



RESEARCH PAPER

Optimism in Postmodern Fiction: A Psychological Study of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* through Martin Seligman's *Hope Circuit Theory*

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates the nuanced portrayal of optimism in Mohsin Hamid's novel "Exit West" by employing Hope Circuit Theory by Martin Seligman. Seligman's theory is situated within the paradigm of positive psychology, dissects the cognitive components of optimism, emphasizing personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness. This research used a descriptive qualitative approach to highlight the characteristics of optimism in Saeed and Nadia's characters, respectively. The textual analysis method has been used to give a thorough comprehension of the character's level of optimism about life. The results of this study provide insights into the subtleties of the perspectives of the characters as well as how literature may be used as a tool for investigating and comprehending psychological ideas. The study also adds to the larger conversation about how literature and positive psychology intersect by offering a sophisticated analysis of the ways in which narratives can reflect and expand our understanding of intricate psychological characteristics like optimism.

KEYWORDS Characters Analysis, Exit West, Hope Circuit Theory, Mohsin Hamid, Optimism, Permanence, Personalization, Pervasiveness

Introduction

Exit West, the author's most important fictional work, by Mohsin Hamid, a well-known contemporary British Pakistani novelist, references numerous modern concerns. His book focuses a lot on "the West" and the role that religion plays in it. Saeed and Nadia are a couple who fell in love in a mysterious or ambiguous city that is going to be ripped apart by civil war, and Exit West follows their love story. (Howard Schaap, Sep: 2018, 42). His portrayal serves as an example for the other migrants on how to successfully overcome their difficulties and suffering. Saeed and Nadia were put in a bad situation by Hamid, yet despite this, they never considered killing themselves or taking their own lives to terminate their pitiful existence. This study goal is to familiarize readers with positive psychology and a thorough comprehension of the human mind. According to Martin Seligman, both one's talents and faults are taken into consideration by positive psychology. It cares just as much about making things better as it does about making mistakes. In addition to nurturing exceptional potential and treating disease, it is primarily concerned with enhancing the quality of life for average people. Martin claims in his best-selling book, "The Hope Circuit," that happiness depends on achieving goals in the following domains: love and friendship, wisdom and education, opportunities and opportunities for advancement, financial comfort and freedom of choice, beauty and civic spirit, and freedom from pain and suffering.

In addition, this study underlines the connection between Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Seligman's Hope Circuit Theory. The five components of flourishing—emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and well-being accomplishment—are effectively provided by this strategy. A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity, whereas an optimist sees the potential in every challenge, according to a quote by Winston Churchill. A constructive explanatory viewpoint views issues as transient, localized, and outward.

According to cultural critic, Popova's book *The Optimists and the Pessimists*, pessimists tend to think that negative things will happen forever, will undo everything they do, and are their own responsibility. Optimists, who experience the same life's hardships, have the opposite perspective on bad luck. They frequently hold the view that failure is merely a temporary setback and that its reasons are specific to this particular instance. The optimists hold that failure was not their doing; events, misfortune, or other people were to blame. Such folks don't let failure bother them. When faced with a difficult scenario, they see it as a challenge and work harder.

Literature Review

The literature review offers a succinct overview and synthesis of the works and contributions made by earlier researchers in the study's connected topic. In this study, some significant and pertinent research is greatly appreciated. Look at the definition of optimism first: Optimism, in the words of Gottfried Leibniz, refers to "the best of all possible worlds." He used both the terms "optimum" and "optimiste" in his 1737 book *Mémoires de Trévoux*. Latin "optimus," which meant "the best," was the source of the modern Latin word "optimum," which means "the greater good."

Keller (1880–1968) believes that optimism is a form of faith that results in success because no pessimist ever learned the secret of the stars, sailed to a foreign place, or even opened a new door for the human spirit. Optimism has eight distinct subthemes that are highlighted: 1) Predisposed optimism, according to Schleier and Carver (1985). 2) unfounded optimism, according to Weinstein (1989). (Buchanan & Seligman, 1995) Attributional optimism is the third factor. (Radcliffe and Klein, 2002) Comparative optimism. 6) Strategic Optimism, according to Ruthig et al. (2007). 7) Conscious optimism In 2001, Sneider. 8. An optimistic inclination. In addition to the optimism discussed above,

As, Hariharan's novels depict the hardships of female characters from diverse levels of society who serve as the spokespeople for their gender, they said that Seligman's thesis sheds insight on the never-die mentality of the female characters. Even though she subjects her female characters to anguish, none of the people in the stories withdrew from facing difficulties with tenacity and drive. Seligman's PREMA hypothesis thereby guarantees the characters' upbeat outlook on life.

