

Resistance to Peer Influence, Optimism, and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Personal Growth in University Students

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In the Pakistani culture, which is marked by collectivist tendencies, the concept of self-esteem becomes closely intertwined with social identity and group identification that has a great impact on personality growth. The study was designed to investigate the resistance to peer influence, optimism, and self-esteem as predictors of personal growth among university students. A correlational research design with non-probability convenient sampling strategy was used for the present study. The sample consisted of ($N=400$) students from various universities including males ($n=200$) and females ($n=200$) with ages ranging from 18 to 30 years ($M=22.37$ & $SD=6.82$). The assessment measures included Resistance to Peer Influence Scale (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007), Life Orientation Test-Revised (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Arslan, 2020) and Index of Self Actualization (Faracia & Cannistraci, 2015). The statistical analysis was carried out by SPSS 20. Regression analysis revealed resistance to peer influence, optimism, and self-esteem served as strong predictors of personal growth, being positively correlated with each other. In terms of gender differences, females tended to be more resistant to peer influence and personal growth whereas males had a higher level of optimism and self-esteem. In essence, the present study embraces beneficial inclusion for the current pool of research as it offers important implications for students, professors, psychologists and researchers.

Keywords: Resistance to peer influence, Optimism, Self-esteem, Personal growth.

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Introduction

During record, psychology has had a profound focus on an individual's strengths, psyche being an asset and constructive mental health. Psychological growth and maturity have included various aspects of well-being, social, emotional, or mental as Adler describes it as a multidimensional construct (Çiçek, 2021). According to Keyes (2012), the mental health model comprises the domains of emotional, social, and foremost psychological. Stemming and changing one through intrinsic and intentional behaviors is termed personal growth (Arslan, 2017). Being certain that change, maturity, and development possibilities along with cognitive modules are part of psychological progression, results in the overall self-change process of personal growth.

A stable personality trait for personal growth that relates to positive expectations for future forthcoming events is optimism (Arslan, 2018). The term "Optimism" is defined as the positive thinking by an individual that is also been expressed as a personality trait (Meldrum, 2009). It refers to the cause of self-growth by developing his ability to make positive relationships and friendships with others which suggests that others also hold a positive opinion about him (Arslan, 2019). Optimistic individuals are not only successful in their educational life period, but it also helps them in their practical life to attain their set goals. It directs towards the positivity of a person that good will come that helps people to cope in their difficult times by reducing their helplessness and stress (Marais-Opperman et al., 2021).

Researchers are keenly interested in the field of optimism due to the vast number of positive outcomes that it results in. Studies have proposed that humans with optimistic thoughts and conduct have a better outlook on life and their self-assessment. Archanaa et al.,(2022) claimed that 80% of individuals as optimistic. It is also said that optimism and self-esteem work hand in hand. People who are higher in their optimism are also able to develop higher self-esteem.

Self-esteem refers to the negative or positive opinion of people about themselves (Arslan, 2020). It is the necessary component of an individual's life that helps them to grow in a better way. People having a high level of self-esteem tend to be more confident and generous and for

that reason, they are successful to achieve their life goals along with self-actualization. It also indicated that adolescents' self-esteem can alter, from approximately eighth grade onwards; where the self-esteem appears to be relatively stable (Bairagi, Saha, Muhammad, Tiwari, & Rubel, 2021). Another generalization to make regarding the low self-esteem of adolescents suggests that there are minimum numbers of people who experience low self-esteem which could relate to serious problems. Theories suggested that self-esteem is a vital human need or motivation. According to Maslow, who made the hierarchy of personal needs, also included self-esteem as a part of basic human needs (Arslan & Coşkun, 2020).

Another factor that maneuvers a person's growth process along with self-esteem and optimism is the influence of peers. Understandably, congregating adolescents depend upon common choices, attitudes, socio-economic status, and personality. The nurture assumption was critically evaluated by Liu et al. (2021) explaining the role of parents in creating an environment for their children and they have a major influence on their child's development, specifically on the child's personality development. Secondly, an alternative model holds an opposite perspective. It is understandable that adolescents, even those close to their parents, spend most of their time with their peers either by spending time at school, staying outside with friends, or having a good relationship with their peers which suggests that excessive time with friends than with family (Hassall et al., 2023). As one grows older and steps into adolescence, their bonding, both physical and emotional, diverts from parents to their peers. They spend a minimum amount of time with their parents and depend upon their peers for emotional support. In other words, it can be said that peers' suggestions become more important than their parents. As adolescence is a period when a person's personality development is at its peak, an individual faces the phase of identity formation and can reach a point of crisis as well, which is considered part of personality development, at this point it becomes quite difficult and sophisticated to deal with the crisis and maintain the unique and stable personality (Sheldon & Prentice, 2019).

