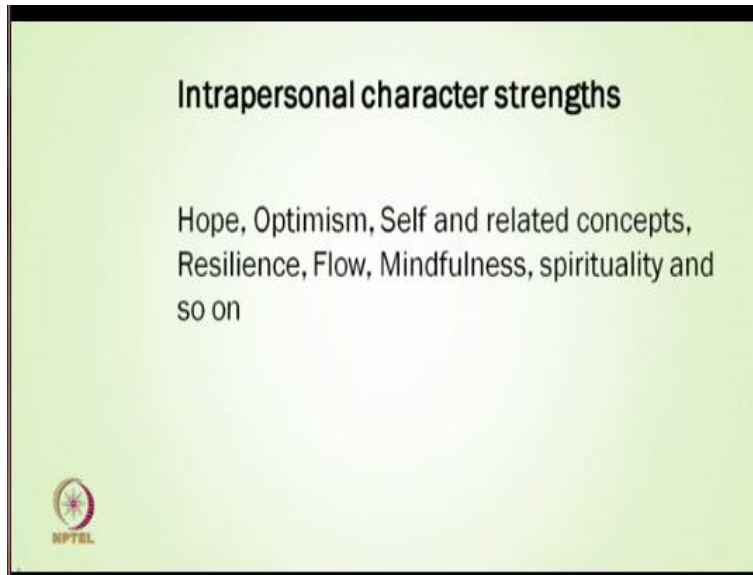**Positive Psychology**
Prof. Kamlesh Singh
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
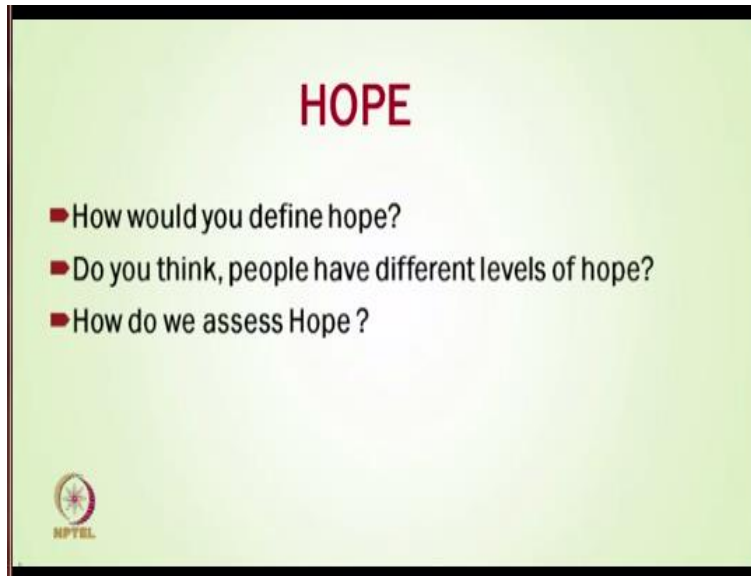**Indian Institute of Technology-Delhi**

Lecture-12
Hope and optimism

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Namaskar, after knowing about character strengths and virtue, positive emotions and happiness let us know about some more intrapersonal character strengths. These intra personal character strengths are hope, optimism, self and related concepts, resilience, flow mindfulness, spirituality and so on, all these constructs will be discussed in the next classes.
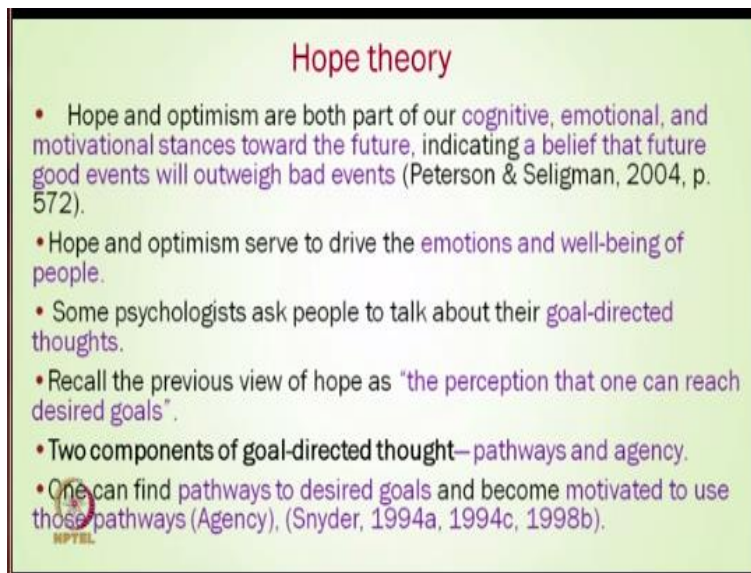
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Let us start with hope that is our first topic in this series, how would you define hope, what do you mean, which words are coming in your mind when I am saying hope. So what is your operational definition of hope, second question is do you think people have different levels of hope, can you identify someone in your group who has highest level of hope as well as person who has lowest level of hope.

So it means it is very important to know how do we, we means positive psychologist assess hope for knowing answer of all these questions. Let us explore how it has been explained by psychologist in psychology - hope, optimism, positive, self and other constructs.