Another related study by Yadav (2020) shows that Thomas Hardy was hailed as a pessimist novelist whose stories is full with heartbreaking terrible incidents. However, Yadvan has offered a novel strategy to draw attention to the novel's hopeful concept, despite the fact that pessimism permeated the entire text. The male and female protagonists in Hardy's writings are thus emphasized as having a glimmer of optimism despite dealing with the irony of fate and chance, as well as how beautifully faith and love reside in their lives. His distinctive manner demonstrates how humanity emerged from despair to hope and pessimism to optimism. Because he was constantly hopeful, he tried to look ahead. He placed a high importance on virtues like optimism, love, affection, sympathy, kindness, gentility, and altruism.

In Hardy Novel, Yadav deftly explains Occidentalism's workings as well as the 'good things in the bad things' from the standpoint of optimism. In addition, Saragih discusses optimism and pessimism in the character of Hazel Grace in Jhon Green's *The Fault In Our Stars* book. His study examines linkages between the two major notions of optimism and pessimism in the literature. Variability in distress during stressful conditions has been demonstrated to be influenced by individual differences in traits like optimism and pessimism. It goes on to examine how optimism and pessimism can relate to literature and how the main character from the novel's illness can be reflected in it.

In this study, dispositional optimism and dispositional pessimism are the two most prevalent types of optimism and pessimism, respectively. In this study, the researcher focuses on Mohsin Hamid's treatment of optimism, making it difficult to find the most pertinent studies. In contrast, Mushtaq Bilal's book review of *Exit West* offers a unique perspective on world history and employs magic realism to address one of the most urgent ethical and moral issues facing modern society: how to deal with the refugee crisis, its sufferings, and migration.

He adds that migration is a good thing, that it cannot be stopped, that "even if we live in the same house our entire lives, everyone migrates," and that "[w]e are all migrants through time." Later, Ahmad, (2021) employs Zola's theoretical framework from *The Experimental Novel: And Other Essays and the naturalistic viewpoint of Hamid's novel "Exit West"* to show the characteristics of individual choices and constraints. Their research centered on the naturalistic factors that influence a person's behavior and personality in accordance with their environment and heredity, and which can have both beneficial and detrimental consequences on their life.

Saeed and Nadia, the study's protagonists, were used to further analyze the themes of survival, detachment, and optimism. As their first form of expression in the story was passion, by the end, they had switched to logic and were also beginning to demonstrate some understanding of the decisions they had made. Similar to *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid, where the story depicted thread and undress refugees from fundamental human rights, another, somewhat comparable work by AI Ammouri in 2020 argues about the function of sentimental adjustment program in modern neoliberal novels. The notion of what makes up a human right needs to be transformed, as is only right. Human rights are actually the "positive rights of citizens as incorporated creatures of the state," not the "natural rights of human beings as prosocial creatures" (Slaughter 2012: 45).

The Western civilizations' weariness and their aggressive attitude toward displaced people were simultaneously lauded as egalitarian. More importantly, this study discusses how refugees are marginalized and mistreated in contemporary works, as well as how they battle to maintain their independence because they are not considered citizens in discussions on human rights. *Exit West* explores coexistence, modernity, nationalism, refugees, and migration. Regardless of how you interpret it, *Exit West* contains a lot to think about anew, including love, peace, significant commitments, moral and ethical principles, and cultural and religious traditions. Most crucially, Hamid's notion that any location can serve as your home.

Exit West's achingly human nature is probably what comes to mind when I think of the word "Coexist." Perhaps coexistence is what we must hope for in light of the passing of Billy Graham, Donald Trump's rise, the wars in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, as well as the West's ongoing retreat into and rabid individualism: that we can live deeply and harmoniously next to one another in simple coexistence, in simple peace—a peace that is

never that simple. This book review aims to transmit to the reader the idea of optimism as it emerges in Hamid's novel, albeit with many ambiguities.

