

Optimism, Pessimism, and Agency

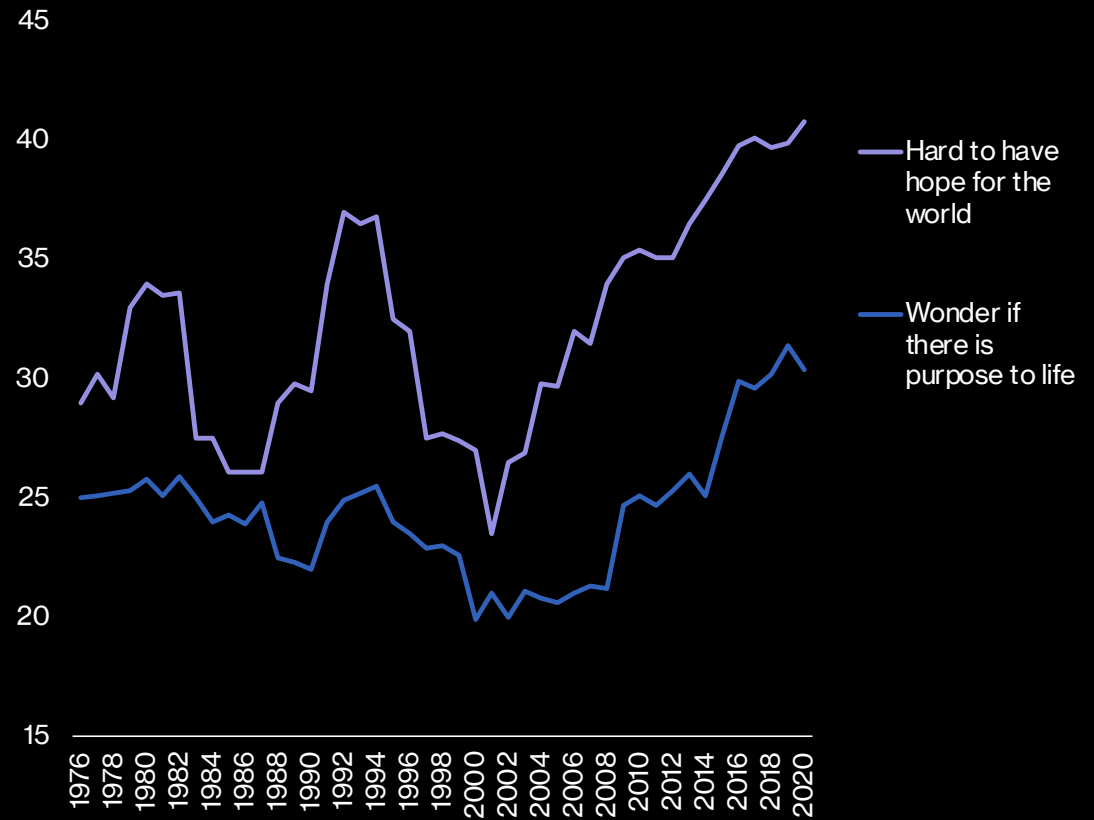
Monta Vista Character Lab

**Do you agree
with the
following
statements:**

When I think about all the terrible things that have been happening, it is hard for me to hold out much hope for the world.

I often wonder if there is any purpose to my life in light of the world situation.

Percent of U.S. 12th graders agreeing with pessimistic statements about the world, 1976-2020



2/26/25

Is the world getting better?

6% of Americans agree

Implications of increasing pessimism

Bad news for politics and society

Not great for an individual's mental health

Is this pessimism warranted? Well...

- **Advancements in Medicine** – Modern healthcare has dramatically increased life expectancy, reduced infant mortality, and eradicated many deadly diseases.
- **Technological Progress** – The internet, smartphones, and AI have made communication, education, and work more efficient and accessible than ever.
- **Lower Global Poverty** – Extreme poverty rates have dropped significantly worldwide over the past few decades
- **Increased Personal Freedoms** – Many societies have made significant progress in human rights, gender equality, and LGBTQ+ rights.
- **Better Quality of Life** – Access to clean water, electricity, and sanitation is at an all-time high in many parts of the world.
- **More Educational Opportunities** – Higher literacy rates and widespread access to online learning have democratized knowledge.
- **Scientific Breakthroughs** – From space exploration to renewable energy, science continues to push the boundaries of human capability.
- **Reduced Violence** – Statistically, deaths from war, homicides, and crime have decreased over the long term compared to previous centuries.

Things are awesome!

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Feel Better? Worse? Did your perspective change at all?

**Me neither. Reciting a bunch of facts
left me right where I started.**

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- **Economic Inequality** – Wealth is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few, leading to financial struggles for many.
- **Climate Crisis** – Global warming, natural disasters, and environmental destruction are accelerating at an alarming rate.
- **Mental Health Crisis** – Rates of anxiety, depression, and loneliness have risen, exacerbated by social media and modern stressors.
- **Political Instability** – Many countries face rising authoritarianism, political division, and social unrest.
- **Job Insecurity** – Automation, outsourcing, and economic downturns make stable employment harder to achieve.
- **Declining Trust in Institutions** – Governments, media, and corporations face widespread distrust due to corruption and misinformation.
- **Social Isolation** – Despite technological connectivity, many people feel more isolated and disconnected than ever.
- **War and Conflict** – Ongoing wars, refugee crises, and geopolitical tensions continue to cause suffering and instability worldwide.