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Let us start with hope. Hope and optimism are both part of our cognitive, emotional and motivational stances towards the future indicating a belief that good events will outweigh bad events. It means hope and optimism both are related to future directions and when we are talking about these future directions, then we are talking about cognitive, emotional and motivational factors and by counting all these factors what do we think would happen - good events in life or bad events – and higher chances for which one?

So, if good events then we are hopeful and optimistic in our life. On the other hand, if our main focus is on bad events and we are thinking that bad events would happen more than good events then we might have lower level of hope as well as optimism. Hope and optimism serve to drive the emotions and well-being of people and that is why these are very important constructs for us to understand in positive psychology.

Some psychologists ask people to talk about their goal-directed thoughts, so by knowing their goal-directed thoughts they could know level of hope, recall the previous view of hope as the perception that one can reach desired goals. So, what is your perception about your desired goals, do you think you can reach and you can obtain those goals, so if yes then you have high level of hope as well as optimism.

When we are talking about hope it has been defined on the basis of goal-directed thoughts. When I am saying goal-directed thoughts it means there are 2 major factors, number one is pathways and second one is the agencies. One can find pathways to desired goals and become motivated to use those pathways or agencies. So, it means you should be able to know various pathways which are available for your desired goals as well as be motivated to follow those pathways.

These are 2 main constructs here or factors here to define goal-directed thoughts or this hope theory. Let us know little bit more about this theory. When we talk about this theory I think there are some factors or can say keywords of this theory, first number is goals.
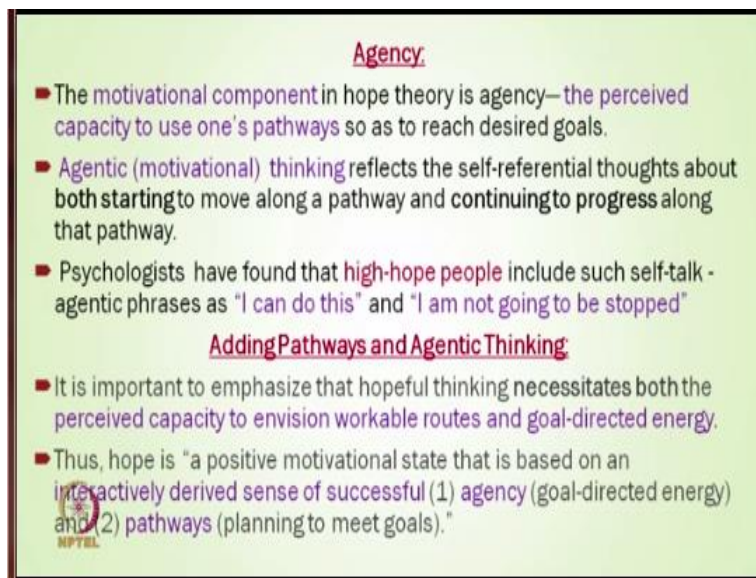
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We begin with the assumption that human actions are goal directed and we focus on those goals directions to achieve certain things that is related to our hope theory. Accordingly, goals are the targets of mental action sequences and they provide the cognitive component that anchors hope theory. So, we have various mental action sequences when we are talking about these goals, these goals could be short- or long-term goals, and of sufficient value to occupy conscious thoughts.

These goals maybe long term or short term but here important point is sufficient value to occupy conscious thoughts. Next factor here is pathways when I am saying pathways it means alternate routes or the routes to follow to achieve certain goals, and thinking in order to reach their goals. People must view themselves as being capable of generating workable routes to those goals. So, first point if they should be able to generate workable routes to those goals and maybe sometimes alternate routes also if it is required.

Pathways thinking signifies one's perceived capabilities at generating workable routes to desired goals. It means when we are saying pathways, then we should be able to generate number of workable routes to desired goals more workable routes, more alternates we maybe more confident if we have higher number of routes to achieve certain goals. The production of several pathways is important when encountering obstacles and high-hope persons perceive that they are facile at finding such alternate routes.

Moreover high-hope people actually are very effective at producing alternative routes, so it means there are 3 main points here number 1 you should be able to have some workable routes. Second you might encounter some obstacles, whenever you have those obstacles then you should be able to find out some alternate routes. If you are high on all these 3 parts then you may have high level of hope, I think we can easily understand it with an ant's example. If we put finger immediately it will take next turn, next finger next turn, so like that as per requirement it is changing its alternate routes. So similarly, high hope people change their routes whenever they observe some obstacles in certain routes.