Sometimes Peer Company helps an individual to help him constructively build his personality, but on the other hand, Peer Company

can make him destroy his personality as well. Choosing a peer can be a matter of luck as well as a choice (Falchikov, 2013). Many factors can be involved in the selection of perspire, being accepted by people, getting influenced by the personality of others, socio-economic status, gender, likeness, and attraction towards another gender. Resistance to peer influence is one of the major factors in personal growth as well (Monahan, et al., 2009). Peer influence, if given high importance, eventually becomes a characteristic of adolescent psychosocial functioning (Brown, 2014). In one recent experimental study on middle-aged college undergraduates, it was found that, if an individual is exposed to a risk-taking task, he becomes dependent on his peer by 50% more, whereas there will be no impact of peer's influence on adults (Reniers et al., 2017).

Two conjointly similar descriptions have been obtained for the increased importance of peer influence during adolescence. One of the descriptions suggests that the presence of peers as a reference group, which stresses changes in the salience of peer groups, points towards the increasingly significant role that peers' crowds play in defining the social background of early and middle adolescence, which eventually suggests the major influence of peers on person's development. As the individual learns to identify himself from the crowd, his perceptions and adoptions of styles, interests, and values, that were the result of peer's acceptance and recognition of the peer group that regulates the social behaviors that created uniformity and solidarity within that specific group that distinguishes them from the crowd.

According to the Sociometer Theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2012; Kirkpatrick & Ellis, 2016), self-esteem might act to work as an appraisal for social interactions. In a perceptual mechanism, humans tend to scrutinize their resistance towards social groups and are designed to monitor social inclusion or acceptance in social groups, it provokes one to work upon themselves to not be excluded from the peer group. Resistance to peer pressure comes with time and wisdom. People are initially under the pressure of their peer's influence. Resistance to peers comes with time, achievement of goals, and motivation of the people. The next phase accounts for individuality than the social context. In light of this view, an individual, during the period of his adolescence, is highly influenced by

his peer group due to his weakness or excessive likeness to be accepted by certain peer group pressure. As there is an excessive willingness or likeness to be accepted by the peer, an individual alters his behavior to get accepted by the peers to fit in, the reason behind this is social rejection and fear of being left alone in the crowd (Rentzsch, et al., 2011). It shows that this excessive conformity to peer pressure during this period builds ways towards the emotional “way station” between becoming emotionally independent from parents and becoming a genuinely independent person (Wentzel, Russell & Baker, 2016).

The analysis of gender variations in optimism and self-esteem among students has been a recurring topic of study in the field of psychology. Previous study has shown that male students tend to have greater levels of optimism and self-esteem in comparison to their female peers (Carver, Scheier, & Segerstrom, 2010; MacCan et al., 2020). However, contemporary studies have raised doubts about this assertion. In their study, Kling et al. (1999) performed a thorough meta-analysis that demonstrated a reduction in the gender gap in self-esteem, suggesting a shift in cultural norms. The results of this study are consistent with the changing dynamics of gender roles and opportunities, indicating that present-day male and female students may exhibit similar levels of optimism and self-esteem. Nevertheless, it is important to go further into the complicated dynamics of individual variations, cultural settings, and educational settings to get a thorough comprehension of this nuanced correlation.

Previous studies have shown that female students tend to demonstrate greater levels of personal growth and self-development in comparison to their male peers (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Helgeson, 2017). Robitschek et al. (2012) conducted research that initially proposed that female students exhibit greater levels of personal growth and self-development in comparison to their male counterparts. The results often demonstrated a correlation between females' heightened propensity for introspection and emotional expressiveness.

Consistent with the previous study conducted by Allen and Land (2019), which posits that females may exhibit greater resilience to peer influence in comparison to males, the present study's discovery that female

students demonstrate a higher level of resistance to peer influence than their male counterparts contribute to the expanding body of scholarly work on gender disparities in vulnerability to peer pressures. Furthermore, Bandura's (1997) research on personal growth and optimism is consistent with the discovery that individuals with elevated levels of optimism and self-esteem often encounter more substantial personal development. This emphasizes the significance of positive psychological characteristics in cultivating personal growth and adaptability throughout the university years. This research provides significant contributions to our understanding of the complex dynamics of peer influence, gender differences, and intrapersonal variables that jointly impact the development of personal growth trajectories among university students.

