

Optimism: The past, present, and future of a positive trait

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1. Optimism: What is it?

- Expectations about the personal future (Carver & Scheier, 1982)
- Continuum: Expect negative vs. positive outcomes



Pessimistic



Optimistic

1. Optimism: How is it studied?

- Measurement: Self-report questions
(Scheier & Carver, 1985; Scheier et al., 1994)
 - *In uncertain times, I usually expect the best.*
 - *If something can go wrong for me, it will.*

1. Optimism: How is it studied?

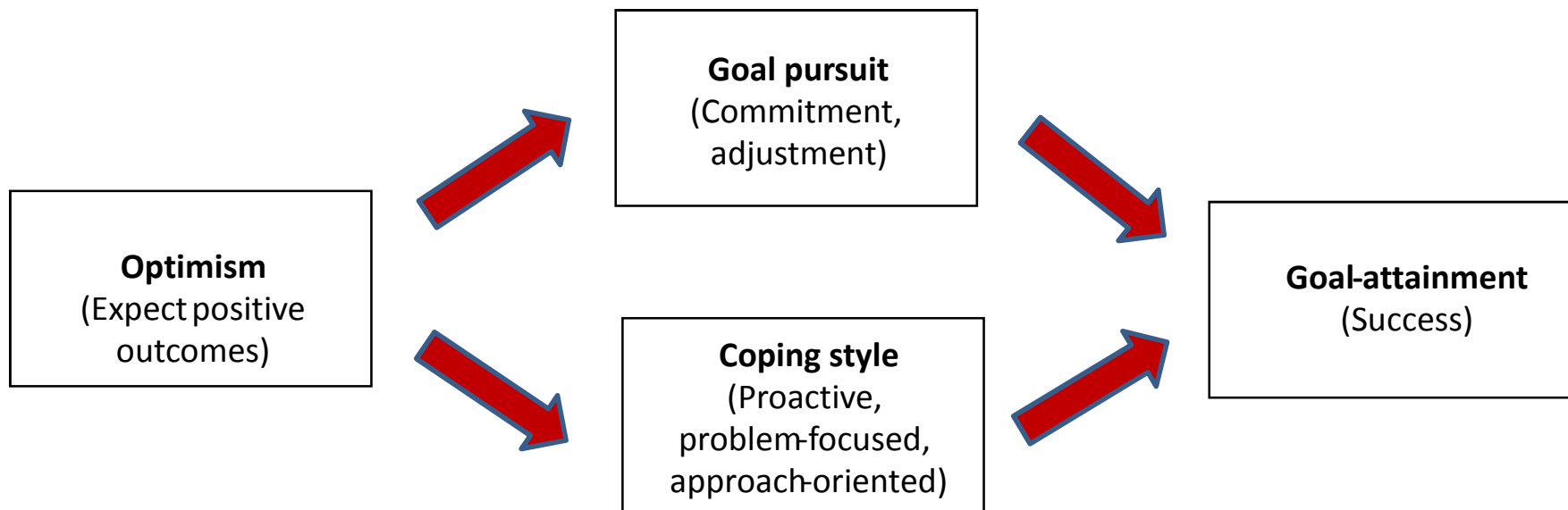
- Measurement: Self-report questions
(Scheier & Carver, 1985; Scheier et al., 1994)
- Focus: Life in general (vs. specific events, domains)
- Stable over time
- Trait: “dispositional optimism”, general way of thinking

1. Optimism: What do we know?

- Higher levels of optimism linked with 'positive' things
 - Higher well-being
 - Less mental illness
 - Stronger social bonds
 - Professional success
 - Less physical impairment/illness

1. Optimism: How does it work?

- Control theory (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Carver et al., 2010)



1. Optimism: How does it work?

- Self-fulfilling prophecy

– Expectation = good things



– Behavior = effective, adaptive



– Result = greater success in life



1. Optimism: How does it work?

- Anticipated future: central role
 - Definition
 - Explaining how it works
- But ... future does not exist in a temporal vacuum
 - Subjective experience of time:
 - *Implications for optimism?*



2. Temporal perspective: What is it?

- How people think about, respond to subjective time
 - Memories about the past
 - Experiences of the present
 - Expectations of the future

2. Temporal perspective: What is it?

- Most research focuses on one temporal period, but ...
- Important intersections
 - Life narratives
 - Self-identity
 - Self-evaluation
 - Cognition, perception, neuroscience

2. Temporal perspective: What do we know?

- Fundamental connections among temporal periods
 - How we view our lives *in the past, at present, in the future*

2. Temporal perspective: Why do we care?

- Optimism
 - Understood as a *future*-oriented trait
 - More to understand using a temporal lens?
 - Roles of the subjective past and present?
- *Optimism from a temporally-expanded perspective*

3. Optimism through a temporal lens

- My research: compare optimists and pessimists
 - How they view their past, present, and future lives
 - Life evaluations, temporal focus
 - Links with positive outcomes

Busseri, Choma, & Sadava (2009), *Personality and Individual Differences*.

Busseri (2013), *European Journal of Personality*.

