

2016

## Perceived Social Support Mediates the Association Between Optimism and Active Coping

Tracy Chapman

*University of South Dakota*, [tracy.chapman@usd.edu](mailto:tracy.chapman@usd.edu)

Terry Chi

*Northwestern College - Orange City*, [terry.chi@nwcsiowa.edu](mailto:terry.chi@nwcsiowa.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nwcommons.nwcsiowa.edu/northwesternreview>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Chapman, Tracy and Chi, Terry (2016) "Perceived Social Support Mediates the Association Between Optimism and Active Coping," *Northwestern Review*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://nwcommons.nwcsiowa.edu/northwesternreview/vol1/iss1/10>

This Collaborative Scholarship is brought to you for free and open access by NWCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Northwestern Review by an authorized editor of NWCommons. For more information, please contact [ggrond@nwcsiowa.edu](mailto:ggrond@nwcsiowa.edu).

---

## Perceived Social Support Mediates the Association Between Optimism and Active Coping

### Abstract

The current study investigated two mediation models that may partially explain the association between optimism and active coping. One-hundred fifty-three participants completed self-report surveys to assess each construct. Results showed that while high perceived social support completely mediated the association between optimism and active coping, internal locus of control was not a mediator of the association. Implications from this study suggest that perceived social support plays a significant role in the relationship between optimistic personality type and active coping style.

### About the Author

A Northwestern College graduate, Tracy Chapman now is pursuing a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling at the University of South Dakota. This poster reflected the research done in her senior psychology thesis.

At Northwestern College, Dr. Chi has been primarily responsible for teaching General Psychology, Theories of Personality, Psychopathology, and Research Design and Introductory Statistics. His articles have appeared in peer-reviewed publications that include the *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, the *Journal of Attention Disorders*, the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, and the *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment*. Dr. Chi has also presented his research at the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, the Association for Psychological Science, the International Society for Research in Child and Adolescent Psychopathology, the Midwestern Psychological Association, the Society for Research in Adolescence, and the Society for Research in Child Development.

Dr. Chi has a strong record of involving students in collaborative research. Since 2000, he has worked with approximately 50 undergraduate research assistants. Most of them have continued onto M.A./Ph.D. training in counseling, clinical psychology, or experimental psychology.



# Perceived Social Support Mediates the Association Between Optimism and Active Coping



Tracy L. Chapman<sup>1</sup> and Terry C. Chi<sup>2</sup>, PhD

<sup>1</sup>University of South Dakota, <sup>2</sup>Northwestern College

## Abstract

The current study investigated two mediation models that may partially explain the association between optimism and active coping. One-hundred fifty-three participants completed self-report surveys to assess each construct. Results showed that while high perceived social support completely mediated the association between optimism and active coping, internal locus of control was not a mediator of the association. Implications from this study suggest that perceived social support plays a significant role in the relationship between optimistic personality type and active coping style.

## Introduction

Stress is an inevitable component of daily human life. Part of effectively dealing with stress is the ability to cope. Coping has been divided into a number of different styles; for the current study, we focused on active and avoidant coping styles. Active coping emphasizes a direct approach to reduce, eliminate, or tolerate stress and other problem situations. Prior research findings report that people who engage in active coping have a greater likelihood of resolving symptoms of stress and producing favorable outcomes such as positive adjustment and overall physical and psychological well-being. Conversely, one with an avoidant coping style might handle stress by mental and behavioral disengagement, as well as focusing on and venting emotions, and were more likely to have distress, maladjustment, depression, repressed anger, and low social support.

**Optimism as a Predictor:** Abundant research has revealed a significant correlation between optimistic personality types and active coping style. Optimists tend to hold an expectancy of favorable outcomes, engage in challenges, are skilled in positive cognitive restructuring, and make the most of their social support. Each of these strategies has been shown to be an important aspect in active coping.

**Possible Mechanisms:** Because both locus of control (LOC) and perceived social support have been shown to be associated with both optimistic personality style and active coping, they were hypothesized to act as mediating mechanisms that may explain the optimism-active coping link.