Rationale

The rationale for doing this study stems from a notable deficiency within the Pakistani context, where previous research has separately investigated factors such as self-esteem, optimism, personal development, and resistance to peer influence. Although there have been many research conducted on these distinct features, their interconnections have not yet been thoroughly studied. The objective of this research is to investigate the underlying influence of these variables on individual development. While there is recognition in literature about the importance of optimism, self-esteem, and resistance to peer influence in different contexts (Chambers, 2016; Thompson & Waltz, 2018; Chen, Wang, & Shi, 2016), there is a need for empirical evidence to support their collective impact on personal development.

It is crucial to emphasize that the empirical establishment of the significance of these characteristics as predictive agents of personal development is lacking. The study conducted by Triandis et al. (2018) highlights the significant impact that cultural and social norms have on individuals' self-esteem and personal development. In the Pakistani culture, which is marked by collectivist tendencies, the concept of self-esteem becomes closely intertwined with social identity and group identification (Ahmed & Saleem, 2015). Therefore, conducting a thorough investigation of these characteristics within the societal framework of Pakistan has the capacity to provide valuable findings that may have

consequences beyond this specific context, providing guidance for future research attempts.

The objective of this study is to build a theoretical framework that establishes a connection between optimism, self-esteem, resistance to peer influence, and personal progress. The research endeavors to provide a thorough explanation for the correlations among these factors by incorporating known ideas within the framework of Pakistani culture. This undertaking not only adds to the advancement of theoretical frameworks, but also increases the practical relevance of research results by connecting them with the cultural context of Pakistan.

Keeping in view the existing literature, the following objectives and hypotheses were formulated

Objectives

1. To investigate the relationship between resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students.
2. To examine the role of resistance to peer influence, optimism, and self-esteem in predicting personal growth among university students.
3. To find out gender-based differences in resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students.

Hypotheses

1. There is likely to be a positive relationship between resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students.
2. Resistance to peer influence, Optimism, and self-esteem likely to predict personal growth among university students.
3. There is likely to be significant gender differences in resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students.

Method

Research Design

A correlational research strategy was used for the present study to find out the relationship between resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students.

Sample

The sample consisted of ($N=400$) university students including Males ($n=200$) and Females ($n=200$) with ages ranging from 18 to 30 years ($M=22.37$ & $SD=6.82$). Non probability convenience sampling was employed in public (47.25%) and private sector (52.75%) in Islamabad/Rawalpindi to collect the data. Permission to conduct the research was granted by the International Islamic Universities by the ethical committee following the guidelines prescribed.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Sample (N =400)

Demographic Variables	Categories	<i>f</i>	(%)
Gender	Male	200	(50)
	Female	200	(50)
Discipline of studies	Natural Sciences	180	(45)
	Social Science	220	(55)
University Sector	Public	189	(47.25)
	Private	211	(52.75)

Instruments

Resistance to Peer Influence Scale. The Resistance to Peer Influence was developed by Steinberg and Monahan (2007). It measured how adolescents interact with their peers. It consists of two scenarios in a single statement in which one reflects behaviors that conform to the peers and the one that acts opposite to them. They are then asked to which degree they fall in that category i.e. (Really true Vs. Sort of True). Each item was

scored from 1 to 4 with 1 indicating “Really true for me” on the first statement and 4 indicating “really true for me” on its opposite statement. All items were arranged on average to generate one total score, getting higher scores representing greater RPI. It is a 4-point Likert Scale. It consists of 10 items and is internally consistent ($\alpha=0.74$).

Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R). This scale was developed by Scheier, Carver, and Bridges (1994). It is a standard psychological measure to assess one’s dispositional level of optimism with 10 items. Out of 10 items, 3 items measure pessimism, the other 3 items measure optimism and the rest of the 4 items are fillers. Items 3, 7, and 9 are reverse-coded. These items identify socially desirable responses of the participants. This scale provides inside into the participant’s thought patterns that could be either positive or negative. The reliability of this scale is ($\alpha=0.70$).

