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MAKING GOOD THINGS HAPPEN:

OPTIMISM AND THE RANGE OF PERSONAL SOCIAL NETWORKS

by

Matthew Anders Andersson

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Arts degree
in Sociology
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

December 2010

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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MASTER'S THESIS

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This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee
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ABSTRACT

Using the 2004 General Social Survey, I illuminate how dispositional optimism as a form of emotional capital enhances personal network range while also contributing to public goods through the formation of heterophilous ties. Network size and diversity are conceptualized as outcomes of optimistic functioning, which is marked by sociability, positive emotion, and problem-focused coping. I find that optimism is linked to substantial leverage in overall, non-kin, and extended network sizes on par with several years of education. Moreover, optimism yields more types of network heterophily than does educational attainment. I discuss limitations of the current study while also identifying future directions for research on emotional capital in the creation of social capital.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Those who are advantaged in terms of achieved statuses (such as education) and ascribed statuses (such as race) tend to have larger, more expansive social networks (Fischer 1982; Marsden 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Brashears 2006) and thus enjoy greater access to information, support, and resources. However, status variables explain only a modest proportion of the variance in personal network characteristics, which suggests that examining other types of factors may be a fruitful avenue of inquiry. Indeed, almost three decades ago, Fischer (1982:254) wrote: "Had we been able to measure dimensions such as introversion/extraversion, fatalism/mastery, cognitive dogmatism/complexity, and the like, we would have no doubt been better able to explain the differences in networks among our respondents." While this is not a formal theoretical statement so much as an informal scholarly remark, it still carries weight to this day, as little research has assessed how actors are predisposed to structure their own social environments (Kalish and Robins 2006).

Exceptions to this trend appear mostly outside the purview of the literature on network stratification. Numerous studies have established relationships between dispositions and overall network size. For instance, Asendorpf and Wilpers (2008) found that extraversion is related to number of peer relationships. Other studies have related dispositions to network structure. For instance, Burt, Jannotta and Mahoney (1998) related the presence of structural holes in a network to the ego's desires for conformity, security, and stability, such that more conservative individuals evidence fewer structural

holes (i.e., greater structural constraint) in their networks. Likewise, Hallinan and Kubitschek (1988) showed how extraverts strive for transitivity within their networks; at the same time, they recruit a relatively large number of alters overall. In another interesting example, Doeven-Eggens and colleagues (2008) examined how personality factors shape the peer versus family composition of social networks among university students. They found that autonomous individuals tend to exhibit networks based predominantly in family or in a mix between family and peers, whereas extraverted students report peer-based networks. Finally, Oh and Kilduff (2008) found that individuals who are high self-monitors tend to occupy brokerage positions within larger networks. Indeed, self-monitoring evokes the glib versatility of the Medici family, as well as its advantageous structural position during the Renaissance (Padgett and Ansell 1993).

Meanwhile, there has been rising sociological interest in emotional and psychological factors as they relate to the dynamics of social inequality. Appropriating Bourdieu's (1984) work on cultural capital, Cahill (1999) posited emotional capital as an embodied resource relevant to "processes of occupational selection and exclusion, socialization, and status reproduction" (102). More recently, Froyum (2010:39) conceptualized emotions as "interactional resources;" high social status may coincide with "a removed and restrained form of emotional capital."

Particular psychological factors such as optimism have entered discussions of capital, though interest seems to be very limited at this point and restricted to studies of organizations. For instance, Luthans, Youssef, and Avolio (2007) identified several kinds of psychological capital, such as efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency. These forms of

capital are related to outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment (Youssef and Luthans 2007).

While the literatures on dispositions and networks and on emotional capital hold promise in and of themselves, their commerce would be quite fruitful. Indeed, no discernible emphasis has been placed on the extent to which individuals exert agency over their core support networks and thus over local instantiations of social capital and social inequality. To begin to remedy this situation, I propose that assessing the role of personality in shaping support networks is crucial to a fuller understanding of network stratification as well as the creation of social capital. In particular, I propose that personality holds ramifications for the volume, diversity, and mutual acquaintanceship of alters that one recruits into one's network, and thus for the perpetuation of network-based inequalities. While structural factors partially shape the formation of social ties, so too are actors involved in building their social networks (e.g., Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). If we are to fully understand how networks are formed and maintained, we have to take the characteristics of actors seriously.

Following Fischer, there are many seeming candidates for illustrating the importance of personality in network stratification. In the present study, I focus on dispositional optimism as an exemplar of this approach. Optimism is related to other psychological factors such as extraversion which already have been identified as affecting network range. However, unlike extraversion, optimism has explicit ties to both civic engagement and the recruitment of social resources. Indeed, optimism is related to social capital through generalized trust (Putnam 2000; Uslaner 2002). Moreover, optimism has cognitive, emotional, and social ramifications that are directly relevant to

the building of numerous and diverse social ties. While other personal dispositions such as mastery and sense of control have been found to reflect and influence social inequality (Mirowsky and Ross 2007; Turner and Lloyd 1999), these dispositions do not possess established, direct ties to interactional determinants such as sociability, positive emotion, problem-focused coping, and cognitive flexibility, as optimism does.

In the present research, I argue that dispositional optimism is a form of human or emotional capital in the creation of social capital, and that it contributes to high-range network formation net of other kinds of capital such as education. To evaluate this claim, I present models which examine the hypothesis that optimism enhances personal network range while aiding in the creation of social capital through the formation of diverse ties which join social circles.

CHAPTER II

PERSONAL SOCIAL NETWORKS: BEYOND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Models of core discussion networks in America (Marsden 1987; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2006) focus on demographic factors as they are linked to network stratification. In both 1985 and 2004, stratification according to education and race was robust (McPherson et al. 2006; see also Fischer 2009, McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Brashears 2009). Increasing levels of education were associated with larger networks whereas racial minority status predicted smaller network size. Even more, education was associated with close ties outside the household as well as lessened network density. That is, highly educated respondents reported socializing more with non-kin and spanning a greater number of social circles.

However, it is still unclear how and to what extent demographic factors and related forms of capital (such as education) contribute to the totality of network stratification processes. I mean this in two respects. First, psychological factors may partially explain links among demographic variables and personal network range. Second, psychological factors may function as largely independent predictors of network range. It is even possible that the effects of psychological capital would be on the same scale as those linked to particular demographic differences. Through a more unified modeling approach, I assess both of these possible adjustments to a solely demographic model of personal network range.

Optimism in particular is dispersed across traditional lines of age, race, education,

and gender, and is an underappreciated factor in social outcomes. It carries broad implications for how situations are approached and how challenges are negotiated – in short, for personal well-being (Carver and Scheier 2002; Peterson 2000). Optimism is marked by sociability and the constructive use of information. Thus, optimists are likely to be appealing as interaction and exchange partners.