Busseri, Malinowski, & Choma (2013), *Journal of Research in Personality*.

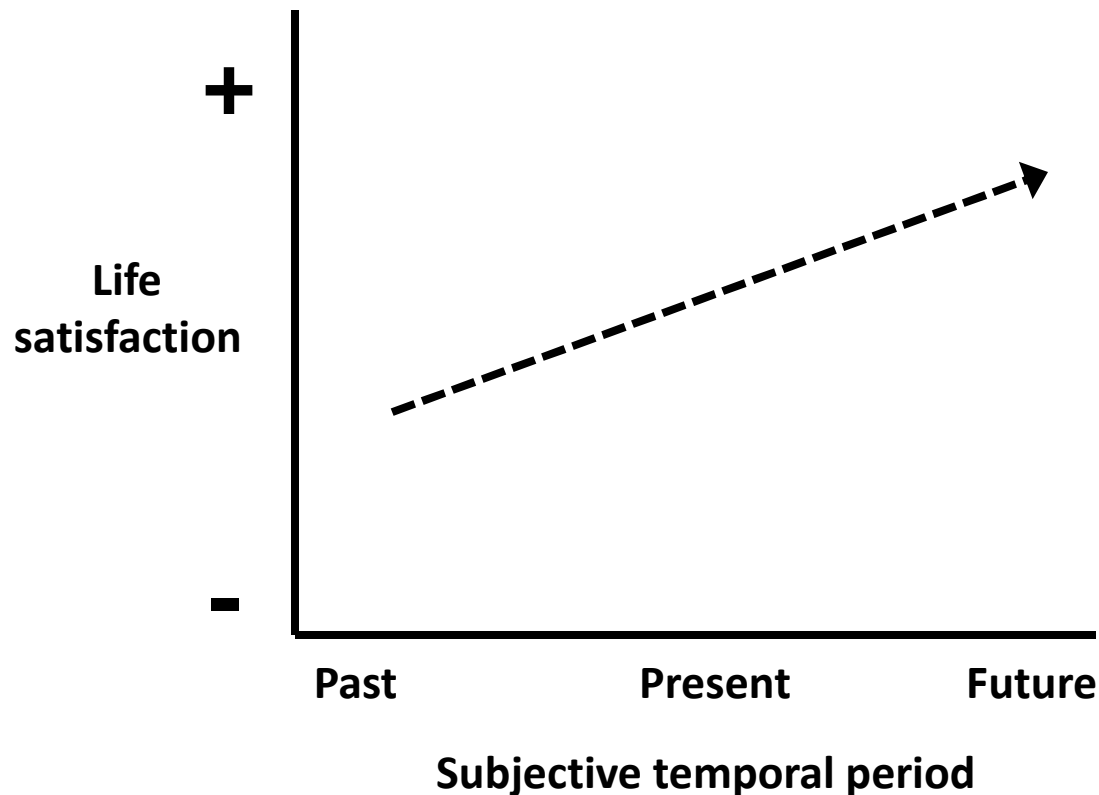
Busseri & Choma (2016), *Journal of Positive Psychology*.

3. Optimism through a temporal lens

- Do optimists view their lives **positively**?
- Optimists vs. pessimists
 - biggest difference ~ expectations for the future?

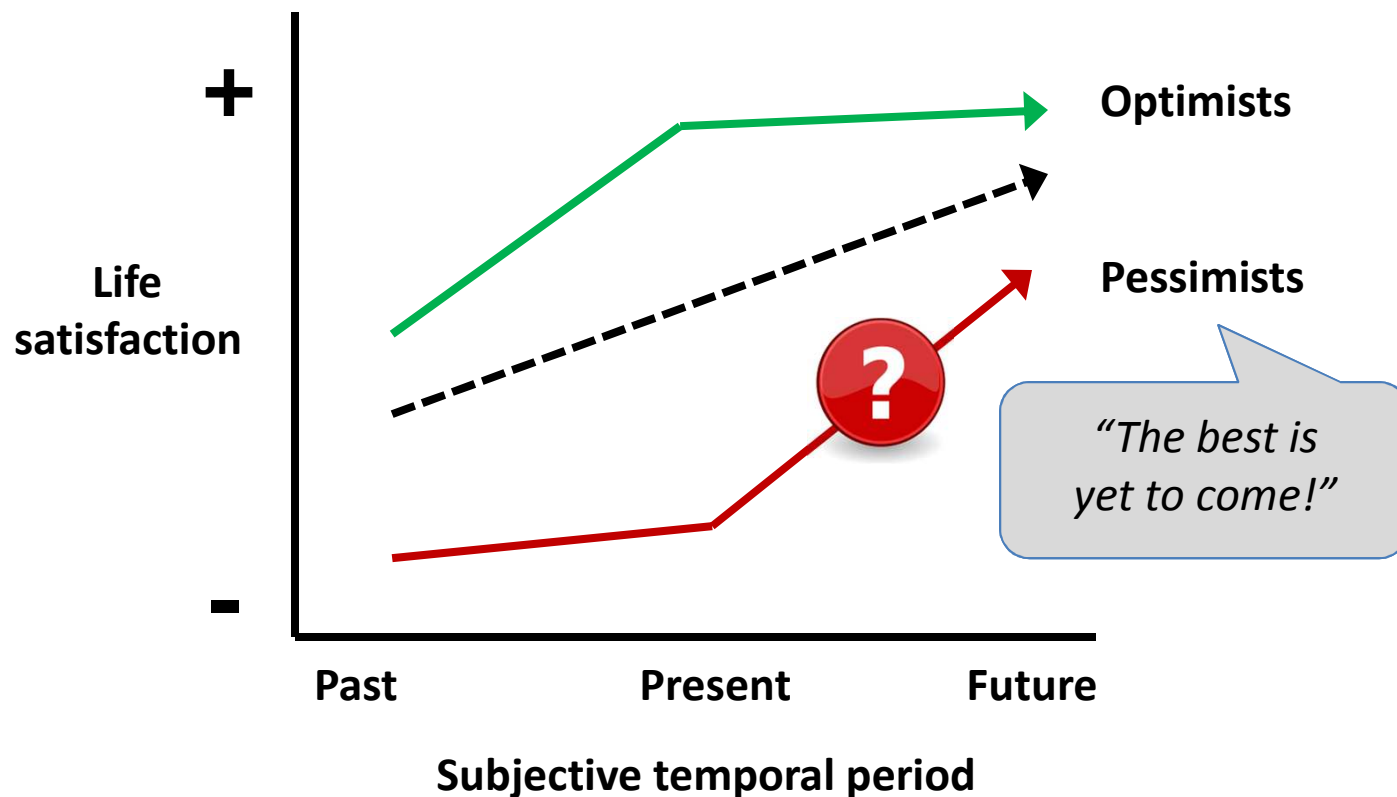
3. Optimism, temporal lens: What do we know?