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES). The Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965), is used to measure self-esteem. 10 items rated from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Five reverse items are on the scale. The scoring ranges from 0=strongly disagree to 3=strongly agree. The scale ranges from 0-30, with 30 indicating higher self-esteem. The reliability of the scale is ($\alpha=0.88$). It is a widely used reliable and valid quantitative measure of self-esteem that has been translated into many languages and has been widely used in cross-cultural studies (Arslan, 2020).

Index of Self Actualization (ISA). The Index of Self-Actualization (Faracia & Cannistraci, 2015) measured Maslow’s concept of self-actualization. It measures personal growth. It has 15 items with a 4-point Likert-type scale 1 (disagree), 2 (somewhat disagree), 3 (somewhat agree), and 4 (agree). The items have been derived from a previously established scale i.e., POI and POD. The reliability of the scale is ($\alpha=0.81$).

Procedure

A cross-sectional research design was employed. An individually administered data collection method was exercised. Students were selected through a convenient sampling technique. Authorities were informed about the purpose of the research. Before handing the questionnaires to the students, they were informed about the purpose of the research and the

confidentiality. Informed consent was taken from every student. The responses for this research were collected from the University student of Islamabad/Rawalpindi. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS 23.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study. Reliability analysis was employed to measure the reliability of the instrument used in the study. To test the correlations, Pearson Product Moment Correlations were utilized and for prediction, Linear Regression Analysis was performed.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for Resistance to Peer Influence, Optimism, Self Esteem and Personal Growth among University Students (N=400)

Variables	k	α	M (SD)	Range		Skew	Kurt
				Potenti al	Actual		
Resistance to Peer Influence	10	.81	41.27(4.32)	10-100	22-90	.13	.07
Optimism	10	.87	36.21(4.89)	10-100	18-92	.17	.09
Self Esteem	10	.79	15.39(3.29)	0-30	5-28	.06	.74
Personal Growth	15	.84	27.73(3.14)	15-60	20-58	.18	.06

Table 2 shows good reliability estimates, which indicates that all the instruments are internally consistent. Results also specify that the values of skewness and kurtosis are falling within acceptable range i.e., -1 to +1.

Table 3

Correlation Matrix of Resistance to Peer Influence, Optimism, Self Esteem and Personal Growth among University Students (N= 400)

		1	2	3	4
1	Resistance to Peer Influence	---	.53*	.62**	.54**
2	Optimism	---	---	.47**	.58*

3	Self Esteem	---	---	---	.55**
4	Personal Growth	---	---	---	---

Note, **p < .01, *p < .05

Table 3 shows the relationship among the studied variables. There is a significant positive correlation between resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students.

Table 4

Hierarchical Regression Analysis Showing Resistance to Peer Influence, Optimism, and Self-Esteem as Predictors of Personal Growth among University Students (N= 400)

Predictors	ΔR^2	B
Step 1	.27*	
Resistance to Peer Influence		.49**
Step 2	.12*	
Resistance to Peer Influence		.52**
Optimism		.37*
Step 3	.10*	
Resistance to Peer Influence		.41**
Optimism		.36*
Self Esteem		.26*
R ²	.49	

**p < .01, *p < .05

The results indicated that resistance to peer influence strongly predicted personal growth, $\beta=.49$, $p<.01$, $F(1,397) = 43.12$ and it explained a 27% variance in personal growth ($R^2=.27^*$). Results further indicated that optimism also significantly predicted personal growth, $\beta= .37$, $p< .05$, $F(1,397) =29.65$ and it explained a 12% variance in personal growth ($R^2=.12^*$). Self-esteem was also found to be a significant predictor of personal growth, $\beta=.26$, $p<.05$, $F(1,397) = 22.63$ and it explained 10% of the variance in optimism ($R^2=.10$). Together, resistance to peer influence, optimism, and self-esteem explained 49% variance in personal growth.

Table 5

Means, Standard deviation, and t-test value of Male and Female University Students for study variable. (N=400)

Variables	Male	Female	<i>t</i> (398)	p	95%CI		Cohen' d
	(n=200)	(n=200)			LL	UL	
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)					
Resistance to Peer Influence	41.39(4.31)	47.25 (4.26)	15.45	.000	-1.35	-.63	0.89
Optimism	39.89 (4.68)	36.57(4.38)	13.73	.000	.11	.45	0.52
Self Esteem	19.63 (3.06)	15.42(3.37)	14.45	.000	-.79	-.30	0.72
Personal Growth	27.83(3.29)	30.93 (3.58)	11.74	.000	-.30	.01	0.28

Note: LL= lower limit, UL= upper limit, CI= confidence interval

Table 5 shows a significant difference between male and female university students on resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth. It is evident from the mean column that female university students are more resistant to peer influence ($M=47.25$, $SD=4.26$) than male university students ($M=41.39$, $SD=4.31$). Male university students are more optimistic ($M=39.89$, $SD=4.68$) than female students ($M=36.57$, $SD=4.38$). Whereas female university students have low self-esteem ($M=15.42$, $SD=3.37$) than male university students ($M=19.63$, $SD=3.06$). Female university students are higher at personal growth ($M=30.93$, $SD=3.58$) than male university students ($M=27.83$, $SD=3.29$).