In the next chapter, I first provide a brief background on how optimism relates to goal-oriented action, and I clarify what optimism is and is not. Then, I propose links between optimism and the building of high-range personal social networks, in terms of both tie formation and diversity of resources. Amid their proactive coping efforts, optimists should embed themselves among a heterogeneous group of associates that offers a variety of instrumental, material, and expressive resources. Therefore, relative to pessimists, optimists should have networks that are larger, draw more on non-kin, and are more heterophilous. However, potential links between optimism and personal network range have yet to be assessed.

CHAPTER III

BACKGROUND ON OPTIMISM

Much of our thinking focuses on the planning and imagination of life events (Wilson and Gilbert 2003). Optimism, in its simplest sense, refers to an "expectation that good things will happen" (Chang 2001:5). It shapes and reflects the life course as "an emotionally-charged, individual orientation towards the future" and is a substantial component of agency (Hitlin and Elder 2007:47). Thus, optimism shapes the self-regulation of action and holds implications for task persistence versus disengagement from goal pursuit. While it is related to constructs such as locus of control (Rotter 1966), self-esteem (Rosenberg and Pearlin 1978), and generalized trust (Uslaner 1998; 2002), optimism does not make any direct claims on the determination of outcomes nor on one's abstract view of mankind. Rather, it pertains to one's prevailing expectations across a variety of situations, regardless of how they might come about, with particular relevance to the attainment of personal goals. One's upbringing and personal experiences are thought to be important for the development of optimism (e.g., Carver and Scheier 2002; Seligman 1991; 2007).

Carver and Scheier (1985; 1987; 2002) maintain that one's generalized outcome expectancies are especially relevant to life outcomes, as most social situations are new in some regard, evolve with time, and are multiply determined. Thus, while specific beliefs (e.g., "I am a good parent," "I manage my time well") are relevant to the pursuit of various goals, generalized expectancies are overarching beliefs which infuse virtually all goal pursuits and therefore shape one's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral tendencies.

Segerstrom and Sephton (2010) found that generalized expectancies robustly predict personal well-being at the beginning of a distinctive life phase such as postbaccalaureate study; with time, phase-specific expectancies (such as those relevant to classroom performance) seem to have a more direct bearing on adjustment.

Optimism as "Non-Negative," Constructive Thinking

While optimists expect good outcomes for themselves across a variety of life situations, optimism is *not* a matter of being naively positive. Rather, it is based in "non-negative thinking" that, quite the opposite from being naïve, involves responding realistically and constructively to setbacks (Seligman 1991:221). While some research suggests that optimism is a form of idealism or, likewise, makes one overly sensitive to life setbacks due to the naïveté of "positive thinking" (e.g., Weinstein and Lachendro 1982; Weinstein 1987), this likely reflects a confusion of different types of "optimism" which have "differential relations to the management of negative information" (Aspinwall and Brunhart 1996:994).

That is, while dispositional optimism is routinely associated with a variety of beneficial outcomes, other forms of so-called positive thinking may be associated with denial or blaming the victim and thus are potentially maladaptive (see Peterson 2000). Indeed, dispositional optimism is associated with health-promoting behaviors and taking preventative measures (Scheier and Carver 2002). Hinting at a possible mechanism, Aspinwall and Brunhart (1996) found that optimists show enhanced attention to and recall of information about health complications (see also Radcliffe and Klein 2002). Optimism may function as a personal resource that enables one to encounter and

effectively address unpleasant facts and circumstances (Aspinwall, Richter, and Hoffman 2001; Taylor, Kemeny, Reed, Bower, and Gruenewald 2000).

Cognitively, optimists build attributions for negative events that allow room for improvement or change.[1] Attributions comprise three empirically distinct dimensions: permanence, pervasiveness, and degree of personal responsibility (Seligman 1991; Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, and Gillham 2007). That is, people understand life events in terms of how enduring and universal their causes are, and also in terms of how responsible they feel for what transpired (Abramson, Seligman, and Teasdale 1978). Optimism entails assigning the appropriate amount of blame to oneself when something goes wrong as well as identifying factors that can be changed or that only apply to certain situations. In this way, having an optimistic attribution style favors one's social adjustment. Those who have optimistic attribution styles generally perceive the world as full of possibilities rather than constraints – as consisting of fewer hassles, in other words (Dykema, Bergbauer, and Peterson 1995) – and this worldview often is self-reinforcing.

CHAPTER IV

OPTIMISM AND SOCIAL TIE FORMATION

Optimists are desirable to potential interaction and exchange partners (Carver, Kus and Scheier 1994) and tend to have fewer negative social interactions themselves (Brissette et al. 2002; Lepore and Ituarte 1999). Contrary to the notion that pessimists simply have pessimistic friends (Peterson and Bossio 1991), those who are low in optimism may have difficulty initiating and maintaining social encounters (Geers, Reilley, and Dember 1998; Rosenblatt and Greenberg 1991). Also, they tend to perceive less support and more conflict from their romantic partners; this predicts disintegration of the relationship in the long term (Srivastava et al. 2006).

Generally, individuals prefer to socialize with others who do not suffer from bleak worldviews or outlooks (Gotlib and Beatty 1985; Lerner and Miller 1978). Indeed, optimists have or report higher levels of social support (Mosher, Prelow, Chen, and Yackel 2006; Park and Folkman 1997; Scheier and Carver 1992) and lower levels of social alienation (Scheier and Carver 1985). Also, they tend to recruit social support during times of illness or distress (Dougall, Hyman, Hayward, McFeeley, and Baum 2001; Matthews and Cook 2008; Trunzo and Pinto 2003).

Optimism also is associated with unconscious attention to positive social stimuli (Segerstrom 2001) and the experience of positive emotion (Chang and Sanna 2001). Generally, positive emotion is implicated in the building of physical, social, and intellectual resources – capital, in other words – that can be drawn upon during tough times (Fredrickson and Joiner 2002). This is likely because positive emotion enhances

one's ability to connect with others and navigate situations. For instance, positive emotion is linked to enhanced problem solving via the wideness of thought-action repertoires as well as the propensity to seek out and integrate information across a variety of domains (Aspinwall 1998; Aspinwall and Brunhart 2006; Isen 1987, 1993, 2000). It also facilitates "switching set," or changing one's way of approaching or understanding a problem (Ashby, Isen, and Turken 1999). Finally, positive affect involves a broadened attentional focus (Basso, Schefft, Ris, and Dember 1996; Fredrickson 1998; Sedikides 1992). In contrast, negative moods are associated with a narrow and rigid focus of attention, which can undermine the sound assessment of situations (see Mor and Winquist 2002).

