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Exploring Cherishing: A Qualitative Approach

Pratishtha Bhattacharyya

Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, pratishthabhattacharyya@gmail.com

Rabindra Kumar Pradhan Dr.

Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, rabi2020@gmail.com

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Abstract

The word cherishing is frequently used in our daily jargons. It is also very often mentioned in empirical literature on cherished possessions. However, despite the relevance of the term in the empirical literature on cherished possessions, very little is known about the way it operates in people's lives. The only link with cherishing happens to be the studies conducted in individualistic cultures on cherished possessions. Besides, there is hardly any consensus on how cherishing operates in collectivistic culture such as India owing to the scarce literature available on the topic. Hence, the present study addresses the gap in the literature with the objective to explore the concept of cherishing. The present study examines cherishing through qualitative investigation by using semi-structured interviews in India. Forty-eight participants were interviewed for the study. Analysis of the data based on grounded theory techniques revealed three major themes: (i) the attributes of cherishing, (ii) functions of cherishing and (iii) the objects of cherishing. The attributes of cherishing convey a sense of protectiveness, a tendency to care, affective orientation and reminiscence. The functions reveal the benefits experienced from cherishing. The objects of cherishing convey the targets towards which one experiences cherishing. Recommendations for further study, along with theoretical and practical implications of the study findings, are also discussed.

Keywords

Cherishing, Attachment, Cherished Possessions, Cherished Objects, Qualitative Research

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Exploring Cherishing: A Qualitative Approach

Pratishtha Bhattacharyya and Rabindra Kumar Pradhan
Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, West Bengal, India

The word cherishing is frequently used in our daily jargons. It is also very often mentioned in empirical literature on cherished possessions. However, despite the relevance of the term in the empirical literature on cherished possessions, very little is known about the way it operates in people's lives. The only link with cherishing happens to be the studies conducted in individualistic cultures on cherished possessions. Besides, there is hardly any consensus on how cherishing operates in collectivistic culture such as India owing to the scarce literature available on the topic. Hence, the present study addresses the gap in the literature with the objective to explore the concept of cherishing. The present study examines cherishing through qualitative investigation by using semi-structured interviews in India. Forty-eight participants were interviewed for the study. Analysis of the data based on grounded theory techniques revealed three major themes: (i) the attributes of cherishing, (ii) functions of cherishing and (iii) the objects of cherishing. The attributes of cherishing convey a sense of protectiveness, a tendency to care, affective orientation and reminiscence. The functions reveal the benefits experienced from cherishing. The objects of cherishing convey the targets towards which one experiences cherishing. Recommendations for further study, along with theoretical and practical implications of the study findings, are also discussed. Keywords: Cherishing, Attachment, Cherished Possessions, Cherished Objects, Qualitative Research

An abundance of contemporary popular life improvement platforms ranging from blog posts to self-help books often mention cherishing as a significant pillar towards attaining personal growth. Yet, empirical literature lacks a sound base for reference when it comes to offering a scientific elaboration on the term. The Oxford English dictionary (2013) defines the word *cherish* as three significant actions: protect and care for someone lovingly, hold something dear; keep (a hope or ambition) in one's mind. Previous research on education and environmental ethics offer a brief understanding of cherishing. This available literature emphasizes the relevance of cherishing in connection with human emotions. Harry Broudy's work on *enlightened cherishing* defines cherishing as a love and desire to preserve an object for its intrinsic value (cited in Martin, 1994). Cherishing is also defined as a love infused with a desire to preserve a cherished object from harm and overprotecting it to ensure that the object remains the same and does not decay or gets damaged (Lee, 1994).

Apart from the relevance of emotion, the definitions also reflect another psycho-social phenomenon that is the system of human attachment. Classical works on philosophy frequently mention cherishing in the context of human development. In Locke (cited in Androne, 2014) and Rousseau's (cited in Sauerteig, 2012) conceptualization, cherishing conveys nurturance. They considered cherishing children as an essential ingredient in human development. According to Locke, parents have a significant role in imparting practical knowledge of life by cherishing a healthy sense of curiosity in their children (cited in Androne, 2014), yet refrain from cherishing their faults out of sheer fondness (cited in Brandt, 1981).

According to the contemporary works on behavioral science, the concept of cherishing has emerged as a significant factor to be taken into consideration while discussing human

psycho-social development. Apparently, contemporary psychoanalysts emphasizing early childhood experiences popularly endorse cherishing as a crucial emotion in psycho-social development (Young-Bruehl & Bethelard, 2000). Young-Bruehl and Bethelard's 2000 psycho-analytical work on *cherishment*, discusses in length the role cherishment performs in an individual's life in the context of the patient-therapist relationship. The concept of cherishment draws its roots from the French *cher* conveying dear and Latin *caritas* conveying kindness, compassion, and benevolence (Young-Bruehl & Bethelard, 2000), thereby signifying the relevance of the term in human psycho-social development. Young-Bruehl and Bethelard, (2000) took inspiration from Balint's concept of *primary love* and Doi's idea of *amaeru* to label the wish for "getting cherished" as cherishment. The authors explain emotional distress as the outcome of thwarting an individual's early expectation for receiving cherishing affection. They further elaborate on how a baby's wish for getting cherishing from his/her primary caregiver ultimately influences the way he/she relates to the world and significant social relationships in adulthood. This initial expectation is what leads towards healthy or unhealthy psycho-social development.

Cherishing in the Backdrop of Attachment and Cherished Possessions

The concept of cherishing lacks consensus both in terms of conceptualization and empirical investigation. Hence, it is a challenge for the present researchers to explore such a complex psycho-social phenomenon such as cherishing. Owing to an insufficiency in the available number of empirical studies on cherishing, the researchers incorporated various ideas in the domain of social sciences that help us in defining the term cherishing. Therefore, it is necessary to begin exploration with a similar and related concept such as cherishment.

Young-Bruehl and Bethelard, (2000) consider cherishment as, "the emotional equivalent of nourishment" (p. 9) and a precondition for human social and emotional development. This affect includes an instinctual need to be cherished and a predisposition to do cherishing (McWilliams, 2002). Individuals who experience cherishing in early years from their primary caregivers are likely to be satisfied with and have a positive perception of others in a social relationship. This eventually helps them to develop emotionally rewarding relationships with others (Sarason, Pierce, & Sarason, 1990). An individual's interaction with their primary caregiver is internalized with time and shapes their thoughts, feelings and actions (Bowlby, 1982). This leads to the development of healthy relationships with others (Bowlby, 1988). This assumption of positive effects of cherishing in early years of human life is well documented in a recent study (Lee et al., 2015). The longitudinal study on successful aging reveals that cherished children had better mental and physical health in their adulthood (Lee et al., 2015). They studied three groups of children (i.e., the *cherished*, the *harshly disciplined* and the *ordinary*) till their adulthood. The cherished children had healthy parental nurturance, support and presence of positive role models. The harshly disciplined group had harsh parental control and strictness and the ordinary group had low parental attention. The cherished group reported higher level of well-being, autonomy, competence in adulthood in comparison to the other groups. However, the understanding of the concept of receiving cherishing and nurturance remains incomplete without referring to the way the human attachment system works.

