

The academic advantages of pessimism

AHMED NUZHA OISHEE

Despite brainstorming countless ways to make this article insightful and having re-edited it several times, I have prepared myself for the possibility that readers might find my writing tedious and unhelpful. Similarly, prior to exams, my mind keeps conjuring up scenarios how I might mess up. Pessimism makes me think of innumerable setbacks instead of what can go right.

Optimism is so highly regarded that being a young pessimistic person is deemed “ominous” for our life and academics. However, the key takeaway is that if pessimism makes you understand why something might go wrong and look for ways to prevent that, it can be a positive quality after all. This mentality of hoping for the best while expecting and preparing for the worst is “defensive pessimism”, which can sometimes have tangible academic benefits.



DESIGN: KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

PERFORMING UNDER PRESSURE

Suppose, you have a due paper or exam that you are ill-prepared for. As a pessimist, you assume the worst outcome. The upside is that you voluntarily relinquish the need to perform exceedingly well. Since your results cannot go further downhill than your predictions, you reassure yourself that you can only march upwards from here. When pessimism convinces you that you cannot perform worse, enabling you to prepare accordingly, the brain functions better during important events.

COPING WITH ACADEMIC INFERIORITY COMPLEX

As students, we often find our hard work be unrewarded or fall short of expectations. This leads to lingering self-doubt or feeling incompetent in comparison with our peers. However, defensive pessimists have an easier time acknowledging the fact that there might always be someone who is

better than them at academics. Pessimistic students, knowing their limitations and capabilities, gauge how much control they have over own situation instead of fixating on others’ performance.

LEVERAGING ANXIETY

Optimism aims for success under any circumstance. Consequently, this brings on anxiety to accomplish that. Contrarily, pessimists intensively weigh their probability of success. Rather than festering unrealistic results, pessimism prioritises evaluating vulnerabilities. Pessimistic students find redirecting anxiety into consistent effort to evade improbabilities more fruitful than expecting to excel at something overnight, which provides a sense of control amidst the anxiety.

ENCOURAGES CONSISTENT PREPARATION

Optimism sequesters weaknesses so that nothing can fundamentally go wrong. Whereas the doom and gloom whispers, “What if the teacher sets a difficult question? What if you forget what you’ve studied?” It necessitates focusing on your deficiencies, anticipating setbacks and making concrete plans to circumvent ill-outcomes. Is it not better to be overprepared for what might be an easy test than being underprepared for a difficult one?

KEEPS EXPECTATIONS IN CHECK

Perpetual academic stress and disappointments can lead to burn-outs. Pessimism protects you from the let-downs of subpar results because you started off expecting the worst outcome. That way, you can strive to make amends and do better without the burden of expectations weighing you down.

It’s okay to be the person who notices the cloud in a silver lining. However, it is untenable to despair due to pessimism. Make sure you do not self-sabotage yourself and put effort into self-reflection.

Reference

PositivePsychology.com (August 14, 2017). *The Upside of Defensive Pessimism: The potential benefit of anxiety*

Nuzha forgives people for pronouncing her name wrong and wallows in books and anxiety. Suggest her fiction at nuzhaoishee1256504@gmail.com



PHOTO: BAGH & CO.

How pets help our mental health

TAJREEN TABASSUM NUSHBA

Imagine an adorable puppy wagging its tail as soon as it sees you, or a cranky old cat sitting on your lap and staring at you with large eyes. The effect would be immediate –you can feel yourself instinctively grin, and a terrible day would turn into a better one. An adorable defenceless kitten pawing at our face would soften even the most jaded and hardened one among us.

What most people don’t realise is that pets can have a significantly larger long-term impact on our mental health.

Although individual experiences may vary, it can be argued that pets positively impact the mental health of their human companions in the vast majority of cases. Most of us can relate to craving affection and companionship, especially during our time spent in quarantine.

Our basic need for human touch may go unsatisfied, especially in homes where physical affection isn’t as freely given. Hugging friends also become a rare occurrence during our mutually busy lives. Interacting with our pets through touch can alleviate that craving since their affection is provides positive sensory input. Coming home to a loving animal companion after a stressful day can feel immensely comforting.

Furthermore, as some studies have shown, merely petting or playing with pets can raise oxytocin and dopamine levels, which create positive feelings and serve as a good bonding experience for both the person and their pet.

Petting and embracing our pets can provide sensory stress relief for those who suffer from anxiety. Pets can also be an accessible source of mutual affection for people who may be deprived of that level of comfort due to social anxiety. Animals live in the moment and their love for us is not contingent upon painstakingly going through layers of social cues before coming to a position where affection can become a granted thing. Asking for a hug from another person, no matter how close we might be to them, can still be daunting at times. Fear of being judged or questioned can stop us from even asking. Pets can give us that quick boost of serotonin without any prelude.

In the long run, having an animal to care for can make us feel loved and wanted even when we are at our lowest. It can also assist us in implementing some structure into our lives. Feeding, walking, and caring for a pet can help us stick to a schedule, which can be especially difficult for those of us who become easily distracted or often get lost in our own heads.

Pets also encourage us in becoming more active in our daily lives, which is something that many of us avoid. Walking our dogs or playing with a cat encourages physical activity when we might just want to stay in bed all day during our more depressive periods.

Pets are not a solution to our mental health problems, but at the very least, they can give us a reason to smile even when we feel as though we don’t have much to smile about, which is a big feat in and of itself.

Nushba is uselessly raging about the patriarchy and crying because her cat doesn’t love her. Please send help at nushba.tajreen@gmail.com