

TOWSON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

DISPOSITIONAL AND COMPARATIVE OPTIMISM: A FRAMEWORK FOR
UNDERSTANDING POSITIVE MINORITY EXPERIENCE

By

Kirsten A. Gonzalez

A thesis

Presented to the faculty of

Towson University

in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts Clinical Psychology

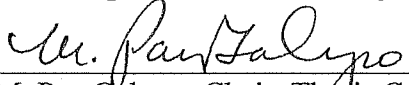
May 2011

Towson University
Towson, Maryland 21252

**TOWSON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**

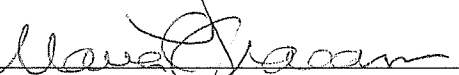
THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that the thesis prepared by Kirsten A. Gonzalez, entitled *Dispositional and Comparative Optimism: A Framework for Understanding Positive Minority Experience* has been approved by the thesis committee as satisfactorily completing the thesis requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology.



M. Paz Galupo, Chair, Thesis Committee

5-10-11
Date



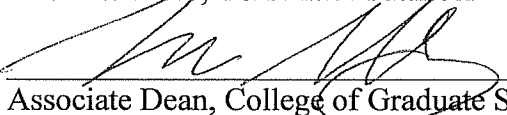
Maria Fracasso, Committee Member

5-10-11
Date



Devin Wallace, Committee Member

5-10-11
Date



Associate Dean, College of Graduate Studies and Research

11 May 11
Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the participants who completed my survey. I would also like to thank my advisor, Dr. M. Paz Galupo for all of her guidance and support. Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful parents Karen & Chuck, and my amazing boyfriend Marc for always believing in me and supporting me throughout this process.

ABSTRACT

DISPOSITIONAL AND COMPARATIVE OPTIMISM: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING POSITIVE MINORITY EXPERIENCE

Kirsten A. Gonzalez

The present research is the first to explore dispositional and comparative optimism across sexual orientation and race. Participants included 327 individuals 18 to 63 years of age from different race, sex, and sexual orientation backgrounds and were recruited through online data collection sites. Multiple ANOVAs were conducted to determine differences among the responses to the dispositional and comparative optimism measures. Supporting the initial hypothesis, there were no differences in the dispositional optimism scores across minority status. Partially supporting the initial hypothesis, sexual but not racial minorities rated the minority salient positive events of the comparative optimism measure more likely to happen to them as compared to individuals who identifying with the majority. There were no significant differences in those who identify with the majority and those who identified as minorities with regard to general positive events. Findings suggested that focusing on comparative optimism provides as a useful framework for further understanding positive minority experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES.....	vii
INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
Optimism.....	1
Dispositional Optimism.....	3
Research on Dispositional Optimism Using the Life Orientation Test.....	3
Effect of Dispositional Optimism on Mental and Physical Health Outcomes.....	4
Minority Experience and Dispositional Optimism.....	5
Comparative Optimism.....	6
Research on Comparative Optimism.....	7
Effect of Comparative Optimism on Mental and Physical Health.....	8
Comparative Optimism and Minority Experience.....	8
Research on Positive Minority Experience.....	9
Intersectional Theory: A Framework for Considering Optimism & Minority Experience.....	10
Statement of the Problem.....	11
METHODS AND MATERIALS.....	13
Participants and Recruitment Procedure.....	13
Measures.....	14
Dispositional Optimism.....	14
Comparative Optimism.....	14
General Positive Events.....	15
Minority Salient Positive Events.....	16
Demographics.....	16
Procedure.....	17
RESULTS.....	17
Dispositional Optimism.....	17
Comparative Optimism.....	18
General Positive Events.....	18
Comparison Target: General Population.....	18
Comparison Target: Similar to the Self.....	18
Minority Salient Positive Events.....	19
Comparison Target: General Population.....	19
Comparison Target: Similar to the Self.....	19

DISCUSSION.....	20
Dispositional Optimism.....	20
Comparative Optimism.....	21
Comparative Optimism: Comparison Targets.....	21
Comparative Optimism: General Positive Events vs. Minority Salient Positive Events.....	22
Limitations of Current Study & Directions for Future Research.....	23
APPENDICES.....	25
Appendix A: Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT – R)	25
Appendix B: Positive Events Scale.....	26
Appendix C: Comparison Groups.....	27
Appendix D: Demographics Questionnaire.....	28
Appendix E: Figure 1.....	29
Appendix F: Figure 2.....	30
References.....	31
Curriculum Vitae.....	36

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: General Positive Events With Both Comparison Targets

Figure 2: Minority Salient Positive Events With Both Comparison Targets

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

Dispositional and Comparative Optimism:

A Framework for Understanding Positive Minority Experience

The present research is the first to consider the impact of racial and sexual orientation identity on dispositional and comparative optimism. Past research has disproportionately focused on negative mental health outcomes for sexual and racial minorities (Cochran, Sullivan, & Mays, 2003; Cochran, Mays, Alegria, Ortega, & Takeuchi, 2007). However, there is some evidence to suggest minority status may serve as a protective factor (Riggle, Whitman, Olson & Rostosky, 2008). The present research focuses on optimism as a framework for further understanding positive minority experience.

Optimism

Only recently has the field of psychology considered positive emotions, traits and qualities as a way to understand prevention of negative mental health outcomes (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Prevention research had shown that individual strengths serve as protective factors against mental illness, and research in the immediate future should focus on conceptualizing strengths in addition to weaknesses in individuals to form a more complete picture of human functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). With regard to positive constructs, optimism has specifically been associated with positive well-being and physical health (Scheier & Carver, 1987). Intricately studying

optimism provides a guide in how to reframe psychological research to incorporate important positive constructs (Peterson, 2000).

The definition of optimism is twofold where optimism can be defined as the belief in general positive outcomes and the belief that the world is the best it can possibly be (Gillham, Shatte, Reivich, & Seligman, 2002). Specifically, optimism is defined as positive expectations in specific situations (Scheier & Carver, 1988). Often optimism is linked with pessimism where there is an expectation for either positive outcomes or adverse outcomes depending on personal expectancies for the future (Gillham et al., 2002). The formation of optimistic or pessimistic viewpoints is best understood through the expectancy-value model of motivation (Carver & Scheier, 2002).

The expectancy-value model of motivation posits that pursuing a goal causes specific behavior, where individuals adopt behavior that support their values and shun behavior that depicts undesirable values (Carver & Scheier, 2002). Depending on how important these goals are to the individual determines the level of motivation an individual has in achieving them. Expectancies are defined as an individual's confidence or doubt in obtaining set goals or avoiding unwanted goals (Carver & Scheier, 2002). The more confident the individual is in obtaining goals or avoiding unwanted goals, the better the eventual outcome, even in aversive situations. In essence, positive or negative expectancies in obtaining goals lead to positive or negative outlooks about future events. If an individual adopts negative expectancies and formulates doubt in obtaining goals, that individual will be less confident and will stop believing in the possibility of obtaining goals or avoiding unwanted goals more quickly (Carver & Scheier, 2002). More positive

expectancies, even if the face of adversity, lead to a more positive general outlook that good things will happen in life. This is also called dispositional optimism.