Attachment

The attachment system performs a critical role in human socio-emotional development (Gartstein & Iverson, 2014). An attachment system is a species-specific behavior characterized by function which promotes protection and survival enhancement of the attachment figure

(Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Close relationships such as family, friends and romantic partner often act as sources of attachment security, both physical and psychological for individuals (Keefer, 2011; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The tendency for closeness with the attachment figures is what constitutes the base for developing emotional bonds among individuals, ultimately shaping the attachment system (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). The attachment bonds display four features: proximity seeking, secure base, safe haven and separation distress (Beckes & Coan, 2015). Proximity seeking is the extent to which an individual seeks proximity to their attachment figures. Secure base relates to the extent of an individual's exploratory behavior knowing that they can return to their secure base when required. Safe haven, relates to the extent of availability of a consistent social support even in the face of distress. Separation distress is the feeling of distress owing to the separation from the attachment figure.

These features of attachment in way shape our inner working model (i.e., the mental representation of self and other; Bowlby 1969, 1982). A child's working model is based on the basic everyday interaction he/she shares with their parents. In general, it comprises of two mutually confirming models representing the self and others (Bowlby, 1988). The model representing the significant others in a child's life involve three features that is the information about who the attachment figures are, where are they are located and how they would respond. Corresponding to this, the self model represents the extent a child's acceptance or rejection in the eyes of the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1973). In short, the working model representing others conveys the degree of the attachment figures availability, responsiveness, and sensitivity; and the working model of the self conveys capacities related to inducing support from others and feelings of being loved and valued by others (Mikulincer, Shaver, & Slav, 2006). Consequently, these interactions slowly become integrated with the child's belief system (Bowlby, 1988) and acts as a reference for the child to function in unfamiliar situations in the absence of their attachment figures (Sherman, Rice, & Cassidy, 2015). Apparently, the inner working model provides shape to the formation of secure and insecure attachment styles. A secure attachment promotes healthy thoughts and feelings about self and others in person. It is also characterized by acknowledgment of distress and seeking support to remedy the distress (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). On the contrary, an insecure attachment leads to negative sense of self and others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007) and hesitancy in acknowledging distress (Collins & Feeney, 2004).

Attachment and caregiving. Besides emotion, another facet of human behavior that is caregiving is also mentioned by Broudy (cited in Martin, 1994) and Lee (1994) in their initial definition of cherishing. Caregiving conveys an assimilation of different types of behavior with the primary intention to promote growth and development of another individual and help in diminishing their distress (Canterberry & Gillath, 2012). However, the basic assumption at this juncture of the reviewing process is to understand whether caregiving as a concept has any association with attachment, as it forms the central premise of cherishing. Likewise, empirical literature on attachment reports that despite the functional difference between caregiving and attachment, the latter has significant influence on the other (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The main focus of attachment system in caregiving is the attitude of sensitivity, empathy and help towards other's distress. On this issue, previous studies report that secure attachment behavior leads towards caregiving behaviors for close relationships (Cassidy, Jones, & Shaver, 2013) and those beyond close relationships without any egotistical reasons (Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005). In a secure attachment system, the model of good care witnessed from the attachment figures provides a sense of safety, protection and reduction of distress to individuals and enables them to develop a sense of security and a model of good care-giving as they age (Collins & Feeney, 2000; Mikulincer, Shaver, Gillath, & Nitzberg, 2005).

Attachment and culture. Discussing cherishing in the perspective of attachment security further demands the consideration of the cultural context of attachment security for more clarity and better understanding. Attachment security explains a lot about how human social bonds function. Yet, it cannot do so isolated without taking into account the cultural context of the attachment (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyaki, & Morelli, 2000). There are several cross-cultural studies exploring the influence of culture on attachment style. Although a large section of studies has investigated attachment across cultures, studies on attachment in India are still limited (van IJzendoorn & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2010; van IJzendoorn & Sagi-Schwartz, 2008). India is culturally a collectivistic country which emphasizes group cohesiveness, interdependence and provides greater importance to family (Albert, Trommsdorff, & Mishra, 2007). Previous studies indicate a strong sense of attachment with parents for children (Pearson & Child, 2007) and increased obligation among children to care for parents (Verma & Saraswathi, 2002). Interestingly, a recent investigation across 67 countries reports that Indians displayed more attachment security than other countries in the study (Agishtein & Brumbaugh, 2013). A possible explanation behind secure attachment as displayed by India is well explained by Levine, Sato, Hashimoto, and Verma, (1995) who remark that emphasis on intense emotional attachment with family members is perceived incompatible with Indian family system. Besides, earlier studies corroborate that over interdependence is not one of the norms of Indian culture as it shows a rich assimilation of collectivism and individualism tendencies (Sinha, 2014). Indian belief in universal interconnectedness which explains that the omnipotent source of energy (atman) manifests through every living and non-living object, thus sharing a common basis of existence. This universal interconnectedness in no way hinders achievement of individual life goals such as personal and social duties and obligations, financial accomplishment, and individual effort to gain self-realization and self-knowledge (Sinha, 2014).

Attachment and stability. Conceptualization of cherishment frequently mentions that affection in adult relationship is conditioned on receiving cherishing affection in the early years of development (Young-Bruehl & Bethelard, 2000). In terms of developmental psychology, this is optimally interpreted in the context of the stable nature of an attachment security. An attachment security remains stable throughout an individual's life, transitioning from childhood to adulthood (Gartstein & Iverson, 2014; Waters, Hamilton, & Weinfield, 2000). However, negative life events associated with the loss of an attachment figure due to death, and separation, both for children and adults leads to disruption in secure attachment style (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Despite these assertions, recent investigations report that insecure attachment styles can gain more healthy attachment security with interventions. Previous empirical evidence points out that attachment security can be enhanced through therapy, and interventions (Canterberry & Gillath, 2012). One of the most prominent methods is the use of security primes. Security primes apply cognitive activation of attachment security related contexts to transform insecure attachment to secure (Baldwin, 1994). Security primes include different techniques such as use of picture, words, guided imagery or initiation of interaction to invoke a sense of secure attachment (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007).

A contemporary study used the context of positive relationship as a significant technique on romantic partners with avoidant attachment style. This study reports that, the context of positive relationship such as a guided imagery to increase positive perception of the partner's behavior, and intimacy-inducing tasks such as self-disclosure lead to an increase in feeling of closeness with the partner and better relationship outcomes (Stanton, Campbell, & Pink, 2017).

However, more contemporary studies emphasize that attachment styles be examined in the perspective of recent interpersonal experience of an individual rather than the distant ones such as early experiences (Fraley & Roisman, 2018).

Attachment and inanimate objects. The relationship between people and what they cherish can be traced back to our infancy and its influence is very much relevant throughout our life span (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The source of attachment security sometimes extends beyond the usual circle of close relationships and includes non-human objects or possessions (Keefer, Landau, Rothschild, & Sullivan, 2012).