**Current Study:** (1) Does optimistic personality predict active coping style? (2) Do either LOC or perceived social support act as conduits through which optimistic

## Participants

One hundred and fifty-three individuals (72% females; age range 18-66), the majority of whom were Caucasians, were recruited via classroom recruitment in a small rural liberal arts college, social networking sites, online postings, and word-of-mouth communication.

## Measures of Key Constructs

All materials and procedures were approved by the Northwestern College's IRB Committee, and all participants digitally signed an online informed consent form prior to participation. Participants then completed a series of five online surveys ([https://nwciova.col.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_8qDaanVR1FSmYRf](https://nwciova.col.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8qDaanVR1FSmYRf)) presented in varying order for the purpose of eliminating order effects. The surveys included the following:

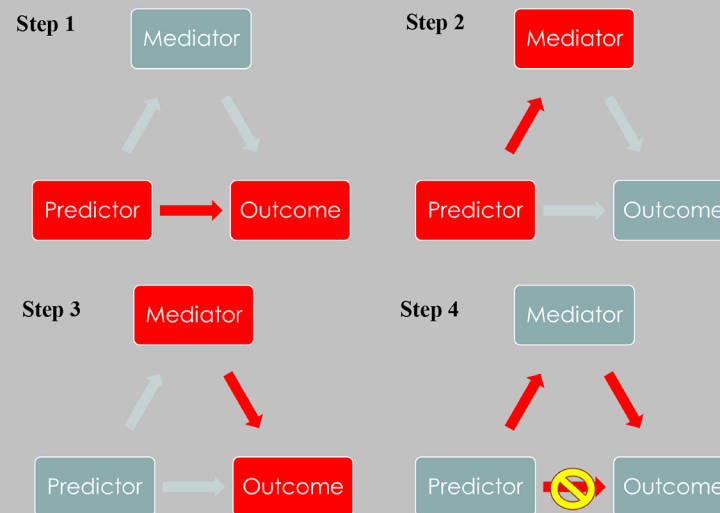
<b>Predictor: Optimism</b>	<i>Life Orientation Test</i>
<b>Mediator 1: Perceived Social Support</b>	<i>Multidimensional Scale of Social Support</i>
<b>Mediator 2: LOC</b>	<i>I-E Scale; IPC Scale</i>
<b>Outcome Variable: Active Coping</b>	<i>Coping with Stress Scale</i>

## Data Analysis

### 4-Step Baron and Kenny (1986) Mediation Approach

- 4 steps:
- 1) Regression of Optimism on Active Coping
  - 2) Regression of Optimism on Perceived Social Support / LOC
  - 3) Regression of Perceived Social Support / LOC on Active Coping
  - 4) Regression of Optimism on Active Coping controlling for Perceived Social Support / LOC

First 3 steps must be significant for a mediation to be possible

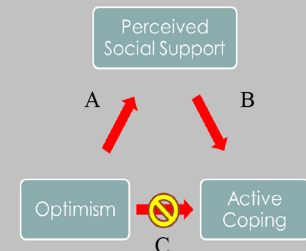


## Results

**LOC was shown not to be a mediator of optimism-active coping link.**

**Perceived social support was shown to be a full mediator.**

- Path C** – statistically significant ( $\beta = .19; p = .033$ )
- Path A** – statistically significant ( $\beta = .39; p = .000$ )
- Path B** – statistically significant ( $\beta = .29; p = .000$ )



**Path C** no longer statistically significant when controlling for paths A and B.

## Conclusions

The present study found a statistically significant relationship between optimism and active coping. Therefore, the findings showed that participants who were more optimistic reported more active coping behaviors. We also wanted to examine possible mechanisms that may be responsible for the link between optimism and active coping. In other words, we wanted to know *how* optimism increases active coping. Two possible mediators—internal locus of control and perceived social support—were tested.

Analysis showed that perceived social support was a full mediator of the optimism-active coping link. This finding showed that in the current sample, the extent to which optimistic individuals engaged in active coping was completely explained by their *perceptions* of social support.

**What does this mean?** This pattern of results seem to indicate that the “active ingredient” of *how* optimists actively deal with their life problems was not because they felt they have control over their lives. Instead, their optimism helped them to believe they have ample social support, and that perception helped them to be more active problem-solvers in their lives.