- General belief: (my) “life gets better and better”



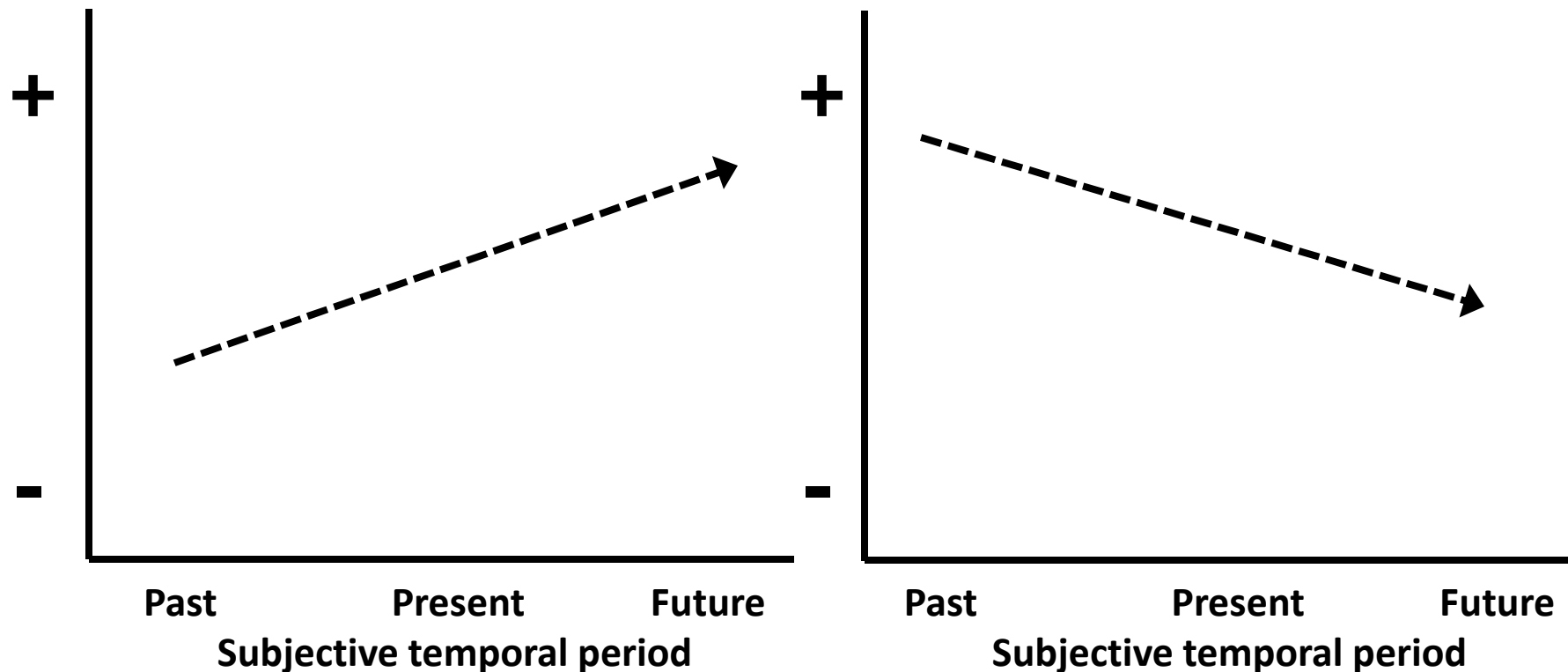
3. Optimism, temporal lens: What do we know?