The association between individuals and their inanimate cherished objects reflects the human need for psychological security obtained from close relationships (Bowlby, 1969, 1982). Eventually, people develop a close attachment to inanimate objects if this need is thwarted (Keefer et al., 2012). Specifically, this attachment helps an individual to identify their separate sense of self and find a healthy way to identify as a social being (Dyl & Wapner, 1996). Attachment bonds function as a system in which the individuals tend to invest emotionally in a specific target and extract a sense of comfort and psychological security out of the said relationship. This bond is generally persistent with time and involves a relentless motivation of the individual to be with their targeted object of affection (Ainsworth, 1989). The context of human attachment to their object of affection is extensively discussed in the empirical literature on cherished possessions (Keefer et al., 2012).

Cherished Possessions

Empirical works on cherished possessions emphasize the personal significance and distinctiveness of an object to its owner beyond its financial valuation as the major implication behind labeling an object as “cherished” (Curasi, Price, & Arnould, 2004a; 2004b; Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000). This personal significance is of more value than the financial worth of the object to its owner. The term cherished possessions conveys “those [objects] considered special by the individual; those that, in a particular way, embody goals, serve a valuable purpose, or reflect the identity of a person” (Wapner, Demick, & Redondo, 1990, p. 220).

A significant number of psychological investigations have revealed several significant functions of cherished objects. Broadly speaking, cherished possessions can be clubbed under two categories (i.e., general and person-related) (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981). The “general meaning” category includes possessions signifying: life experiences, memories, distinctiveness, individual values, morals, and others. On the other hand, the person-related category consists of objects associated mostly to individual relationships and the self (Wapner et al., 1990). On a related note, cherished objects such as heirlooms with almost no monetary value are cherished more for their emotional value than those objects with financial worth (Finch & Mason, 2000). Previous studies indicate to several cognitive functions such as inducing reminiscence about significant people in life, relationships, prior events and incidents (Habermas & Paha, 2002). The memory function of cherished possessions is discussed quite prominently in gerontology.

For older adults, cherished possessions are considered as a way to re-evaluate life and communicate with their past. In this context, a previous study on older individuals residing in nursing home facilities suggests certain functions of cherished possessions such as: a consoling object to ease transition from one residence to another, an object symbolical of the past life, and as a symbol of societal status (Holzapfel, 1982; Price et al., 2000). In a sense, cherished possessions evoke memories related to them (Habermas & Paha, 2002) and generate special meaning in life (Chapman, 2006). To be precise, cherished possessions not only provide an opportunity for the older adults to reminiscence about the significant people, places and times

in their lives, they also offer them a sense of continuity (Cram & Paton, 1993) and identity of who they are regardless of the several life transitions they witness (Kamptner, 1989). Earlier studies also assert that personal memorabilia pose as “reconstructive symbols” (Sherman, 1991) of our important life events (such as personal accomplishments, relationships) and become a part of our extended self (Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981).

Cherished possessions and emotion. The value of a cherished possessions depends a lot on the emotions they induce (Belk, 1991) and are instrumental in offering their owner a certain level of comfort and happiness for owning them (Kroger & Adair, 2008). A former study reports that people who have a strong attachment to cherished possessions are happier and experience more warmth, joy, security, care, pleasure, and peace. Moreover, people perceive strong attachments possessions as an extension of their selves (Schultz, Kleine, & Kernan, 1989). In contrast, people who have a weak attachment with their cherished possessions experience negative and neutral emotions such as disgust, boredom, stress, and feeling nothing (Schultz et al., 1989). Possessions with only utilitarian value are categorized in this study as weak attachment possessions (Schultz et al., 1989).

Cherished objects are also instrumental in facilitating emotional management and problem solving (Dyl & Wapner, 1996). A longitudinal study conducted on medical students states that cherished possessions help students cope with role transition and other professional demands (Habermas & Paha, 2002).

Besides, the effectiveness of cherished possessions in coping among children and adolescents also reveals age and gender-related differences in nature, meaning, and function of cherished possessions (Dyl & Wapner, 1996). This phenomenon is elaborately reported in a study conducted by reported in a Dyl and Wapner (1996). The study reports that adolescents had more meaningful engagement with their cherished possessions compared to children. Female adolescents preferred to cherish objects as a symbolic representation of their relationships such as friendship and were introspective of the association they shared with it. In contrast, male adolescents derived pleasure out their cherished objects and chose to engage more in physical play with it.

Cherished possessions and culture. There are several factors responsible for making a cherished possession meaningful to its owner. One significant factor is the cultural context of the cherisher (Richins, 1994). Cross-cultural evidence on the value of cherished possessions between the USA and New Zealand revealed that participants from equality based individualistic culture like New Zealand cherished more sentimental objects (such as family heirlooms, souvenir). In comparison, participants from the hierarchy based individualistic culture like the USA preferred to cherish aesthetically pleasing objects (Watson, Lysonski, Gillan, & Raymore, 2002). The emphasis on treasuring a sense of collective existence has also come up very prominently in studies based on participants from collectivistic culture. A study on Indians residing in Canada discusses about treasuring possessions like heirlooms, and other material objects as a way to sustain cultural roots (Joy & Dholakia, 1991). Similarly, another study on Indian immigrants to the US discusses about cherished possessions such as traditions specific of one’s culture, (e.g., holidays, dressing styles, and food) and others that helps to preserve their Indian identity. These studies further acknowledge that for Indian immigrants the sense of cherishing their collectivistic attribute carried more importance than cherishing possessions which they viewed as a materialistic extension of their selves (Joy & Dholakia, 1991; Mehta & Belk, 1991).

Research Gap and Objective of the Study

Although, previous literature provides some ideas about cherished possessions (Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981), very little is known about how people experience cherishing and how it operates in people's lives. Kroger and Adair's (2008) study on cherished possessions offer some direction in this area. They suggest that exploring the exact ways a cherished object is valued may provide an understanding of how it works and what are its functions. Despite this, at present there is hardly any empirical investigation on the meaning people ascertain to their own experience of cherishing.

From a cross-cultural perspective, the experiences of cherished possessions as documented in the earlier studies indicate a prominent variation from collectivistic to individualistic culture. Moreover, a handful of studies conducted on Indian immigrants necessitate investigating cherishing from a collectivistic perspective (Joy & Dholakia, 1991; Mehta & Belk, 1991). Indian views from Indian immigrants documented decades back cannot be generalized as a contemporary Indian perspective on cherishing. Therefore, based on these research gaps, the present study attempts to explore cherishing with the hope that it would offer some preliminary understanding of the way it operates among Indians. The present study addresses a few basic questions: (a) What meanings do people attribute to experiences related to cherishing? (b) What are the targets towards which people experience cherishing? (c) What are the functions of cherishing? These questions explore how people interpret the experience of cherishing in the context of their own lives. Hence, a qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study to explore an in-depth personal view of the participants in describing cherishing (Drobot, 2012).

In this paragraph, we report on the authors' contributions to the study. The first author (Pratishtha Bhattacharyya) is pursuing her PhD under the supervision of the Dr. Rabindra Kumar Pradhan on exploring the concept of cherishing and its scope and application in both personal and professional life in India. The concept of cherishing emerged out of an informal academic dialogue on positive psychology and attachment theories between the authors of the paper. Dr. Rabindra Kumar Pradhan is an associate professor in the department of humanities and social sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur. He has a strong academic interest and curiosity in the field of social and positive psychology. Our present study on cherishing is a result of a series of discussions and deliberations between the authors.

