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Pessimism and Virtuous Hope: Can They Coexist?

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Pessimism and virtuous hope: Can they coexist?



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INTRODUCTION

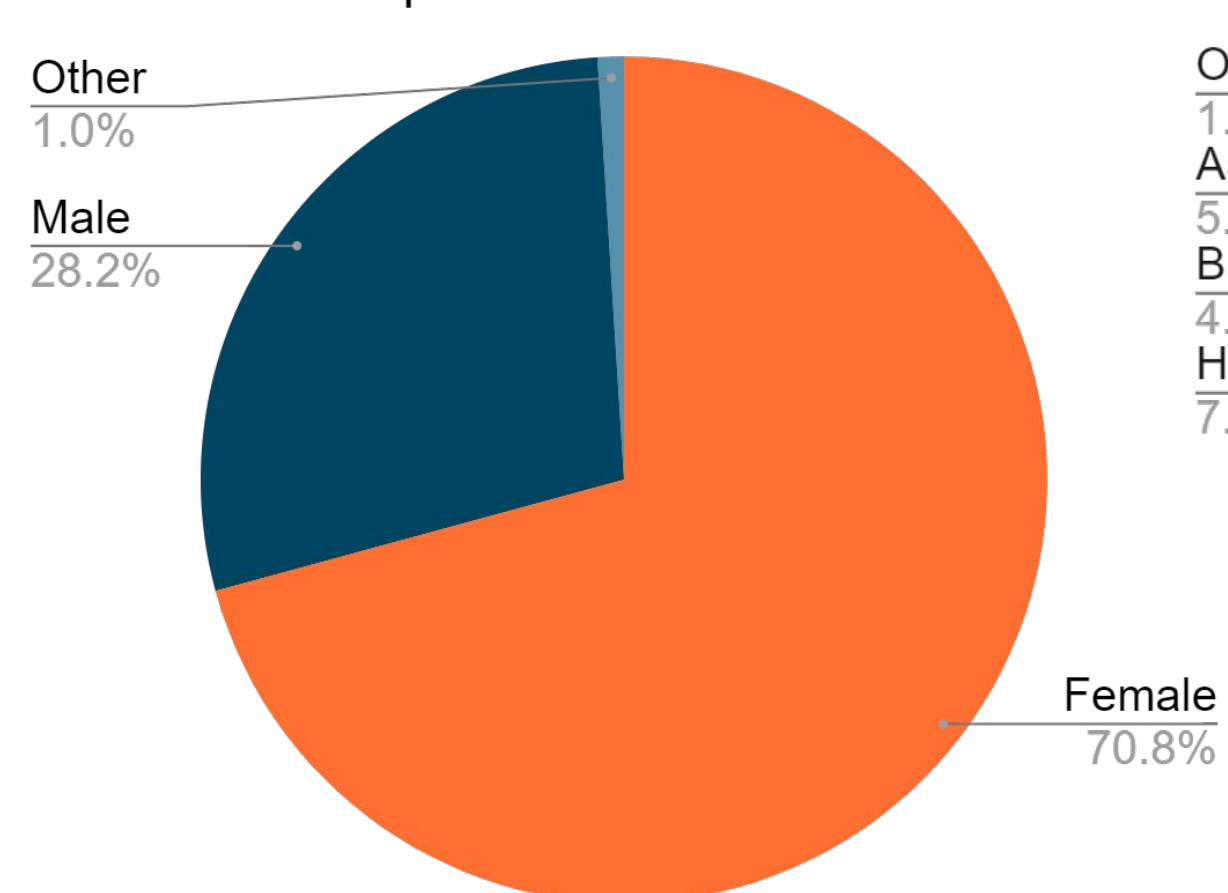
The virtue of Ithemba hope is operationally defined as a purposeful vision in adversity, encouraging others for the common good (Thomas et al. under review). A qualitative study has suggested that the **virtue of hope can coexist with pessimism** especially in the context of high adversity, showing that anticipating bad events with a hopeful mindset can result in positive outcomes of flourishing (Thomas et al., 2022). This study builds on the construct of virtuous hope and will search for more variables it relates to such as pessimism, that we measure as the opposite of optimism.

The **purpose of this study** is to conduct an exploratory analysis to understand if high pessimism and high virtuous Ithemba hope can coexist as individual differences.