Things are awesome!

It's the worst.

**Does it help you
when you are told,
“Why can’t you be
more optimistic?”**

2/26/25

Marty Seligman (and Coach Flatow) at UPenn graduation 2024



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The OG of Optimism Marty Seligman



Optimism and agency

- Optimists believe they have the ability to shape events to achieve their objectives
- Pessimists feel they don't have any control over their destiny

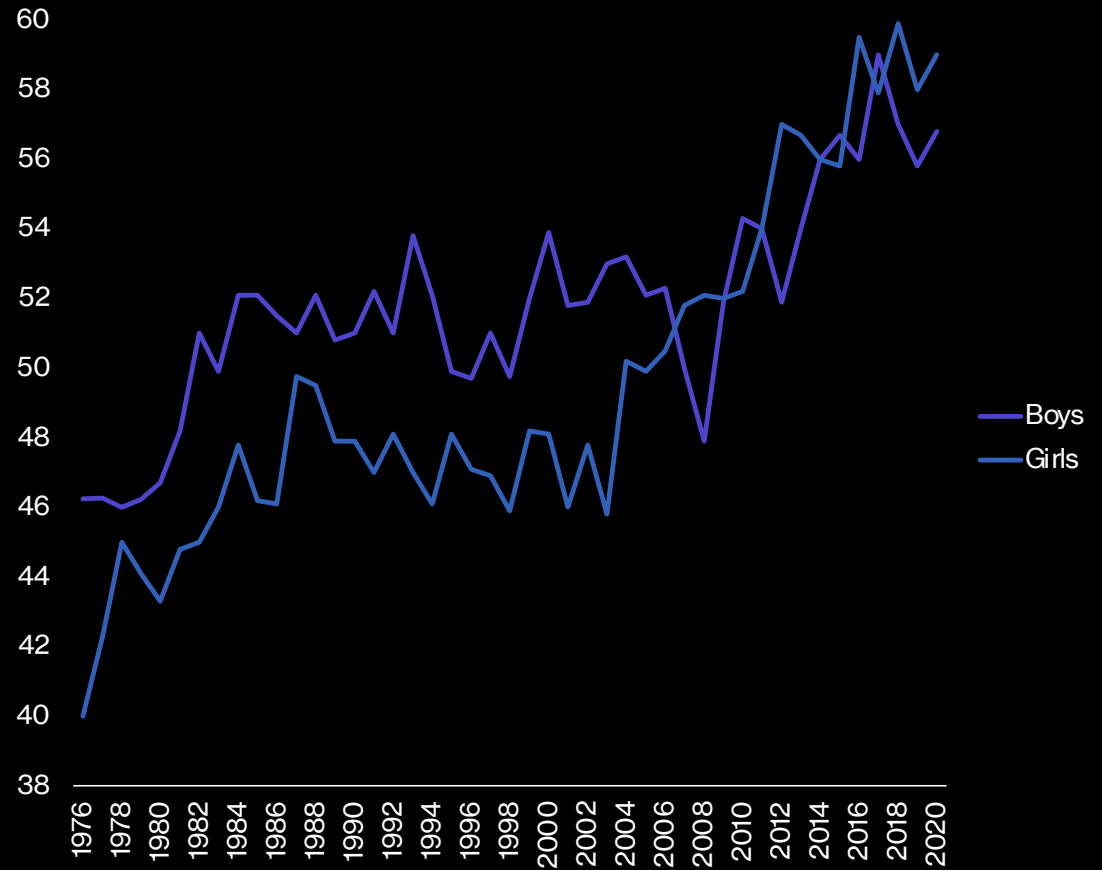


People did not always feel they had agency

- Increasing sense of agency over time
- Greek myths: Zero agency
 - + If Zeus decides you are going to win the battle, you win the battle
 - + If Zeus decides you are not going to win the battle, you don't win the battle
- Everything attributed to the gods



Percent of U.S. 12th graders with an external locus of control, 1976-2020



SOURCE: MONITORING THE FUTURE AND *GENERATIONS* BY JEAN TWENGE

Locus of Control is a Powerful Prediction of Life Outcomes

More likely to engage in healthy behaviors

Less likely to suffer from anxiety and depression

Predicts academic outcomes

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Can we learn agency?



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Can we learn agency?

Science gives us
some direction...
small wins.

The Value of Small Wins



- Investigation into developing persistence
- Control group given standard IQ test
- Intervention was to ask easier questions after a failure
- Result was as much as a 10 point increase in tested IQ

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What I Do To Combat My Personal Pessimism

- Create lots of lists – small wins
- Take some global action
- Exercise agency locally – improve what I can
 - + For me, this means working to create the best team possible
 - + Helping make the children I care about more resilient – and optimistic

Checklists!