Method

This qualitative study employed grounded theory techniques for analysis of the data. Grounded theory inquiry is a practical qualitative methodology as it helps in exploring and developing psychosocial phenomena grounded in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is also extremely reasonable and meaningful for investigating on research concepts with very limited theoretical background (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, the present study did not construct a theory instead it used the grounded theory techniques to generate a thematic analysis about cherishing.

Participants

Forty-eight adult participants (aged 27 to 65 years) consented to participate in the interview (Table 1). A majority of the participants were male (61.5%) followed by females (38.5%). Since cherishing is a complex psycho-social phenomenon, it requires diverse views from multiple spheres of human life for a holistic understanding. In other words, multiple views of cross-sectional samples/subjects are expected to provide better understanding about the

concept. This in turn helps researchers to propose an appropriate definition to describe the concept with clarity and meaning. Therefore, the present study has included views of diverse people across different geographical regions, employment sectors, educational groups, and ethnicities in the study. For the convenience of analysis, the present study grouped the participants into a broad grouping based on the geographical location of the ethnicities in India. Based on ethnic grouping, majority of the participants belong to eastern India (76.9%), followed by northern (19.2%), western (10%) and southern India (3.8%). Moreover, information on educational qualification report that more than half of the participants had a graduate degree (64.7%), and the rest had an undergraduate degree (table 1). Details on employment information of the participants report a majority of public sector employees (48.1%), followed by students, homemakers, retired personnel, and private sector employees (table 1).

Table 1. Demographic details

Demographic factors	Percentages
Age	27 to 65 years (Mean Age = 42.4 years)
Gender	Male (61.5%) Female (38.5%)
Employment Status	Private sector employees (9.6%), Retired employees (9.6%), Public sector employees (48.1%), Homemakers (1.9%) Graduate Students (30.8%)
Education	Graduate (Masters and PhD) (64.7%) Undergraduate degrees (35.3%).
Ethnic representation of the participants based on broad geographical location	Eastern India (76.9%) North India (19.2%) Western India (10%) Southern India (3.8%)

Setting

The authors selected a local yoga and meditation centre (YMC) for data collection. The present study was approved by the institutional review board. The study followed a convenience sampling technique. Convenience sampling refers to the technique of selecting participants based on the convenience of the researcher (Saumure & Given, 2008).

The participants were regular attendee at YMC. The members of the facility attended classes every day for one hour. English was the primary medium of instruction in data collection. As English was also the primary language followed in the YMC, the authors found this arrangement convenient for their investigation and decided to use this institute as their setting.

The present study includes participants enrolled in a basic yoga course since it was the only course offered during the tenure of our data collection. The basic yoga course was designed for beginners practicing yoga. However, the course did not include any meditation practice. The following lines report the exclusion criteria observed in the choice of participants: absence of any previous history of psychiatric and physical illness, presence of membership of more than one week to the facility. The authors only included participants with a membership of less than a week to rule out any impact of yoga as scientific literature indicate several

physical and mental health benefits of yoga when practiced for more than a week regularly (Büssing, Michelson, Khalsa, Telles, & Sherman, 2012; Sherman, 2012).

Preparation and Description of the Tools Used in the Study

The authors prepared a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of nine subjective questions (Table 2) for the interviews. The interview schedule is mentioned below. Along with this, the authors prepared a working definition of cherishing based on the review of the literature. She introduced cherishing to the participants as, “a feeling which makes you take care of something (which may be anything such as an object, event or a person) that you hold dear to yourself.”

Data Collection

The first author conducted and transcribed the interviews. The interviews were conducted in a neutral environment (e.g., a meeting room of a local community centre) at a pre-decided time. Before conducting the interview, she debriefed the participants about the procedures involved in participating in the study. All the participants read and signed an informed consent form before the actual investigation. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were allotted a participant ID. The data was only accessible to the authors in order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes until data saturation. Data saturation conveys the occurrence of repetitive and redundant themes and categories in an interview with no emergence of new information (Polit & Beck, 2006).

Table 2. Interview Schedule

Cherishing was introduced as: “A feeling which makes you take care of something (which may be anything such as an object, event or a person) and hold it dear to yourself to protect it from harm or damage.”

1. Would you like to share an instance of this feeling? If yes, would you like to elaborate on this?
2. Tell me how this experience has been for you?
3. What do you experience in this feeling? Would you like to specify?
4. What kind of thought comes to your mind when you hear about this feeling?
5. How is this any different from your everyday feeling for significant things in your life? Would you like to mention any specific incidence or instance?
6. Can you identify the things/person/events towards which you experience this feeling for?
7. What makes you to experience this feeling? Would you share with us an instance?
8. What benefits do you gain from this feeling? Please specify.
9. Is there anything in your life which you love, care, and value the most? If yes, would you like to share your experience?

Data Analysis

Data analysis consisted of analyzing the transcripts of the interviews for codes, to build subsequent themes. The first step of the analysis involved line by line coding of the transcripts through open coding. The first author transcribed the data herself. She maintained a codebook to record the codes derived from open coding of the transcripts. Open coding refers to the

labeling of data and categorizing it with other similar concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Open coding considers each line of the transcript as each line of the transcript is a potential data source. During the transcription, the first author labeled any meaningful data chunk with a name relevant to its underlying meaning. Next, she categorized the labels with common properties under the same conceptual category. Simultaneously, she also maintained the memos of all the emerging codes in their respective codebooks. Memos are the write up about the ideas related to each code and the inter-relationship among codes. They are usually in the form of sentence, paragraphs or pages (Glaser, 1978). In the process of transcription, the first author used the coded data from the first two initial interviews as a guide for analysis of the later interviews. She constantly referred to this coded data and compared it with the transcripts of the subsequent interviews.

In the next step, the first author merged the categories in a final codebook through axial and selective coding. Axial coding conveys establishing relationships between categories and their subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Finally, she integrated all the categories through selective coding, around a specific phenomenon. She explained these categories with the help of relational statements (Cottrell & McKenzie, 2005).

Three major themes emerged from the analysis (i.e., attributes of cherishing, the function of cherishing, and the objects of cherishing). The sub-themes were collated to form the major themes. In the study, quotes from the respondents are used to explain the themes. The prevalence of each theme was quantified to make the result more objective and easy to comprehend (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000).

Data Trustworthiness

Data trustworthiness was examined by following Creswell and Miller's (2000) eight strategies for validation of a qualitative study. The strategies include: persistent observation and engagement, peer review and debriefing, negative case analysis, triangulation, rich and thick description, member checks, external audits, and clarifying research bias. However, satisfying any two of the criteria is sufficient for validation (Creswell, 2013). The present study selected member checking as one of the strategies for validation and provided a careful elaboration of every step and procedure involved in the study in their attempt for validation. The criterion of member checking was achieved by sharing the original transcripts of the conversations with the participants (Shenton, 2004). Prior to data analysis, the authors distributed the transcripts to the participants for verification. The participants checked the transcripts to match the quality of their original response. Each interview session was audio taped with prior consent of the participants. Audio taping the sessions enriched the transcripts and helped the investigators understand the exact nuance of a response. The transcripts were written in English language as it was the primary language used in the interview. All the participants were proficient in English in terms of reading, writing, and speaking.