Dispositional Optimism

Dispositional optimism is defined as generalized positive expectancies (Scheier & Carver, 1993) and can best be understood through explanatory style theories (Gillham et al., 2002). When negative events happen in life, individuals often look for explanations as to why those events happen. The manner in which life events are explained either cause an individual to shut down and give up (reformulated learned helplessness theory) (RLHT; Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) or to problem solve and thrive (explanatory style theory) (Gillham et al., 2002). Explanations of events can be seen as internal or external, stable or unstable, and global or specific. Negative events that are perceived to be internal, stable, and global support the pessimistic viewpoint where as negative events that are depicted as environmental and temporary support the optimistic viewpoint. Specific pessimistic and optimistic explanations are often followed by distinct expectations for the future. Individuals who are pessimistic will feel less in control of their future and will not be as resilient as those who are optimistic and feel more in control of their future (Abramson et al., 1978). More optimistic or positive explanations have been shown to lead to better physical and mental health than those who adopt more negative explanations for events (Gillham et al., 2002).

Research on dispositional optimism using the Life Orientation Test.

Dispositional optimism is most often assessed in research using the Life Orientation Test – Revised (LOT – R; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994). The LOT-R is a six-item scale that assesses generalized expectancies for future outcomes. The findings

on health outcomes for dispositional optimists using the LOT or the LOT-R (Scheier et al., 1994) are similar to the findings on health outcomes for individuals with positive explanatory style (Gillham et al., 2002). Individuals with higher dispositional optimism experience fewer health problems than pessimists (Scheier & Carver, 1992). Similarly, individuals with higher dispositional optimism experience better psychological health, and recover after coronary artery bypass surgery faster than those who experience lower amounts of dispositional optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1992). There is a strong link to positive health outcomes and higher levels of dispositional optimism using the LOT or LOT-R.

Effect of dispositional optimism on mental and physical health outcomes.

Although research on the optimism construct is relatively new, there is strong evidence to suggest that adopting an optimistic orientation to life events has numerous physical and psychological benefits (Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 2002). A review of the literature depicts a strong relationship between generalized expectancies for outcomes that are positive and better health outcomes in response to medical stressors (Scheier & Carver, 1985).

Additionally, higher levels of dispositional optimism have been linked to more positive daily moods in individuals with fibromyalgia and asthma, among other physical health stressors (Affleck, Tennen, & Apter, 2002). With regard to psychological well being, past research has shown that a more optimistic outlook plays a large part in resisting against psychological stressors including depression after child birth (Carver & Gaines, 1987). Similarly, research conducted on the relationship between optimism and distress in populations where individuals experience adversity has shown that individuals

who adopt an optimistic orientation respond better to difficulties that they face (Scheier et al., 2002). Research has shown that higher levels of optimism predict lower levels of psychological distress in first year college students (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1992).

Additionally, research has been conducted in specific populations facing adversity including medical students, law students and middle-aged adults with high blood pressure (Scheier et al., 2002). There is a considerable gap in the literature as minority experience is not included in research on populations facing adversity.

Minority experience and dispositional optimism. With regard to research on dispositional optimism and minority experience, Asians have been the primary minority group studied (Chang, 2002). Chang (1996) found that Asian Americans did not exhibit lower levels of dispositional optimism as compared to White Americans, but did demonstrate significantly higher levels of pessimism. Using a modified LOT scale, Chang assessed the differences in optimism, pessimism, coping and adjustment in 111 self identified Asian Americans and 111 matched White Americans. Additionally, Chang assessed psychological and physical adjustment in the participants. Chang (1996) found that Asian Americans socially withdrew and avoided to cope with stressful situations as compared to White Americans. His findings suggest that there are distinct differences between Asian Americans and White Americans with regard to optimism, pessimism, coping and adjustment.

Chang (2002) identified the absence of optimism and pessimism research in differing cultural groups as a weakness and an area that merits further exploration. Similarly, Chang's (1996) study only included one cultural group and neglected other areas of minority status. Although Chang focused on optimism and pessimism as well as

coping and adjustment, negative differences between Asian Americans and White Americans with regard to physical and psychological negative health outcomes were the primary focus of analysis. Chang's (1996) research should be expanded to incorporate not only a focus on multiple minority groups but also a more in depth analysis of the optimism differences.

Chang (2002) concluded by saying that any conceptualization of optimism or pessimism that does not take into account culture is very much incomplete. To date, the Asian American population has been the only minority group studied with regard to dispositional optimism.

Comparative Optimism

Comparative optimism (also called optimistic bias) is described as the belief that good events in life are more likely to happen to the self, and negative events in life are more likely to happen to others (Chambers, Windschitl, & Suls, 2003). There are several different motivational and cognitive explanations for why these beliefs happen (Sheppard, Carroll, Grace, & Terry, 2002). Comparative optimism is a product of desired end-states or goals (Sheppard et al., 2002). There is a strong motivation for people to identify positive events as more likely to happen to them because they want to believe and they want others to believe it is the truth. Similarly, people report positive events are more likely to happen to them because it makes them feel good about themselves and reduces negative feelings about possible negative events. Additionally, people are more likely to report positive events happening to them and negative events happening to others because they believe they have more control over situations than other people do (McKenna, 1993).

With regard to cognitive explanations, Tversky (1977) argues that the concept of the representative heuristic explains comparative optimism where judgments of the likelihood of an event happening are largely due to the individual's schema for the event. When given an example of an event, people often conjure up their own schema for that event and base judgments of likeliness off that schema and not off an average person who is similar to them. If they do not perceive the schema to be similar to them, they will see themselves as dissimilar and judge the event to be less likely to happen to them than to others. Klar & Giladi (1997) posit that when people judge events to be likely to themselves or others, they often do not take into account other groups and rather just judge themselves. There has been little agreement on the theory behind comparative optimism and researchers often debate reasons behind this bias (Sheppard et al., 2002).

Research on comparative optimism. Past findings on the comparative optimism construct demonstrate the perception that negative life events such as having a heart attack before 40, being sued by someone, having your car stolen, or being fired from a job are self identified as significantly more likely to happen to others as compared to self (Weinstein, 1980). In past literature, when an event was considered controllable, often individuals had a specific stereotype of someone who would typically experience that specific event. The individuals who held these stereotypes often felt that the controlled event would be more likely to happen to people that fit their stereotypes as opposed to happening to them (Weinstein, 1980). These stereotypes were formed based off of perceptions of events and not perceptions of individuals. There is a considerable gap in the research literature about optimistic bias as most studies have lumped optimistic bias of positive and negative events together. Additionally, there is some variability on the

belief that comparative optimism is always present as past research has shown that some events conjure comparative pessimism where individuals, depending on their schemas, report being less likely to experience potentially positive events (Chambers et al., 2003).

