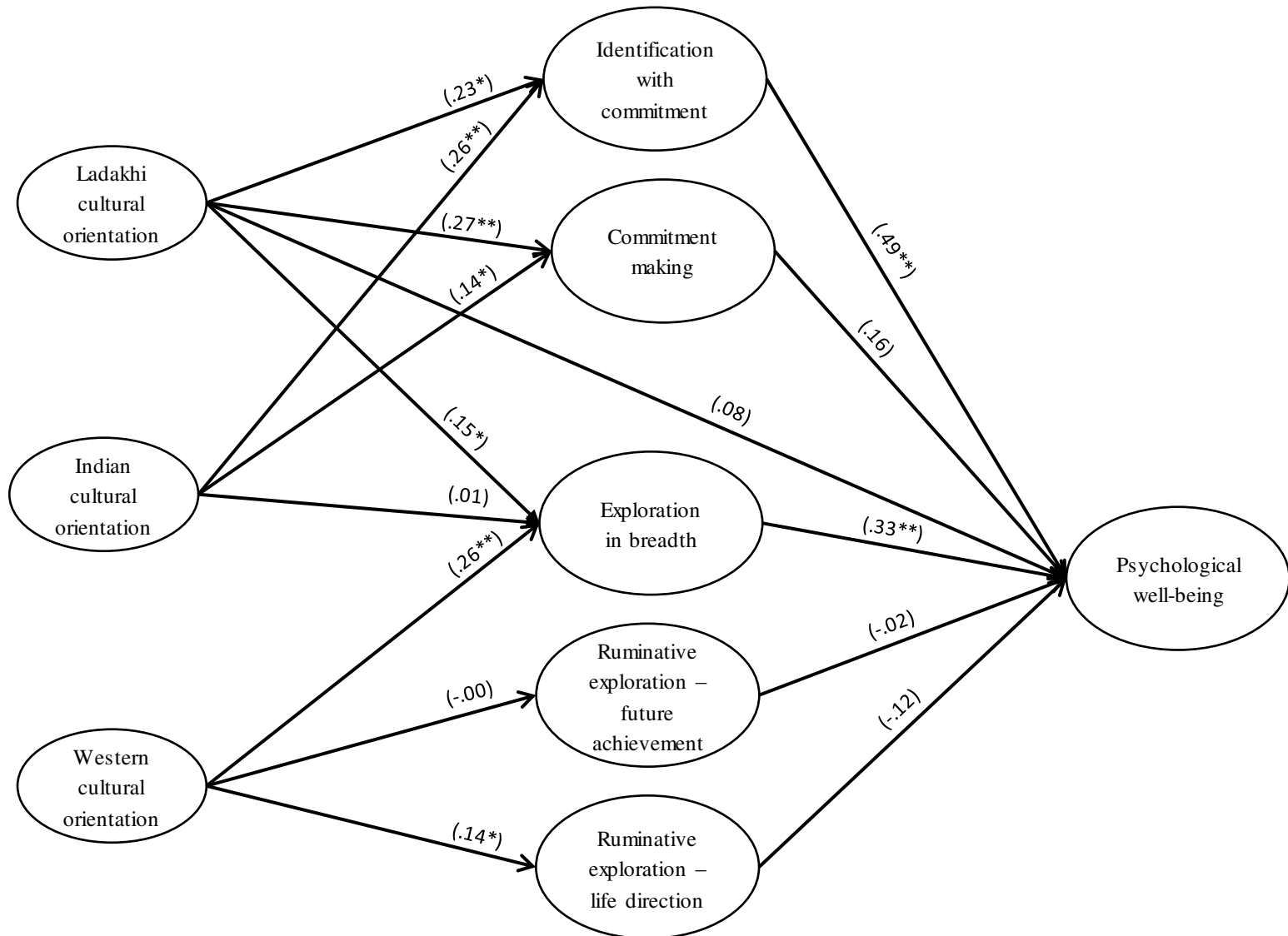


Figure 2. The mediation model



Note. \* marks  $p < .05$  and \*\* marks  $p < .001$