Results

Three major themes emerged out of the data analysis (i.e., attributes of cherishing, functions of cherishing, and the objects of cherishing). Attributes of cherishing has four sub-themes: a sense of protectiveness, a tendency to care, affective orientation, and reminiscence. The function of cherishing includes two sub-themes: a positive distraction and a sense of continuity. The objects of cherishing consist of three sub-themes: personal, interpersonal, altruistic. Each of the sub-themes constituted of several codes. The major themes and sub-themes are mentioned below:

Major Theme 1: Attributes of Cherishing

Attributes of cherishing convey the characteristic features that describe the way individuals engage in the experience of cherishing their object of affection. These attributes comprise:

Sub-theme 1: A sense of protectiveness. Protectiveness refers to the tendency to protect a target of cherishing out of concern for its security. Protectiveness was prominently described towards parents ($n = 43$), siblings ($n = 6$), and material objects ($n = 19$). One participant described about his concern toward his parents well-being as:

It is all about how much involved I am with their (parents) lives. I am particularly concerned and anxious about how they are going to do things on their own when I am not around...I was previously working with a bank in Durgapur, but recently I have taken a transfer to a village branch near my native place. I know the facilities are not the same here in my current office, but at least I get to come back home to take care of my parents everyday.

For this participant, the sense of protectiveness towards his parents made him take a job transfer to a nearby facility. The object one cherishes usually takes a centre point of an individual's life. Even significant career decisions are shaped keeping the object one cherishes in context. For some, the sense of protectiveness conveys taking up parental role. One participant described her experience of cherishing as taking up the role of stand-in parent for her younger sibling:

My sister was born 19 years after me. She is hardly a few years old now and has just started her schooling. One day she was shoved by another student during recess and had to receive two stitches in her chin. That was a terrible accident. Somebody had to talk to the school authority since my mother was unwell at that time and my father was working in Delhi. So I decided to talk to the school authority on my own. Since then, I have taken up my sister's responsibility. I am always checking in whatever she is doing. I frequently call back home, even though I stay most of the academic year in Bangalore for my bachelors.

Apart from the sense of concern mentioned by participants, protectiveness was also displayed through the behavior of caution in preserving the cherished possession from harm at the hands of others. One participant recounted her concern for a marble perfume holder gifted by her paternal grandmother as a, "delicate thing of beauty which I protect like a baby...I have no guilt in admitting, I feel a little possessive about it. I usually don't let people touch it as you never know when the motifs might come off."

Sub-theme 2: A tendency to care. A tendency to care refers to an inclination to take care of the target of cherishing. The tendency to care shows the likelihood of the caring behavior to occur. The likelihood to care was described as a continuous process by some participants. It conveys an uninterrupted engagement in fostering love, and care to the object of one's affection. The likelihood to care for an object of cherishing is extended throughout an individual's life. This persistence to convey care towards the object of one's affection was reported mostly in the context of relationships ($n = 46$) and treasured memories (such as events, images, conversations, and fragments of life) ($n = 41$) by the participants. One participant recounted in this context, "my love for my parents is not a one-time process of just providing them with a monthly allowance and I am done...it is in each and everything I do for them every day." Participants have recounted of preserving their cherished memories and desires for a long

time, almost throughout their life. This persistence in preserving memory was recalled by a 37-year-old private sector employee participant as, “keeping alive and maintaining my hopes and memories over a long period of time in fact, for my whole life.”

Cherishing was also reported as “spontaneously occurring” (n = 37) in nature. The tendency to care is a naturally occurring behavior, which manifests without any external triggers. One indulged in a caring behavior towards their cherished objects/person because s/he felt intrinsically prompted to do so. One participant reported that her love and concern to protect her cherished object was a lifelong process which came spontaneously to her without any external triggering factor: “the intention of love and care is not dependent on anything or what I receive from others. There is no monetary gain, no gifts in return. It is a natural feeling. I love because my heart says so.”

Sub-theme 3: A strong affective bond. A strong affective bond refers to the affective nature of cherishing. This orientation of cherishing is perceptible from the emotions displayed in the presence and absence of the object of affection. A majority of the participants discussed the context of cherishing as a positive emotional experience. However, the loss of a cherished object/person was mentioned as a negative emotional experience.

Positive emotional experience. A positive emotional experience is central to any cherishing experience. A majority of the participants reported experiencing a positive emotion such as the feeling of love and admiration (n = 14) towards their object of affection. For example, one participant recounted this experience as: “I have an immense feeling of love, care, and admiration for things that means a lot to me.”

Besides the feeling of being valued (n =6), followed by a sense of happiness (n = 3) obtained from their object of affection was another significant reason for engaging in cherishing. A female participant recounted her experience of cherishing as: “when something or somebody makes you feel special, bring more value to your life; you tend to cherish them... At the end of the day, we all cherish those things that make you happy.”

Loss as a negative emotional experience. The loss of the object of affection is described as a negative emotional experience. Emotional difficulty was reported in situations involving damage to a cherished personal qualities (n = 5), loss of cherished people (n = 9), contemplating loss of cherished people (n =2), and loss of cherished material objects (n = 3). Loss of a cherished person owing to death was observed as one of the most prominent themes in this category. A participant described the loss of one of her parents as emotionally troubling for a brief period of time. The time briefly after the loss was described by her as a, “dark time of hopelessness... I thought I would never be able to be happy ever in my life again.”

Apart from the real loss of people, the contemplation of a probable loss of a cherished people was also described as emotionally difficult. A female participant recounted that thinking about losing the cherished people someday was painful. This kind of thought made her feel as if she would lose a part of her identity with the loss of her cherished people:

I am always concerned about my parent’s health. At times when I imagine the future without my parents, all I can see is a huge gap in my life. They are everything to me and imagining a life without them seems so impossible at times. I know it sounds quite impractical of me but losing them would definitely feel losing a part of me.

Sub-theme 4: Reminiscence. Reminiscence was reported as another significant attribute of cherishing. Reminiscence is defined as a habit of recollecting personal events of

past (McMahon & Rhudick, 1964). In the present study reminiscence was experienced in two ways by the participants: spontaneously reminiscing the cherished objects ($n = 13$) and encounters with the cherished items and people eliciting reminiscence ($n = 17$). Spontaneous reminiscence was experienced without being elicited by any external triggers such as item, people, or events. It occurred naturally. One participant recounted experiencing reminiscence when she returned home back for the first time after her first year in college. The anticipation of meeting her family made her recollect about the life she spent with her family at home:

The first time when I went back to my city Kolkata from Bangalore after a gap of 1 year and 24 days, the excitement of going back home and seeing my family (I belong to a joint family... especially those people whom I love) made me cry...As if I could see everybody in front of me. It was like pictures flashing in my mind.

