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# The Idea of Optimistic Bias in Thinking, Fast and Slow, a Book by Daniel Kahneman

## Optimistic Bias: Innovation Through Creators

Hope: used to encourage and convince ourselves of a better future or outcome against the odds. It is the light at the end of the tunnel. It lives in the dreams of the innovators of our future. It is the last gift in Pandora's Box, left to help us endure the everlasting evils of this world. But how does the human brain continue to have hope when given significant information against them? How do people still obtain this hope when they are most likely going to fail? Daniel Kahneman, in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, gives this hope a new name- optimistic bias. The term optimistic bias refers to the human brain's reaction when given odds against a situation, yet still believes in a positive result. According to Kahneman, the optimistic bias provides individuals with the ability to see past the obstacles and take risks; due to our competitive and evolving society, optimistic bias is necessary for the innovation of culture through entrepreneurship and artistry.

Attitude is the basis of which optimism flourishes, but optimism is more than a happy-go-lucky attitude; it leads to more than a bright outlook on life. Studies prove that optimism leads to longer lifespans, but also to successful careers. "Optimists are normally cheerful and happy, and therefore popular; they are resilient in adapting to failures and hardships, their chances of clinical depression are reduced, and their immune system is stronger, they take better care of their health, they feel healthier than others and are in fact likely to live longer." (Kahneman, 255) People who express optimistic bias are seen throughout history as the "inventors, the entrepreneurs, the political and military leaders- not average people." (Kahneman 256) These innovators of our future are subject to the optimistic bias through the influential role of taking risks. This is subject to their overconfidence in their respective fields. "Their experiences of success have confirmed their faith in their judgement and in their ability to control events." (Kahneman, 256) With the tangency of overconfidence and the blind eye towards statistics, Kahneman discovers that "the people who have the greatest influence on the lives of others are likely to be optimistic and overconfident, and to take more risks than they realize."

In the manifestation of optimistic bias through attitude, persistence is then enabled to obtain their goal. "One of the benefits of an optimistic temperament is that it encourages persistence in the face of obstacles." (Kahneman, 257) In a study conducted by Thomas Åstebro, Kahneman notes the reactions of a group of inventors when provided a constructive assessment on their inventions to the Inventor's Assistance Program. "Discouraging news led about half of the inventors to quit after receiving a grade that unequivocally predicted failure. However, 47% of them continued development efforts even after being told that their project was hopeless, and on average these persistent (or obstinate) individuals doubled their initial losses before giving up." (Kahneman, 257) Statistics show that holding out for the long run leads to more success. "The chances that a small business will survive for five years in the United States are about 35%. But the individuals who open such businesses do not believe that the statistics apply to them. The bias was more glaring when people assessed the odds of their own venture. Fully 81% of the entrepreneurs put their personal odds of success at 7 out of 10 or higher, and 33% said their chance of failing was zero." (Kahneman, 256-257) Without the resilience of an

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optimistic outlook and the persistence to continue to create, inventors and entrepreneurs would be lost in the safe space of a 9-5 cubicle.

It is safe to say that optimistic bias affects our lives on a daily basis, presented through popular taste within my own experience as a theatre artist. In the history of pop culture, we hear of the morale-building stories of creators being rejected repeatedly before success arrived at their doorstep. For example, the author of the world's most beloved wizardry novels, J.K. Rowling sent her manuscript to multiple different publishers and received multiple rejections before her success with Bloomsbury Publishing company. "Failure meant a stripping away of the inessential. I stopped pretending to myself that I was anything other than what I was, and began to direct all my energy into finishing the only work that mattered to me." (J.K. Rowling) Our beloved author could have followed in the path of those discouraged inventors that refused to develop their invention further, but that would result in the loss of a well-loved, world-wide phenomenon. In my pursuit of theatre, I am already faced with many odds. For one, I am Asian. 1 out of the 20 speaking roles in film go to Asian actors, and Asian actors make up 1% of the leading actors in Hollywood in 2016. (USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism) With little representation, Asian actors are met with little jobs and even more so jobs taken by white actors through Hollywood's whitewashing. Most logical people would run for the hills and pick a more "sensible", a safe career. However, we are drenched in the American Dream. We have been hand fed the ideal that every successful person in American history gave everything to their career, and have somehow created a Hallmark movie of their lives through hard work. Yet, I am determined to forge my way in my passions and I am taking risks every day to get to it.

The culture of our society relies on those who take risks, and this has been the case since the beginning of our evolving world. Walt Disney took the risk of becoming the first animator to create feature length animations, and he has become the man who shaped many of our childhoods. Mark Zuckerberg took the risk of creating a new website to connect college students, and he has become the man who set the standard of social media. Lin Manuel Miranda took the risk of creating a hip-hop musical about a founding father, and he has become a catalyst for avant-garde theatre. Without their optimism, they would not have shared their creations with the world. Without these important people, the history of our world would be completely different.