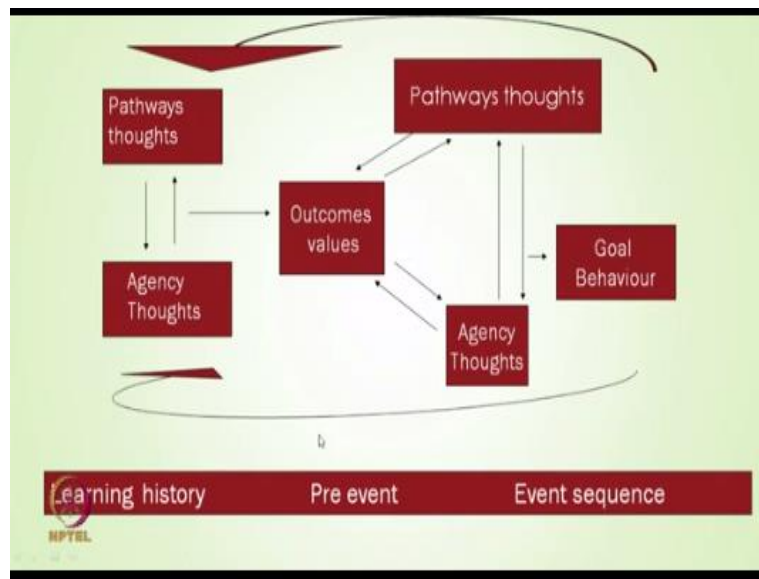**(Refer Slide Time: 06:45)**

Next point is agency. The motivational component in hope theory is agency - the perceived capacity to use one's pathways so as to reach desired goals. Agentic or motivational thinking reflects the self-referential thoughts about both starting to move along a pathway and continuing to progress along that path. So, both parts are important to start a particular task, we need motivation as well as to keep it continued or be persistent in task - we need motivation, and this agency factor defines this motivational thinking only.

Psychologist have found that high-hope people include such self-talk - agency phrases they have like I can do this and I am not going to be stopped. So, this theory is combination of pathways and agentic thinking, it is important to emphasize that hopeful thinking necessitates both the

perceived capacity to envision workable routes and goal-directed agencies and both factors are very important here.

Thus, hope or hope theory can be defined as a positive motivational state that is based on an interactively derived sense of successful agency (goal-directed energy) and pathways (planning to meet goals). So, if we are high on both factors then we have high level of hope.
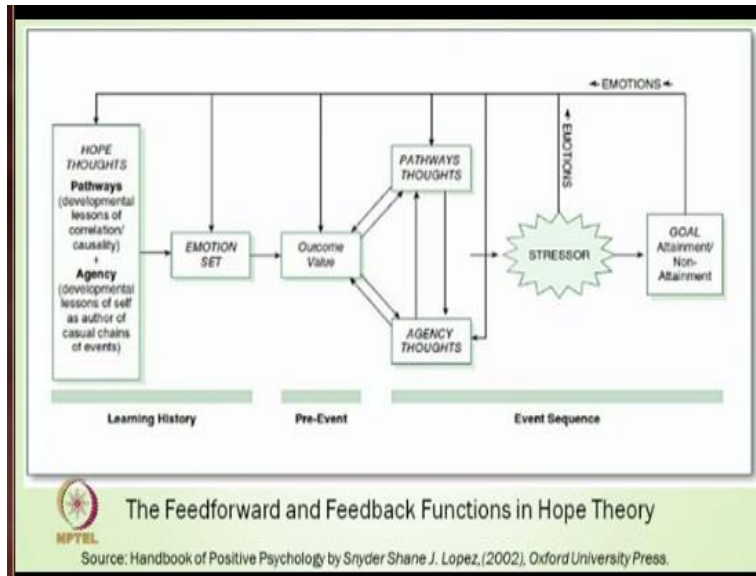
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Let us understand a little bit more about this theory, so that we could know how past experiences may have significant role when we are deciding about or having level of hope. There are 2 factors even in the past they were 'pathways thoughts' as well as 'agency thoughts' and we had certain outcomes. So that is our learning history, in the past how many pathways we had, what was our motivational or agency level and what kind of outputs we got.

On the basis of all these we may have, you know, as per this feedback - today's pathways thoughts as well as agency thoughts and then our goal behaviour. So, when we talk about this theory then learning history, prior events as well as events sequences are also very important.

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The Feedforward and Feedback Functions in Hope Theory

Source: Handbook of Positive Psychology by Snyder Shane J. Lopez, (2002), Oxford University Press.

Now a little bit more about the same theory with the same notion. So here hope thoughts as well as agencies are there then in between we have emotion set or may be some stress, anxiety, stress or maybe some supporting positive thoughts or positive emotions which are triggering in positive directions. So, then outcome values we have and this past experience, learning history, or pre events also help us to have right now whatever we are deciding about that our pathways thoughts as well as agency thoughts.

And then again when we are moving towards the goals then in between emotional factors maybe some stress, maybe some say anxiety, tension created you know factors as well as some supporting emotions might be there and then finally, we achieve certain goals. So, this is the sequence, past experience or even childhood experiences are very important for what kind of hope or what level of hope we have now.

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Scales Derived From Hope Theory

➤ Trait Hope Scale: The adult Trait Hope Scale (Snyder, et.al., 1991) consists of four agency, four pathways, and four distractor items.

➤ State Hope Scale: The State Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1996) has three agency and three pathways items in which respondents describe themselves in terms of how they are "right now."

After knowing hope theory let us know do we assess hope, there are 2 type of scales developed by Snyder and his associates in 1991 trait hope scale and state hope scale. When I am saying trait hope scale it means stable pattern in your behaviour or consistent behaviour related to hope what kind of you have, these are your habitual responses. So, in this type of questions we focus more on your stable patterns or traits in your behaviour.

On the other hand, when we are saying state hope scale then in particular situation right now in this situation what is level of hope. So, then situation-oriented responses we will be having. On the other hand, in the trait hope scale this is your habitual reactions or stable patterns in your behaviour. So, in both type of scales we have different notions specially in instructions – situation-oriented or trait-oriented questions we have.