“Encounters with the cherished items” convey the experience of coming across cherished objects such as souvenirs, mementos, and cherished photographs leading to reminiscence. Whereas “encounters with people” convey the experience of coming across cherished people either virtually (e.g., discovering a social post on social networking sites, and /or phone call from a friend etc.) or in real. One middle aged male participant reported of experiencing an elicited reminiscence after he came across a cherished photograph of him with his friends in a social networking site:

I was just scrolling through Facebook the other day and I came across an old photograph posted by one of my friends. It was an emotional experience for me, I had a flashback of those times, and I could see the fun we had in my mind. Everything was so clear. I felt like missing those days terribly.

Major Theme 2: Functions of Cherishing

Function of cherishing refers to the apparent benefits people obtain from cherishing. As described by participants cherishing has two significant functions: a positive distraction, and a sense of continuity.

Sub-theme 1: Positive distraction. The experience of cherishing objects like books ($n = 2$) and photographs ($n = 11$), was described as way to distract oneself from feeling low and lonely. This distraction offered a sense of pleasure and relief. However, this function of cherishing was only discussed in context of material objects like books and photographs. One male participant mentioned about his habit of reading as a way to cope with his loneliness and renew vitality in life:

My books are integral part of life which provides sustenance and energy in the daily turmoil of rat-race. It helps me to overcome loneliness, and makes me more positive minded and energetic both physically and mentally. It also helps me to face life's problems with new zeal and endeavor.

Sub-theme 2: A sense of continuity. The sense of continuity conveys a sense of an uninterrupted relationship with the cherished objects/persons. The cherished possessions are the symbolic representations of the significant people, relationships, and event in one's life. Cherished possessions such as mementos ($n = 18$), landed properties (i.e., house / land) ($n = 3$) signify an uninterrupted presence of the people represented by those objects. The mementos

represented significant life events like childhood experiences (n = 7), wedding (n = 3), professional milestones such as promotion at job (n = 3) and social relations (n = 5). Childhood related mementos demonstrated specific experiences attached to it. For instance, one participant reported about cherishing a wooden pistol gifted by his grandfather on his 10th birthday.

Preservation of landed properties was considered as a way to continue the legacy of ancestors by few participants. The intention to preserve a land-property was illustrated by a 38-year-old male participant as:

All that I have been left with by my father and my forefather is the house I live in. I try to maintain it as much possible as I can; after all, my house not only gives me shelter but reminds me of my roots.

The sense of continuity was also described for relationships (n = 13). Sustaining relationships was described as an integral part of life by some participants. The participants reported the loss of cherished relationships as a significant loss of emotional support. One participant described her apprehension of losing the continuity of the relationship she shared with parents. In her words:

The more I get old, the more I feel I am losing my parents every day. This is a horrible feeling. The only thing that I can do is to protect these people from harm. This assures me that things are going to be good for at least some time even though not for long.

Major Theme 3: The Objects of Cherishing

The objects of cherishing convey the targets towards which one experiences cherishing. In the present study, the object of cherishing consists of different targets such as relationships, the self, inanimate things, and altruistic deeds. The target objects are discussed as follows:

Sub-theme 1: Interpersonal. The interpersonal object of cherishing consists of relationship contexts such as bond with parents (n = 42), spouse (n = 16), friends (n = 6), children (n = 37) and siblings (n = 15). However, the context of caring for parents and children emerged as the prominent under this type of object of cherishing. In this context a participant narrated, "...my parents cared for me a lot throughout my life. They have never let me face any hardship in life, even though they faced problems... I try to show my care and concern in every possible way I can manage as they mean everything to me."

The next most prominent phenomenon was the experience of cherishing children. The experience of cherishing for parents revolved around the well-being of their children. In this context, one middle aged female public sector employee recounted, "My thoughts always revolve around my son and I wish that he keeps healthy and grows up to be a good human being." Parents especially mothers were more elaborate in describing the experience of cherishing their children. This experience was described as a naturally occurring feeling of love. One participant described this experience as:

The feeling of love and care for a child comes naturally to a parent, and nobody teaches how to do it. Once a child is born, your whole self changes, you get new insight into things and whatever you or however you are the well-being of your kid always stays in your mind.

Most of the participants who reported cherishing their siblings expressed their desire for sharing strong sense of emotional attachment with them. Apart from being in regular contact with their sibling, these participants also reported about providing required help and support during emergency to their siblings. The participants discussed providing support such as listening to their sibling's problems, financial help, and suggestions. One participant recounted about his two older brothers, "they played a very important role in shaping my life...I always look up to them. In good and bad times, I know I will find them by my side."

Participants also discussed about cherishing their spouses and friends. Female participants were more open about expressing cherishing their spouse. The contribution of a spouse was described as a significant part of identity for a female. One female reported about her husband's contribution in her life as something which she will value and preserve for her entire life. She described her experience as: "The love, care and support received from him (her husband) means a lot to me. It's now part of my existence and identity and worth preserving throughout my life."

Cherishing friends was more prominent among younger (i.e., within the age range of 27 to 38 years) participants. Younger participants were also proactively involved in their friend's lives such as offering emotional and financial assistance, receiving help in return and sharing good times with each other. In this context, one participant described about his friendship with his best friend as, "Our understanding of each other's need is mutual; we are always there for each other. I don't remember a time in life when he was not there in my life." However, the frequency of cherishing friends was reportedly less among older adults.

Sub-theme 2: Personal. The personal object of cherishing consists of different representation of self, such as, strength, skills, abilities (n = 11), achievements, success (n = 18), personal struggles (n = 12), valued memories of past (n = 18), and hopes and dreams in one's life (n = 5). Cherishing "strength, skills, and abilities" convey accepting and appreciating the individual behavioral qualities such as, resilience, compassion, humor, wit, wisdom, and perseverance. For instance, one participant mentioned that he treasures his quality of perseverance, and it was also an essential part of his identity:

I never shy away from any problem, I believe in seeing the end of everything. I wait, wait and wait, because I know every problem ends somewhere... but I would not trade this quality for anything, this is what defines me as me.

Participants also reported that protecting and guarding their inner strengths was essential to their existence. In this context, one of the participants described:

I always hold on to my strengths, as I believe they are the ones which will help me to sustain eventually. There have been times when I questioned my own existence, but the assurances of the strengths I have make me feel encouraged.

On the other hand, cherishing external achievements covered a long range of personal accomplishments like topping examinations or bagging first prize in any competition (n = 8), professional achievements (n = 7), and materialistic gains for family (n = 5). A retired female college professor described her personal achievements as:

I can never forget the golden moment of my life when I was declared as the university topper. It was equally a proud moment for my parents. As a college teacher, I was well admired by my students and colleagues. After retirement, I

terribly miss the love and respect I received from my students and the admiration and appreciation I received from my principal and colleagues.

Some participants referred to materialistic gains in terms of buying a car and a new house.

