

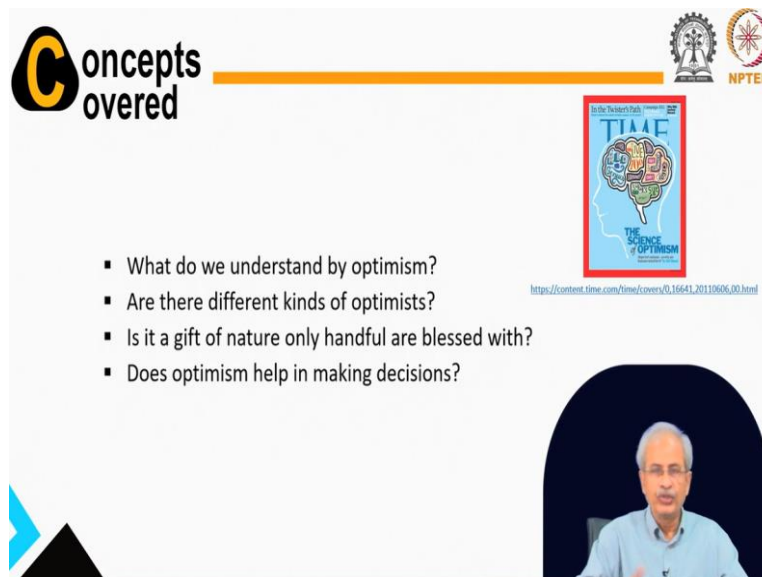
The Science of Happiness and Wellbeing
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Module No # 04
Lecture No # 19
How Does the Optimism Affect Happiness?

We will have a topic this time on optimism and happiness question is how optimism affects our happiness. More often we have found that there are 2 classes of people in the society one class of people who always shows some kind of positivity in their approach. Morning when you meet them they say I hope that day will go well with you and other kind of people we find we call them, pessimist. They talk like as if the day is not going to be very good or going to be burdensome.

That is let us somehow surpass the time in the day so we often find these 2 classes of people. Today we will try to understand how optimism relates to happiness that is if you are optimist then how happy will you be? And as I said this is a topic on science of happiness we are not going to talk something, based on layman's understanding or understanding which is not empirically or backed up by some kind of researchers. So given that in the backdrop will first try to understand what is the basic concept that we are trying to understand?

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The slide features the 'Concepts covered' logo in the top left, which includes a stylized 'C' and the text 'Concepts covered'. In the top right, there are logos for IIT Kharagpur and NPTEL. A central image shows the cover of 'TIME' magazine with the headline 'THE SCIENCE OF OPTIMISM'. Below this, a list of four bullet points is presented: 'What do we understand by optimism?', 'Are there different kinds of optimists?', 'Is it a gift of nature only handful are blessed with?', and 'Does optimism help in making decisions?'. A URL is provided below the magazine cover: <https://content.time.com/time/cover/0,16641,20119606,00.html>. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset showing Prof. Manas Kumar Mandal speaking.

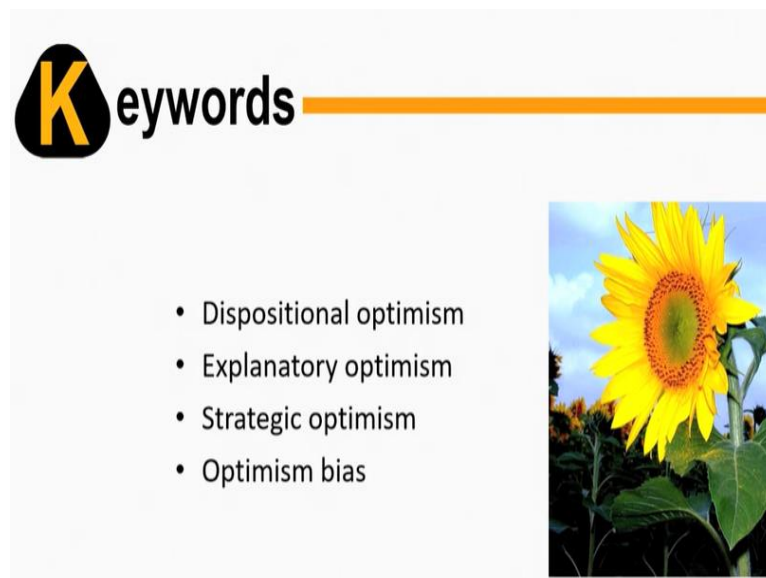
And what kind of concepts we are going to deal with. First of all we will try to understand what do we mean by under optimism? Generally people believe that probably, optimistic the term optimism is a probably layman term but it is actually a very scientific term it is a construct and

