

WIU CENTENNIAL HONORS COLLEGE
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Abstract

Podium

Major: Psychology

Faculty Mentor(s): Kristine Kelly

Is The Future Too Bright? Loneliness, Belonging, and Unrealistic Optimism

Courtney Norris

The unrealistic optimism bias is the tendency for people to overestimate that positive events will happen in their future (Weinstein, 1980). Research has shown that people with depression and anxiety are less susceptible to this bias; they actually perceive their future life events fairly accurately (Dewberry et al., 1990; Harris et al., 2008; Pyszczynski et al., 1987). Because loneliness has been found to correlate with depression and anxiety (Leary et al., 2013), I expected that lonely people would be less likely to show the unrealistic optimism bias. Furthermore, in previous studies, loneliness has been seen as an indicator of the satisfaction of one's belongingness needs. Thus, I expected that the need to belong would also be negatively related to unrealistic optimism.

Participants were 58 undergraduate students (mean age = 22) who completed an online questionnaire consisting of a loneliness measure (Russell, 1996), an unrealistic optimism measure (Weinstein, 1980), and the need to belong scale (Leary et al., 2013.) A correlational analysis was conducted to measure the relationship between unrealistic optimism bias, loneliness, and the need to belong. The results revealed a negative correlation between unrealistic optimism and the need to belong, $r(57) = -.46$, $p < .05$. However, the correlation between unrealistic optimism and loneliness was not significant ($p = .67$).

These results partially supported my hypotheses. As predicted, high levels of belonging needs were associated with less unrealistic optimism. However, my hypothesis concerning loneliness was not supported. My findings will be discussed in the context of previous research.