So, the trait hope scale - adult trait hope scale developed by them which consists of a 4 agency, 4 pathways and 4 distractor items. On the other hand, state hope scale, in this scale they have 3 agency and 3 pathways items in which respondents describe themselves in terms of what they are right now, how they are in this situation and so we get situation-oriented responses. This trait and state concept will be used with various other constructs also.

So, you must understand difference between 2, in flow chapters I will talk about state flow as well as trait flow. Similarly, we can say anxiety - trait anxiety as well as state anxiety. So here

difference is whether we are interested to know stable patterns in your behaviour or we are interested to know what is happening in the given situation, situation-oriented responses this is main difference between these 2.

After knowing about hope let us know about optimism is also, optimists are people who expect good things to happen to them. On the other hand, pessimists are the people who expect bad things to happen to them. Dictionary definitions of optimism and pessimism rest on people's expectations for the future. What do you expect in the future - bad things or good things, bad things means you are a pessimist person, if you expect good things then you are an optimist person.

This grounding in expectancies link the concepts of optimism and pessimism to a long tradition of expectancy-value models of motivation. Expectancy-value theories begin with the assumptions that behavior is organized around the pursuit of goals. We want to pursue certain goals and that is why we have particular attitude maybe positive or maybe negative. Goals are stated as actions that people view as either desirable or undesirable.

So, we observe whether we expect or we perceive desirable goals or we expect or we perceive undesirable goals in the future. Undesirable goals mean pessimism, desirable goals mean optimism. The second conceptual element in expectancy value theory is expectancy, a sense of

confidence or doubt about the attainability of the goal value. So important variables here are – goals, then desirability or sense of confidence or doubt, it means what are your goals and what do you desire.

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When you are desiring these goals then what is your confidence level or are you confident or you are doubtful about the situation. So, goals vary in breadth and it means goals vary in specificity from the very general to the very concrete or specific. In some situations, we have very concrete and specific goals, on the other hand in other situation we may have very general goals. For example, you may have some goals related to your education that is very general.

You may have certain goals related to a particular goal - maybe positive psychology, then this is very concrete and specific goal. Range of variance, again very important here because whenever we have confidence or doubtfulness it is not based on all or none principle, it does not mean we would be having 100% confidence or we would be having 100% doubtfulness it is a matter of degree.

When I am saying matter of degree, maybe certain level of confidence or certain level of doubtfulness we have. You can be confident or doubtful about having a fulfilling career about making good impression in social situations about finding a nice place to have dinner etc. And that is matter of degree, and when I am saying matter of degree there could be various
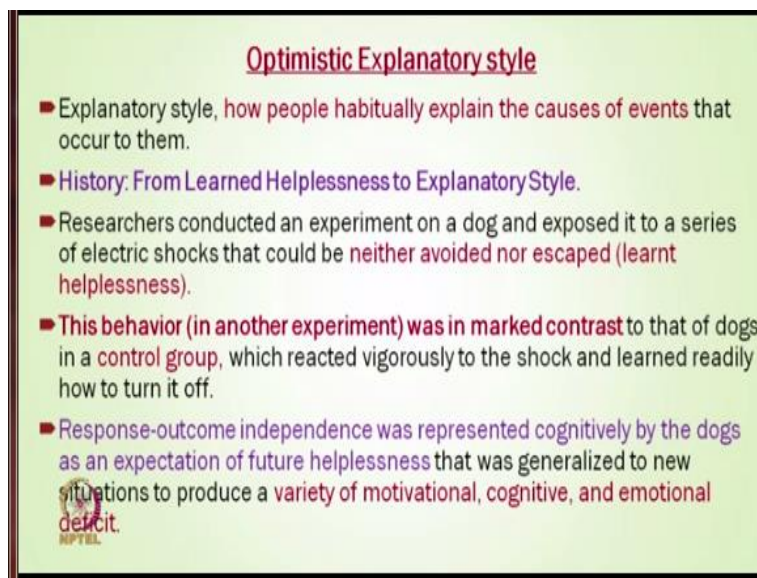
combinations, for example 1 combination is you are 100% confident second maybe you are 100% doubtful.

On the other hand, there could be some other alternates, for example 50% confident you are but 50% doubtful or maybe 70% confident or 30% doubtful. So, matter of degree is there and for this confidence or doubtfulness, our previous experiences or past experiences are very important. So, there is role of developmental stage theories in optimism - when we say confidence or doubtfulness, so like hope, again for understanding optimism scholars have counted role of developmental stages or role of our past experiences, role of our childhood experiences.

If we had very good and flourishing environment then by nature, we may have higher level of confidence-oriented activities. On the other hand, if we were not able to manage good environmental conditions during our childhood and we had various doubts in our childhood activities or in our childhood experiences, then in our personality may have more doubtfulness level, that is why there is significant role of developmental stage theories.

I will discuss Erik Erikson's theory in resilience chapter which is applicable for hope as well as for optimism and then I will discuss how it is relevant for hope as well as optimism.

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Next point related to optimism is optimistic explanatory style, explanatory style how people habitually explain the cause of events that occurs to them, there are various options, and these options decide whether you are optimist person or a pessimistic person. If we talk about history related to optimism or helplessness or hopefulness then from learned helplessness to explanatory style work that has been done is very important.

Researchers conducted an experiment on a dog and exposed it to a series of electrical shocks that could be neither avoided nor escaped and this dog learnt helplessness. Because there was no way to stop this electrical shock, this behavior was in marked contrast to that of dogs in a control group which reacted vigorously to the shock and learnt readily how to turn it off.