there is a fundamental difference between a concept and a construct. When it is a concept it is a layman's understanding of certain mental setup but when we call it as a construct it is scientifically understandable empirically verifiable.

Therefore we say that optimism is a, scientific construct therefore time magazine sometime back came up with a special issue on this issue on this matter the science of optimism. Though we will get to understand in the process of our discussion that whether there are different; kinds of optimist. Because as I said there are two major classes we see optimist and pessimist do we have to measure classes or there are variations within the optimist, and there are variations within pessimist.


And then we will discuss about is it inherited or is it learned? I mean whether some people are actually blessed with this mental setup or others are not? And finally if you are an optimist person does it help in making decision that is if you are a optimist person your decision making would be different from someone who is a pessimist person. We will try to, explain it through different concepts we will discuss about different kind of optimist like dispositional optimist like explanatory optimist and these are the concepts we are going to deal.

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Keywords

- Dispositional optimism
- Explanatory optimism
- Strategic optimism
- Optimism bias



As I said strategic optimist and optimism bias in fact when we talk about dispositional optimism means you are optimist all the time whatever; be the issue you are always optimist. Explanatory optimism means even, if you have a failure you explain the failure and do not try to be pessimist in the process. You explain try to understand what went wrong and then try to recover from that situation.


There are strategic optimists as well strategic optimists are those people who develop a mental strategy in order to remain optimistic because optimistic people would never like to get some kind of pessimistic thoughts they are rarely under stress. So they develop a strategy for themselves and finally we will talk about optimism bias. That if you have got too much of optimism in which way you are going to harm yourself.

Now these key concepts we will discuss with pessimism as well that; its keywords are also parallelly would be spoken in terms of dispositional pessimism explanatory pessimism strategic, pessimism and optimistic or pessimistic bias.

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Optimism: An attitude reflecting a belief that the outcome of an endeavor will be positive

- *When I wake up in the morning, I look forward to the day ahead of me...*
- *I believe that I can make a difference in this world...*

A photograph of a clear glass filled with water, positioned centrally below the text. The water level is approximately halfway up the glass, illustrating the concept of a half-filled glass as a metaphor for optimism and pessimism.

Let us see one after another first let us try to understand what do we mean by optimism now when optimism is an attitude it is a belief that the outcome of an endeavor would be positive you would be doing something and the outcome would be very positive. Now I can give you some examples that is when I wake up in the morning I look forward to the day, ahead of me that is I get out in the morning I try to understand that I will do certain things positive I will make certain difference.

But those who are negatively oriented or pessimist in nature they do not believe in that way so optimists also believe that they can make a difference in this world that is those who are having dispositional optimism. But those who are having dispositional, pessimism they always think that they are redundant in this world and they cannot do anything they have got no worthwhile capability. So the glass example with half-filled water has often been cited whenever we discuss about optimism those who are pessimist they will see that the glass is half empty.

And those who are positive and optimistic they will say that the glass is half full therefore with, this notion of optimism that it is an attitude that reflects our belief about the outcome of an endeavor is reflected in several ways.