Additionally, there is no one measure used to assess comparative optimism and past research has largely modified positive and negative events from Weinstein's (1980) study. This can be seen as a weakness in the literature as it is difficult to replicate or fully validate comparative optimism findings without a unified comparative optimism measure.

Effect of comparative optimism on mental and physical health. Comparative optimism has been associated with positive mental health (Taylor & Brown, 1988).

Unrealistic optimism can boost self-esteem, support self-efficacy and aid in development of an optimistic perception of the future. Additionally, comparative optimism has been linked with happiness, care for others, higher drive for success, and better performance. Taylor & Brown (1988) theorize that inaccurate perceptions about the self can serve adaptively and promote well-being in life.

Comparative optimism and minority experience. Most studies on comparative optimism rely on a direct comparison methodology where participants are instructed to rate the likelihood of an event happening to themselves in comparison to an individual who is their same age or sex (Helweg-Larsen & Sheppard, 2001). This method, then, orients participants to make comparisons based on similarity. No research to date has directly instructed participants to make comparisons to individuals of their same race or orientation. Comparisons with individuals who are similar to the individual rater and with the general population are likely to yield different results.

Comparative optimism patterns have not been explored across racial and sexual orientation identity as differences in demographic backgrounds of participants have not been the focal point of past research. Participants in these comparative optimism studies have been mostly students who were instructed to compare themselves to other students of similar ages and sexes. This research, then, has neglected comparisons with individuals who are different from participants on the basis of age and sex or even sexual orientation and race. The study of optimistic bias presents as a potentially useful direction for future research considering the role of social identity in optimism.

Research on Positive Minority Experience

General past research on minority experience has focused on the negative aspects of being a minority with regard to race and sexual orientation. Meyer, Schwartz, & Frost (2008) found that minority individuals with regard to race and sexual orientation experience more stress and utilize less coping mechanisms than individuals who identify with the majority. Likewise, most research focused on understanding the experiences of lesbians, gay men and bisexual individuals has highlighted the negative aspects of being a minority, including psychopathology and stress (Riggle et al., 2008). Research on minority experience has mirrored the general trend in psychology to focus on the negative aspects with only recent consideration of the positive.

Recent research has found that identifying as a minority status individual may aid in positive mental health and physical well-being (Riggle et al., 2008). Riggle et al., (2008) found that belonging to a community, creating families of choice, and having strong connections with others were all positive experiences of sexual minorities. Similarly, research on African Americans in the United States has shown that negative

experiences of racism can be adaptive and can aid in psychological well being among racial minorities (Constantine & Sue, 2006). Constantine & Sue (2006) found that heightened perceptual wisdom, bicultural flexibility and the ability to rely on nonverbal and contextual meanings were all strengths experienced by people of color facing adversity. Research on minority experience has largely highlighted the negative health outcomes as a result of identifying as a minority. To further the knowledge in the field of positive psychology, specific positive psychological constructs including optimism within minority experience where multiple minority statuses should be investigated. The study of multiple minority groups at one time and the possible intersections of two or more minority groups at a time pose quite a challenge to the research field (McCall, 2005). Intersectionality provides a strong framework for analyzing numerous social dimensions and categories (McCall, 2005).

Intersectional theory: A framework for considering optimism & minority experience. Intersectionality supports the idea that distinct social identities including sexual orientation, gender, race, or class work together and form very different experiences (Warner, 2008). Past research on minority experience has focused on one identity at a time, whether that be race, sex, or sexual orientation. Research conducted in the context of intersectional theory compares the intersections of demographic or minority groups as the focal point in understanding the differences between the groups (Galupo, 2009).

McCall (2005) distinguished three different approaches that researchers can adopt when understanding a topic using intersectional theory: anticategorical complexity, intracategorical complexity, and intercategorical complexity. An anticategorical

complexity approach rejects categories completely (McCall, 2005). Because of the complexity that exists by multiple identities, grouping participants based on any category or identity is not seen as productive. Intracategorical complexity recognizes identity categories and focuses analysis on neglected points of the intersection (McCall, 2005). For example, an approach among optimism researchers may be to recognize that the majority of the research on dispositional optimism has utilized college age students who are mostly white and in response to this, may decide to investigate optimism among older black males. Although this approach can yield an important, in-depth understanding of experience of one narrowly defined group at the intersections of two identities, it does not allow for a comparative analysis. Intercategorical complexity, in contrast, is an approach often used where categories are adopted provisionally for the purpose of understanding patterns of experience across intersections of identity (McCall, 2005). An example of this approach would be considering optimism among individuals across race/ethnicity, sex, and sexual orientation. This research is comparative by design and the patterns of effects across multiple identities become the focus of the analysis. Utilizing multiple minority categories allows for a more complex understanding of the experiences of individuals from varying minority backgrounds that have frequently been overlooked in past literature (Cole, 2009). Intersectional theory provides a promising framework from which to consider the positive experiences, specifically optimism with regard to minority experience.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of the present study is to examine and compare levels of dispositional and comparative optimism across sexual orientation and race, using

intersectionality as a theoretical framework. The present study can be distinguished from past optimism research in four important areas. First, sexual orientation and race will be used as grouping variables to allow for a systematic consideration of identity on optimism scores. Second, both dispositional and comparative optimism is considered within the same study. Third, with regard to comparative optimism, participants will rate general positive events (derived from past research on comparative optimism). In addition, participants will rate minority salient positive events. These minority salient positive events were developed specifically for this study and have not been previously utilized in comparative optimism research. Fourth, with regard to comparative optimism, participants will rate each positive event twice – once in comparison to a member of the general population and once in comparison to a person similar to the self.

Three specific hypotheses will be tested: 1) Supporting Chang's (1996) earlier findings on Asian Americans, there will be no difference in the dispositional optimism scale (LOT-R) scores across minority status; 2) Tversky (1977) explained that judgments of the likelihood of an event happening are based on the individual's schema for the event. As the minority salient positive events have been derived based on themes from past literature (Riggle et al., 2008; Constantine & Sue, 2006), it is expected that sexual and racial minorities will rate the minority salient positive events section of the comparative optimism measure as significantly more likely to happen to them as compared to a person of the general population; 3) McKenna (1993) indicated that people are more likely to report positive events as happening to them than to other people. Tversky (1977) also said that people have schemas for events. For those schemas that are perceived as not being similar, people are more likely to judge those events as happening

to others over happening to the self. Based on this research, it is predicted that individuals who identify with the majority will rate the general positive events section of the comparative optimism scale as more likely to happen to them as compared to a person similar to the self.

CHAPTER TWO:

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Participants and Recruitment Procedure

Participants were 327 women ($n = 254$), men ($n = 70$), transgender females ($n=1$), transgender males ($n=1$), and transgender not identified individuals ($n=1$). Participants ranged in age from 18-63. With regard to sexual orientation, participants self-identified as heterosexual ($n = 273$) or sexual minority ($n = 54$). There was considerable racial diversity in the sample where 77 (23.55%) participants identified as racial minorities, specifically: five (1.53%) Native American; 17 (5.20%) Hispanic / Non-White; 15 (4.59%) Other / Bi-Racial; eight (2.45%) Asian / Asian American; 32 (9.78%) African American / Black; and 250 (76.45%) White. For educational background, 42 participants (12.8%) had completed Some High School, 145 (44.3%) were High School Graduates, 109 (33.3%) were College Graduates, and 39 (11.9%) had Professional or Graduate Degrees. Participants represented all regions of the United States, residing in almost all 50 states and Washington D.C. Participants under the age of 18 and participants who lived outside the United States were excluded.

