

Optimism & Hope

Semester 5 DSE A

A dark blue diagonal gradient bar that starts from the bottom left corner and extends towards the top right corner, covering the lower half of the slide.

History of Concept

- A Psychological Deficit [till 1970's]
- A sign of Immaturity, or weakness of character
- [Eg. in the work of Voltaire [1759], Porter [1913] , Freud [1939], analyses of religion.
- During the late 1970's Margaret Matlin & David Stang in their Pollyanna Principle showed, that people's thinking processes were inherently optimistic.
- Tiger [1979] Optimism- The Biology of Hope, claimed optimistic thinking to be a naturally selected characteristic of our species.

Research traditions

Three important research traditions have thrown light on how people take a positive view of the world-

- A] Positive Illusions & Self -deception
- B] Optimism
- C] Hope

Positive Illusions

Shelly Taylor [1989], showed that

- Most healthy people view themselves in an optimistic way & positive illusions are associated with
- greater health & well-being,
- greater relationship satisfaction,
- a greater capacity to adjust to adversity &
- higher persistence on work-related tasks.

Human Thought & Positive Illusion

Distinguished by a robust positivity bias.

-It is designed to think positively rather than realistically or negatively about personal selves, the world & the future.

- They see past behaviour, personal attributes and their selves as a person in an enhanced light

-Nurture an unrealistic sense of personal control, with an exaggerated belief that they can make things turn out better rather than worse, but are never responsible for bad things that happen to them.

-they have an unfounded sense of optimism that the future will be rosier than the facts suggest it to be. it will hold more opportunities rather than adversities, stress & chaos.

Self- Deception

- We use a variety of self-deceptive strategies and defences to manage negative information.

- Such negative information are contrary to our positive worldview, setting limits on our sense of control as well as creating a bleak portrayal of the future.

For eg, loss of youth & vitality, intellectual abilities, friendships, work roles, and deaths of dear ones.

- Such self-deceptive strategies includes defence mechanisms & positive illusions

Denial & Repression

These two are important defences that help us maintain a positive worldview.

Denial- Not acknowledging the existence or meaning of threatening or stressful events .

Repression-Not acknowledging unacceptable aggressive or sexual impulses in the inner world.

Both of these defences are maladaptive as they distort reality. A part of the brain becomes dissociated from the other that knows the distorted facts.

Illusions are adaptive because they permit interpretation of the reality in the best possible light.

Cognitive Processes Involved

Selective Attention & Benign Forgetting -

Noticing positive things while screening out negative information about ourselves. Filtering information in a biased way so that only positive news is registered and encoded- Selective Attention

Benign forgetting - Negative information about the self are less easily recalled compared to Positive information.

Pockets of Incompetence

“Im not good with numbers”

“I sing very badly”

But believing that one is of high intelligence otherwise- treating these areas as peripheral to the essential core of the self which is viewed as having predominantly positive attributes.

Negative Self-schema

An organised set of beliefs that allows us to anticipate situations in which negative information is likely to be received about the self and then develop strategies for dealing with these.

Eg. “I am shy so cannot talk in social situations”

NSS are used to protect self-esteem by attributing any negative evaluation of self to the particular negative characteristic.

Optimism

- A broad personality trait characterised by general optimistic expectations

As well as

- As an explanatory style

Dispositional Optimism

A Global expectation that more good things than bad things will happen in future.

Researchers argue that optimistic people in situations of adversity continue to pursue their valued goals, regulate themselves using effective coping strategies and are more likely to achieve their goals.

Research Data

Optimism is a relatively stable state.

Family environments characterised by parental warmth and financial security are associated with the development of optimism.

Optimists reported greater wellbeing and less distress than pessimists in health related research.

Dispositional optimism is associated with coping strategies that aimed to eliminate, reduce or manage stressors or emotions and was negatively associated with avoidance coping strategies involving avoidance or ignorance of stressors or emotions.

Optimistic Explanatory Style

Martin Seligman & others conceptualised optimism to be an explanatory style rather than a broad personality trait.

According to this perspective optimists are likely to explain negative events or experiences by attributing them to external, transient specific factors such as the prevailing circumstances.

Pessimists attribute negative experiences to global, stable and internal factors such as being a personal failure.

Development of Optimism

1. Parental Mental Health
2. The type of role-modelling offered by parents
3. The degree to which parents encourage and reward optimism.