In the first experiment a dog learnt helplessness because there were no ways to avoid or escape from this electrical shock. So, it did number of activities but could not escape or avoid and that is why after certain period it learnt helplessness. When this dog was put in another experiment where there were ways to escape or avoid this electrical shock, there the new dogs did number of activities and they successfully turned it off. On the other hand, this dog - the previous one which learnt helplessness did not do anything and it repeated the same behavior. Response-outcome independence was represented cognitively by the dogs as an expectation of future helplessness that was generalized to new situation to produce a variety of motivational, cognitive and emotional deficits. Human helplessness is a little bit different and because we have higher level of cognitive processes, so we may have some extra variables or factors which define helplessness.

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Human Helplessness

- Seligman found that often the difference between people who give up in the face of adversity and people who persist is how people explain bad events and good events (explanatory style) .
- He also found that an optimistic explanatory style is not an inherent trait, but rather a trainable skill (hence the name of Seligman's book is "Learned Optimism")
- **Humans vs. Animals Helplessness**: First, more generally, people differ from animals in their sophistication of assigning meaning to events. Rothbaum, et. al(1982) suggested that there are circumstances in which passivity, withdrawal, and submissiveness among people are not prima facie evidence of diminished personal control; rather, these reactions may represent alternative forms of control achieved by cognitively aligning oneself with powerful external forces.
- A second factor is what can be termed vicarious helplessness. Problem-solving difficulties can be produced in people if they simply see someone else exposed to uncontrollability (Brown & Inouye, 1978). (through Social modeling?)

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Seligman found that often the difference between people who give up in the face of adversity and people who persist is how people explain bad events and good events, so people are different on explanatory style. He also found that an optimist explanatory style is not an inherent trait, but rather a trainable skill hence the name of Seligman's book is 'learned optimism'. So, he has mention that this optimism or helplessness or hopefulness is learned.
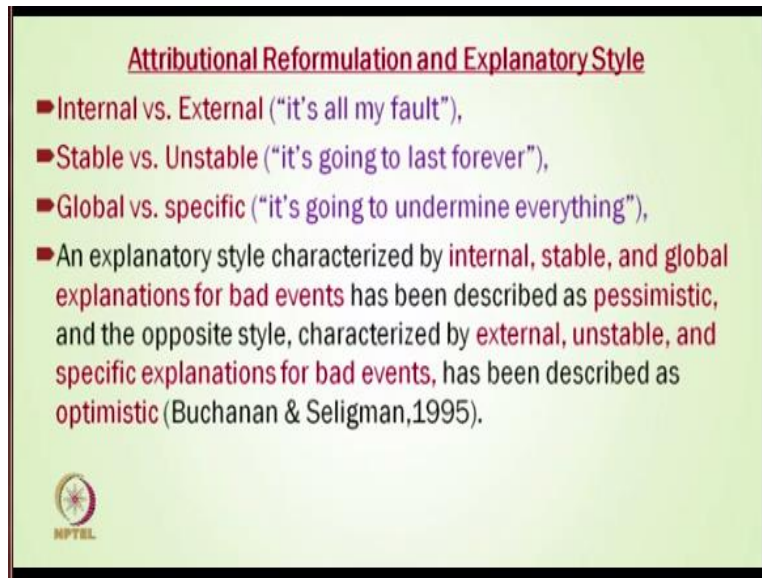
These are not traits of our personality rather we learn them through our past experiences - what kind of environment we are getting whether our actions are related to output or actions are not related to our output. So, such kind of situations decide or define whether we have high level of helplessness or hopefulness, when we compare humans and animals' helplessness - then because we have higher level of cognitive processes that is why we are different on certain levels.

First, more generally people differ from animals in their sophistication of assigning meaning to events. Scholars suggested that there are circumstances in which passivity, withdrawal and submissiveness among people are not prima facie evidence of diminished personal control rather these reactions may represent alternative form of control achieved by cognitively aligning oneself with powerful external factors or forces.

So it means when we are defining helplessness there are several other variables along with the situations that happened. A second factor is what can be termed vicarious helplessness, problem

solving difficulties can be produced in people if they simply see someone else exposed to uncontrollability. Suppose we observe someone else who is in the situation where his actions are not contributing to output, so by observing these people or through social modeling we can learn helplessness.
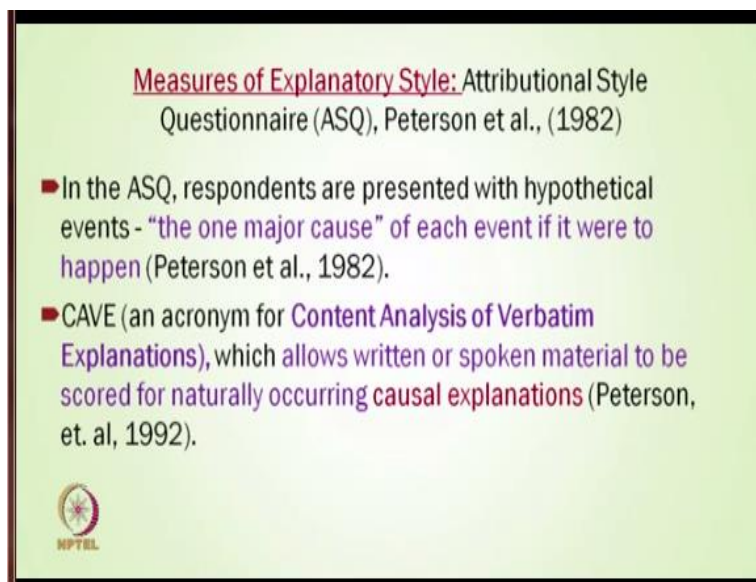
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So not only it is happening with me or with you, even by observing others we may develop helplessness. If we observe in this situation this person has been doing it again and again and it is not contributing to it is results. Next point again very important to explain optimism, attributional reformulation and explanatory style. There are various ways to define a particular event and for these events they have identified 3 factors, how do we define a particular event - particular negative or bad event.