All data were collected online. Participation in this study was completely voluntary and anonymous. Participants were not offered incentives for completing the

study. Towson University's Institutional Review Board approved this study and all data was collected through an online data collection system.

Measures

Dispositional Optimism

Participants' dispositional optimism was measured using the Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R; Scheier et al., 1994). The LOT-R is a six-item measure that assesses an individual's expectation of good versus bad outcomes in life. An example of an item on the LOT-R is, "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best." Participants responded to each of the ten items on a Likert scale where 0 = *strongly disagree* and 4 = *strongly agree*. Participants received a score from 0 -24 on the LOT-R, where higher scores indicated a higher level of dispositional optimism. The LOT-R has high internal consistency with a Chronbach's alpha of .78 (Scheier et al., 1994) and has been shown to be stable over time with test-retest reliability of .79 for a 28 month time period (Scheier et al., 1994). For the present sample, the LOT-R had a high internal consistency with a Chronbach's alpha of .80.

Comparative Optimism

Comparative optimism was assessed using a 20-item measure developed by the author specifically for this research. This measure was designed to include both general and minority salient components. The general positive events component was designed similar to Weinstein's (1980) previous research on comparative optimism. The minority salient positive events component was designed by utilizing Riggle et al., (2008) and Constantine & Sue's (2006) findings on positive minority experience. Participants were asked to rate the likelihood of both general and minority salient events happening to the

self as compared to a member of the general population and as compared to a person similar to the self.

In addition, all participants rated 10 general positive events and 10 minority salient positive events. This research utilized a novel response method where participants were asked to complete likelihood ratings of the self in reference to two target groups: 1) In comparison to a member of the general population and 2) In comparison to a person similar to the self.

General positive events. The 10 general positive event statements were generated using previous research conducted by Weinstein (1980) and were adapted from his initial list of positive event statements. These ten positive event statements were modified for the present research to parallel the minority salient positive event statements and were developed into the General Positive Events Statements (GPES). For the GPES, participants were asked to indicate the chance of a positive event applying to themselves (e.g. “have your achievements in a newspaper.”). Participants responded to each of the ten items on a Likert scale where *1 = extremely less likely, and 7 = extremely more likely*. Participants rated each item twice. First participants responded to the question, “What do you think the chances are that the following will apply to you compared to a person of the general population” for each item. Second they responded to the question, “What do you think the chances are that the following will apply to you compared to a person who is similar to yourself” for each item. Participants received a score from 10 –70 where higher scores indicated a higher level of general comparative optimism. Two reliability tests were conducted indicating high internal consistency for GPES scores when

comparing to a member of the general population (Chronbach's alpha of .72) as well as to a person similar to the self (Chronbach's alpha of .77).

Minority salient positive events. The participants completed the same procedure for each of the ten minority salient positive event statements. The Minority Salient Positive Events Statements (MPES) includes experiences of being a sexual (Riggle et al., 2008) and racial (Constantine & Sue, 2006) minority. For the MPES, participants were asked to indicate the chance of a positive event applying to themselves (e.g. "serve as a positive role model"). Participants responded to each of the ten items on a Likert scale where 1 = *extremely less likely*, and 7 = *extremely more likely*. Participants rated each item twice. First participants responded to the question, "What do you think the chances are that the following will apply to you compared to a person of the general population" for each item. Second they responded to the question, "What do you think the chances are that the following will apply to you compared to a person who is similar to yourself" for each item. Participants received a score from 10 –70 where higher scores indicated a higher level of general comparative optimism. Two reliability tests were conducted indicating high internal consistency for MPES scores when comparing to a member of the general population (Chronbach's alpha of .86) as well as to a person similar to the self (Chronbach's alpha of .82).

Demographics

Participants' demographic information was collected through a questionnaire developed by the author for the present study. This questionnaire included information regarding the participants' age, sex, race, self-identified sexual orientation, and state of residence.

Procedure

Participants completed electronic versions of an informed consent form, the LOT – R, the GPES, MPES, and the demographics questionnaire. These materials were uploaded through a secure website and were completed from June 1, 2010 through March 1, 2011 at the convenience of the participants. On the website, the study title appeared as, “Adult Experiences of Positive Life Events.” After providing informed consent, the participants were administered the LOT-R. GPES & MPES items were randomly ordered and followed by the demographic questionnaire. Upon conclusion of the study, participants were given a debriefing statement that thanked them for participating and provided the researcher’s contact information in the event that they had any follow up questions about the study.

CHAPTER THREE:

RESULTS

Multiple Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to determine any differences in LOT – R, MPES, and GPES scores. This study’s hypotheses was tested using a 2 (sexual minority versus heterosexual) X 2 (racial minority versus white) factorial between subjects design with the responses on the LOT – R, the MPES, and the GPES serving as the dependent measures.

Dispositional Optimism

Supporting the initial hypothesis, there was no significant interaction between race and sexual orientation for the dispositional optimism measure, the LOT-R, $F(306,1) = .510, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$. In addition, there were no significant main effects of

race $F(306,1) = .828, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$ or sexual orientation $F(306,1) = .020, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$ on the dispositional optimism measure.

Comparative Optimism

The initial hypotheses for the comparative optimism measure were partially supported. There was a different pattern of responses based on the target of comparison for general positive events (See Figure 1) and minority salient positive events (See Figure 2).

General Positive Events

Comparison Target: General Population

The likelihood ratings for general positive events of the comparative optimism scale did not differ across identity. There were no significant main effects of race $F(306,1) = 1.418, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .005$ or sexual orientation $F(306,1) = .519, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$ when comparing to a member of the general population. There was also no significant interaction of race and sexual orientation $F(306,1) = .066, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$ when comparing to a member of the general population.

Comparison Target: Similar to the Self

Similar to the general population comparison target findings, there were no significant main effects of race $F(306,1) = .023, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$ or sexual orientation $F(306,1) = .117, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$ when comparing to a person similar to the self. There was also no significant interaction of race and sexual orientation $F(306,1) = .023, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$ when comparing to person similar to the self. All groups displayed similar likelihood ratings for general positive events of the

comparative optimism scale, regardless of whether they were comparing themselves to a member of the general population or to someone who was similar to the self.

Minority Salient Positive Events

Comparison Target: General Population

Sexual, but not racial, minorities rated the minority salient positive events as more likely to happen to them when compared to members of the general population (See Figure 2). There was no significant main effect of race $F(306,1) = .092, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$ when comparing to a member of the general population. There was also no significant interaction of race and sexual orientation $F(306,1) = .917, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .003$ when comparing to a member of the general population. There was a significant main effect of sexual orientation when comparing to a member of the general population, $F(306,1) = 5.708, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .018$. When comparing themselves to a person of the general population, sexual minorities were much more likely to rate the minority salient positive events as happening to them.