- Optimists vs. pessimists



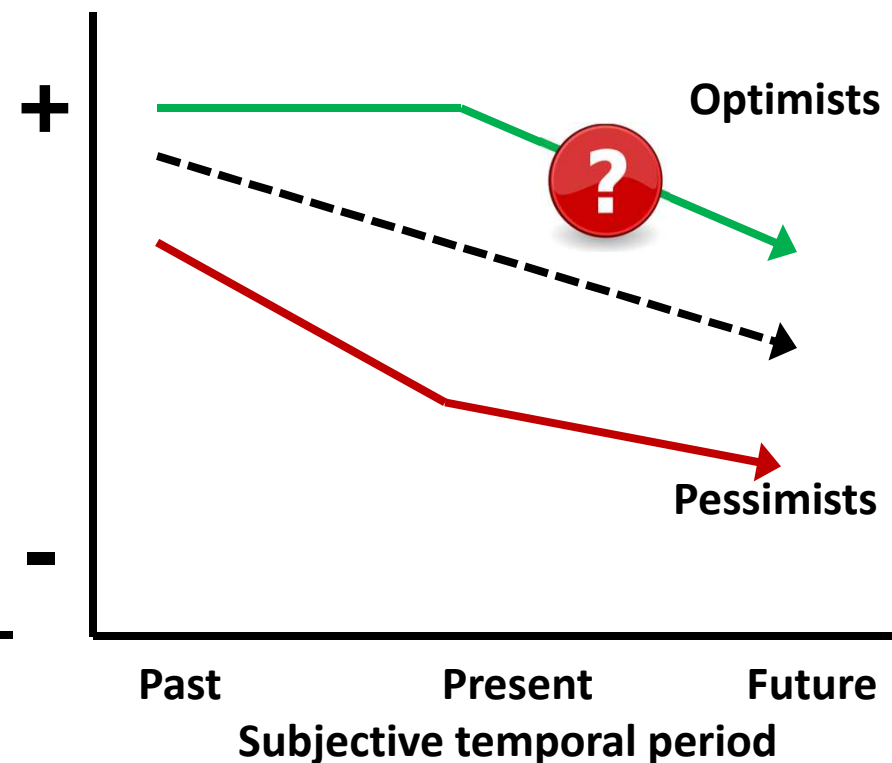
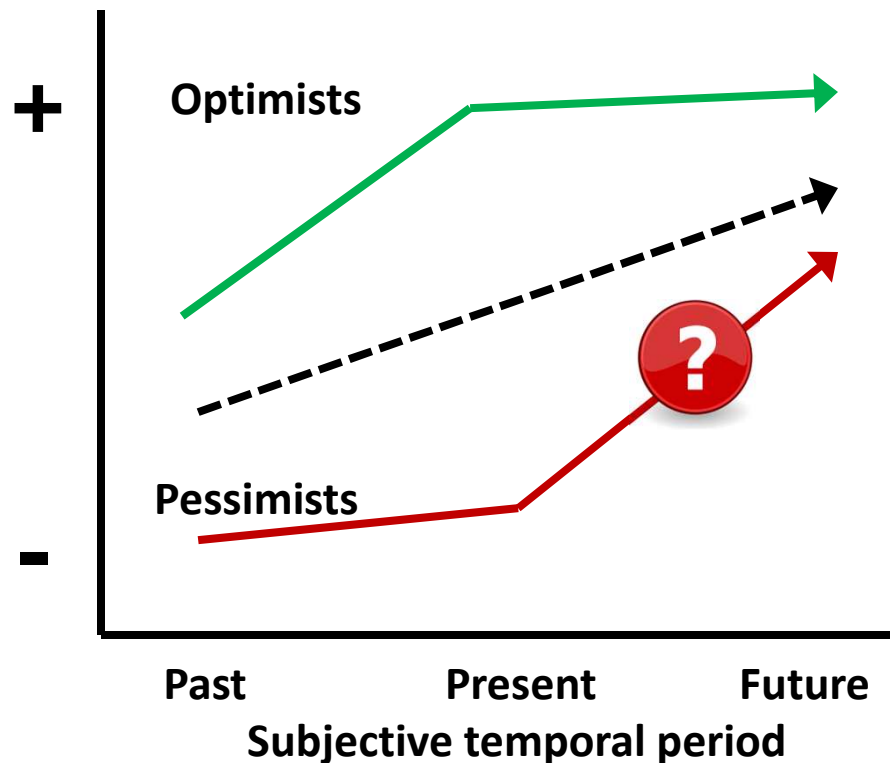
3. Optimism, temporal lens: What do we know?