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The Science of Optimism: Research findings

- Strong negative relationship between optimism & depression
- Optimism diminishes thoughts of heaviness
- ... improves immune system
- Optimists have better coping strategies to deal with adversities



Research has shown that there has been a strong association between optimism and your behavior that is if you are pessimist then there is more likelihood that you will get depression. That is a negative correlation has been seen between optimism and depression that is, high optimism will have low depression. Likewise high pessimism will have higher levels of depression so there has been a negative correlation between optimism and depression.

Also it has been found that if you are an optimistic person then you do not carry so much of load in your head you do not feel burdensome all the time your thoughts are not so heavy you always look positive. You think that well, if there is a problem we would be able to sort it out since they have this kind of feeling it leaves an impact in their body system which is in their immune system.

Earlier we have understood that if the belief system is positive then it affects our system body differently as compared to if your belief system is negative. That is your gene unfolding that is protein expression out of those genes would be different and your immune system would be different if you are positive or negative. That is if you are an optimistic person you improve your immune system will improve if you are a pessimist person your immune system will go down.

So optimists have got better coping strategies to deal with adversities so we generally deal in behavioral science with 2 concepts one is a lifestyle other is a coping style. Lifestyle is

something which is about your health your daily habits your activities that you perform as part of your routine activities or routine initiatives. But coping style is something that when you approach a problem when; you have a stress for a certain event how do you deal with it?

So coping strategy is somewhat different from our life strategy so if you are a optimist person, disregard of your lifestyle your coping style is found to be always better. Now let us see four different types of optimist and four different types of pessimist.

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Optimism Types

- **Dispositional optimism:** A tendency to expect a future that is more positive than negative
 - *Good things will happen to me*
- **Explanatory optimism:** A style of explaining negative events by referring to specific external causes that will likely change over time
 - *You lose money in business but think market is crazy right now. You will do better when it settles down*

As I said in the beginning there could be dispositional optimist that is trait optimism. Trait optimism means it is part of my trait personality trait it will remain with me that is a tendency to expect a future that is more positive, than negative you believe that well future may not be all good. But you always feel that the future will always be positive more often as compared to negative. So before we start doing any work we believe that good things will happen to me we do not start with the day as bad things will happen to me so this is called dispositional optimism that is straight optimism.

The second kind of optimism is, called explanatory optimism that is you explain if there is a negative event with you. So you refer the external event differently you explain it and then you believe that well the negative things will not remain with me over a period of time I would be able to get rid of and I would be able to come out with something positive. So I try to give you an example that is you lose money in the business but you, think that well I am losing money currently or in the stock market.

Because the market is crazy right now the fault is attributed to outside not to inside when fault is attributed to yourself then you become a pessimistic person. So you believe that you will do better when it settles down so a pessimistic person if they have to explain the reason for failure they explain in terms of something which is, outside to their body. A pessimist person actually does the opposite for it.

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Optimism Types

- **Strategic optimism:** These people distract themselves & don't dwell on a potentially stressful event coming up.
 - *Upcoming examination – you don't give much thought until it comes up & you feel prepared*
- **Optimistic bias:** The tendency to think that bad things are more likely to happen to other people & good things are likely to happen to you.
 - *I am a better driver than others*

There are 2 more types of optimist one is called a strategic optimist other is called optimistic bias. It is a phenomenon of course rather than calling it as a particular characteristic it is a phenomenon. We will explain it when we talk about strategic optimism they can sustain their optimism even in face of lot of stress. Suppose I have got to face sit for the exam tomorrow or I have to deliver a public lecture tomorrow which is a very important occasion and I am extremely stressful about it.

Now strategic optimist they can actually delink between their stress and their ability to remain hopeful. So these people actually distract themselves and do not dwell upon the stressful event which is coming up because what, really happens? If we continuously think about the stressful event which we often do in case we are pessimist our thoughts keep on coming back to us and the repeat thoughts if it keeps coming to us actually creates difficulty with our coping style with our immune system and so on and so forth.

