



OPTIMISM AND PESSIMISM AS PARTIALLY INDEPENDENT CONSTRUCTS: RELATIONSHIP TO POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE AFFECTIVITY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

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Summary—Using weighted least-squares confirmatory factor analysis, support was found for the bi-dimensionality of optimism and pessimism defined as positive and negative outcome expectancies, thus, replicating previous findings (Chang, D'Zurilla & Maydeu-Olivares, 1994; Marshall *et al.*, 1992). In addition, support was also found for the discriminant validity and utility of employing separate measures of optimism and pessimism for predicting individual differences in measures of life satisfaction and depressive symptoms. Moreover, significant predictive relations with these criterion measures were found even after controlling for the influence of positive and negative affectivity. Implications regarding the present findings for future research on optimism and pessimism are discussed. © 1997 Elsevier Science Ltd

INTRODUCTION

The concepts of optimism and pessimism have been a part of Western thought for more than 200 years (Bailey, 1988), and within the last decade they have generated a great deal of research interest in the areas of personality, social, and clinical psychology. A number of investigators have attempted to clarify the role of optimism in the use of adaptive coping behavior (e.g. Scheier, Weintraub & Carver, 1986; Scheier & Carver, 1985), as well as in the promotion of better psychological and physical well-being (e.g. Chang *et al.*, 1994; Mroczek *et al.*, 1993). Similarly, studies have also been done to elucidate the role of pessimism in the use of maladaptive coping behavior (e.g. Scheier *et al.*, 1986), and its relation to psychological and physical illnesses (Mroczek *et al.*, 1993; Peterson, Seligman & Vaillant, 1988).

Recently, however, Chang *et al.* (1994) have argued that this area of research suffers from at least two major problems. First, there are still no generally accepted definitions of optimism and pessimism. The most popular view is Scheier and Carver's (1985) definition of optimism and pessimism as generalized positive and negative outcome expectancies. The widely used Life Orientation Test (LOT; Scheier & Carver, 1985) is based on this definition. In contrast, Dember *et al.* (1989) have defined optimism and pessimism in a much broader way as a positive and negative outlook on life. Whereas Scheier and Carver's definition is future-oriented, their view includes present perceptions and appraisals as well as future expectancies. On the basis of this broad definition, Dember *et al.* (1989) have developed the Optimism and Pessimism Scale (OPS). Hence, because different measures of optimism and pessimism are not necessarily assessing the same cognitive processes, caution is needed when interpreting and comparing the empirical findings generated by different measures.

The second problem in this field of study is that there is confusion and controversy about the dimensionality of optimism and pessimism. The dominant view has been Scheier and Carver's (1985) conceptualization of optimism and pessimism as polar opposites on a unidimensional continuum. This view assumes that a person is either optimistic or pessimistic; one cannot be both optimistic and pessimistic. Recently, however, a number of investigators have seriously challenged this unidimensional model, arguing that optimism and pessimism might be better conceived as

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representing two partially independent dimensions (e.g. Fischer & Leitenberg, 1986; Mroczek *et al.*, 1993).

In a recent study, Chang *et al.* (1994) addressed this issue empirically using both confirmatory and exploratory factor-analytic methods. In a sample of 389 college students, these investigators found that a two-factor model was more appropriate than a one-factor model for the LOT, with one factor corresponding to optimism and the other to pessimism. The correlation between the factors was found to be -0.54 . In contrast to these results, however, Chang *et al.* (1994) found that the OPS was multidimensional. Because of the very broad definition of optimism and pessimism on which this instrument is based, these findings suggest that the OPS may be confounding optimism and pessimism with other related or overlapping constructs, such as life satisfaction, morale, mood, and self-esteem. When Chang *et al.* (1994) analyzed an abbreviated version of the OPS that consisted only of items that best fit the definition of optimism and pessimism as positive and negative outcome expectancies, they found that a two-factor model fit this data satisfactorily. The inter-factor correlation was -0.45 .

Consistent with these results, Marshall *et al.* (1992) factor analyzed the LOT and found it to be bidimensional in two large samples of male navy recruits. Moreover, in the same samples, they also found that a two-dimensional model fit the Hopelessness Scale (HS; Beck *et al.*, 1974) which, like the LOT, was designed to assess positive and negative future expectancies. It is important to note, however, that a modified version of the HS was used in this study. Instead of using the original true-false format, Marshall *et al.* (1992) had Ss respond to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'). In contrast, in two different studies that analyzed the original HS, a one-factor model was found to be most appropriate for the data, and in both cases the scale was interpreted by the investigators as measuring a unipolar pessimism dimension in the more extreme range (Chang *et al.*, 1994).

Taken together, the findings reported by Chang *et al.* (1994) and Marshall *et al.* (1992) join those of other studies (e.g. Dember *et al.*, 1989; Fischer & Leitenberg, 1986) in casting growing concerns about the presumed validity of the traditional one-dimensional view of optimism and pessimism. When optimism and pessimism are defined as positive and negative outcome expectancies, a two-dimensional model appears to be a more appropriate conceptualization for these constructs.

In an attempt to build upon previous research, the present study had several objectives. First, we attempted to replicate the findings of Chang *et al.* (1994) by attempting to construct a bidimensional measure of optimism and pessimism, which consisted of items from both the LOT and the OPS that best fit the definition of these constructs as positive and negative outcome expectancies. The construction of this measure, which we will call the Extended Life Orientation Test (ELOT), will be later described. If successful, this replication would strengthen the conclusion that optimism and pessimism, when defined in this way, are bidimensional in structure. The second objective was to examine the discriminant validity and utility of separate measures of optimism and pessimism in predicting external criteria of psychological well-being, specifically, life satisfaction and depressive symptoms. We chose these particular criteria because they are important indicators of adjustment in a college student population, from which the participants will be drawn (see Dunkel-Schetter & Lobel, 1990). The third objective of this study was to investigate the discriminant validity and utility of optimism and pessimism in predicting the same criterion measures of psychological well-being when positive and negative affectivity are controlled. Finally, because all of the measures used in this study are self-report instruments that overlap with the global constructs of positive and negative affectivity (Watson & Tellegen, 1985), it is important to show that correlations between optimism and pessimism measures on the one hand, and the criterion measures of well-being on the other, are not merely reflecting the variance that these measures have in common with positive or negative affectivity.

METHOD

Participants

The participants were 425 undergraduate college students at the State University of New York at Stony Brook who were enrolled in the introductory psychology course. All students participated

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