

Positive Psychology of OPTIMISM

Optimism: (Be happy, Don't worry attitude):

Optimism is a cognitive construct (expectancies regarding future outcomes). It is a disposition to an expectation that the future will have more positive events than negative ones.

That is it is simply attending & acknowledging the positive things in life.

It relates to motivation: optimistic people exert effort, whereas pessimistic people disengage from effort.

Dispositional optimism is defined as a global expectation that more good (desirable) things than bad (undesirable) will happen in the future (Scheier and Carver, 1985). Whereas **Situational optimism** is the expectation that a specific situation will be positive.

Dispositional optimism is associated with various positive outcomes such as better mental and physical health, motivation, performance, and satisfying personal relationships.

Explanatory style (Attribution)

It determines how people explain an event (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) . This influences their expectation of an event.



When faced with challenge Optimists are more confident, whereas Pessimists remain doubtful.

Ex. Unemployment

Optimism & Health

- Study of optimism began largely in health contexts, finding positive associations between optimism and markers of better psychological and physical health.

(Charles Carver & Michael Scheier)

- Optimists when think toward the future, they are able to generate more vivid mental images of positive events than are pessimists. This frame of mind helps them to be more able than less optimistic people to disengage mentally from physical pain.
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Optimism & Health

- Empirical research shows that optimism relates to good health & long life.
 - Over an 8-year follow up optimism predicted better pulmonary (lung) functions among older men, even when smoking was controlled.
 - In a longitudinal study older men & women, optimism predicted not only better health but also lower levels of pain.
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Optimism has been linked to lower levels inflammation, better antioxidant levels, better lipid profiles, and lower cortisol responses under stress.

Optimistic show stronger immune responses. However, they show lower immune responses under conditions of high challenge. *Seegerstrom* argues that the reduction in immune response under high challenge reflects greater behavioral engagement with the challenge, which induces suppression of immune responses to conserve energy for the behavior.

One major study of cardiovascular disease, using data from the Women's Health Initiative (WHI), examined quality of life, chronic disease, morbidity, and mortality among over 95000 women across an 8-year period. All of the women were free of cardiovascular disease and cancer at study entry.

Findings: Optimists women were less likely than pessimists to develop coronary heart disease (CHD), were less likely to die from CHD-related causes, and had lower total mortality due to all causes, across the 8 years of study.

Other studies found that optimism was protective against stroke and against increase in Carotid Artery blockage over a 3-year span and that optimists were less likely to be re-hospitalized by 8 months following coronary bypass surgery.

Optimistic children show more adaptive sleep profiles. It is noteworthy that associations between optimism and markers of good health appear so early in life.

Optimism & Life-Style

Optimism is associated with more health-promoting and less health-impairing behavior. Optimists are less likely to smoke, more likely to exercise, and have more healthy diets compared with pessimists.

Optimism & Social Support

Recently, the scientific study of optimism has extended to the realm of social relations: new evidence indicates that optimists have better social connections, partly because they work harder at them.

Optimists report having greater social support than do pessimists, but there is some indication that it is the perception of support that matters rather than the actual provision of support.

There is also evidence that this association works in both directions: having strong social networks can enhance optimism.

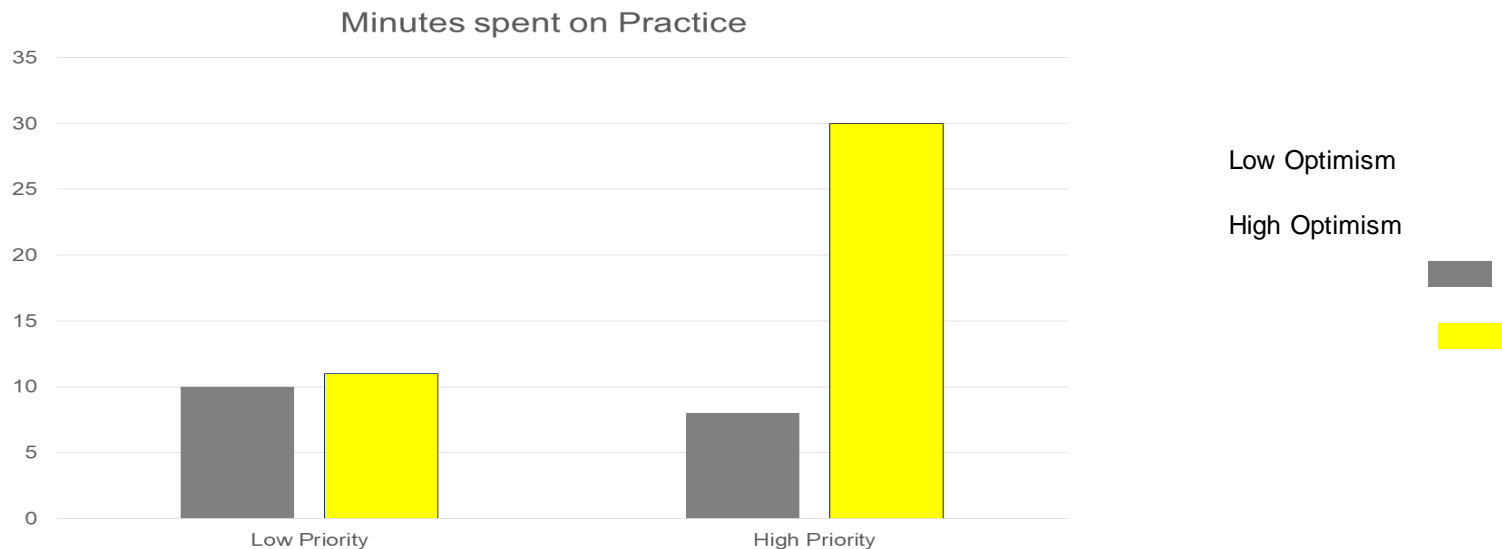
Optimism (assessed 10 years previously) predicted greater resilience to developing loneliness late in life.