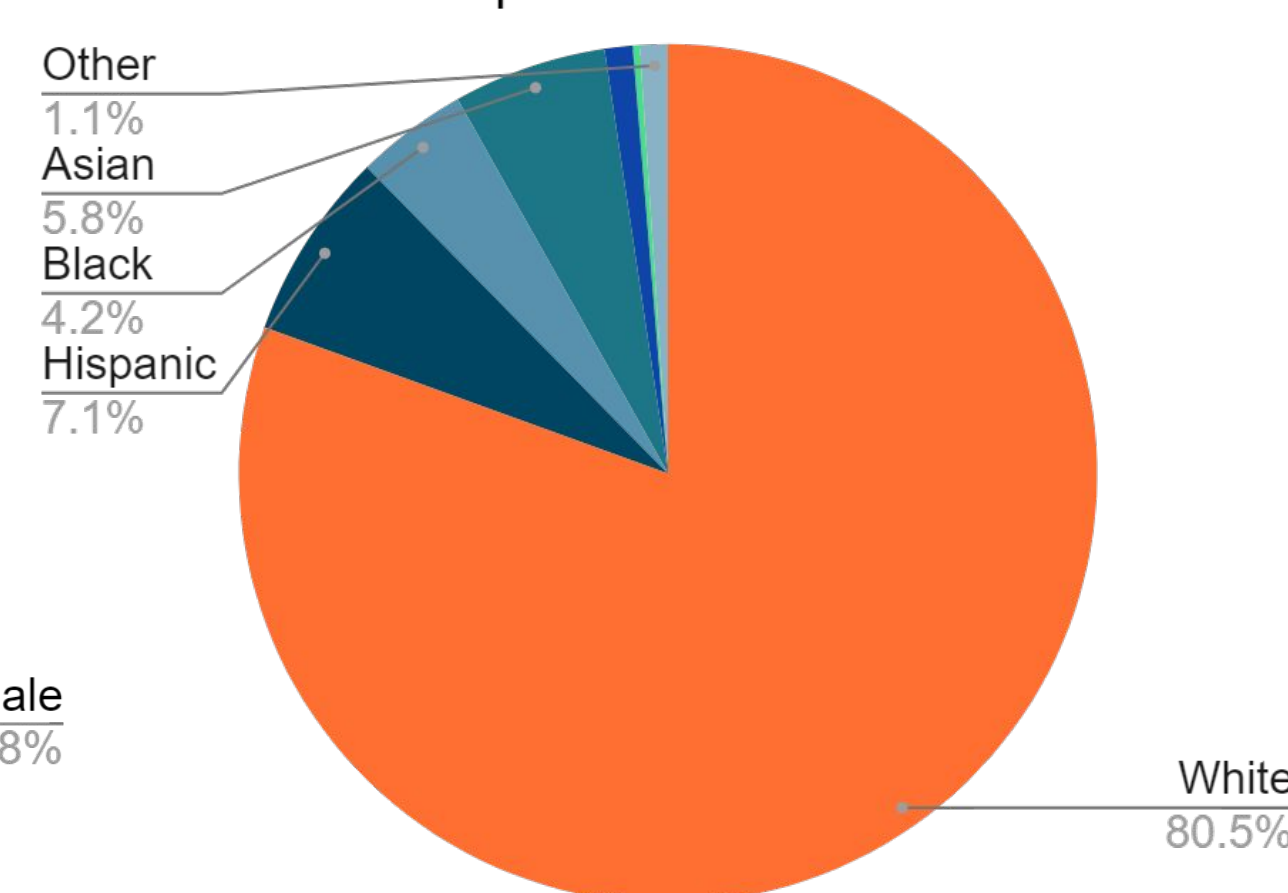
METHOD

397 students from PSY 100 in Fall of 2022 and Spring of 2023 completed surveys including many items about their views on life and how they displayed a variety of virtues.

Gender in Sample N=397



Ethnicities in Sample



We then divided students into four groups depending on their hope and optimism. We **hypothesized** that pessimism and virtuous hope will significantly differ enough to coexist with each other as separate variables of well-being.

Some students were optimistic but not hopeful, others were hopeful but not optimistic.

Which is better?