So if there is an examination coming; up you do not give much thought until it comes up and you feel, prepared. So that is the strategy they often take in face of any stress but the problem lies with the optimistic biased people this is a tendency which needs to be taken due care of this

is the tendency to think that. Nothing bad will happen to me only other people will have the bad things will happen to others nothing bad will happen to me. So with me only good things will happen so I am a, better driver than others so I have got over confidence.

So optimistic bias will discuss in the end a little great elaborative manner therefore I would not explain it right away.

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Pessimism Types

- **Dispositional pessimism:** People who have a chronic tendency to expect a negative future.
 - *My future is dim*
- **Explanatory pessimism:** A style of explaining why bad things happens to yourself
 - *You lose money in business & consider yourself as unsmart*

First let us therefore go to the pessimism like optimism there is dispositional pessimism as well this is a trait pessimism. These people believe that well my future is dim maybe they have had lot of positive experiences but, they will simply selectively inattentive to those positive things. So people who have a chronic tendency to expect a new negative future they are called trait optimist trait pessimist or dispositional pessimist.

Likewise we have got explanatory pessimism as well anything that happens to you, you believe that bad things always happen to you. So it is a style of explaining why bad things happen to yourself? Because you believe that you are unsmart person you are a stupid person so you lose money in the business because you do not have enough caliber you do not have enough talent. If you remember explanatory optimism there we said that we lose money but we blame the market we do not blame ourselves.

In case of explanatory pessimism we do not blame the market at all we blame ourselves only we believe, that it is me who is foolish therefore negative things always occur to me.

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Pessimism Types

- **Defensive pessimism:** A strategy to manage anxiety by lowering expectations & anticipating a potentially stressful manner.
 - *You are preparing for examination & think that you may not be able to write at all*

- **Pessimistic bias:** The tendency to think that you are worse at something than other people. You expect more bad things & fewer good things.
 - *I am horrible on the road...so defer to other drivers*

We have defensive pessimism it is a strategy to manage anxiety by lowering your expectation. You believe that well if you have to face exam you will not perform well so you compromise your thought process and your chances about success you believe that either I should avoid that stress or somewhat I will get the pass marks. So if, you have to prepare for the examination you think that you would not be able to write it up at all and somehow you should be able to lower down your expectation or anticipation.

And finally we have got pessimistic bias as well the pessimistic bias is just a reverse to optimistic bias where they believe that they do not have any capability as compared to others. They may be having enough capability, to drive a car but they believe that they are horrible in the road so they should not drive the car so they do not have the confidence for that. So it is a tendency to think that you are worse at something than other people and you expect more bad things and fewer good things.

While optimistic biased people they expect more good things and fewer bad things so that is the kind of bias we often, get it in terms of pessimistic bias.

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Learned Optimism: Martin Seligman, UPenn

- Positive psychology aims to discover & promote conditions that enable individuals to thrive
- Based on learned helplessness & attributional style theories



Now we will show you some of the we will try to explain the matter with some experimental evidence. And this experimental evidence has come from a person who is considered to be the father of positive psychology Martin Seligman from university of Pennsylvania. So he actually came up with the concept of learned optimism now learned optimism he wrote a book on that.

But the basis behind the theory was learned helplessness who believes that they cannot be helped but before we actually explain about it let us first try to understand what; is the theoretical backdrop behind this concept of learned optimism. Martin Seligman thought that well behavioral science has done enough research on the mental architecture of human being. But 98% of the studies have, actually dealt with the negative experiences in life.

And the effort has always been how to get rid of those negative experiences or mental health conditions which are detrimental to our positive health. Only few studies have done in the reverse direction so he in late nineties when he was the president of American psychological association presented a case on positive psychology. The basic theme behind, positive psychology is to promote the conditions that enable people to thrive.

He says that well behavioral science can actually work with a efficiency model as well as with a deficiency model. 98% as I said has been studies have been done on the deficiency model only trying to understand why people are deficient in certain capacities or activities where if you are done on efficiency model. So, positive psychology is a movement which started in late nineties and since then this concept of learned optimism have started.