Similarly, optimism is linked to extraversion (see Darvill and Johnson 1991; Marshall et al. 1992), which is a stable disposition towards positive emotions (Costa and McCrae 1980; Digman 1990). Extroverts utilize their networks intensely and expand them naturally by introducing people to other people (Kalish and Robins 2006). Thus, extraversion is positively correlated with number of peer relationships (Asendorpf and Wilpers 1998) as well as giving and receiving work and non-work related support (Bowling, Beehr, and Swader 2005). However, the link between extraversion and network size seems to vary according to respondent age (Roberts et al. 2008). Overall, extraversion predicts perceived social support in combination with other traits such as neuroticism openness to experience (Swickert, Hittner and Foster 2010).

Accordingly, because it is linked to sociability, broadened attentional focus, and extraversion, optimism should enhance overall and non-kin network size (*Hypothesis 1a*) while decreasing the probability of social isolation (*Hypothesis 1b*).

CHAPTER V

OPTIMISM AND NETWORK HETEROPHILY

In dealing with adversity, optimists invoke problem-focused coping when possible, which involves direct efforts to mitigate a stressor (Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub 1989) even in spite of short-term discomfort (Segerstrom 2005). More specifically, optimists tend to engage in information seeking, active coping and planning when possible; in situations that are less controllable, they engage in acceptance behaviors such as positive reframing, seeking benefit, and use of humor (Scheier, Carver, and Bridges 2001). In contrast, pessimists are given to emotion-focused coping (Carver et al. 1989), which seeks to abate negative feelings rather than the stressor itself. That is, pessimists tend to engage in suppression of thoughts, giving up, self-distraction, cognitive avoidance and overt denial (Scheier et al. 2001:204). Because optimists utilize problem-focused coping styles when applicable, their networks ought to be not only larger but also diverse in content and resources, so as to facilitate problem solving across the life course.

Moreover, optimism is thought to foster generalized trust (Uslaner 1998; 2002). Therefore, optimists may be more likely to engage in social interactions with members of diverse groups and backgrounds, and to approach relationships more openly than those who are mistrusting. With this, optimists may be more likely to form social ties across demographic lines of age, sex, race, and education, in accordance with their own goals and needs. In this way, they would tap a relatively high number of social circles. Because it is linked to problem-focused coping as well as generalized trust, optimism should enhance personal network diversity (*Hypothesis 2a*). Following this logic, optimism may

also be negatively associated with network density (due to involvement in numerous social circles; *Hypothesis 2b*).

CHAPTER VI

EXTENDED PERSONAL NETWORK: VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

Voluntary associations, or memberships in formal organizations, serve as extensions of one's personal network. For the most part, associations are work-based, community-based, or church-based and include commitments ranging from book clubs to sports teams to political organizations to volunteer-based, cultural, ethnic, or religious groups (Putnam 2000:49). The degree to which they reinforce one's preexistent social background or extend it depends upon the makeup of the relevant organizations. One's access to diverse resources increases with the sheer number of voluntary associations, and especially with the number of types of memberships. Pursuant to the latter, one's joint membership in a political club, a church group, as well as a professional society would make for a more resourceful network than would membership in, say, three political clubs. For this reason, *types* of association memberships should be more relevant to optimistic functioning than should sheer number of memberships.

Optimism should be linked to number of types of voluntary association memberships (*Hypothesis 3*). First, it is likely linked to membership diversity directly through one's sociability and problem-focused coping, as discussed above. It may also indirectly influence voluntary association membership through one's level of generalized trust. Indeed, Uslaner (1998; 2002) demonstrates that optimism precedes trust and suggests that persons with high levels of generalized trust are more likely to join a variety of groups.

CHAPTER VII

DATA AND METHODS

To examine links between dispositional optimism and the range of personal social networks, I utilize the 2004 administration of the General Social Survey (GSS; see Davis and Smith 1992). The GSS is a broad assessment of the social attitudes and behaviors of the non-institutionalized, English-speaking U.S. population age 18 and over, based on a random sample of households. Conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago, it has been undertaken at least every other year since 1972. Depending on the year, modules of questions on topics such as culture, work environment, religion, well-being, and social networks are given. In 2004 the core discussion networks module and items on optimism (part of a well-being module) were administered to a large subsample (*N* = 1273).

To generate the personal social network, respondents were asked the following:

> From time to time, most people discuss important matters with other people. Looking back over the last six months—who are the people with whom you discussed matters important to you? Just tell me their first names or initials. (McPherson et al. 2006:355)

To probe the names given in response to this prompt, respondents also were asked to identify attributes of the nominated alters, including their age, sex, race, and level of education. Also, the respondent designated whether each alter was kin or non-kin, by choosing from a variety of kin-based and non-kin-based roles (e.g., parent, spouse, child vs. coworker, neighbor, friend).

Measures

Personal Network Range

I measure personal network range in terms of both size and diversity (Campbell, Marsden, and Hurlbert 1986). For size, I consider overall and non-kin network sizes, and I model the probability of social isolation as well. Then, to evaluate network range in terms of diversity, I look at age, education, race, and sex (see Marsden 1987; McPherson et al. 2006). Diversity can be measured by way of heterogeneity or heterophily, where the former quantification only takes into account the variance of alters' values whereas the latter uses the ego's own value as a reference point for interpreting alters' values. Given how optimists should tend to mobilize interpersonal resources that diversify their coping repertoires, a measurement strategy based on heterophily is more appropriate. Therefore, in assessing age heterophily, I quantify variability across the network using the respondent's age as a reference point. More specifically, I calculate a sum of squares around the respondent's age, taking the square root so as to quantify average distance.

Next, for education, I emphasize the qualitative distinction between BA and non-BA holders, for substantive and methodological reasons. Snibbe and Markus (2005) have shown that this distinction in particular holds significant ramifications for how the world is viewed and which kinds of information are valued and deemed pertinent to the self. Moreover, the educational attainment levels of respondents and their alter(s) were coded differently, the former continuously (in years) and the latter in a seven-category format. Rather than coding the respondent into a seven-category format and, with this, assuming that the distances between categories carry equal substantive value, I instead streamline the analysis on dichotomous terms. Accordingly, I calculate educational heterophily as a

dichotomous outcome: whether or not education (i.e., baccalaureate degree status) varies across the personal network (for a similar approach, see Stoloff, Glanville, and Bienenstock 1999:98).