Comparison Target: Similar to the Self

There was no significant main effect of race $F(306,1) = .079, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$ or sexual orientation $F(306,1) = .006, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .000$ when comparing to a person similar to the self. There was also no significant interaction of race and sexual orientation $F(306,1) = 2.211, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .007$ when comparing to person similar to the self.

CHAPTER FOUR:

DISCUSSION

This research is the first to explore the impact of identity when assessing dispositional and comparative optimism. Negative minority experience has been disproportionately emphasized in the literature and the current research was designed to address the gap in the literature with regard to positive minority experience in the area of optimism.

Dispositional Optimism

The present findings reflect no differences in generalized positive expectancies across minority identity. This finding replicates Chang's (1996) findings that Asian American and white participants did not differ in levels of dispositional optimism. The present study extended these findings where no differences in dispositional optimism were found across race (white vs. racial minorities), where racial minority was broadly defined. Similarly, the present research found no difference in dispositional optimism between heterosexual participants and sexual minorities.

Results from the present study demonstrate that identifying as a minority is not associated with an increase or a decrease in levels of dispositional optimism. These findings speak to the fact that despite the overwhelming negative portrayal of minority experience, just having a minority identity does not lead an individual to adopt a more negative generalized expectancy.

Comparative Optimism

Although no significant differences were seen across identity for dispositional optimism, identity did play into the way individuals rated themselves in reference to others. Comparative optimism is the concept that good things are more likely to happen to the self and bad things are more likely to happen to others (Chambers, Windschitl & Suls, 2003). In order to fully address the impact of identity on comparative optimism, this research introduced two unique methodological differences from past research: 1) the inclusion of two different comparison targets in assessing the positive events and 2) the inclusion of minority salient positive events.

Comparative Optimism: Comparison Targets

Past comparative optimism research has used different instructions or prompts for participants in rating the positive events. For example, some researchers (Tusaie & Patterson, 2006) asked participants to rate the likelihood of an event happening to them specifically while comparing themselves to “others” where “other” was not defined. Other researchers asked participants to rate the likelihood of an event while specifically comparing themselves in reference to an individual with some dimension of similarity, such as the “average student” (Chambers, Windschitl, & Suls, 2003), “the average student of the same sex” (Weinstein, 1980), or “the average student of the same age and sex as you, and from the same school” (Tyler & Rosier, 2009). The standard protocol across these studies was that participants were only asked to complete comparisons in reference to a single comparison group. Consistent with Tversky (1977), this method may lead participants to spontaneously choose a comparison target based on characteristics that are most salient to their experience or their activated schema.

The present research aimed to take into account how an individual with a minority identity may relate differently to these comparison targets. For the present study, participants rated the likelihood of events occurring as compared to two target individuals: 1) A member of the general population and 2) A person who is similar to the self. These different reference groups did impact comparative optimism scores. Specifically, for minority salient positive events, different patterns of effects were seen across sexual orientation when participants made comparisons in relation to an individual in the general population versus a person who is similar to the self. This finding suggests that in order to fully and accurately interpret the comparative optimism literature, participant identity as well as who participants are comparing themselves to (either based on instructions or spontaneous comparisons) need to be considered.

Comparative Optimism: General Positive Events vs. Minority Salient Positive Events

The present research was methodologically unique in that generic positive statements were used (allowing comparisons with past research on comparative optimism conducted by Weinstein, 1980) but also integrated positive life events that were derived from lived experiences of minorities (Riggle et al., 2008). Utilizing this methodology allowed for replication and integration of past research findings and allowed for an analysis of positive events that were salient to minority individuals. This methodology proved to be meaningful as differences across sexual orientation were found for ratings of minority salient (but not general) positive events. This finding serves as a powerful statement for the need to consider minority experience when conducting comparative optimism research – not just by grouping participants by identity – but also by including measures that are salient to the experiences of minorities.

It was hypothesized that both sexual and racial minorities would rate minority salient positive events as more likely. However, the expected effect was found for sexual minorities, but not racial minorities. Although the minority salient positive events were developed from themes identified from the literature considering the positive aspects of being a sexual (Riggle et al., 2008) and racial minority (Constantine & Sue, 2006), the way they were worded could have resonated more strongly with sexual minorities. In addition, although the themes related to the positive aspects of being a person of color were derived from literature that surveyed racial minorities broadly, it could be argued that the use of categorizing all racial minorities in a singular group for the purposes of this research was not effective.

Limitations of Current Study & Directions for Future Research

The present findings have important implications for the consideration of minorities in optimism research. However, several limitations should be addressed. As discussed above, collapsing across minority identity by placing participants into sexual and racial minority groups may not have allowed for a full analysis of sexual orientation or race. This grouping was necessary to establish preliminary findings and replicate past findings as well as generate enough power for the sample. Future research could tease apart differences within minority groups, particularly differences across racial minority groups, as the current findings were not particularly salient to race. Despite this weakness, assessing comparative optimism from the intersections of sexual orientation and racial identity was still useful in teasing apart differences in identity. These groupings were necessary as part of the initial analysis of the effect of identity on comparative optimism.

There is another limitation within the recruitment methodology. Collecting data only online does not provide a voice to those participants who do not have access to a computer. It is possible that these findings are not representative of the entire racial and sexual minority population in the United States because only participants who had access to a computer were allowed to participate. Similarly, there were a few states (e.g. Maryland) where a large part of the sample was obtained. This is problematic in that participants from more rural areas could contribute very differently if they actually participated. Obtaining participants from a few key states does not allow for a representative sample of the entire American population.

Despite these identified limitations, the present findings suggest that focusing on optimism can provide a useful framework for further understanding positive minority experience. In addition, it points to methodological considerations for including identity in future work on comparative optimism.

Appendix A

Revised Life Orientation Test (LOT – R)

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions about yourself indicating the extent of your agreement using the following scale:

0 = strongly disagree

1 = disagree

2 = neutral

3 = agree

4 = strongly agree

Be as honest as you can throughout, and try not to let your responses to one questions influence your responses to other questions. There are no right or wrong answers.

_____ 1. In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.

_____ 2. It's easy for me to relax.

_____ 3. If something can go wrong for me, it will.

_____ 4. I'm always optimistic about my future.

_____ 5. I enjoy my friends a lot.

_____ 6. It's important for me to keep busy.

_____ 7. I hardly ever expect things to go my way.

_____ 8. I don't get upset too easily.

_____ 9. I rarely count on good things happening to me.

_____ 10. Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad.

Appendix B

Positive Events Scale

Instructions:

Please answer the following questions about yourself indicating the extent of your agreement using the following scale:

- 1 = extremely less likely
- 2 = somewhat less likely
- 3 = slightly less likely
- 4 = average
- 5 = slightly more likely
- 6 = somewhat more likely
- 7 = extremely more likely

Be as honest as you can throughout, and try not to let your responses to one questions influence your responses to other questions. There are no right or wrong answers.

