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3. Learned Optimism

Re-marketing of Traditional Topics?

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[Brief Intro](#)



According to our class lecture learned optimism can be referred to as exercises that are short of experiencing success. This is an idea that can be cultivated. Martin Seligman describes optimism, “the basis of optimism does not lie in positive phrases or images of victory, but in the way you think about causes (Seligman, 1990).” Learned optimism is contrasted by the idea of learned helplessness. This is when experience of failure makes someone expect to fail, and so to give up.

After studying learned helplessness, Seligman came up with the concept of learned optimism. He conducted a great deal of scientific studies and began to notice that some individuals blamed themselves for negative outcomes, and others blamed different factors (Ex. experiment) that set them up to fail.

Seligman then changed his area of study and focused on conditioning people to be optimists. Seligman made a significant finding when he conducted a study on dogs. He found that dogs can learn actions to portray helplessness. This also led to Seligman's claim that people can learn to become helpless.

Dr. Albert Ellis designed a method to change pessimistic thought processes known as the ABC model. Seligman later expanded this theory changing it to the ABCDE method. Seligman thought that any individual could learn to be optimistic even if a pessimist. This process has potential to help depression, help an individual attain more, and improve physical health.

A (Adversity). The negative objective description for what happened (not your interpretation of it).

B (Beliefs). Your beliefs are how you interpret the adversity.

C (Consequences). Your feelings and what you did.

D (Disputation). A deeper, more lasting remedy for disturbing beliefs is to question them; look for alternative reasons.

E (Energization). The process of bringing together and applying the model; this will lead to a more optimistic outlook.

History / Traditional Topic

Positive psychology began as a new area of psychology in the 1990's. Although this didn't come about until the 20th century, early influences of positive psychology came from philosophical and religious sources. There still remains to be religious and cultural impacts in regards to optimism. **Heine & Lehman (1995)** researched levels of optimism among different cultures and discovered some significant findings. Levels of optimism were compared between Canadians and Japanese in two studies. In the first study Canadians showed much stronger levels of unrealistic optimism in comparison to Japanese. In the second study it showed that Japanese were less unrealistically optimistic for occasions that were threatening to their interdependence.

Key Paper

Peterson, C. (2000). The Future of Optimism shows that optimism can be a very beneficial characteristic correlated with maintaining a good mood, achievement, physical health and more. This paper tackles questions that still remain about optimism. Are optimism and pessimism mutually exclusive? What is the relationship between optimism and reality, and what are the costs of optimistic beliefs that prove to be wrong? Peterson concludes that optimism is one important topic within positive psychology, as long as optimism can be "approached in an even-handed way."

Does PP add Anything New or is it Re-marketing?



Knowledge about optimism goes back extremely far. **Peterson (2000)** states that writers as diverse as Sophocles and Nietzsche argued that optimism prolongs human suffering and that it is better to face the hard facts of reality. Although some thoughts about optimism have changed, the knowledge of optimism has indeed been around. Rather than a new branch of psychology I would address positive psychology as a redirection of former knowledge. Optimism has been used in past religious practices and cultures for centuries, so this is not a new concept. Seligman addressed optimism and developed a strong base of knowledge about it. Psychologists have taken some of this former knowledge and transformed it into a way of life.

Optimism leads individuals to enhance their happiness. Positive psychology adds concepts such as the easy ABC method, which is to change pessimistic thoughts.

[If you were to read 3 papers...](#)

Youssef (2007) This study tests the hypotheses on the impact that the selected positive psychological capacities of hope, optimism, and resilience have on desired work related employee outcomes.

Peterson (2000) This paper looks at the beneficial aspects of optimism. This paper also focuses on a great deal of intriguing questions.

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References

Heine, S. J., & Lehman, D. R. (1995). Cultural variation in unrealistic optimism: Does the West feel more vulnerable than the East?. *Journal Of Personality And Social Psychology*, 68(4), 595-607.

Peterson, C. (2000). The future of optimism. *The American psychologist*. 55(1).

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Youssef, C.M., & Luthans, F. (2007). Positive psychology Behavior in the Workplace: The Impact of Hope, Optimism and Resilience. *Journal of Management*, 33, 774-800.

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