Now this theoretical concept of learned optimism has got 2 basis one basis was derived from the concept of learned helplessness and the other basis was derived from attributional theory or attributional study. Now we would like to learn more about it but before we learn, actually what is being shown in the picture I would like to show you first what do, we mean by learned helplessness.

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Learned helplessness: Martin Seligman, UPENN

- The passive resignation produced by repeated exposure to negative events that are perceived to be unavoidable
- Uncontrollable bad events lead to perceived lack of control which culminate into helpless behavior like
 - *We can't change the course of negative events*
 - *Failure is inevitable & insurmountable*
- It's a response to failure & not to success
- It's a control problem & not a competence problem

Unless we understand that we will not be able to understand that experiment as well. So I will go back to that experiment after I explain it what is meant by learned helplessness? Learned helplessness is nothing but a passive resignation because you always have some negative experiences, you resign yourself. You do not find enough energy to think positively and you believe that negative events are unavoidable.

They will keep on coming you call that my fate is bad I mean I am good for nothing I am not going to get anything I will not be able to avoid the pains in life. So the uncontrollable bad events actually produce or trigger this sense of learned helplessness that is you feel that, you have got no way out. So they believe those who have developed such phenomenon they believe that they cannot change the course of negative events if it is to come it will come by developing positivity I cannot change that so there is no point in making an effort to that.

And failure is inevitable and insurmountable but those who are optimist they believe that well pain is inevitable but our, suffering is optional. We may not even suffer in face of pain therefore with this notion before I explain the 2 other points we would like to go back to the experiment first. This experiment was done by Martin Seligman in nineteen seventies now what do you see is that is a representative or a schematic diagram of the whole experiment.

In this experiment he had some dogs and all these dogs were actually given, electric shock every time they stepped into this grid they were given shock and those shocks were inescapable that is they cannot escape it. And after repeated exposure of electric shock they Martin Seligman actually conducted a second phase of study with the same set of dogs. Now in the second experiment he put a barrier in between the electric grids.

And if the dog comes on the other side of the, barrier and pushes that knob he will not the dog will not get electric shock. So he found that a majority two third of the dogs did not even try to go to the other side. And they believed these dogs probably believed that they are helpless in any case they are going to get shocks. But only 30% that is one third of the dogs had gone to the other side of the bar push the knob and could get rid, of the electric shock.

So from this experiment he believes that majority of the people believe that the negative events cannot be overcome its better not to make an effort attempt or effort. But one third of the people that is 30% of the people in the population they believe that well there is a possibility so we must keep on making attempts to see whether this problem or pain can be avoided, or not.

So when these 30% that is one third of the dogs had gone to the other side they did not get the shock after pressing the knob which you see in the yellow colour. They are called to be learned optimist and the other set of dogs were called to be learned helpless. So what Martin Seligman said that learned helplessness is a response to failure and not to success it is a problem its a control problem not a competence problem.

Those who are optimist they believe it is a competence problem and those who are pessimist they believe that they cannot control situations. So situation negative events will continue to happen with them and they cannot get rid of it so this is the basic theory based on which learned helplessness has come. Apart from that he also talked about attribution theory.

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Attributional thinking style

- Personal : its all my fault
- Personal: it might be hard, I would better plan
- Pervasive: It will affect all aspects of my life
- Pervasive: I want to make changes or get out
- Permanence: It will never change
- Permanence: Things will improve in days to come

Attribution means that your belief about the negative events that had happened let us first try to understand before we go into these 3 characteristics. Suppose you are going by your car and the car broke down if the car breaks down in the middle of the road you start blaming yourself. You do not blame the car, its the fault of the car that it breaks down you believe that you are either not, a good driver or your fate is bad or whenever you go out you find that kind of difficulty so this is what is called attribution.