_____ Please rate how likely you are to...

_____ When comparing yourself to a member of your same community?

_____ When comparing yourself to a member of the general population?

1. Serve as a positive role model.*
2. Take an annual vacation.
3. Own your own home.
4. Feel like you belong to a community.*
5. Like your job.
6. Be recognized as having a unique perspective and insight.*
7. Forge strong connections with others.*
8. Live a long, healthy life.
9. Have a gifted child.
10. Develop empathy and compassion for others.*
11. Have your achievements in a newspaper.
12. Be satisfied with your salary.
13. Live authentically and honestly.*
14. Not be ill all winter.
15. Gain personal insight and sense of self.*
16. Marry somebody wealthy.
17. Be involved in social justice and activism.*
18. Be free from gender specific roles.*
19. Have freedom in exploring sexuality and relationships.*
20. Have your work recognized with an award.

(* denotes minority salient positive events)

Comparison Groups

What characteristics best describe the person you considered?

____ Same race as yourself

____ Same sexual orientation as yourself

____ Same religion as yourself

____ Same age as yourself

____ Same sex as yourself

____ Other (please specify)

Demographics Questionnaire

1. What is your sex?
2. What is your race?
3. What is your age?
4. How do you identify (sexual orientation)?
5. What is your highest completed level of education you have received?
6. Are you currently enrolled in a college, university or other institution of learning?
7. Where did you hear about the study?
8. Are you a U.S. resident?

Figure 1

General Positive Events With Both Comparison Targets

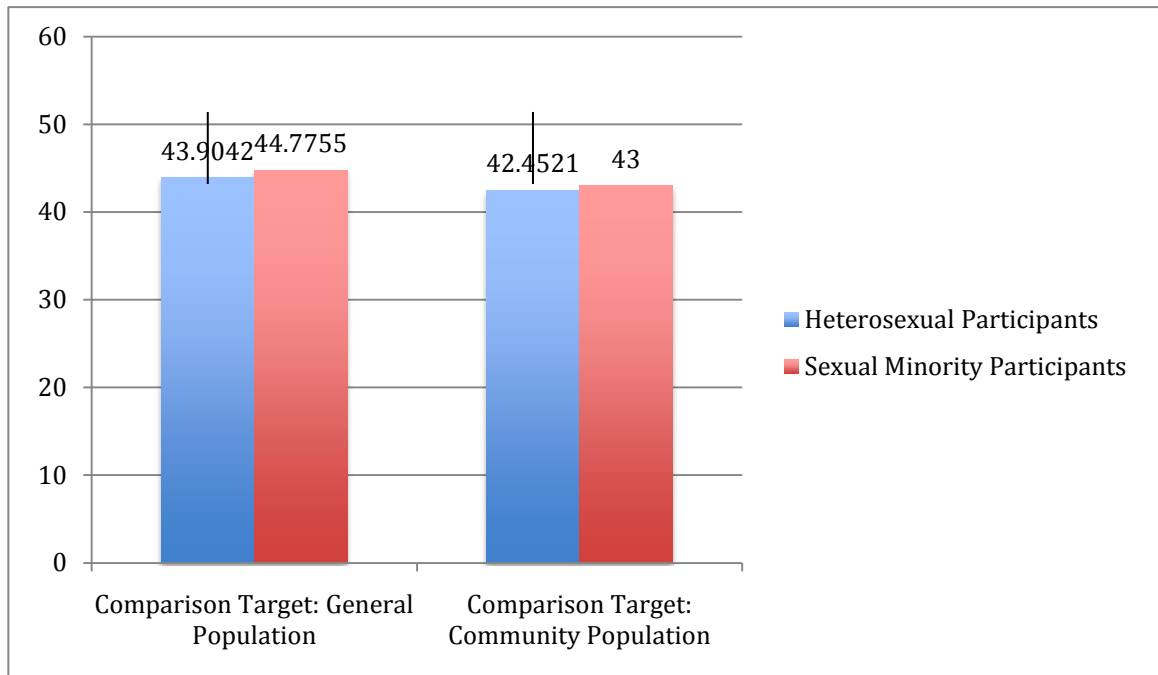


Figure 1. Mean differences values representing differences in likelihood ratings of general positive events for both comparison targets. Mean differences values indicated that there were no significant differences in the likelihood ratings for general positive events.

Figure 2

Minority Salient Positive Events With Both Comparison Targets

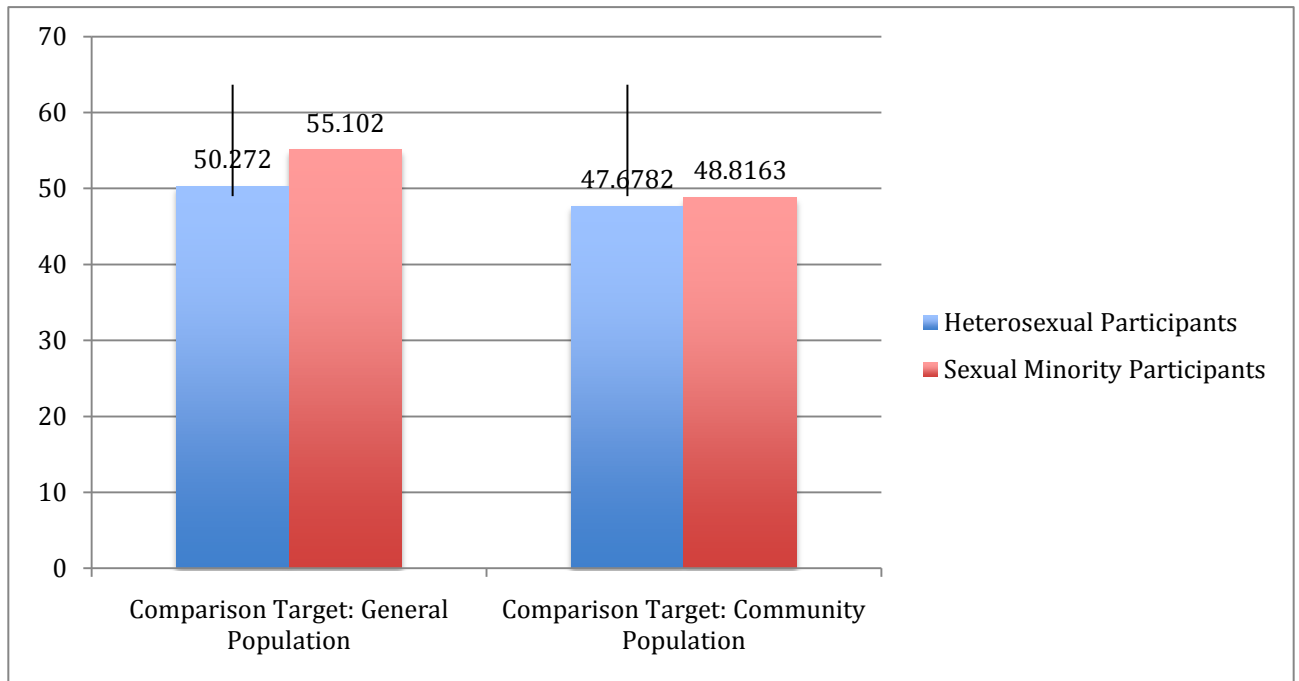


Figure 2. Mean differences values representing differences in likelihood ratings of minority salient positive events for both comparison targets. Mean differences values indicated that there was a significant main effect of sexual orientation for the general population comparison target. Sexual minorities rated the minority salient positive events as more likely to happen to them when compared to members of the general population.