Personal struggles also formed another facet of personal objects of cherishing. The personal struggles were reported to occur in the early years of a participant's life. Most of the adversities occurred during adolescence and early adulthood. For three participants, cherishing an object was associated with the incidents of loss of loved ones (e.g., father and mother, spouse) and a reminder of those loss. However, majority of the personal adversities shared by the participants were incidents of financial hardships with theme of overcoming them. One home-maker narrated about her early days of married life:

The first shawl bought by my husband...it was a long time back around 1980's. In those days affording a good quality shawl meant a lot, particularly it was beyond our purchasing capacities. We were newly married and I and my husband were invited to a friend's place. It was December and I unfortunately didn't have a good shawl to go out. I had to ask one of my relatives for a shawl before going out, she kept me waiting for more than an hour, and we reached to the party quite late. It was very humiliating. A few months later, my husband bought me a Kashmiri shawl. It was beyond my imagination to express the joy in words. For last 20 years, I have treasured the gift of my husband (The Kashmir Shawl) and would love to preserve it as long as I can.

The connotation of the term "valued" was used in reference to memories of events. Memories consisted of a wide range of experiences and activities such as buying a car for the first time in life (n = 1), a house where one grew up (n = 5), native place (n = 4), educational institutions (n = 3), mementos (n = 3), and job experiences (n = 2). For instance, a retired government employee shared his experience:

I try to protect and preserve whatever I feel emotionally connected to me. I tend to preserve them almost for eternity. I still remember vividly my childhood days when I visited my native home during a summer vacations, I had lots of fun and enjoyment in the company of my friends and family during this visit. The place and its memories will always be special and unique to me throughout my life.

Hope and dreams in one's life were found to be another facet of self-related cherishing. Participants reported cherishing in form of several types of hopes such as achieving financial stability (n = 3) and achieving a stable social footing (well established in society with good name and fame) (n = 2). One of the participants narrated, "My thoughts and happiness always revolve around my family. This wish is deeply rooted within me since my adulthood. I have an ambition for my family to possess some property that will make my family secured."

Sub-theme 3: Altruistic. The altruistic object of cherishing refers to altruistic deeds and concern for others. Altruism is defined as "a motivational state with the goal of increasing another's welfare" (Batson & Shaw, 1991, p. 108). Altruism was expressed by engaging in altruistic deeds/ actions and expressing compassion for others difficulties in life. The feeling of compassion was evident for others outside the premises of close relationships (i.e., family and friends), but also for others such as colleagues, students, clients, animals and the whole humanity at large. One participant expressed his concern for the victims of wrong doings of religious extremists while discussing his idea of cherishing fellow human beings. He further

elaborated his feeling in emotional tones, "...my heart goes out to the victims of crimes perpetrated by the religious fanatics throughout the world."

Altruistic actions involved selfless acts. Most of the student participants engaged in selfless deeds ($n = 17$) like volunteering in local orphanage, raising funds for a cause, and organizing blood donation camps. Participants less than 30 years of age reported high level of engagement in selfless acts. The frequency of selfless acts was reportedly less among participants in the age range of 30-50 years. However, a couple of participants at the age of 60 years of age engaged in selfless acts for the community they lived in. For instance, volunteering to prepare playgrounds for children, and helping to disinfect areas for a clean community. One female schoolteacher informed that her sense of cherishing is not only confined to her family and friends but also to her economically weaker section of students whom she teaches. She continuously strives to bring new methods of teaching for better performance of students. She further elaborates:

.....material gains have never inspired me much. I feel that when my student succeeds in life, my dreams are fulfilled and goals are achieved. In order to see my students do well, I keep working hard and improvise methods to teach them well.

Discussion

The present study addresses an existing research gap in exploring the way cherishing works in our lives. This study is an attempt to develop a preliminary understanding of cherishing as a psycho-social concept. The objective of the present study was to explore the meaning, nature, and function of cherishing. The findings of the study reveal that cherishing is a multidimensional psycho-social construct which can be defined as a secure attachment behavior displaying protectiveness, love, care, and affection towards certain targets such as event(s), object(s), and person(s). Analysis of the data reveals cherishing in three broad themes: the attribute, functions and the objects of cherishing.

The Attribute of Cherishing

The attributes convey the meaning people ascertain to the experience of cherishing something. The attributes that make up the experience of cherishing include a sense of protectiveness, a tendency to care, affective orientation and reminiscence. Protectiveness refers to the behavior of safeguarding an object of affection. It was reflected in the participants' concerns about their object of affection and the subsequent decisions to safeguard them. The second attribute "a tendency to care" conveys an inclination to care for the object of one's cherishing uninterruptedly. Cherishing was also described to possess an affective orientation in the study. The feeling for an object of affection is described in as a positive emotional experience. However, the absence of the object of affection was reported as a feeling of loss. Reminiscence as an attribute of cherishing suggests that it is spontaneously occurring and often prompted by stimulus such as encounter with a cherished person/object. Consistently, available literature on reminiscence describes it as a process of recollecting past memories related to our self either spontaneously or triggered by external cue (Bluck & Levine, 1998).

The whole concept of care, preservation, and emotional involvement in reference to an object of affection is prominently documented in earlier studies (Belk, 1988). The endurance in the care and preservation of cherished objects can be better explained in terms of the attachment behavior. Attachment behaviors are guided by an inner working model that promotes protection of the attachment figure and maintains proximity with it (Solomon &

George, 2008). In a way, cherishing depicts a sense of secure attachment towards the objects of cherishing. A secure attachment style is associated with greater relationship interdependence and commitment (Fraley & Davis, 1997) as is displayed through the protective and nurturing characteristics of cherishing. Moreover, secure attachment ensures a secure attachment with family member (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008) and other close relationships. Another feature of secure attachment is its capacity in dealing with loss of a cherished possession. This loss is a suggestive of the separation distress (Bowlby, 1969, 1982) mentioned in attachment theory. Most of the participants have acknowledged a feeling of distress owing to the loss of their cherished possessions which is a feature of securely attached individuals (Kobak & Sceery, 1988). Out of all the responses collected in the present study, two revealed a sense of distress with contemplated loss. Although, the pattern of behavior show anxious attachment it might not be necessarily so; rather it can be discussed as a form of adult attachment with their parents. For a child frequent physical assurance from the attachment figure helps in assuaging distress in stress. However, for adults physical presence is replaced by symbolical representation of the attachment figure through thoughts, shared beliefs, goals, and interests (Koski & Shaver, 1997). With age the vulnerability of losing an attachment figure such as a parent becomes more prominent which surpass the sense of felt security through symbolic representation. Therefore, individuals engage in more direct care-giving behaviours in the form of protectiveness to delay the loss of attachment figures as long as possible (Cicirelli, 1993).