Similarly, for race and sex, I dichotomize the outcome based on whether the demographic factor varies across the personal network. This approach makes interpretation simple and is fitting because numerous networks show no variability on at least one of these dimensions (see Table A1). In order to maintain the substantive meaningfulness of heterophily outcomes, I consider only respondents who report at least one alter; this approach is similar to analyses of heterogeneity that only consider respondents with two or more alters (Marsden 1987; McPherson et al. 2006).

Also, I examine diversity in a structural sense by modeling personal network density. If all members of a social network are in contact with all other members, then the network is maximally dense (i.e., has a density of 1). Oppositely, if none of the respondent's close ties are acquainted with one another, the network is minimally dense (i.e., has a density of 0). As density approaches 1, a respondent's alters are presumably more likely to possess similar resources and information due to their shared acquaintanceship. In contrast, lower values of density suggest access to diverse opportunities and information.

Finally, to broaden my investigation of the relationship between optimism and network-based inequality, I also look at the respondent's extended personal network. In particular, I consider the number of types of voluntary association memberships that a respondent reports, and I also model the probability of belonging to multiple types of

associations. Types include youth groups, sports groups, political clubs, fraternities, church groups, labor unions, and professional societies.

Dispositional Optimism

To measure dispositional optimism, I utilize the GSS items MOREGOOD ("Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad") and NOTCOUNT ("I rarely count on good things happening to me"; reverse-coded), both of which appear on the Life Orientation Test-Revised, which has been used to measure dispositional optimism (see Scheier, Carver, and Bridges 1994).[2] Each item has a four-category response format, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. I combine these two items into a composite index, for which scores range from 2 (low) to 8 (high).

Control Variables

For all estimated models, I control for the respondent's age, education, gender, race, and marital status, as well as his or her cooperativeness during the interview itself, based on the significance of these variables as identified by past research (see Marsden 1987 and McPherson et al., 2006).[3] Age (in years) ranges from 18 to 89 and has been found to be a negative predictor of network size and density. Also, consistent with previous research, I consider a nonlinear effect of age by also including age squared and reporting significant effects where applicable. Education (in years) ranges from 0 to 20 and is reliably found to be the strongest predictor of personal network range. Gender is measured as male or female; past research indicates that females, relative to males, tend to have social networks that are more based in kin. Race is measured in a three-category format (White, Black, Other). Relative to the reference category of White, minorities

report smaller personal networks, on average. For the current purposes, marital status is specified as a dummy variable reflecting whether the respondent was currently married at the time of the interview; marriage has been identified as a negative predictor of social isolation. Cooperativeness was assessed by the interviewer on a three-level ordinal scale ranging from Friendly to Cooperative to Restless/Hostile; the latter two designations are entered into all models (with Friendly serving as the reference category). On average, friendly respondents nominate more alters than do those who are rated as cooperative or restless/hostile by their interviewers.

For models of network diversity and density, I additionally control for overall network size, as larger networks tend to be more diverse and less dense than smaller networks simply because they contain a greater number of alters. Likewise, for the respondent's extended network (i.e., involvement in voluntary associations), I control for network size in order to isolate the effect of optimism on the breadth of one's social network net of what results from close ties alone. Survey-weighted descriptive statistics for network range outcomes, dispositional optimism, and all control variables are given in Table A1.

Overview of Modeling Strategy

For all hypotheses, I estimate two models.[4] In the first model I model the network-related outcome on demographic factors only. Then, in the second model I enter the psychological factor of dispositional optimism.[5] Thus, in addition to revealing whether optimism contributes significantly to network range net of demographic factors, the second model quantifies to what extent demographic effects may be explained by individual differences in optimism.

Because they are count outcomes, I model overall, non-kin, and extended personal network sizes using negative binomial regression. Next, I model network density and age heterophily, both continuous variables, using ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression. Finally, because all other heterophily outcomes (i.e., race, sex, and education) are binary, I model them using a logistic regression framework.

CHAPTER VIII

RESULTS

To interpret the models, I employ three complementary approaches. First, I locate any differences in coefficients between the two model steps so as to determine whether optimism might partially explain links among demographic factors and personal network range. Second, I examine the dispositional optimism coefficient for its direction and significance,[6] and then I take a comparative approach by comparing the factor increases in personal social network range that obtain from optimism versus educational attainment (all else held constant). In deriving factor increases, I often make reference to the contrast between a "below-average" optimist (a 5/8 scorer, roughly in the bottom quartile; see Table A1) and an "above-average" optimist (a 7/8 scorer, roughly in the top quartile; see Table A1). I liken the gains in network range that obtain from a shift from the bottom to top quartile in optimism to a correspondent number of years of educational attainment. This comparison is meant to further my argument that optimism, like education, is a form of human capital in the creation of social capital.

As a third interpretational approach, I quantify and plot the expected overall, non-kin, and extended network sizes for given demographic examples for increasing levels of optimism (Figures A1-A3). To facilitate this approach, I utilize the post-estimation command *prchange*, developed by Long and Freese (2006).

Partial Mediation of Demographic Factors by Optimism

Tables A2 through A5 summarize the multivariate results. The results are only weakly consistent with a framework wherein the emotional resource of optimism mediates the relationships among demographic factors and personal network range. Depending on the model, optimism explains anywhere from 7 to 9% of the link between education and personal network range. Also, in some models, optimism appears to weakly illuminate the effects of gender and/or marital status. Because these trends are weak, I do not consider a mediational framework any further and treat demographic factors and optimism as essentially independent predictors of personal network range. That is, I interpret the effects of optimism in a comparative sense only.

Overall and Non-Kin Network Size and Social Isolation (Hypotheses 1a and 1b)

Optimism predicted both overall and non-kin network sizes (ps $\leq .01$) net of education (ps $\leq .001$) and other demographic factors (see Table A2). For dispositional optimism, a movement from below average (i.e., a score of 5/8) to above average (i.e., a score of 7/8) yields a 15% mean increase in overall network size as well as a 26% mean gain in non-kin network size. This gain in overall network size exceeds the factor increase that obtains from two years of education. Moreover, being an above-average optimist offsets anywhere from one-third to one-half of the factor decrease in overall network size among racial minorities (raw decrease = 21% for black to 29% for other race; corresponding decreases among above-average optimists = 9 to 19%).

Projected network sizes are visualized in Figures A1 (overall) and A2 (non-kin). Typically, optimism is associated with a spread of about 0.7 alters in overall network size

and 0.5 alters for the non-kin network. For example, a white male of average age and educational attainment who was cooperative during the interview and currently married is expected to have an overall network of 1.6 to 2.4 alters and a non-kin network of 0.5 to 1.0 alters, depending on his level of optimism. Switching the racial status of the previous example from white to African-American yields a spread of 1.3 to 1.9 alters overall and 0.5 to 0.9 for non-kin. Following the same logic, a white female's personal network ranges in size from 1.7 to 2.6 (0.5 to 1.0 for non-kin), whereas an African-American female's network ranges from 1.4 to 2.0 (0.4 to 0.9 for non-kin).

