

OPTIMISM, HOPE AND PERSONAL CONTROL

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WELLNESS

Researchers who study people with a cheerful, confident mindset find them to be rather prudent, realistic, and highly attentive to their health and safety.

They not only face a lower risk of depression during their lifetime but they have better overall health and strong emotional coping skills.

They detect potential problems and accurate appraisals.

HEALTH

Optimists have healthy eating habits and avoid alcohol and tobacco.

When they become ill, they stay home and take care of themselves.

They pay attention to risks to their health, rather than deny them.

They stay away from perilous places, even eschewing raucous parties and bars.

Pessimists on the other hand, tend to prefer potentially dangerous situations and more likely become ill or be involved in accidents.

DISCOVERY

Optimism helps soften the hardships of bereavement.

65% said they found something positive in their loss of a spouse, child or loved one: they learned patience; a new sense of independence; the importance of personal relationships

RELIGION

Fundamentalists - those who spend more time being involved in pray and other religious activities, are more optimistic than moderates who are more optimistic than liberals.

They develop a sort of immunity to depressive symptoms because they are less likely to blame themselves for misfortunes.

HOPE

Psychology should be able to focus on repairing damage with a *psychology of hope*; to identify ways to nurture courage, honesty, altruism and hope as a way of preventing the proliferation of depression and other mental disorders; to do more research on *preventing mental illness*.

The positive psychology - the positive social science we envision for the 21st century may not only prevent mental illness but may lead to scientific understanding of how to build personal strength and civic virtue - the best things in human life.

CHALLENGES

To develop a positive psychology we need a positive conception of a good human life.

Modern culture is very reluctant to tell people how they should live. Social Scientists do not want to do it.

Science has managed to ignore the fact that undesirable events often produce extraordinary strength, growth and creativity.

Psychological literature on optimism, joy and virtue, pales in size when compared with studies of depression, anxiety, and other mental disorders.

Many social scientists have come to view courage, perseverance and good cheer as illusory, defensive and inauthentic negative states, while weaknesses like depression, greed and lust are genuine.

LANDMARK CONCEPT OF LEARNED OPTIMISM

Is the idea that people with a pessimistic outlook can, with help master a more positive mindset about themselves and others.

This program teaches children to think up alternatives to negative thoughts, and has been shown to offset depression in boys and girls who are at risk for this disorder.

EVENT

The "John Templeton Foundation" which strives to draw stronger links between science and religion, sponsored this unprecedented symposium on Feb. 10, 1998.

Behavioral scientists shared their various findings about the unique personalities, coping styles and general well being of optimists compared to pessimists. They also discussed the need to focus on the study of nurturing optimism, altruism, and other human strengths.

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