- Younger adults (<45 yrs) vs. older adults (>70 yrs)



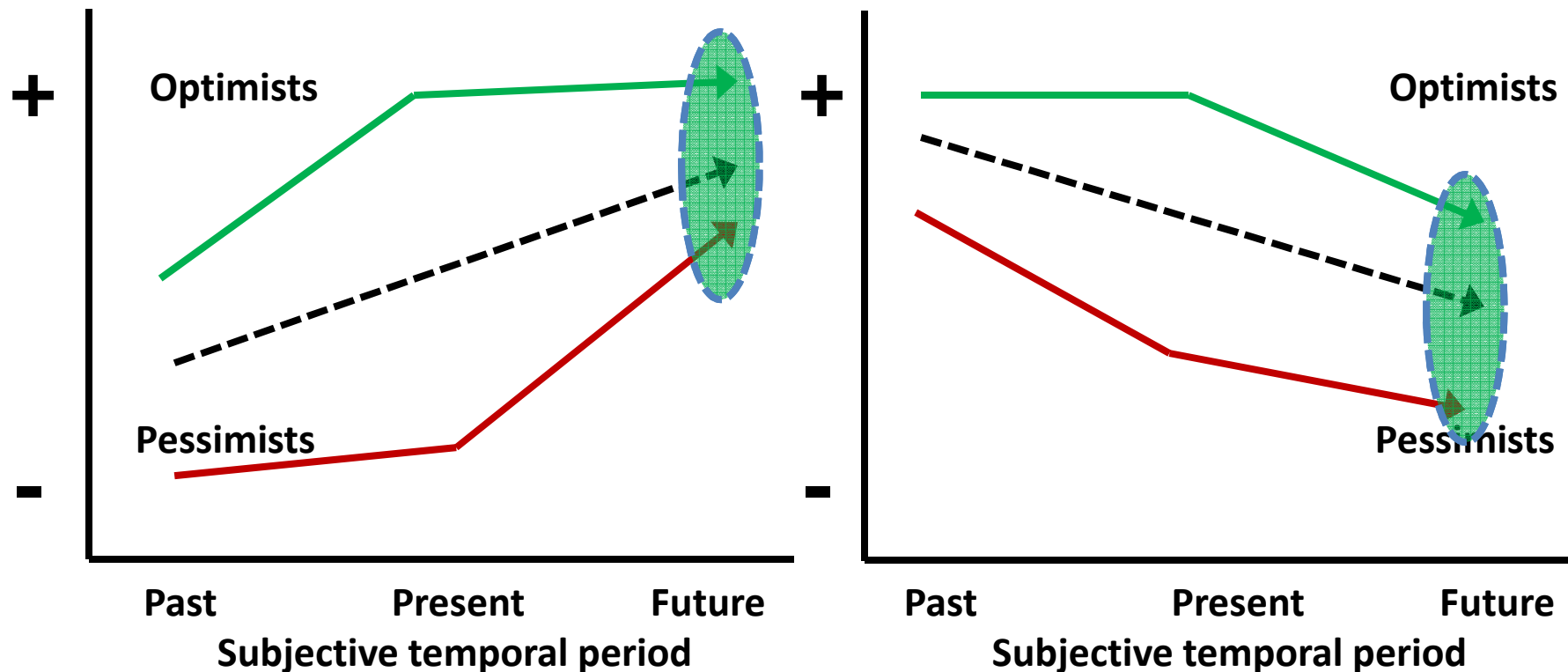
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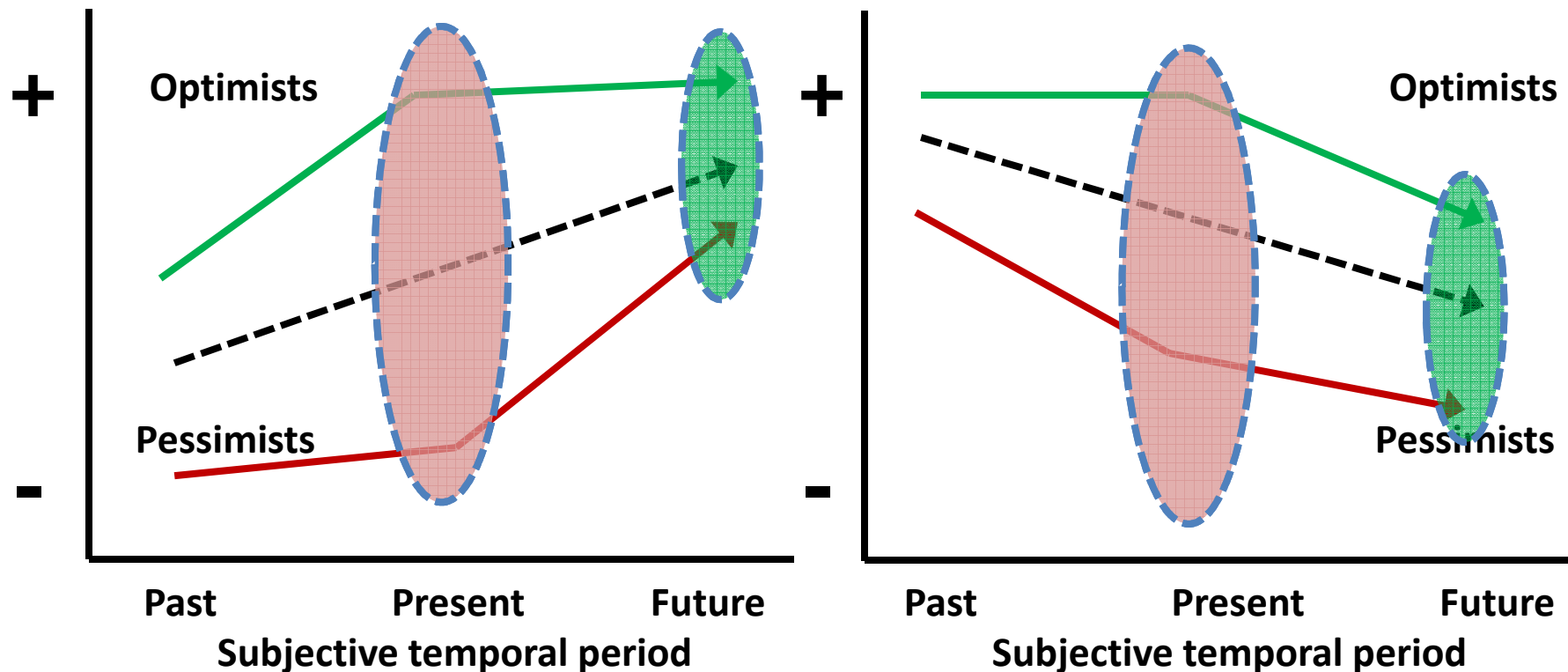
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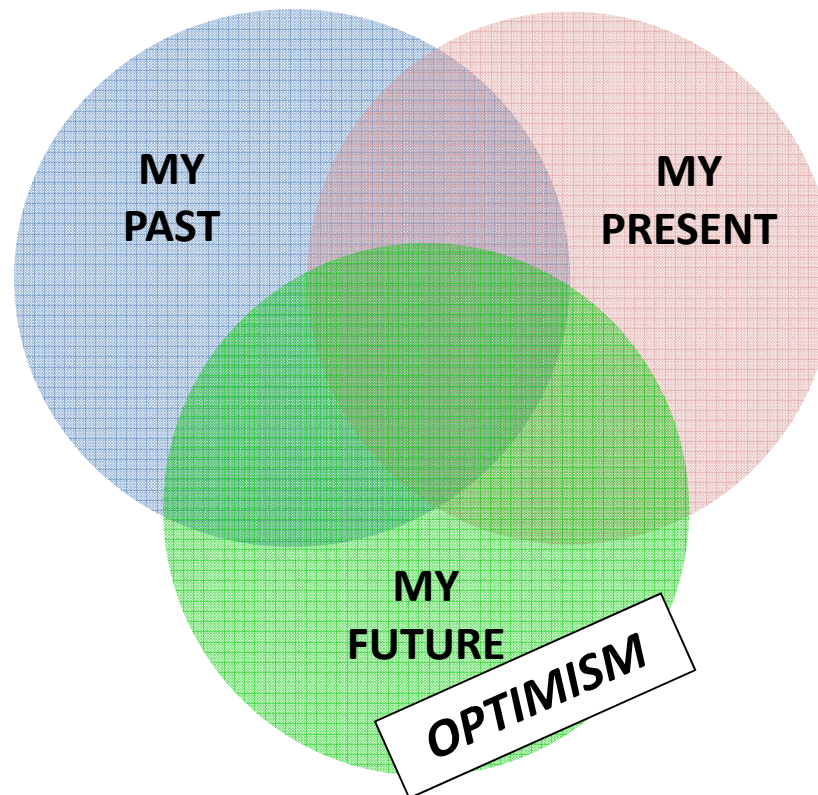
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Optimism: Past, Present, & Future