Optimism was a marginally significant predictor of having at least one confidant (i.e., was a negative predictor of social isolation; $p = .069$),[7] such that above-average optimists were 29% less likely to be isolated than were below-average optimists, on average. Education likewise was a negative predictor of isolation ($p = .01$). The buffering effect of optimism was comparable to what results from four years of education (probability decrease = 31%).

Network Heterophily and Density

(Hypotheses 2a and 2b)

As shown in Table A3, optimism was linked to age heterophily across the personal network (unstandardized $b = .628$, $p < .05$). The contrast in age heterophily between below- and above-average optimists is +1.26 years, on average. Also, optimism was linked to educational and racial network heterophily (ps $< .05$). Relative to below-average optimists, above-average respondents are 35% more likely to situate themselves in an educationally mixed network consisting of BA and non-BA holders (see Table A3)

and 50% more likely to be embedded in a core discussion network that contains at least one alter of different racial status (see Table A4).

Comparatively, educational attainment was linked only to educational network heterophily ($p < .001$; other heterophily ps > .2), such that a 2.5-year increase in education yields the same enhanced likelihood of heterophily as observed between below- and above-average optimists (+35%). Neither optimism nor education was linked to sex heterophily (ps > .8).

Contrary to Hypothesis 2b, optimists did not exhibit less dense networks on average (unstandardized $b = -.008$, $p = .47$; see Table A4). As expected, education showed a strong, negative association with network density (unstandardized $b = -.014$, $p = .002$).

Extended Personal Network:

Voluntary Associations (Hypothesis 3)

As revealed in Table A5, optimism predicted number of types of voluntary association memberships as well as having multiple membership types (ps ≤ .001) net of education (ps ≤ .001) and other controls. Relative to the below-average optimist, above-average optimists belong to 34% more membership types and are 58% more likely to belong to multiple types. The former factor increase can be likened to 2.75 years of education (+33%); likewise, the latter increase in probability is roughly equivalent to what obtains from 2.75 years of education (+59%).

Projected numbers of membership types for different demographic profiles are visualized in Figure A3. Typically, optimism yields a spread of about 1.2 types. For

example, a white male of average age and educational attainment who was cooperative during the interview and currently married is expected to have 0.8 to 2.0 types. For an African-American male, the expected range is 1.0 to 2.4. A while female is expected to have 0.7 to 1.7 types; an African-American female's expected range is 0.8 to 2.0.

CHAPTER IX

DISCUSSION

Current approaches to network-based social inequality focus on demographic stratifying factors and as a result tend to neglect psychological resources. In the present research, I have offered a step towards a more unified modeling approach by estimating links between network range and demographic factors as well as the human capital inherent in dispositional optimism. By revisiting survey data on core discussion networks in America, I have produced models in favor of the hypothesis that optimism enhances the range of personal social networks, in terms of overall size, non-kin size, lessened probability of isolation, and number of voluntary association membership types, as well as heterophily with respect to age, education, and race. Thus, dispositional optimism seems to constitute an adaptive strategy that coincidentally adds to public goods by joining social circles. In any case, optimism predicts more types of network heterophily than does education. This may mean that optimism has been an overlooked factor in explaining the emergence of network-based homophily versus heterophily.

Optimists expect good things to happen to themselves and situate this general outcome expectancy by accumulating and attending to information in a problem-focused way. Moreover, they tend to be trusting, positive, and extraverted individuals, which adds to the volume and diversity of their social ties and resources. Consistent with this logic, optimism was linked to factor increases in overall and non-kin network size, on par with more than two additional years of education. Moreover, it buffered against social isolation on par with four years of education while offsetting anywhere from one-third to

one-half of the factor decrease in overall network size among racial minorities. Furthermore, optimists were more likely to have educationally and racially diverse networks that also were more variable with respect to the ages of confidants. Finally, optimists tended to extend their personal networks by belonging to a greater number of types of voluntary associations, and by being more likely to belong to multiple membership types, on par with what obtains from about three years of education.

While above-average optimists' personal networks were larger and more diverse relative to the interpersonal environment of the below-average optimist, these two facts together did not seem to produce a reduction in network density. Thus, optimists may make more intensive use of local social circles without necessarily branching out into far-reaching circles that do not overlap with each other (contrary to what is observed among highly-educated respondents). Because this study is the first to empirically examine links among optimism and personal network structure, links between optimism and network characteristics remain to be further clarified by future research.

Although the current findings are consistent with the argument that optimism provides an important pathway through which broader ranging social networks are formed and maintained, there are several limitations to bear in mind. First, network data as gathered by the GSS name generator only include core contacts. While core discussion networks are assumedly at the hub of one's larger network and therefore ought to suggest or imply bridges through which further information and resources are accessed, there are reasons to question this assumption. For instance, mixed-methods research on the "important matters" name generator has shown that not all respondents deem it pertinent to how they socialize; as a result, it often yields a relatively high number of social isolates

(Bearman and Parigi 2004). Moreover, that respondents with higher levels of education nominate more people on average than do less-educated respondents could reflect the former's identification with the language of the prompt itself, rather than their actually having a greater number of social ties or, for that matter, networks that are more diverse. In short, the "important matters" name generator may be biased by systematic sources of measurement error. Thus, future research should continue to evaluate links among optimism and personal network range by using a variety of name generators.

Next, different measures of network heterophily should be sought. Within the GSS sample, demographic characteristics were the only sensible basis for evaluating diversity. Resource-based measures of social capital offer a promising future direction for heterophily measurement (e.g., Lin 2001).

Finally, the causal direction is potentially ambiguous, especially for models of network size. If one has more confidants with whom to discuss important matters, this may lead one to be more optimistic. Because the data at hand are cross-sectional, this possibility cannot be ruled out in a strict sense. However, empirical research supports the conceptualization of optimism as a disposition – not as a factor that changes dynamically according to one's interpersonal support (Carver and Scheier 2002). In fact, according to numerous studies, social support partially mediates the relationship between optimism and well-being, as optimism is linked to the recruitment of support during difficult times (e.g., Brissette et al. 2002; Dougall et al. 2001; Mosher et al. 2006; Trunzo and Pinto 2003). Thus, research finds chiefly that social support is a coping tool among optimists – not a factor in the development of optimism.