Discussion

The present study evaluated the relationship between resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students. The first hypothesis stated that there will be a positive correlation between resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students. Results found that there is a significant difference in the resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth among university students. The difference is based on gender. It has also been observed that individuals who can manage resistance to peer influence will also be able to increase their self-

esteem, optimism, and personal growth whereas students who depend on their peers for their life choices and decision-making will have low optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth (Bagana, et al., 2011).

According to the second hypothesis, resistance to peer influence, optimism, and self-esteem predicts personal growth among university students. According to the findings of the study, there is a significant difference based on gender. The results revealed that male students are high in optimism and self-esteem, whereas female students are high in resistance to peer influence and personal growth. It has also been supported by the previously conducted study. In a previously conducted study, it was also evident from the results that gender differences on the variable Personal Growth males rank less than females which means that female subjects have a higher level of desire of perfecting their lifestyle than male subjects (Chraif & Dumitru, 2015).

According to the third hypothesis, Male students have high optimism and self-esteem than female students. The findings of the study confirmed that male university students have high optimism and self-esteem as compared to female university students. It has also been confirmed by another study conducted by Wellman (2009). It was discussed in the previous research that optimistic people tend to be more optimistic than those who are not. It is suggested according to various research that people who have higher optimism will also have a higher level of self-esteem. Individuals who are dealing with some difficult affairs in their life or have a history of trauma, abuse, or bullying will have a low level of self-esteem. Various pieces of research indicated that optimistic people have positive life outcomes that not only increase their life expectancy but also influence their general health including mental and physical health. These people are more engaged in sports and their work. These people not only cope with illness better than others but also, have fewer chances of getting ill (Chang, et al., 1997). It is also evident from previous research that self-esteem has a great influence on the personality development of university students. Gender plays an important role as a determinant factor in optimism. Various studies indicated that on average, adolescent females have a lower sense of self-esteem as compared to adolescent men (Bairagi et al., 2021).

According to the fourth hypothesis, female students have high personal growth than male students. It is evident from the results that female students have high personal growth than male students. In a previously conducted study gender difference was also found among Filipino college students in psychological well-being (Perez, 2012). In another study conducted on adolescents in Hong Kong, females were found to have high personal growth than male adolescents (Sun & Chan, 2016).

According to the fifth hypothesis, Female students show more resistance to peer influence than male students. The results indicated that there is a gender difference in resistance to peer influence as female students show more resistance to peer influence than male students. A recent study also found that there is a gender difference in resistance to peer influence where females are more resistant to peers than males. The study focused on the developmental pattern of resistance to peer influence in adolescence (Sumter, et al., 2019).

Conclusion

The present study was carried out to investigate the resistance to peer influence, optimism, and self-esteem as predictors of personal growth among university students. As stated by all the statistical analyses and literature review, the results of the study showed a significant difference between male and female university students on resistance to peer influence, optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth. It is evident that female university students are more resistant to peer influence than male university students. On the other hand male university students were found more optimistic than female students. Whereas female university students scored low self-esteem than male university students. Moreover, female university students scored higher in personal growth than male university students.

Limitations and Implications

The limitations of this study are that the sample size was inadequate and invariable. In the future, the size of the sample can be expanded to increase generalizability and data should be collected from people of different regions rather than being restricted to Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

This study will be a valuable addition to the accumulation of research as the variables under the study are rarely studied in past research. These findings will be beneficial for students, intellectuals, researchers, and counselors as they will help them in building self-esteem, optimism, and personal growth. It will provide individuals help with the selection of peers and to resist those that can be a cause of hurdle in achieving high optimism, self-esteem, and personal growth. Furthermore, it will help counselors to motivate students and to work out on the traits of optimism, self-esteem, and achieving high personal growth among individuals.

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Received March 3rd, 2022

Revisions Received December 08, 2023