

LEWIS, KELLY A., Ph.D., May 2016

Lifespan Development
and Educational Sciences

WHEN IT COMES TO TEST TAKING, IS A POSITIVE OUTLOOK TOO
OPTIMISTIC? (51 pp.)

Co-Directors of Dissertation: Christopher A. Was, Ph.D.
Bradley J. Morris, Ph.D.

This investigation examines the relationship between optimism, self-efficacy, and test score predictions, post-dictions, and actual test performance. Optimism, a positive outlook toward the future, has been correlated with several positive behavioral and psychological outcomes. However, in some settings this positive outlook may lead to less desirable outcomes, for example, overconfidence on an exam. Alternatively, self-efficacy, believing one is capable of achieving a goal, has been linked with increased effort toward a task. Examining optimism and self-efficacy is important in relation to test taking as being overly optimistic about performance on an upcoming exam may lead to overconfidence in predictions of scores. Self-efficacy may lead to greater accuracy of test score predictions. In this investigation, students enrolled in an educational psychology course completed a measure of optimism, a self-efficacy scale, predicted test performance, completed the exam, and post-dicted scores on that exam. Results indicated a relationship between optimism and self-efficacy, and higher self-efficacy was related to higher exam scores. Bias on test score pre and post-dictions was also related to exam scores. Optimism and self-efficacy did not relate to overconfidence in exam score predictions or post-dictions. Surprisingly, students who kept self-efficacy consistent throughout the semester scored higher on the final exam compared to students' whose level of self-efficacy changed from the start to the end of the semester.