References

- Abrahamson, L. Y., Seligman, M. E. P., & Teasdale, J. D. (1978). Learned helplessness in humans: Critique and reformulation. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 87*, 49-74. doi:10.1037/0021-843X.87.1.49
- Affleck, G., Tennen, H., Apter, A. (2002). Optimism, pessimism, and daily life with chronic illness. In E. C. Chang (Ed.), *Optimism & pessimism: Implications for theory, research, and practice* (pp. 147-168). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Aspinwall, L. G., & Taylor, S. E. (1992). Modeling cognitive adaptation: A longitudinal investigation of the impact of individual differences and coping on college adjustment and performance. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 63*, 989-1003. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.63.6.989
- Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (2002). Optimism, pessimism, and self-regulation. In E. C. Chang (Ed.), *Optimism & pessimism: Implications for theory, research, and practice* (pp. 31-51). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Carver, C. S., & Gaines, J. G. (1987). Optimism, pessimism, and post-partum depression. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 11*, 449-462. doi:10.1007/BF01175355
- Chambers, J. R., Windschitl, P. D., Suls, J. (2003). Egocentrism, event frequency, and comparative optimism: When what happens frequently is “more likely to happen to me.” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 29*(11), 1343-1356. doi:10.1177/0146167203256870
- Chang, E. C. (1996). Cultural differences in optimism, pessimism, and coping: Predictors of subsequent adjustment in Asian American and Caucasian American college

students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 43, 113-123. doi:10.1037/0022-0167.43.1.113

Chang, E. C. (2002). Cultural influences on optimism and pessimism: Differences in western and eastern construals of the self. In E. C. Chang (Ed.), *Optimism & pessimism: Implications for theory, research, and practice* (pp. 257-280). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Cochran, S. D., Mays, V. M., Alegria, M., Ortega, A. N., & Takeuchi, D. (2007). Mental health and substance use disorders among Latino and Asian American lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 75(5), 785-794. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.75.5.785

Cochran, S. D., Sullivan, J. G., & Mays, V. M. (2003). Prevalence of mental disorders, psychological distress, and mental health services use among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults in the United States. *Journal of Counseling and Clinical Psychology*, (71), 1, 53-61. doi:10.1037/0022-006X.71.1.53

Cole, E. R. (2009). Intersectionality and research in psychology. *American Psychologist*, 64(3), 170-180. doi:10.1037/a0014564

Constantine, M. G., & Sue, D. W. (2006). Factors contributing to optimal human functioning in people of color in the United States. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 34(2), 228-244. doi:10.1177/0011000005281318

Galupo, M. P. (2009). Cross-category friendship patterns: Comparison of heterosexual and sexual minority adults. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 26(6), 1-21. doi:10.1177/0265407509345651

Gillham, J. E., Shatte, A. J., Reivich, K. J., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). Optimism,

pessimism, and explanatory style. In E. C. Chang (Ed.), *Optimism & pessimism: Implications for theory, research, and practice* (pp. 53-75). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Helweg-Larsen, M., Shepperd, J. A. (2001). Do moderators of the optimistic bias affect personal or target risk estimates? A review of the literature. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 5(1), 74-95. doi:10.1207/S15327957PSPR0501_5

Klar, Y., & Giladi, E. E. (1997). No one in my group can be below the group's average: A robust positivity bias in favor of anonymous peers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 73, 885-901. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.73.5.885

McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(31), 1771-1800. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxytu.researchport.umd.edu>

McKenna, F. P. (1993). It won't happen to me: Unrealistic optimism or illusion of control. *British Journal of Psychology*, 84, 39-50. Retrieved from <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy-tu.researchport.umd.edu>

Meyer, I. H., Schwartz, S., & Frost, D. M. (2008). Social patterning of stress and coping: Does disadvantaged status confer excess exposure and fewer coping resources? *Social Science & Medicine*, 67, 368-379. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2008.03.012

Peterson, C. (2000). The future of optimism. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 44-55. doi:10.1037//0003-066X.55.1.44

Riggle, E. D. B., Whitman, J. S., Olson, A., Rostosky, S. S., & Strong, S. (2008). The positive aspects of being a lesbian or gay man. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 39(2), 210-217. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.39.2.210

- Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1985). Optimism, coping and health: Assessment and implications of generalized outcome expectancies. *Health Psychology*, 4, 219-247. doi:10.1037/0278-6133.4.3.219
- Scheier, M. F., & Carver, C. S. (1987). Dispositional optimism and physical well being: The influence of generalized outcome expectancies on health. *Journal of Personality*, 55(2), 169-210. doi:10.1111/1467-6494.ep8970713
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S. (1988). A model of behavioral self-regulation: Translating intention into action. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 21, pp. 303-346). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S. (1993). On the power of positive thinking: The benefits of being optimistic. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 2, 26-30. doi:10.1111/1467-8721.ep10770572
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (1994). Distinguishing optimism from neuroticism (and trait anxiety, self-mastery, and self-esteem): A reevaluation of the Life Orientation Test. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(6), 1063-1078. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.67.6.1063
- Scheier, M. F., Carver, C. S., & Bridges, M. W. (2002). Optimism, pessimism, and psychological well-being. In E. C. Chang (Ed.), *Optimism & pessimism: Implications for theory, research, and practice* (pp. 189-216). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Seligman, M. E. P., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 5-14. doi:10.1037//0003-066X.55.1.5
- Sheppard, J. A., Carroll, P., Grace, J., & Terry, M. (2002). Exploring the causes of

comparative optimism. *Psychological Belgica*, 42, 65-98. Retrieved from
<http://www.psych.ufl.edu/~shepperd/publications.htm>

Taylor, S. E., & Brown, J. D. (1988). Illusion and well-being: A social psychological perspective on mental health. *Psychological Bulletin*, 103(2), 193-210.
doi:10.1037/0033-2909.103.2.193

Tusaie, K. R., & Patterson, K. (2006). Relationship among trait, situational, and comparative optimism: Clarifying concepts for a theoretically consistent and evidenced-based intervention to maximize resilience. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 20(3), 144-150. doi:10.1016/j.apnu.2005.10.004

Tversky, A. (1977). Features of similarity. *Psychological Review*, 84, 327–352.
doi:10.1037/0033-295X.84.4.327

Tyler, J. M., & Rosier, J. G. (2009). Examining self-presentation as a motivational explanation for comparative optimism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 97(4), 716-727. doi:10.1037/a0016231

Warner, L. (2008). A best practice guide to intersectional approaches in psychological research. *Sex Roles*, 59(5/6), 454-463. doi:10.1007/s11199-008-9504-5

Weinstein, N. D. (1980). Unrealistic optimism about future life events. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 39(5), 806-820. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.39.5.806

Curriculum Vitae

Kirsten A. Gonzalez

kgonza4@students.towson.edu

19105 Abbey Manor Drive

Brookeville, MD 20833

Educational Background

2011	M. A. Candidate	Towson University, Towson, Maryland Clinical Psychology Thesis advisor: Dr. M. Paz Galupo
------	-----------------	---

Thesis title: *Dispositional and Comparative Optimism:
A Framework for Understanding Minority Experience*

2009	B. A.	Elon University, Elon, North Carolina Psychology, Minor in Communications
------	-------	--

Research Interests

Intersectional theory, positive psychology, optimism, minority experience, multiculturalism, friendship patterns, and HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) risk and protective factors.