Car service appt
- Front camera issue

Lunch with Sam?!

Talk to Sammi about HJ

Optimism/Pessimism talk

~~Review with Hone~~

- Practice

- Remind kids

Stess + Falva - maybe split hairs

- Draft

- Ask Angela for copy of slide deck

Thank you note to A.D.

~~make overnight out~~

Get uniforms back from Aledwa, Riharun, ~~Vishaka~~,
~~Ashley~~, James, Mica

~~Get uniforms for Alex, Smithay, Sam~~

Pie-sale for Oregon trip -

Motivator Monday speaker - Ben?

Boathouse in order.

Taxes

- Pull together organizer

- Drop off with George

~~Next week without plan~~

~~Update quality log, coord smite~~

~~Maccadden help at Post Box~~

400
1200
1600

3200
1600

1600

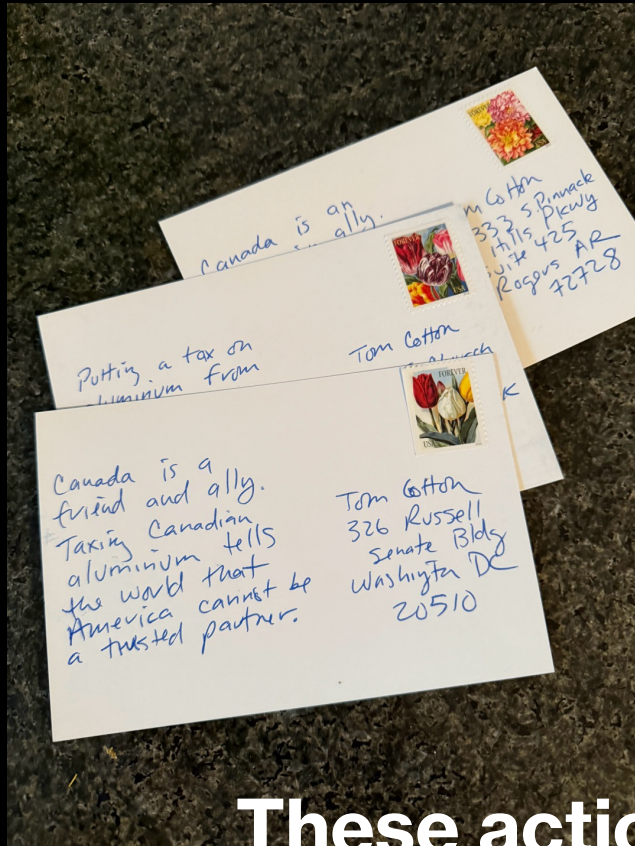
Call with Ranger about Westamelon
Run 285 -
Tuesday

~~Cost~~

A Proposal to Develop Your Sense of Agency Checklists!

- School goals:
 - + Review my APUSH notes
 - + Ask Anika for time to help me prep for my math test
 - + Sign up for the SAT on a date that won't conflict with XC
- Running goals:
 - + Ask dad to pick up chocolate milk for post run recovery
 - + Make it to practice all six days this week
 - + Try to make the last interval the fastest interval of today's workout
- Personal goals:
 - + Text Rohan to set up a game night
 - + Help mom make dinner tonight
 - + Save a seat for Ananya at the library

Remember me and my tariffs rant? What did I do...



- I wrote to some congressmen and senators and let them know I thought this was a dumb idea
 - + Did this have an impact? Maybe, maybe not...but complaining to my wife or a friend certainly would not
- I worked on this presentation
 - + At least I can make my local world and the kids I care about a little better off
- I prepped for the day's workout for you all

These actions helped my sense of agency

Take action to improve something close to home; for me, that's the teams I coach

- Plan the next week of track workouts
- Work on planning for the XC Three Course Challenge trip
- Improve our uniforms for next year

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekly Miles
Week 6	3-Mar	4-Mar	5-Mar	6-Mar	7-Mar	8-Mar	9-Mar	Week 9
Location	MV	MV	MV	MV	MV	MV		
Workout Tpr	CV	Endurance/Long	Pre-race	Track Meet at Wilcox	Maint.	Threshold		
Description	2 x 200m @ 320R pace with 200m jogs. 600/800/800 @ CV pace with rests of (90/120/150/120 seconds) 4 x 400m @ 320R pace with 75 sec rest, then optional one run. 800 @ CV or faster	Conversations + add on	Easy and strides and core	Race	Stelling Loop, drills at Jollyman	Palm Tempo run plus add-on		
Notes								
Other training								
Mileage Low	6.0	7.0	3.0	3.0	5.0	7.0		31.0
Mileage Hgt	8.0	10.0	3.0	5.0	5.0	10.0		41.0



3/3/25

Habitat for Humanity Lafayette, Louisiana 2008



What I Want For My Kids: Confidence and Optimism

- Small wins to create agency
- Consider some action to change the world in a big way...
- and act locally – make something around you (your team, school, club, friend group) a little better