Optimists thrive in a wide range of social conditions, with the result that optimism is related to greater network size, and to ties with others that cross age, educational, and racial boundaries.

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- Optimism is associated with a **warm and slightly dominant interpersonal style**, which among men results in greater relationship satisfaction not only for themselves, but also for their wives.
 - A similar effect has been found for caregiver burden among wives of men about to undergo coronary artery bypass surgery.
 - Optimists handle relationship crises more successfully than do pessimists and they provide nurturing and **involved parenting** to their children resulting in better adjustment of the children.
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Students & Optimism:

Some students (but not others) were given information stressing the importance of doing well on their final course exam, and indicating that preparing for the exam should be a high priority over the following week. Optimists practiced significantly more on high priority tasks.



Result:

Optimism leads to greater effort toward high-priority, but not low- priority goals.

Optimism & Adversity

If life turns seriously **sour**, as reflected in a lack of connection with others and perceiving that one has become a burden on others, suicidal ideation emerges among persons low in optimism, but not among those higher in optimism.

Given the adversity of an extended lack of employment, optimists manage to maintain higher life satisfaction, mediated partly by perceptions of family support.

Optimists report more finding of benefits in adversity than do pessimists and there is evidence that this difference is mediated by differences in problem- focused coping.

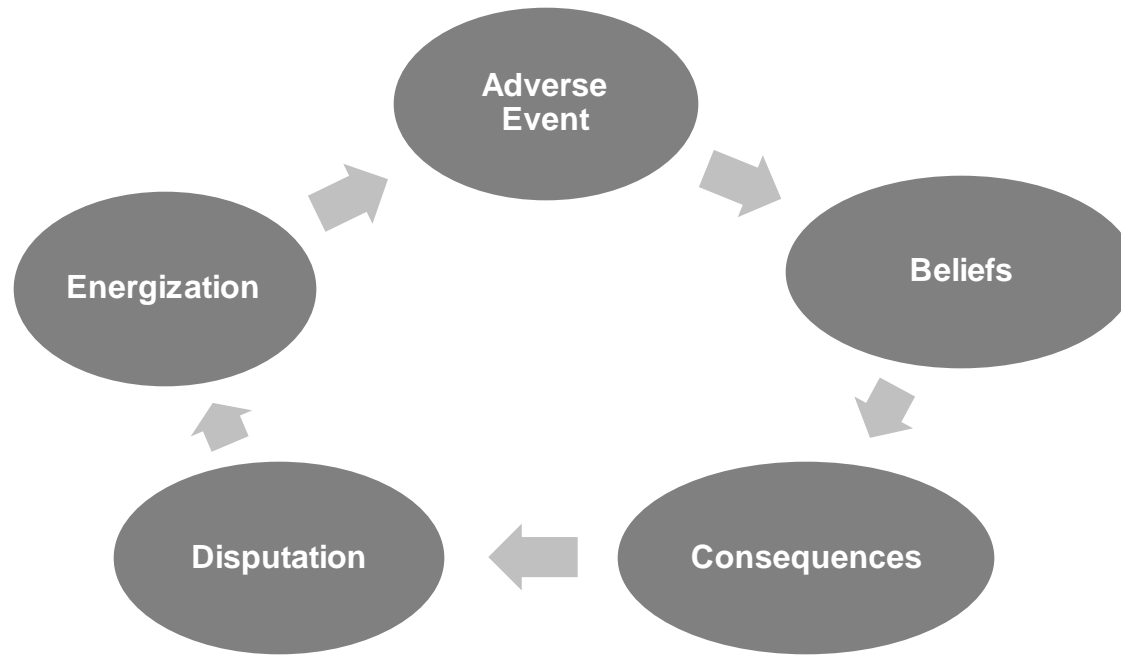
Increasing Optimism

Recent research has found that 2 weeks of daily 5-min sessions of **imagining one's best possible self** can increase optimism, at least temporarily. Others have trained people to make systematically more optimistic explanations for events.

Still, optimism is a personality trait. Without manipulation, it generally remains relatively stable over extended periods, at least in the absence of major life transitions.

Changing a person's overall outlook on life can be done, but it is not a simple matter.

Changing Pessimism to Optimism (ABCDE model)



A - Adverse event or situation- Identifying adverse situations that one routinely faces and writing down the objective descriptions of them.

B- Beliefs about that event- Learning to hear and record the beliefs about those events which come to mind.

C - Consequences of those beliefs- Feeling the consequences of those beliefs and writing them down in terms of emotions and actions.

D- Disputation - Disputing those beliefs (moving from Irrational to Rational).

E – Energization- Finally, noticing what happens to one's energy and willingness to act when one disputes the negative beliefs.