For all of the variables below, those who were hopeful (though not optimistic), scored higher:

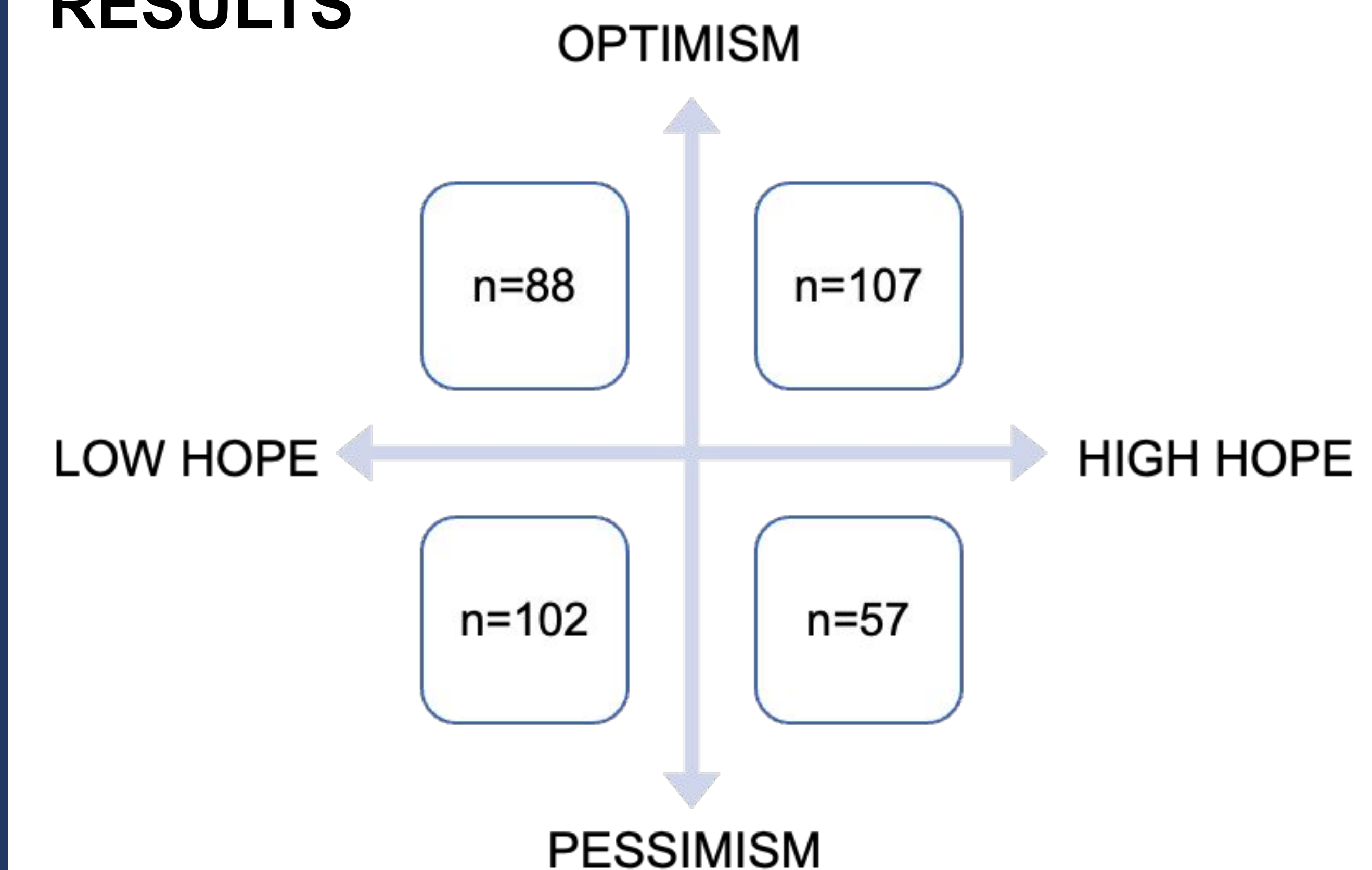
autonomy cognitive hospitality hope accountability transcendent justice accountability sensitivity forgiveness