The attributes of cherishing has a prominent relevance to the cultural scenario of India. The features of protectiveness, tendency to care and emotional orientation has a strong association with collectivistic trends displayed by Indians. Collectivistic culture relates to a sense of strong social cohesiveness, protective feeling, and loyalty to each other among the members of the society (Hofstede, 1991). Collectivism in Indian culture has been described in terms of strong emotional sharing, mutual care for one another and less emotional disruption (Roland, 1982). The features of protectiveness and care show a significant prominence in comparison to the attribute of emotional expression when describing cherishing according to the present study. It was expected that the present study would reveal a higher prevalence of emotion to be expressed by the participants in describing cherishing as apparent from the theories of attachment and empirical literature on cherished possessions. Yet, the frequency of the use or the expression of emotional words was less when compared to other attributes of cherishing by the participants in the present study. Interestingly, this phenomenon is relevant to the emotional norms of collectivistic cultures. Empirical investigations suggest that individuals from Asian collectivistic cultures tend to control their emotional expression (Russell & Yik, 1996). In addition, several previous studies confirm that in collectivistic culture such as India, emotional suppression functions prominently as a way of regulating emotions (Matsumoto et al., 2008). However, a recent study confirms that individuals from collectivistic cultures only perform emotional suppression with individuals whom they were not intimate with, especially individuals not in their in-group (Huwaë & Schaafsma, 2016). This asserts the low frequency of reported emotional expression as an attribute of cherishing by the participants which generally involved sharing about intimate emotional information with an interview who hardly qualified as an intimate member of their in-group. To summarise, all of the attributes of cherishing has a strong cultural relevance in context of India as a setting of the study.

Functions of Cherishing

Function conveys the benefits people receive from experiencing cherishing. The participants described two prominent function of cherishing: positive distraction and sense of continuity. The function of positive distraction was explained as a way to escape from feeling low and lonely. In fact, the concept of positive distraction is a prominent type of emotion focused coping which involves distancing oneself from the situation of stress (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986) by engaging in techniques such as reading, watching television and other pleasurable activities (Allen & Leary, 2010). The concept of coping can be again traced back to object attachment theory, where cherished objects are described as transitional objects (Winnicott, 1953). This attachment is reflected in an individual's relationship with both animate and inanimate objects in later life. In a way, cherished objects provide a sense of psychological ownership and act as good coping instrument in the face of adverse situations (Furby, 1978; Wapner et al., 1990). The continuity function of cherishing conveys a sense of an uninterrupted relationship with the significant people, and event in an individual's life. Erikson (1963) describes the continuity function as an extension of our ego identity. The ego identity has an inherent need to maintain a sense of sameness and continuity over time and space. The maintenance of identity function is a process involving reintegration of important identity elements into a tangible unit (Kroger, 2002). These tangible units operate as cherished possessions for individuals.

The Objects of Cherishing

The objects of cherishing encompass those targets towards which one experiences cherishing. In terms of attachment behavior, objects of cherishing are the targets towards which the attachment behavior is directed. This study reveals a wide range of target of cherishing such as relationships, the self, inanimate things, and altruistic deeds. The targets are categorized under three broad domains: interpersonal, personal and altruistic. Interpersonal cherishing describes the experience of cherishing with relationships such as family and friends as targets. Secure attachment fosters a healthy sense of expectation about self and other persons (Collins, 1996). This healthy sense of security helps an individual to engage in other people's needs and concerns (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Besides, culture also has a significant contribution in influencing the way we care and nurture our self and others. Collectivism is deeply rooted in Indian culture (Sinha, 2014), which supports the concept of togetherness and family harmony. For Indians, family well-being (Mishra, 1994) and integrity (Triandis et al., 1993) takes a prominent position in the social context. Consistent with the norms of collectivism caring and protecting members of the family and those considered family is a common phenomenon in India.

The personal objects of cherishing include concepts related to self. Self-related elements like personal achievements, struggles, individual abilities, cherished memories, and hopes are part of this category. The concept of nurturing and treasuring our self and related concepts is not altogether a new topic in the psychology. Contemporary literature on positive psychology emphasizes the development of human inner strengths and abilities (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) as essential for human survival and emotional growth. Before the advent of positive psychology, the context of unconditional acceptance of self was popularly endorsed by the humanistic school of psychology. Humanistic psychology stresses that accepting ourselves unconditionally with our different capacity to care, behave and express emotions unlike others, set us apart as humans; and performs a significant role in maintaining our well-being (Ellis & Robb, 1994; Jeffcoat & Hayes, 2013). Furthermore, from the perspective of attachment theories, positive views about oneself are considered a significant characteristic of secure attachment behavior (Mikulincer, 1998). Personal cherishing also has a prominent cultural relevance in the context of the Indian setting where the main cherishing study is

located. Although, empirical evidence on cultural orientation in India corroborates its collectivistic tendencies it does not deny the dissonance displayed by the presence of prominent individualistic tendencies within collectivistic mentality (Sinha, 1988; Tripathi, 1988). Literature on culture and behavior reveals that Indians have both the elements of collectivism and individualism embedded with their identity (Sinha & Tripathi, 1994). Consistent with the demographics of the present study, previous research reports that the educated and urban Indians are more individualistic than their rural and less educated counterpart (Sinha, 2014). This further clarifies the findings related to cherishing self-related concepts in the present study.

The third object of cherishing includes altruistic concern and deeds. It describes the concept of treasuring every living being on earth with love and helping others unconditionally. Some earlier studies on attachment assert that secure attachment provides a significant base to foster compassion to others (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). The attachment theories explain that individuals indulge in offering help to others only when they are assured of their own safety (Bowlby, 1969, 1982; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005).

Conclusion

Cherishing has several implications in terms of emotional and social functioning of an individual. Cherishing represents a sense of attachment security. Secure attachment is reported as beneficial to our sense of comfort and security (Bell & Spikins, 2018) and offers several benefits. Earlier studies on attachment security assert several beneficial outcomes such as, greater emotional well-being (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2016), increased resilience (Jakubiak & Feeney, 2016) and enhanced sense of compassion and altruism (Carnelley & Rowe, 2010; Gillath, Shaver, & Mikulincer, 2005). Cherishing received from others also has a role to play in an individual's life. Children who receive cherishing from caregivers are reported to develop personal competence, autonomy and enhanced level of well-being at later years of their lives (Lee et al., 2015). These implications are congruent to people's lives within the context of Indian culture which emphasizes group cohesiveness, obligation, and emotional interdependence (Pearson & Child, 2007).

The findings of the present study have certain limitations. This study offers a nuanced understanding of cherishing as it is only confined to the perspectives of limited number of individuals conveniently sampled from educated urban area of India. Moreover, the findings of the present study cannot be further generalized across population as it lacks verification across diverse age range, ethnicities and other significant demographic considerations. Hence, future studies should try to include people from different ethnicities, socio-economic background, cultural scenario, age range, and personality traits to explore diverse perspectives on cherishing.

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Author Note

Pratishtha Bhattacharyya is a doctoral research scholar and perusing her PhD under the supervision of Rabindra Kumar Pradhan in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur. She works in the field of positive psychology. She can be contacted at: pratishthabhattacharyya@gmail.com.

Rabindra Kumar Pradhan, PhD, is Associate Professor of Psychology in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur, India. He has 20 years of teaching and research experience in the field social and organisational psychology. His current researches focus of positive psychological phenomenon such as subjective well-being and happiness, psychological empowerment, workplace spirituality, positive leadership, psychological capital and emotional intelligence, etc. He has published more than 60 research papers in reputed national and international peer reviewed journals. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: rabi2020@gmail.com / rkpradhan@hss.iitkgp.ac.in.

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