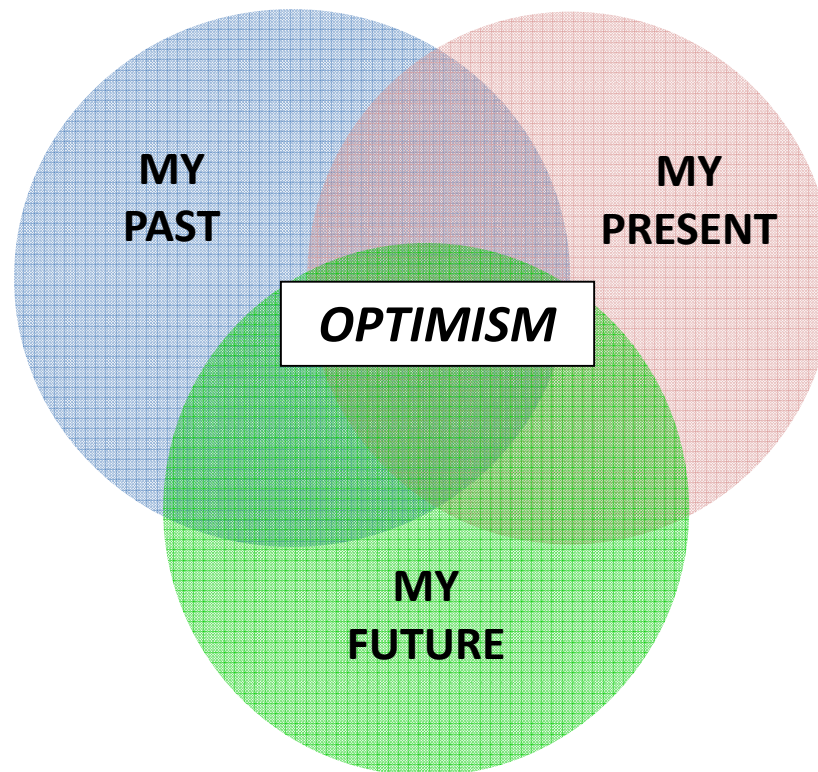
3. Optimism, temporal lens: What do we know?