Sadiq, Saleem, and Fisher (2018), among others, assert that the "doors" of refugee resettlement are utilized as a weapon to restrict asylum applications in their nation. Additionally, they argue that while relocation is a crucial component of refugee protection, it should never be exploited as a substitute for asylum. Exit West's doors are covered in Part I. Part II covers the three challenging alternatives for refugees – voluntary repatriation, local integration, and refugee resettlement – which are out of reach for the majority of them. It also explores the right to apply for asylum for those fleeing persecution. The researcher of the current study makes it abundantly evident that no researcher has examined Hamid's Exit West in the Light of Seligman's Hope Circuit; therefore this work offers a positive perspective on Exit West in the context of Seligman's Hope Circuit Theory.

Material and Methods

Exit West by Mohsin Hamid analyzed by utilizing a non-empirical research approach. Non-empirical approach is based on scholarly investigation that does not depend on gathering and evaluating empirical evidence, rather, it entailed theoretical analysis, and reviews of the literature, conceptual modeling, or other non-direct observation/experimentation based methods of inquiry (Maxwell, 2013). Hence, the theoretical underpinning for this study is provided by Martin Seligman's *Hope Circuit Theory* in postmodern text. This paper utilized textual analysis technique which is used to give a thorough analysis of the character's level of optimism toward life by extracting the original text. The original text of the novel is closely read and analyzed to make a well nuanced interpretation of the theory and revealed the expected findings based on the objectives of the study.

Theoretical Framework

The psychologist Martin Seligman is well-known for his contributions to the discipline of positive psychology. He is frequently linked to the idea of optimism as well as the theory of learned helplessness, which is more encouraging. Through the 1991 publication of his book "Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life," Seligman gained widespread recognition for his work on optimism. Seligman defines optimism as a mental state that expresses the expectation of good things happening in one's life. Seligman found three essential elements of optimism in his research: personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness.

Martin Seligman claims that positive psychology is the mental condition that makes it possible to place more emphasis on positive than on negative things. Being the founder of positive psychology, he was upset that several studies from the 1960s to the 1970s focused on human negativity, mental illness, trauma, abnormality, sufferings, and pains when that period should have been used to rebuild and repeat something positive. He declared that rather than striving to once again understand human psychology, the next generation of psychologists should concentrate on positive psychology. He extended an invitation to scholars to participate in studies that aim to cultivate positivity in people's minds and, as a result, positively shape the next generation. Seligman developed the PERMA model, a novel hypothesis intended to encourage individuals to be more optimistic. He claimed that positivity is a state of mind that can be attained by continuous practice and training. The abbreviation "PERMA" stands for Seligman's five dimensions of well-being: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. By offering a novel interpretation of the refugees' characters' upbeat

thoughts and attitudes under the sad circumstances, the present study investigates the elements of Hope Circuit theory on the Exit West which contributes to a new study in research field. According to Seligman's Hope Circuit hypothesis, characters constantly adopt new ways to cope with the hardships and sorrows of life.

Results and Discussion

In this postmodern novel, Mohsin Hamid's treatment of Positive Psychology is analyzed through the characterization of Saeed and Nadia, their love story takes place during a tragic event. As a result, through his novel, Hamid explores a variety of modern issues and elements. Despite of all the consequences and hurdles seen in the novel, the examination of this paper looks at whether Mohsin Hamid found his positive viewpoints in *Exit West* through his characters or if he only discussed contemporary challenges of postmodern man. The examination then shifts its attention to the main characters, Saeed and Nadia, and how they maintain and overcome the unfortunate circumstances throughout their lives, even throughout times of suffering and difficulty. The application of Martin Seligman's *Hope Circuit Theory* to the characters' optimistic tendencies is the major goal of analysis.

The PERMA model, developed by Martin Seligman, is a positive psychology framework that focuses on five key elements: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Positive emotions, such as joy, gratitude, and love, are crucial for overall well-being. Engagement involves being deeply involved in meaningful activities, while relationships are essential for social connections. Meaning is about finding purpose and connecting to something greater than oneself. Accomplishment involves achieving goals and overcoming obstacles, enhancing overall life satisfaction.

Since we are all defended as refugees in *Exit West*, Hamid is upbeat about the species and believes that one day the fear will pass and a solution will be found. He views optimism as an unseen or hidden aspect of human existence that no one contests. In the context of his story, he emphasizes optimism through the Magical Door, which served as a hopeful exit for refugees fleeing the harsh and unfamiliar environment of the West. Saeed and Nadia make the decision to leave their home country and look for asylum abroad. They enter western nations through magical doorways, where they are turned away due to their status as refugees and noncitizens. Another upbeat perspective he presents is that migration is a chance for refugees to find a new home where they may survive and perhaps lead a bit better lives. Most significantly, refugees constantly look forward because they had no choice but to leave their oppression and suffering. Hamid and Seligman share similar perspectives on positive psychology at the moment. In our positive psychology, hope, gratitude, and wisdom are all essential elements of life. According to Hamid (Leyshon 2012), "*a novel is like a dance, with two people dancing, writer and reader.*" In order to engage his target audience and evoke an emotional response from them, Hamid expertly weaves his dance/narrative.