So, whenever we have bad events in our life how do we perceive, do we perceive as internal factor or external factor or stable or unstable attributional style or global or specific style. So, if it says internal it means person would say it is all my fault, on the other hand if it is external then he could say it is happening in this situation only. Stable verses unstable, stable means it is going to last forever on the other hand it could be unstable and you are thinking that it is happening here only.

Next factor is global verses specific. Global - it is going to undermine everything. So, you generalize this event to your life you generalize this event to all other activities which you have in your life. On the other hand, another explanation could be specific, specific means it is happening in that situation only. So, in that case if you are saying external, unstable, specific then you are an optimist person, on other hand if your explanations are internal, stable, global then you are a pessimist person.

An explanatory style characterized by internal, stable, global explanations for bad events has been described as pessimism or pessimist personality and the opposite style characterized by external, unstable and specific explanations for bad events has been described as optimism or optimistic personality.
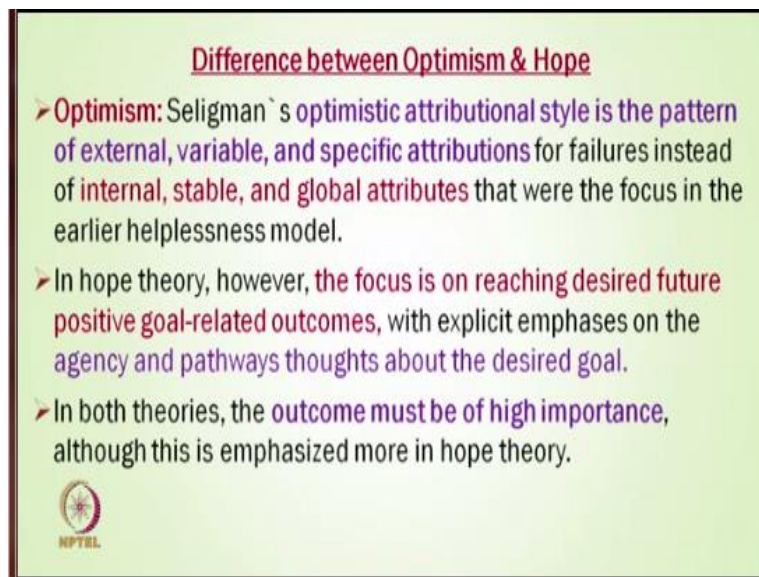
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So, for measuring attributional style, a questionnaire has been developed by Peterson and his associates in 1982. In this ASQ (Attributional Style Questionnaire) respondents are presented with hypothetical events – and ask for the one major cause of each event if it were to happen, so it means they have 1 statement and as per this statement they try to know whether explanations are internal or external, stable or unstable, global or specific.

And on the basis of these explanations they identify whether this person has high level on optimism or on pessimism, another way of assessing this attributional style is they use content

analysis of verbatim explanations which allows written or spoken material to be scored for naturally occurring causal explanations. So, in this case from the total data or data which was spoken or written they try to find out what kind of terms they are using are this optimism oriented or are this pessimism oriented.

So, on the basis all these explanations they identify casual explanations and then they define what kind of person he is on optimism and pessimism dimensions.
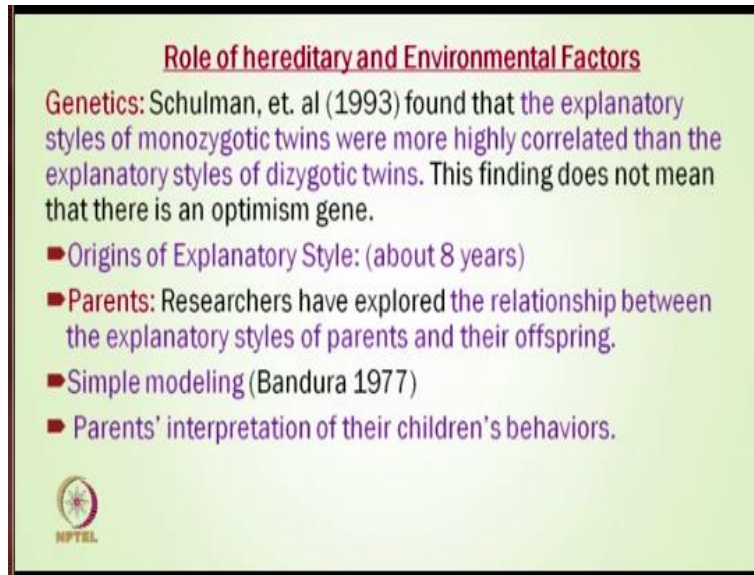
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I think after covering both topics hope and optimism you can easily identify difference between 2 and how psychologists have defined differently these 2 constructs. If we just summarize one by one then we would be able to know exact difference between 2 a little bit more. Optimism - Seligman's optimistic attribution style is the pattern of external, variable and specific attributes for failures instead of internal, stable and global attributes that were the focus in the earlier helplessness model.

