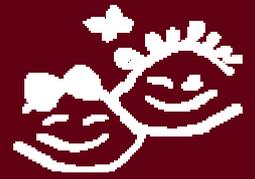


Optimism and Relationship Satisfaction: The Role of Social Support

Manja Vollmann & Katja Antoniw

University of Greifswald, Germany



Objectives

Optimism is considered to be an important determinant of social functioning. Particularly, optimism is related to fewer problematic social interactions, lower social alienation and longer friendship duration (e.g., Geers et al., 1998; Symister & Friend, 2003). In intimate relationships, optimism is predictive of higher relationship agreement and greater relationship satisfaction (e.g., Abend & Williamson, 2002; Srivastava et al., 2006). One prior study suggested that the association between optimism and better relationship outcomes is mediated by perceived social support (Srivastava et al., 2006).

The aim of the present study was to closer analyse the mediating mechanisms by focusing on actual social support exchanges rather than perceived social support. Thus, we investigated whether optimists and their romantic partners are more satisfied with their relationships, and if so, whether this is due to actual social support exchanges. Social support exchanges were examined from both the recipient's as well as the provider's perspective.

Method

Measures

Dispositional optimism: rev. Life Orientation Test (LOT-R, Scheier et al., 1994)
6 items, $\alpha = .79$, "I am always optimistic about my future"

Social support received from the partner within the last 6 month: Inventory of Social Support in Dyads (ISU-DYA, Winkler & Klauer, 2003)

emotional: 15 items, $\alpha = .85$, "My partner consoled me when I was upset"

practical: 7 items, $\alpha = .69$, "My partner assisted me with severe problems"

informational: 12 items, $\alpha = .76$, "My partner gave me advice how to behave"

Social support provided to the partner within the last 6 month: Inventory of Social Support in Dyads (ISU-DYA, Winkler & Klauer, 2003)

emotional: 15 items, $\alpha = .89$, "I consoled my partner when he/she was upset"

practical: 7 items, $\alpha = .74$, "I assisted my partner with severe problems"

informational: 12 items, $\alpha = .82$, "I gave my partner advice how to behave"

Relationship satisfaction: Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS, Hendrick, 1981)
7 items, $\alpha = .83$, "How satisfied are you with your relationship"

Sample

111 couples, which were living in a steady relationship for at least one year
 $N = 222$ participants

Length of partnership: 1-29 years, $M = 4.9$ years ($SD = 4.6$)

56% were living together

7% were married

15% had children

Females

$N = 111$

Age: 19-47 years, $M = 24.2$ years ($SD = 5.6$)

81% students

Males

$N = 111$

Age: 18-53 years, $M = 25.9$ years ($SD = 6.1$)

57% students

Results

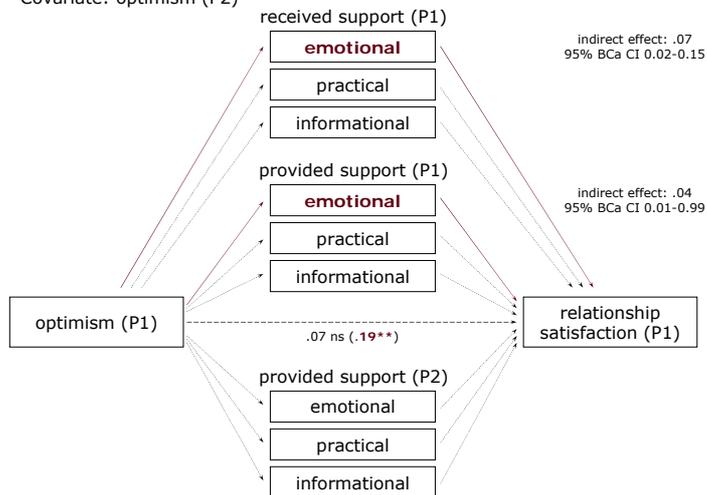
Statistical Analysis: Multiple Mediator Model (Preacher & Hayes, 2007)

Independent Variable: optimism (P1)

Dependent Variable: relationship satisfaction (P1)

Mediators: received support (P1), provided support (P1)
provided support (P2)

Covariate: optimism (P2)



Notes for both figures. Models testing direct effects, (total effects) and indirect effects of optimism on relationship satisfaction. P1 = Partner 1, P2 = Partner 2. No of bootstraps: 5000. Dashed lines stand for nonsignificant (in)direct effects. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

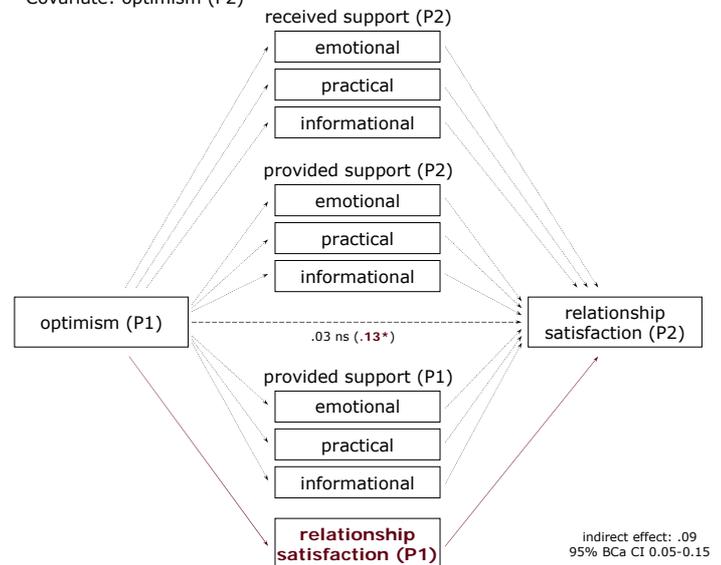
Statistical Analysis: Multiple Mediator Model (Preacher & Hayes, 2007)

Independent Variable: optimism (P1)

Dependent Variable: relationship satisfaction (P2)

Mediators: received support (P2), provided support (P2)
provided support (P1), relationship satisfaction (P1)

Covariate: optimism (P2)



Discussion

As predicted, Optimists and their (not necessarily optimistic) partners are more satisfied with their relationships. Additionally, the analyses indicated the effects of optimism on both the own relationship satisfaction as well as the partner's relationship satisfaction are rather indirect than direct.

Optimists' greater relationship satisfaction is mediated by an increased provision of emotional support to the partner and an increased receipt of emotional support from the partner. However, the reciprocal partner ratings of actual support provision do not explain the optimists' greater relationship satisfaction. This suggests that the tendency of optimists' to see their partners as more supportive mediates this positive relationship outcome.

Not only do optimists report a greater relationship satisfaction, but so do their partners - independent of their own optimism. However, actual social support exchanges do not explain the positive relationship outcome. In fact, optimists' partners are more satisfied with their relationship due to the higher relationship satisfaction of their optimistic partners.

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Contact Details

Dipl.-Psych. Manja Vollmann
vollmann@uni-greifswald.de

Dipl.-Psych. Katja Antoniw
antoniw@uni-greifswald.de