Optimism in the Creation of Network-Based Social Capital

Following the current results, optimism seems to be a personal resource that is related to the building of high-range personal social networks. Optimism may be conceptualized as a form of emotional capital, or more generally as a form of human capital in the creation of social capital. If optimism indeed is related to network-based inequality, a richer understanding of how it is developed and modified would be sociologically useful.

Reay (2000) qualitatively examined the transmission of emotional capital in an educational context, by looking at how mothers instill "confidence and enthusiasm in children" (577; see also Cahill 1999). Likewise, previous research indicates that the attribution styles of one's parents could well be related to the second-generation embodiment of optimism (see Carver and Scheier 2002; Seligman 1991; Seligman et al. 2007; Uslaner 2002). In general, one is socialized and builds one's worldview through emotionally-charged interactions with significant others such as parents, mentors, and friends (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Erikson 1968; Mead 1934).

At the same time, optimism as form of human capital can be learned and rehearsed. In primary and secondary schools, optimistic thinking has been taught with noteworthy success, leading to lessened rates of social isolation and maladjustment relative to wait-listed control groups (Seligman et al. 2007). Like education itself, optimism and other ingrained ways of viewing life events are arguably forms of human capital in the building of social capital. Whereas pessimists tend to blame themselves pervasively and permanently for their setbacks and thus effectively dismiss themselves from many (unnoticed) opportunities, optimists tend to understand social interactions in a

more empowering and often more realistic way, and in doing so to sustain and even create opportunities for themselves.

Indeed, the current results on optimism and personal network range are consistent with a broader formulation of emotional capital, for two reasons. First, discussions of emotion capital seem to focus on the inhibition or management of behavior (e.g., Hochschild 1983; see Froyum 2010). In contrast, optimism is more correctly understood in terms of constructive (rather than defensive) action, as well as in terms of extraversion and trust. While optimism often does involve a kind of self-control regarding one's thoughts and attributions, this is only part of what it entails. Just as much, it involves proactive types of social action. Second, optimism has thus far only been studied sociologically in select subareas such as organizations (Luthans, Youssef and Avolio 2007) and the life course (Hitlin and Elder 2007). In contrast, the current results favor a broader theoretical treatment of optimism, towards a comprehensive framework that describes how emotional forms of capital shape the evolution of network stratification and social capital.

In this vein, it may be appropriate to consider the socializing influences of particular significant others such as parents, teachers, and friends as they pertain to the next-generation embodiment of capital (Coleman 1988). The study of embodied dispositions has recently been updated by a broad appreciation for how personal experiences and relationships contextualize one's location in the field coordinated by economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992; for an overview of updates, see Vaisey 2008, 2009). Building on this diversified approach to embodiment, it could be useful to illuminate pathways linking particular formative relationships to mental

organization and one's habitual ways of explaining life events. Research on dispositional optimism suggests that significant others such as parents and teachers play a key factor in its development, but this contention awaits further study in social context.

Altogether, optimism has introduced itself as a potentially important factor in understanding network-based social inequality in two respects. First, at the individual level, optimists may embed themselves in high-range networks so as to facilitate their own problem-focused coping efforts. Second, at the meso level of analysis, optimists may act as interpersonal catalysts by bringing individuals of diverse social backgrounds together. In total, optimists may reduce local manifestations of social inequality while also meeting their own needs.

NOTES

[1] Usually, optimism is conceptualized and measured in terms of one's generalized outcome expectancies or in terms of one's explanatory style (Carver and Scheier 2002). Because outcome expectancies are amenable to brief survey-based measurement and because the majority of research on optimism focuses on them, I take a generalized expectancy (i.e., dispositional) approach in the current study. Reassuringly, expectancy- and attribution-based approaches to optimism are similar in their prediction of life outcomes (Peterson 2000).

[2] The 2004 GSS also contains two other items from the Life Orientation Test-Revised: OPTIMIST ("I'm always optimistic about my future.") and PESSIMST ("I hardly ever expect things to go my way."). Like MOREGOOD and NOTCOUNT, these two alternate items form a reciprocal pair (in which one item is reverse-scored). Auxiliary analyses, however, showed that MOREGOOD and NOTCOUNT together create a two-item measure of dispositional optimism that is maximally predictive of various aspects of network range (relative to one-item, three-item, and four-item approaches). While this pattern of auxiliary results is somewhat difficult to interpret, it may have occurred because OPTIMIST refers to an unqualified sense of positivity rather than expectations per se, and because PESSIMST, when combined with MOREGOOD and NOTCOUNT, creates an unbalanced scale (i.e., one with two pessimism items and only one optimism item). Indeed, Mirowsky and Ross (1991) examined the social-psychological construct of sense of control, finding that scale balancing was vital to reducing measurement error in the form of acquiescence bias. More specifically, some respondents agree with certain statements merely because they are worded positively. It is necessary to balance "good" and "bad" outcome items in order to eliminate such measurement bias.

[3] Certainly, third variables such as income and church attendance may be related to both optimism and personal network range. While the factors underlying and contributing to optimism are beyond the scope of this paper's argument, models with income and attendance as covariates (not shown) reveal income as a positive predictor of overall and non-kin network size and church attendance as a positive predictor of voluntary associations and belonging to multiple associations. However, the significance of optimism is robust to these covariates (ps $\leq .004$). Neither income nor church attendance adds significantly to models of network heterophily.

[4] All descriptive statistics and estimated models in this paper are weighted by the GSS variable WTSSNR. WTSSNR was recommended in lieu of McPherson and colleagues' (2006) usage of WT2004NR (NORC, personal communication). For recommendations on weighting, see http://publicdata.norc.org:41000/gssbeta/faqs.html.

[5] Auxiliary analyses did not reveal any significant interactions between optimism and demographic factors for any of the estimated models.

[6] While all hypotheses are proposed directionally and thus would prescribe one-tailed tests of statistical significance, I infer conservatively by using two-tailed tests of significance.

[7] For a one-tailed test of significance, $p = .035$.