So by attribution we mean an optimist will find explanation why such failure has taken place but if a person is pessimist he or she will try to blame themselves. So there are 3 characteristics Martin Seligman has said personal pervasive and permanence. Those who are, pessimist they always believe that it is my fault those who are optimists they believe it might be hard I would plan it better.

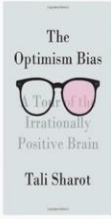
Those who are pervasive type they believe that my negative events will keep on coming it will pervade all aspects of my life. But those who are pessimist they believe that well someday I will be able to get out of it. And I should be able to make a change and the factor of, permanence that those who are pessimists they believe that nothing will change in this world but optimists believe that things will improve in days to come.

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Optimism bias: *An expectancy that good, ..., will occur, without evidence to support (Sharot, 2012)*

- Do we expect to live longer & be healthier than average?
- Do we make more mistakes by becoming optimistic unrealistically?

A selective estimation error about future



<https://www.amazon.in/Optimism-Bias-Irrationally-Positive-Brain/dp/0307378487>



So finally we are going to talk about optimism bias which is a problem with the optimistic people. It is an expectancy that good will only occur and there is no support for that you believe that you I mean you smoke cigarette and you, believe that nothing is going to happen with you. But others who are smoking cigarette may even get a cancer so likewise I am going to live more than 100 years but others probably will die early.

So do we expect to live longer and be healthier than average what is the average age? We always believe that will actually live more than the average do we make mistakes by becoming optimistic, unrealistically? That is the theory by Tali Sharot in 2012 she came up with this notion and she says that it is a selective estimation error about future that you try to calculate future and if you are too optimistic about it you are actually going to make a big mistake.

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Optimism bias...negative consequences

- The bias change's objective reality
- Underestimating risk reduces precautionary behavior like buying medical insurance
- Promote harmful behavior like over-eating, smoking
- Temporal discounting like rewarding at present but costly in future

So she says that the bias changes your objective reality subjectively or too pessimistic too optimistic and your objective, reality is changing. You underestimate risk that is you do not buy medical insurance you believe that nothing is going to happen so I do not want to invest money on medical insurance. You believe that harmful activities like smoking overeating they will affect others and it is not going to affect me.

And the phenomenon is called temporal discounting that is I would not like to consider my current, events at all I mean in order to calculate my future. So it may be costly in future but rewarding at present this tendency is called temporal discounting.

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The slide features a white background with a blue border. At the top left, the word 'CONCLUSION' is written in a blue, outlined font. To the right, there are logos for an Indian university and NPTEL. Below the logos is a word cloud titled 'Optimistic Vs Pessimistic' with terms like 'Optimistic', 'Pessimistic', 'Depression', 'Sadness', 'Angry', etc. In the center, there are two silhouettes of human heads facing each other, with a brain icon inside each. Below the heads is the website 'www.4enlightenment.com'. On the left side, there is a bulleted list of three points. At the bottom left, there is a quote by Aziz (2018). At the bottom right, there is a video inset of a man in a light blue shirt. At the very bottom, there is a URL.

CONCLUSION

- There is negative relationship between optimism & depression
- Optimists have better coping strategies to deal with adversities
- Optimism bias modifies objective reality

'Optimism should be used as a stimulant, not as an intoxication for misplaced hope' (Aziz, 2018)

<https://4enlightenment.com/tag/depression/>

So the conclusion is that there is a negative relationship between optimism and depression. Not that all pessimists are depressed but there is a negative relationship between optimist and depressed that is if you are optimistic there is less, chance that you are going to get depression. Optimists have got better coping strategies and optimism bias actually modifies objective reality that is the problem area in the optimism bias.

So the conclusion I am making that optimism should be used as a stimulant not as an intoxication of misplaced hope. If optimism is a misplaced hope then in that case we are going to suffer from optimism bias.

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So I have referred about the book on learned optimism by Martin Seligman and also some of the literature I have cited if you are interested you can actually follow through thank you.