- Connections among subjective temporal periods



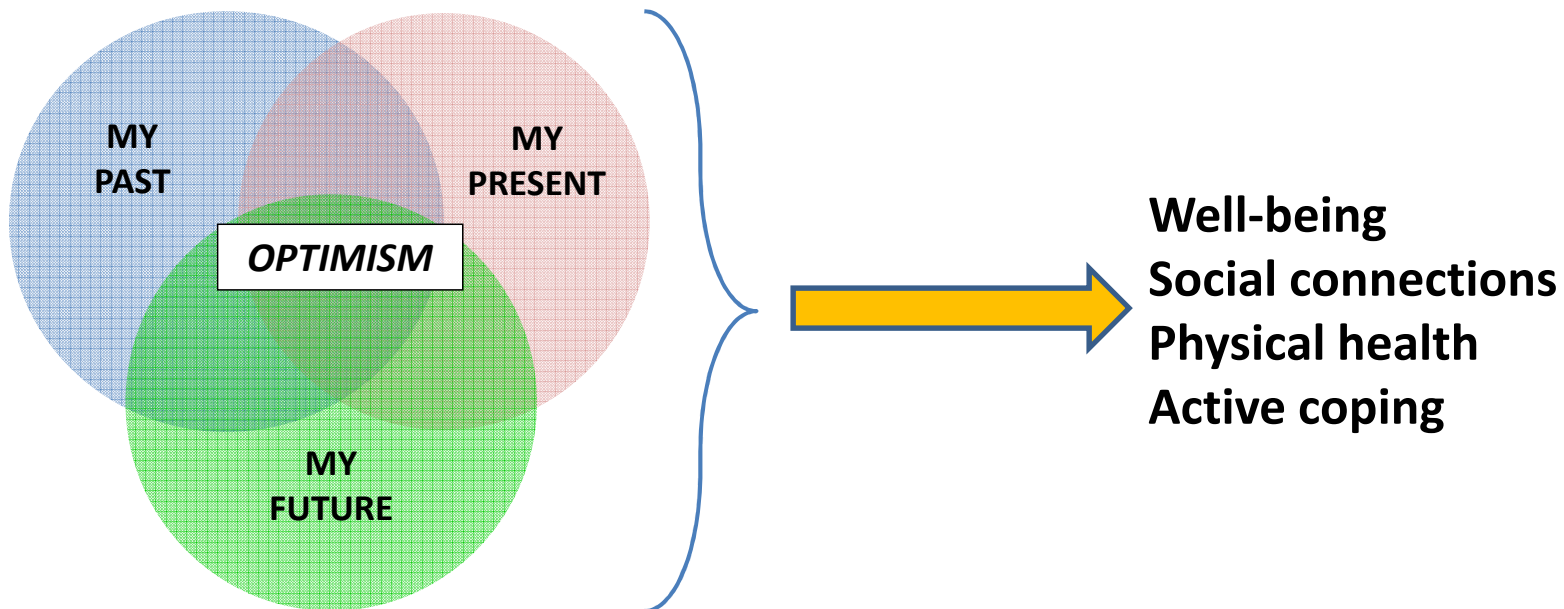
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3. Optimism, temporal lens: What do we know?

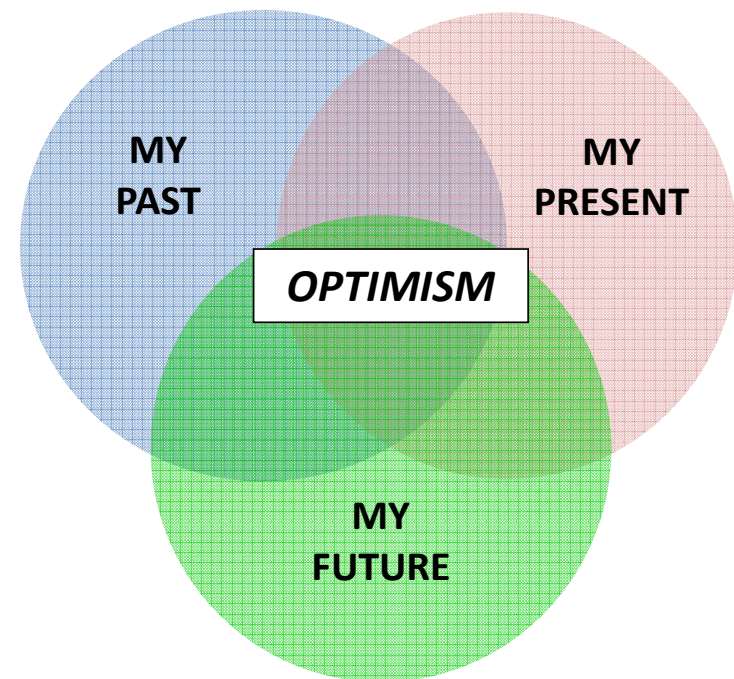
- Links with positive outcomes
 - Anything unique about optimism? ... *no!*