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APPENDIX:

TABLES AND FIGURES

Table A1. Descriptive Statistics for Survey Sample

Variable	Value	%	Mean	Std. Dev.	(N)
Network Range Outcomes					
Overall network size	0	20.1	2.2	1.8	1231
	1	19.7			
	2	19.1			
	3	18.6			
	4	9.6			
	5	7.3			
	6+	5.7			
Non-Kin Network Size	0	50.2	1.0	1.2	
	1	22.6			
	2	15.3			
	3	6.8			
	4	3.4			
	5	1.7			
Age Heterophily (in Years)	0-1.5	16.0	8.2	6.0	958
	>1.5-5	20.4			
	>5-8	32.9			
	>8-10	11.0			
	>10	19.7			
Education Varies[1]	No	52.0			
	Yes	48.0			
Race Varies	No	82.9			
	Yes	17.1			
Sex Varies	No	21.2			
	Yes	78.8			
Density	0-0.33	13.5	0.7	0.3	714
	>0.33-0.45	6.1			
	>0.45-0.66	37.0			
	>0.66-1	43.4			
Voluntary Associations (Number of Types)	0	35.7	1.7	1.9	1230
	1	23.4			
	2-3	24.2			
	4-5	11.2			
	6+	5.5			

Table A1. Continued

Dispositional Optimism Score	2-4	6.1	6.1	1.0	1231
	5	19.5			
	6	43.3			
	7	15.0			
	8	16.2			
Control Variables					
Education (in Years)	0-11	12.6	13.9	2.8	
	12	24.7			
	13-15	29.7			
	16	19.2			
	>16	13.7			
Sex	Male	44.8			
	Female	55.2			
Age	18-24	11.7	44.3	16.0	1231
	25-34	21.3			
	35-44	18.5			
	45-54	20.8			
	55-64	15.8			
	65+	11.9			
Currently Married	Yes	60.3			
	No	39.7			
Race	White	79.1			
	Black	12.7			
	Other	8.2			
Cooperativeness (during interview)	Friendly	84.5			
	Cooperative	13.8			
	Restless	1.7			

Note: All statistics are weighted using the General Social Survey variable WTSSNR (NORC, personal communication).

[1]For variability of education within network, the respondent and his/her alters' were classified dichotomously based on whether they held a Bachelor's Degree.

Table A2. Multivariate Models of Overall and Non-Kin Discussion Network Sizes and Social Isolation

	Model					
	Dependent Variable: Overall Network Size (Neg. Binomial Regression)		Dependent Variable: Non-Kin Network Size (Neg. Binomial Regression)		Dependent Variable: Social Isolation (Logistic Regression)	
Independent Variable	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Dispositional Optimism	—	.068**	—	.115**	—	-.126[a]
Education (in years)	.062***	.057***	.108***	.100***	-.075**	-.068**
Female	.085[a]	.077	-.050	-.068	-.102	-.089
Age	.001	.000	.000	.000	.009[a]	.010*
Currently Married	.038	.029	-.249**	-.266**	-.148	-.126
Black	-.226*	-.235*	-.072	-.086	.817***	.838***
Other Race	-.347***	-.346***	-.089	-.086	.295	.291
Cooperative (ref: Friendly/Intrsted)	-.081	-.071	-.061	-.049	-.066	-.087
Restless or Hostile	-.830***	-.812***	-.884*	-.852*	1.33**	1.32**
Constant	-.105	-.424*	-1.39***	-1.95***	-.791	-.177
Alpha (Heterogeneity Coef.)	.153***	.145***	.595***	.576***	N/A	N/A
F	13.07***	12.90***	7.67***	8.76***	5.09***	4.92***

Note: N = 1,231.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

[a] $p \leq .10$

Table A3. Multivariate Models of Network Heterophily (Age and Education)

	Model			
	Dependent Variable: Age Heterophily (in Years) (OLS Regression)		Dependent Variable: Education Varies Across Network (Logistic Regression)	
Independent Variable	I	II	III	IV
Dispositional Optimism	—	.628*	—	.151*
Education (in years)	-.120	-.166	.130***	.119***
Female	.110	.016	-.076	-.095
Age	-.589***	-.590**	.014**	.014**
Age^2	.007***	.007***	—	—
Currently Married	-2.42***	-2.54***	.090	.061
Black (or Minority)	-.596	-.746	-.554*	-.590*
Other Race	-2.39	-2.38	.294	.301
Cooperative (ref: Friendly)	-.150	-.060	.053	.076
Restless or Hostile	-.329	-.169	-.799	-.743
Discussion Ntwk Size	.815***	.774***	.457***	.450***
Constant	24.61***	21.74***	-3.78***	-4.48***
F	6.42***	7.12***	11.65***	11.40***

Note: N = 958. Socially isolated respondents were excluded from all analyses. Age heterophily model shows unstandardized OLS regression coefficients of network variables on respondents' characteristics. R^2s = 0.105 (Model I) and 0.110 (Model II).

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

[a] $p \leq .10$

Table A4. Multivariate Models of Network Heterophily (Race and Sex) and Network Density

	Model					
	Dependent Variable: Race Varies Across Network (Logistic Regression)		Dependent Variable: Sex Varies Across Network (Logistic Regression)		Dependent Variable: Network Density (OLS Regression)	
Independent Variable	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Dispositional Optimism	—	.203*	—	.021	—	-.008
Education (in years)	-.036	-.052	.006	.005	-.015***	-.014**
Female	-.286	-.331	-.343[a]	-.346[a]	-.006	-.005
Age	-.027***	-.028***	-.019**	-.019**	-.010**	-.010**
Age^2	—	—	—	—	1.1×10^{-4}**	1.1×10^{-4}**
Currently Married	-.284	-.321	1.17***	1.16***	.035	.037
Black (or Minority)	.284	.259	-1.09***	-1.10***	.005	.006
Other Race	—	—	-.832[a]	-.830[a]	.049	.052
Cooperative (ref: Friendly)	-.534[a]	-.528	-.115	-.112	-.030	-.030
Restless or Hostile	.634	.708	1.24[a]	1.24[a]	-.042	-.048
Discussion Ntwk Size	.273***	.264***	.417***	.415***	-.033***	-.032***
Constant	-.432	-1.35	.803	.708	1.17***	1.21***
F	4.13***	4.27***	9.78***	8.90***	5.79***	5.20***

Note: N = 958 (Models I-IV) and N = 714 (Models V-VI). Socially isolated respondents were excluded from all analyses. For racial diversity logistic regression, respondent's and alters' races were coded differently and thus only a "Minority" category was applicable. R^2s = 0.066 (Model V) and 0.067 (Model VI). Network density model shows unstandardized OLS regression coefficients of network variables on respondents' characteristics.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

[a] $p \leq .10$

Table A5. Multivariate Models of Extended Personal Network

	Model			
	Dependent Variable: Number of Membership Types (Neg. Binomial Regression)		Dependent Variable: Multiple Mbrshp Types (Logistic Regression)	
Independent Variable	I	II	III	IV
Dispositional Optimism	—	.145***	—	.228***
Education (in years)	.111***	.103***	.181***	.168***
Female	-.159*	-.187*	-.245[a]	-.273[a]
Age	.003	.002	.006	.005
Currently Married	.250**	.234**	.543***	.522***
Black	.205[a]	.169	.205	.176
Other Race	-.183	-.202	-.139	-.134
Cooperative (Compared to Friendly/Interested)	-.209[a]	-.182	-.321	-.286
Restless or Hostile	-.267	-.255	-.472	-.443
Discussion Network Size	.089***	.079***	.184***	.171***
Constant	-1.47	-2.20***	-3.75***	-4.90***
Alpha (Heterogeneity Coef.)	.554***	.528***	N/A	N/A
F	13.26***	16.86***	10.11***	10.00***