Publications

Darby, A., Mihans, R., **Gonzalez, K.**, Lyons, M., Goldstein, J., & Anderson, K. (in press). The influence of school socioeconomic status on first-year teachers' emotions. *Research in Education*.

Galupo, M. P., & **Gonzalez, K. A.** (submitted). Friendship values and cross-category friendship patterns: Understanding friendship development across sexual orientation and race.

Manuscript in Preparation

Gonzalez, K. A., Galupo, M. P., Schurtz, D. R., & Buckingham, J. T. (in preparation). Social comparisons in romantic relationships: The effects of sexual orientation on comparison target.

Presentations

Gonzalez, K.A., Galupo, M. P., Schurtz, D. R., & Buckingham, J. T. (March, 2011). Social comparisons in romantic relationships: The effects of sexual orientation on comparison target. Poster presented at the 36th Annual Association for Women in Psychology Conference. Philadelphia, PA.

Tzall, D., **Gonzalez, K. A.**, Carswell, S. B., Watts, A. M., & Hanlon, T. E. (May, 2010). HIV risk and protective factors for urban African American youth. Poster presented at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Fourth Annual Conference for the Dissemination of Student Research on Addictions, Infectious Disease and Public Health. Baltimore, MD.

Gonzalez, K. A. (April, 2010). Positive psychology and minority experience: Framing research within intersectional theory. Poster presented at Towson University's Student Research Scholarship Expo. Towson, MD.

Gonzalez, K. A., & Galupo, M. P. (March, 2010). Friendship characteristics and cross-race friendships among racial minority and white adults. Poster presented at the College of William and Mary's 9th Annual Graduate Research Symposium. Williamsburg, VA.

Gonzalez, K. A. (February, 2010). Friendship characteristics: Comparison of cross-orientation friendships between heterosexual and sexual minority adults. Paper presentation at Towson University's 16th Annual Multicultural Conference. Towson, MD.

Research Experience

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 2011 – present | <p>Research Team Member
 <i>Gender and Sexual Identity Lab</i>
 Towson University
 Project Title: Positive Transgender Experience</p> |
| 2009 – present | <p>Graduate Assistant
 <i>Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug (ATOD) Prevention Center</i>
 Towson University
 Duties: prepare and distribute the CORE drug and alcohol survey, plan and implement ATOD Center programming, and attend Substance Education Concerns Committee Meetings.</p> |
| 2009 - 2010 | <p>Research Assistant
 <i>HIV Risk and Protective Factors for Urban African American Youth</i>
 Friends Research Institute
 Duties: assisted in recruitment, interviewed participants, and aided in data input.</p> |

- 2008 - 2009 **Undergraduate Research Assistant**
The Influence of School Socioeconomic Status and Professional Relationships on First- Year Teachers' Emotions
Elon University
Duties: transcribed interviews, analyzed data, and assisted in writing results.
- 2008 **Senior Seminar Student**
Gay Male Identity and Its Effects on Sexual Risk Taking
Elon University
Conducted literature review and prepared proposal on sexual minority adolescent identity as a requirement for graduation.

Clinical Experience

- 2010 – present **Research Assistant Intern**
Identifying Undiagnosed Asymptomatic HIV Infection in Hispanic/Latino Adolescents and Young Adults: Focusing on Young Men Who Have Sex With Men and At-Risk Latinas
University of Maryland Baltimore, Division of Adolescent Medicine
Duties: plan implementation strategies, administer surveys, and train community staff on the protocol.
- 2010 – present **Certified Oraquick & Clearview Rapid HIV Tester & Counselor, Level 1**
University of Maryland Baltimore, Division of Adolescent Medicine
Duties: serve as an HIV tester and counselor for high-risk youth/adolescents in Maryland, and perform HIV testing at outreach events in the community.

Teaching Experience

- 2010 – present **Graduate Teaching Assistant**
Sex Differences: Psychological Perspectives
Towson University
Duties: provide students with necessary handouts and materials, assist in designing tests and grading student assignments, and administer exams.
- 2008 **Undergraduate Teaching Assistant**
Australia: Indigenous Studies
Elon University
Duties: assisted in syllabus development, pre-departure orientation

agenda design, and prepared assignments for 30 students. Helped conduct five two hour-long pre-departure classes and served as the liaison and communication nexus for the class. Graded student presentations and class assignments.

Volunteer Experience

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 2010 – present | Member, On-Site Issues/Volunteer/AV Committee
<i>Association for Women in Psychology 2011 Conference</i>
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Duties: recruit volunteers for the conference and assist in coordinating on site registration. |
| 2007 - 2008 | Volunteer Mental Health Worker
<i>Montgomery General Hospital Mental Health and Addictions Floor</i>
Olney, Maryland
Duties: charted outpatient and inpatient vitals, shadowed hour-long group therapy sessions, observed the patient admittance process, and provided inpatient escort for the inpatient wing. |

Honors and Awards

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 2009 | Graduated Cum Laude in Psychology, Elon University |
| 2006 – 2009 | President’s List (three semesters), Elon University |
| 2006 – 2007 | Dean’s List (two semesters), Elon University |
| 2007 – present | Psi Chi, National Honor Society in Psychology, Elon University |
| 2008 – present | Pi Gamma Mu, International Honor Society in Social Sciences, Elon University |

Professional Memberships

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2009 | Eastern Psychological Association (EPA) |
| 2010 | Association for Women in Psychology (AWP) |
| 2010 | American Psychological Association (APA) |

Completed Graduate Courses

Assessment of Intelligence
 Advanced Abnormal Psychology
 Psychotherapy & Behavior Change I
 Personality Assessment in Clinical Psychology

Research Issues in School/Clinical Psychology
Psychotherapy & Behavior Change II
Advanced Personality Assessment in Clinical Psychology
Ethical, Legal, & Professional Issues in Psychology
Independent Investigation in Psychology
Child Psychopathology
College Teaching Practicum
Advanced Experimental Design I
Practicum in Clinical Psychology

References Available Upon Request