So that is the explanation of optimism, on the other hand in hope theory the focus is on reaching desired future positive goal-related outcomes, with explicit emphasis on the agency and pathways thoughts about the desired goals we had. In both theories the outcome must be of high importance although this is emphasized more in hope theory. So, I think that is clear to you when

we have theories of optimism and hope these are quite different and quite different perspective, we have to define optimism and hope.

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Now next point is what is role of heredity and environmental factors when we talk about optimism. There are some studies which are supporting genetics, for example Schulman found that the explanatory style of monozygotic twins was more highly correlated than the explanatory style of dizygotic twins. This finding does not mean that there is an optimism gene however genetic factors are hereditary factors that may have significant role when we are defining optimism.

It has been observed that origin of explanatory style is about 8 years, so 8 years onwards a child start to develop his or her explanatory style and parent's role is very important. Researchers have explored the relationship between the explanatory styles of parents and their children. So, it means there is relation between 2 and sometimes even simple modeling has significant role - parents interpretation of their children's behaviors.

So, accordingly they learn similar kind of behaviors because they are observing that how their parents as well as other significant people are explaining different events. So accordingly, they also learn, they learn it through social modeling.

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Can Pessimists Become Optimists?

- Optimism relates both to neuroticism and to extraversion, and both are known to be genetically influenced. (Scheier et al., 1994), it may be that the observed heritability of optimism reflects these associations.
- Erik- Erikson (1968) held that infants who experience the social world as predictable develop a sense of "basic trust," whereas those who experience the world as unpredictable develop a sense of "basic mistrust."

Insecurity of adult attachment is related to pessimism. This suggests that optimism may derive in part from the early childhood experience of secure attachment (Snyder, 1994).

If pessimism is that deeply embedded in a person's life, can it be changed?

- Role of cognitive-behavioral therapies.
- Personal efficacy training.

Now next point is which is very interesting - can pessimists become optimist? however if we just go on overall view, Seligman already has written a book 'learnt optimism'. So, then there is no doubt but still there are some other studies showing that even role of hereditary factors and we cannot ignore role of those hereditary factors. Optimism relates both to neuroticism and to extraversion and both are known to be genetically influenced.

It may be that the observed heritability of optimism reflects these associations. Erik-Erikson's theory - which I will discuss in next classes in detail - this is also supporting role of childhood experiences when we are saying can we learn optimism or we cannot. Erik-Erikson in 1968 held that infants who experience the social world as predictable develop a sense of basic trust whereas those who experience the world as unpredictable develop a sense of basic mistrust.

So, at very early stage on the basis of this crises basic trust versus basic mistrust, this child develops understanding whether this world is hopeful or it is not hopeful. Insecurity of adult attachments is related to pessimism; this suggests that optimism may derive in part from the early childhood experiences of secure attachment. So, all these studies saying that to some extent our hereditary factors as well as our childhood experiences or what kind of childhood experiences or environment we had - both have significant impact on our optimism.

Again the same question if we rely on the above mentioned studies then can we say that we can change someone's optimism? Or is pessimism that deeply embedded in a person's life that it cannot be changed - that is question which is asked again and again. What are the answers of such kind of statements? There are some studies which are supporting role of therapies, role of intervention programmes, role of training to improve level of optimism. Role of cognitive-behavioral therapies are there and these therapies are supporting, we can change level of optimism by having certain trainings as well as therapies.

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- The focus of such procedures is on increasing specific kinds of competence (e. g., by assertiveness training or social skill training).
- Training in problem solving, selecting and defining obtainable sub-goals, and decision making improves the ways in which a person handles a wide range of everyday situations.
- The tendency must be countered by establishing realistic goals and identifying which situations must be accepted rather than changed. The person must learn to give up unattainable goals and set alternative goals to replace those that cannot be attained (Schulz, 2000).

Is Optimism Always Better Than Pessimism?

- Chesney, and Tipton (1995) studied the extent to which adolescent girls at risk for HIV infection sought out information about HIV testing and agreed to be tested. Those higher in optimism were less likely to expose themselves to the information and were less likely to follow through with an actual test than those lower in optimism (Perkins, et. al, 1993).

Personal efficacy trainings have been observed to be effective and again supporting that it can be learned. The focus of such procedures is on increasing specific kinds of competence - assertive trainings or social skill trainings through which we observe changes in such positive traits. Training in problem solving, selecting and defining obtainable self-goals and decision making improves the ways in which a person handles a wide range of everyday situations.

The tendency must be countered by establishing realistic goals and identifying which situations must be accepted rather than changed. The person must learn to give up unattainable goals and set alternate goals to replace those that cannot be attained. So, like that we learn what is realistic, what way we can do, and what we cannot do and we should stop doing because these are unattainable goals. It has been observed that if this optimism is away from reality then it may be problematic that is why it has been asked, is optimism always better than pessimism?

