Optimistically-Biased Probability Estimates Longitudinally Predict Positive Mood

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Background

How likely are you to win the lottery? How likely are you to die in a plane crash?

Optimism bias: Healthy people usually rate positive events as more likely than negative events

We know optimism bias is weakened, or even reversed, in depression and anxiety

Some evidence it is exaggerated in positive mood

Research Question: Is optimism bias a *longitudinal predictor* of positive mood?
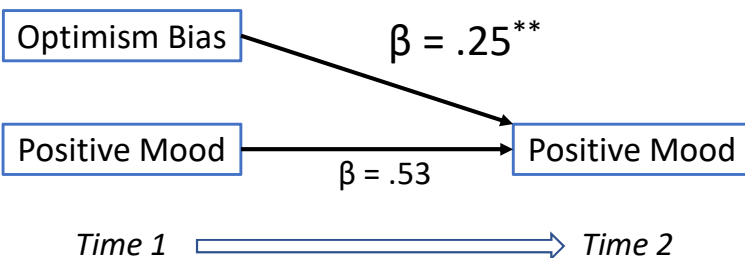
Study 1

Reanalysis of control group from previous RCT

101 students

Optimism bias, positive & negative mood (PANAS)

Measured at pretest, and 1-week follow-up

Optimism Bias → Positive Mood $\beta = .25^{**}$

Positive Mood → Positive Mood $\beta = .53$

Time 1 ⟹ Time 2

Time-1 optimism bias predicted Time-2 positive mood, controlling for Time-1 positive mood

Optimism bias did *not* predict negative mood
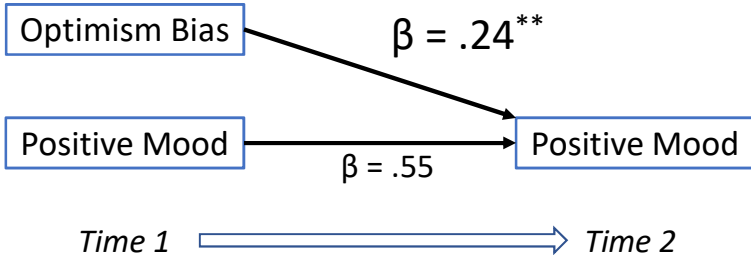
Positive mood did *not* predict later optimism bias

Study 2

Reanalysis of previous psychometric study

116 students

Same measures

Tested twice, 4 weeks apart

Optimism Bias → Positive Mood $\beta = .24^{**}$

Positive Mood → Positive Mood $\beta = .55$

Time 1 ⟹ Time 2

Results were very similar

Optimism bias predicted positive mood *4 weeks later*

Conclusions

Optimism bias reliably, specifically predicts positive mood, up to 4 weeks later

This relationship is unidirectional

Optimism bias can be directly targeted for mood interventions?

In CBT, we correct unhelpful beliefs about the future: this might improve positive mood, but not symptoms?

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