Positive Emotions: In the opening of the book, Hamid paints a positive emotions of the freedom to dress up, saying that "*Saeed had a beard but not a full beard, and Nadia had a black robe from the tips of her toes to the bottom of her jugular notch.*" (2017). These characters continued to have the freedom to wear whatever they pleased, both in terms of their clothing and their hairstyles. To them, these decisions had significance.

Personalization is depicts freedom of living from both characters' perspectives, as evidenced by Nadia's positive impulses when "*she asks Saeed you don't say your nightly prayers? Unfortunately, he said, not always. But her face remained unchanged, and Saeed's hopeful*

viewpoint is cited as follows: "I think it's something personal; each of us has our own way." In any event, everyone is flawed. Through both characters, Hamid conveys a positive psychology message of personalization that we should accept each other for who we are (they are both looking forward).

Engagement: Human rights are never mentioned in the narrative, which concentrates on the difficulties that refugees confront and engaged with, but instead places a lot of emphasis on sympathy and compassion. The narrative presents characters that look, sound, and act like Westerners engagements since it is a sentimental adjustment program aimed at Western readers. This helps the target readers identify with the characters. For instance, *Nadia is a strong woman who rides a motorcycle and lives on her own.* She is a rebellious, defiant woman who won't back down from a social problem. Nadia's first appeared in the novel like she is "like any young woman you would come across in the Western world; fiercely independent, working through school, preoccupied with the best way to decorate her apartment, and looking for love."

Above statements shown the permanence in the character of Nadia when she engaged her to face any problem despite the fact that she is an ignorant creature, still wagging for independent well-being due to her permanency in her thoughts. Because he thinks that "[e]mpathy is about finding echoes of another person in yourself" Hamid depicts Nadia to the readers as an Eastern woman who is Western at heart. The most effective ways to deal with violent males and the police, as well as with aggressive men who were the police, were taught to her. She also learned to never lose confidence in her instincts when it came to knowing which situations to avoid or leave right away. A more thorough comprehension of her character could be obtained from the way she comports herself. She has adequate self-confidence and clarity, and because she has an intelligent mind, she is aware of how to deal with challenging situations in an upbeat manner. She is capable of avoiding or leaving right away without alerting anyone. According to Nadia, saying goodbye creates the impression that you won't see each other again or can be a negative viewpoint.

A perfect example of a man is Saeed, the main character of Hamid's book (Ahmed, 2021). It demonstrates his favorable traits that he was an educated, independent-minded, adult male without children, employed in a respectable position. Compared to Nadia, Saeed's description is more predominantly Western in terms of lifestyle and setting. She thought about Saeed for a while as they spoke. "Cuba." "Why Cuba? I'm not sure," Saeed said. *It brings to mind the sea, lovely old houses, and music*".

Relationships: Saeed and Nadia's relationship in particular "was sure he was in love. Nadia was unsure of her exact emotions, but she knew they were strong. Saeed was a clearer and fairer romantic optimist than Nadia. His parents both have liberal educations and lived modern lives. His mother, a teacher, made overtures towards his father to let him know how much she admired him". His father is a professor at a university who enjoys taking his wife to the theater, coffee shops, and dining establishments. In the beginning of their romance, Saeed's mother and father met covertly in bookstores since they were both readers and, in various ways, debaters. Saeed essentially develops into his parents' image as he enjoys taking Nadia out for "breakfast at a café" where they have "coffee and some bread with butter and jam," which are notably Western dishes. Every now and then, Saeed's mother and father would smile and recall. Saeed's parents were extremely fortunate in the past, as they remembered and recollected things and recollections and also had a positive attitude towards life and hopeful for the future despite the tragic circumstances, even if Saeed's family presents a cheerful one. In recollection of the city's long-gone ancient theaters, bookstores, restaurants, and cafes, Hamid highlights existentialism in this passage since it has always

been crucial to enjoy one's life. Nobody or anything can define who or what you are unless and until you identify yourself. Optimism and happiness were stressed as the only treatments and solutions available to us in trying circumstances in Seligman's Hope Circuit Theory.