There are some studies supporting that optimist people may have problem if they are away from reality. Scholars have studied the extent to which adolescence girls at risk for HIV infection sort out information about HIV testing and agreed to be tested. Those higher in optimism were less likely to expose themselves to the information and were less likely to follow through with an actual test then those lower in optimism.

So, these studies showing that sometimes optimism may keep us away from reality and that is why be optimist but with realistic view and that is why some scholars suggest to be realistic rather than only optimist. And ability to perceive half glass empty, half glass full at a time that is important rather having high level of optimism which might be away from reality. Next point is how optimism, pessimism correlated with coping strategies.

It has been observed that optimist and pessimist have clear cut separate kind of coping strategies in the work place, optimist use more problem focused coping, self-control and directed problem solving then do pessimist.

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It has also observed that pessimist use more emotion-focused coping including escapism such as sleeping, eating, drinking using social support and also avoiding people. So, they focus more on emotions. When you focus more on emotions, you can manage for certain period but problems

are lying with you again. On the other hand, if you focus on the problem then you have better way to solve those problems.

So that is why optimists follow better coping style compared to pessimist people. It has been reported that optimist students engage in more active coping, better adjustment and less avoidance coping or poor adjustment then did pessimist students. So, optimist people have better adjustment because of using active coping style, some people are more vulnerable to suicide than others. It is commonly assumed that depression is the best indicator of suicide risk.

But Beck and his associates in 1985 observed that pessimism is actually a stronger predictor of this act, the ultimate disengagement from life because of pessimism we may have. They assessed this pessimism with the help of hopelessness skill, what learnt optimism predicts that is very important for us to know. Because then we are saying that it is linked with positive psychology and why we should learn optimism.
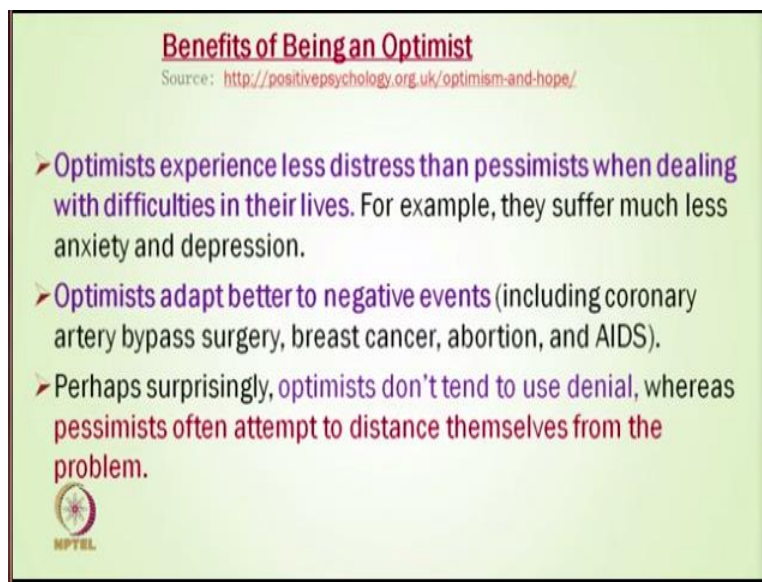
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The various indices of learned optimism have produced a large amount of researches and reported that learnt optimism rather than pessimism explanatory style associated with the following and that is why we recommend to learn optimism : best academic performance, superior athletic performances, more productive work records, greater satisfaction in

interpersonal relations, more effective coping with life stress, less vulnerability to depression, superior physical health, greater life satisfaction.

So, because of all these benefits we can say, we should learn optimism. Again, I am repeating same point here because it is very simple sentence where a psychologist or group of psychologists are saying that better academic performance or superior athletic performance or more productive work records - very simple statements since here. But behind this simple sentence or simple statement there is a rigorous scientific research which they did. And on the basis of those researches they concluded in this manner, so the simple sentence is not that much simple which it seems here.

Now next point is, what are the benefits of being an optimist.

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Optimists experience less distress than pessimists when dealing with difficulties in their lives, for example they suffer much less anxiety and depression. Optimists adapt better to negative events including different type of diseases like coronary artery bypass surgery, breast cancer, abortion and AIDS etc. Perhaps surprisingly optimists do not tend to use denial, whereas pessimists often attempt to distance themselves from the problems and if they are distancing still problems are there and they have negative impact.

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Because of continuity of those problems in their life, optimism is conducive to problem-focused coping, humor, making plans, positive reframing - putting the situation in the best possible light. Optimists are capable of learning lessons from negative situations. Thus, optimist have a coping advantage over pessimism, optimist report more health promoting behaviors like eating healthy diet or having regular medical check-ups and enjoying better physical health than pessimist. Optimists seems to be more productive in the work place, so I think all those theories saying that optimism is better than pessimism and we should learn optimism.

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These 2 constructs we have covered here, I think now you know better what is hope and what is optimism and you know how do we assess or measure hope as well as optimism. We have some

psychological test which are well standardized tools through which we can study someone's level of hope as well as optimism and I think you would agree on this point - these 2 constructs in positive psychology - hope and optimism are very important. Because they are highly correlated with other positive personality traits as well as they are connected with our psychological health, our physical health as well as with our performance. And that is why we should learn to have higher level of hope as well as optimism.

Thank you, in next class we will discuss next constructs. Thank you very much.