3. Optimism, temporal lens: What do we know?

- Optimism across subjective temporal periods:

→ Positive orientation to one's life



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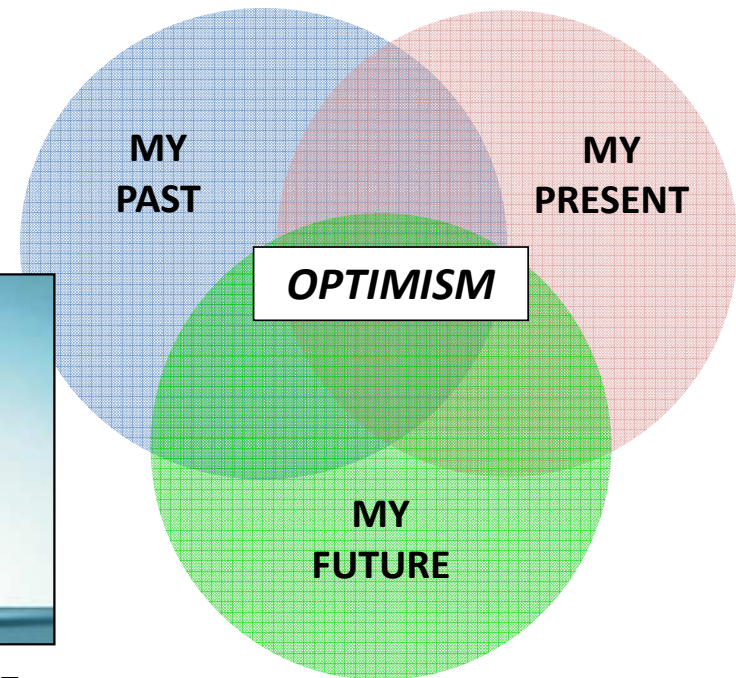
MY PAST



MY PRESENT

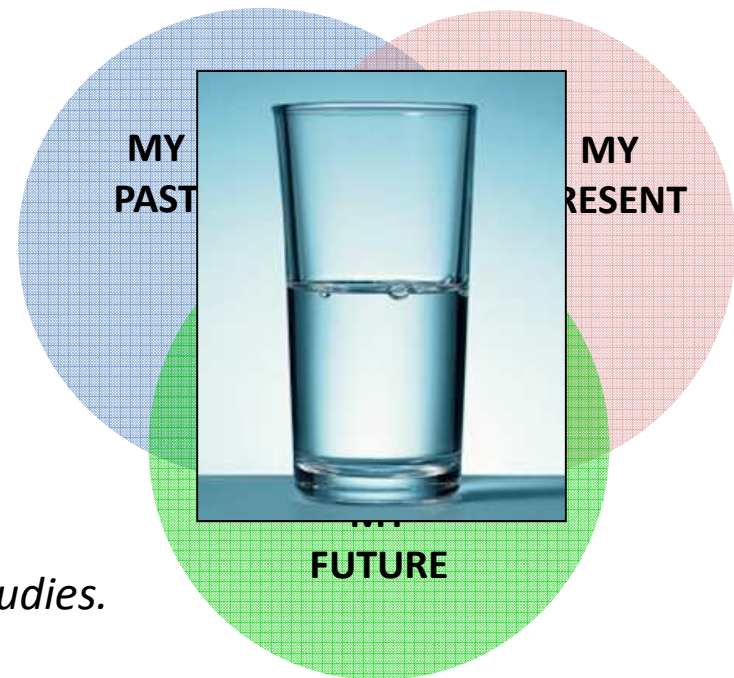


MY FUTURE



3. Optimism, temporal lens: What do we know?

- Optimism across subjective temporal periods:
 - Positive orientation to one's life
 - Broad positive cognitive bias



Nistico & Cummins (2002). *Journal of Happiness Studies*.
Caprara & Steca (2005). *European Psychologist*.

3. Optimism, temporal lens: Why do we care?

- Implications for research and theory
 - Interpreting findings about optimism
 - Central role of anticipated future?
 - Understanding how optimism works
 - Pull of the future vs. power of positive orientation to one's life?

3. Optimism, temporal lens: Why do we care?

- Implications for practice
 - Expecting a brightER future may not be optimistic (?!)
 - Young optimists (expect stability) vs. old (expect decline)
 - Focusing on future vs. past, present, future
 - A plan and a path connecting 'now' to 'then'



4. Conclusions

- Subjective temporal perspective → new insights
- Expecting a bright future vs. bright*ER* future
- Power of optimism → positive orientation