Note: N = 1230.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$ *** $p \leq .001$

[a] $p \leq .10$

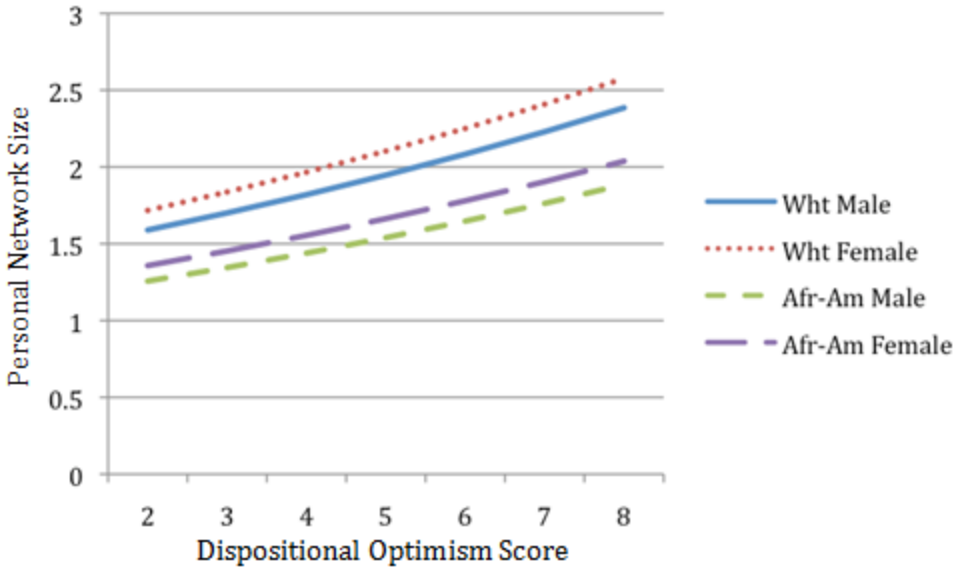

Figure A1. Personal Network Size as a Function of Dispositional Optimism

Note: Expected values are graphed for average age and level of educational attainment; it also is assumed that the respondent was cooperative during the interview and currently married.

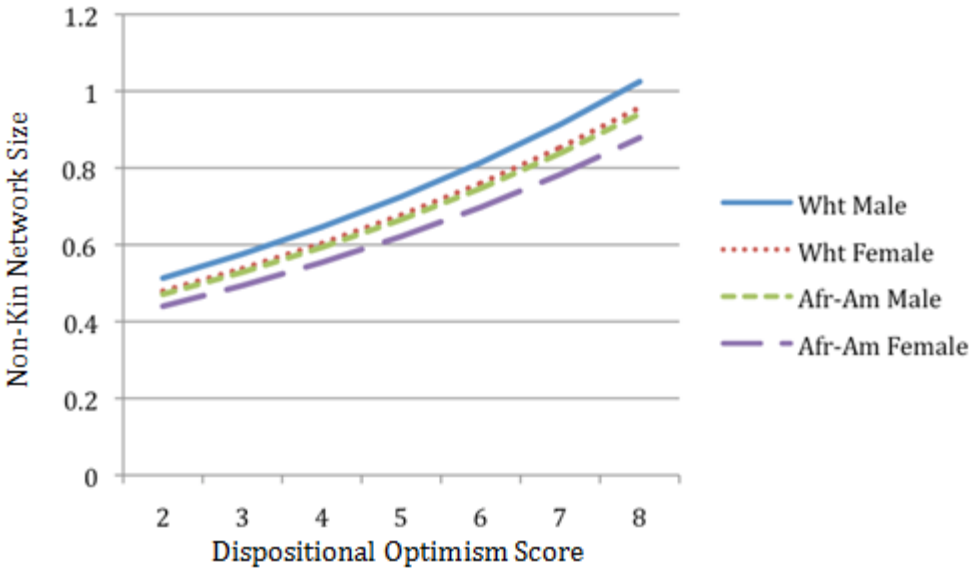

Figure A2. Non-Kin Network Size as a Function of Dispositional Optimism

Note: Expected values are graphed for average age and level of educational attainment; it also is assumed that the respondent was cooperative during the interview and currently married.

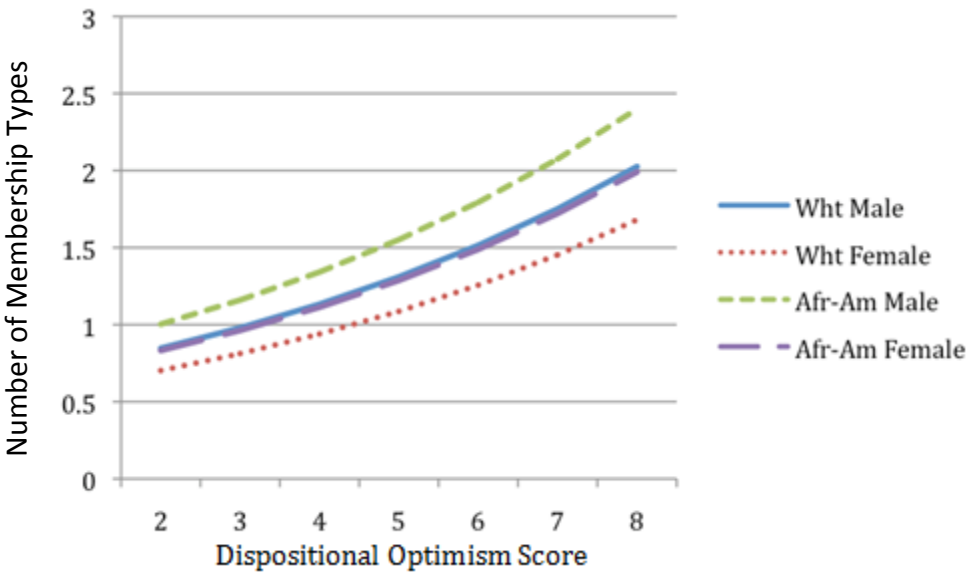

Figure A3. Number of Voluntary Association Membership Types as a Function of Dispositional Optimism

Note: Expected values are graphed for average age and level of educational attainment; it also is assumed that the respondent was cooperative during the interview and currently married.