If you can only choose optimism or hope, choose **HOPE.**

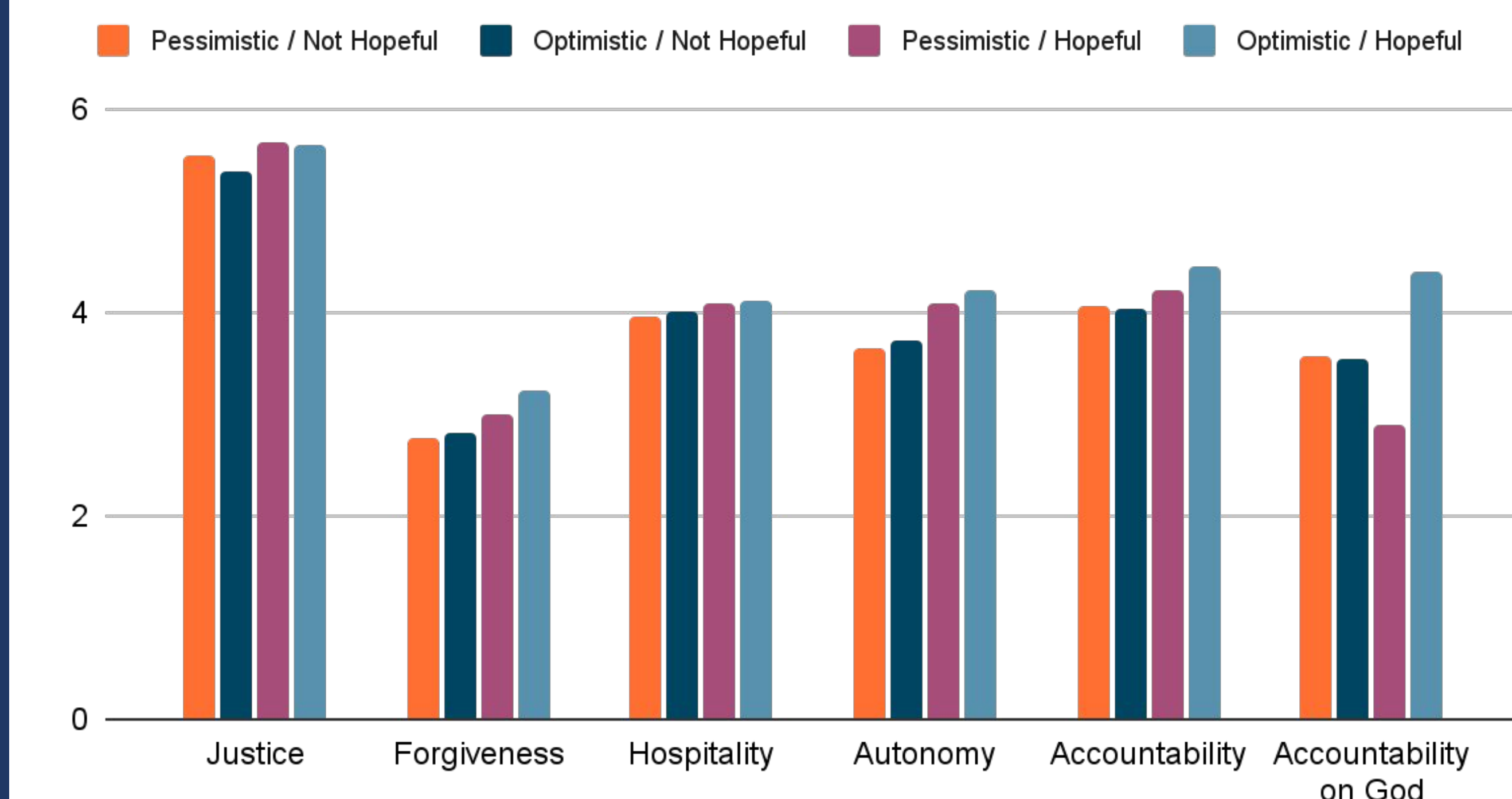
16% of students reported being somewhat pessimistic about the immediate future even though they were committed to hoping and working towards a common good.

Pessimism	Virtuous Hope
"I hardly ever expect things to go my way."	"I stay hopeful when I face hardships."
"If something can go wrong for me, it will."	"I give others a reason to be hopeful for the future."
"I rarely count on good things happening to me."	"My vision for the future keeps me going."

RESULTS



Optimism and Hope Combinations



DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Findings:

- Optimism is not for everyone, but hope is for everyone. Virtuous hope can help people thrive in adversity and correlates with many other virtues.
- Virtuous hope can co-exist with pessimism.

Implications for Theory and Practice:

- Supports development of strategies for well-being in high adversity contexts.

Limitations and Considerations:

- Self-report measures and niche sample (undergraduate, mostly religious)
- Next steps involved broader samples across 3 countries and a community study in South Africa