Hamid explores Saeed and Nadia's magnetic attraction to one another throughout the book; they are an upbeat pair who stand by one another. Only optimists make these kinds of desires and have the patience to carry them out, as evidenced by the phrase "*Saeed wished he had done a better job*" (he wanted he had done a better job). Only optimism, which is unknowingly wishing, has the potential to help people survive difficult circumstances. Strong links to family, and friends, and a dedication to spending time together are associated with higher levels of well-being; claim Diener and Seligman (2002). Whatever we believe, we will manifest, according to Rhonda Byrne's exquisite concepts about positivity and the law of attraction. She also thinks that if we think we have a great love or connection, we will actually manifest it.

Meaning: For much stargazing, the sky above their city had grown too polluted. However, Saeed's father occasionally brought out the telescope after a day of rain, and the family would enjoy a breeze while sipping green tea on their balcony. Here, a cloudless night represents the meaning of dim hope, and a daytime downpour is a sign of a clear catastrophe. The first sip of tea signals a moment of joy that only a tea connoisseur can comprehend and experience. In keeping with Seligman's contention that, "*we are not designed to be depressed or oppressed, they used their free time to benefit one another. This life is ours, and we have the right to make it noteworthy by cultivating a pleasant environment*". Saeed expresses his affection for "*old buildings*" in these lines since they are a positive representation of history. He also expresses his admiration for the sea because thalassophiles are the most vivacious and heartfelt of all the peoples. Historians retort that "*Geography is destiny*" because there was fighting everywhere in the book. A day's toll will soon surpass that of a decade as the effects of war eroded their building fading as though time had been sped up War is bad, but it has a long history of glory and optimism, and it inspires nations to stand up for themselves, even though the true cause of war is high expectations from individuals or nations. A special issue started and ended with Seligman and Fowler in relation to this. the claim that we are living in a time of decisive war for "*the predictable future*" In between, a cast of experts in the field offered their opinions on how their individual areas of expertise could be applied to solve this issue, all while blindly accepting the military's assumption that this never-ending combat is inevitable. Building strong troops is the best we can do, and as Seligman reminded us, *it is our patriotic obligation to do so*. This is "*positive psychology*": "*Fasting is well known to heighten one's appreciation for food, and long-distance relationships are well known for their potential to heighten passion, at least for a while.*

Accomplishment: The amount of coffee in their cups dwindled, and they grew younger and more jovial. Nadia replied, "*Imagine how different life would be if I had agreed to marry you,*" while Saeed replied, "*Imagine how different it would have been if I had agreed to have children with you.*" Important elements were both highlighted and left out of their conversation as they navigated two lives. This is how they accomplishment each other in their bad times. Because they had once been in love and hadn't injured each other so badly that they were no longer able to dance together, it was also a dance.

Hamid attempted to leave a glimmer of optimism at the conclusion of his novel because while things fade away with time and place, "*the power of hope endures despite the worst of circumstances*" (Hope Circuit Theory: 25). They feel a sense of attachment to the past and recall all of Saeed's wonderful qualities, including his commitment to his family

and his role as a patriot during their difficult time. After migrating, he is still dissatisfied but has some optimistic views for continuing to live a better life.

Conclusion

Finally, the analysis of optimism in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* using Martin Seligman's Hope Circuit Theory uncovers a rich tapestry of psychological positive dynamics woven throughout the story. The novel's portrayal of the characters' experiences intricately reflects and contradicts Seligman's three tenets of optimism: personalization, permanence, and pervasiveness. Characters created by Hamid struggle with grief, love, and displacement as they traverse a world in transition. The investigation shows examples of positive personalizing, through the PERMA model of Seligman as a) Positive emotions, b) Engagement, c) Relationships, d) Meaning, and e) Accomplishment. People attribute happy outcomes to their fortitude and initiative. A constant topic is the temporality of failures, reinforcing Seligman's emphasis on perceiving bad things as passing rather than permanent. The characters also demonstrate a remarkable capacity for compartmentalizing difficulties, which helps them avoid being completely influenced by misfortune. To answer the aforementioned research question, the American psychologist Martin Seligman's Hope Circuit Theory was used to successfully emphasize the components of optimism in Saeed and Nadia's characteristics in the current study. Further upbeat perspective on the subject of migration in the context of the hope circuit theory is that it represents a refugee's best chance at survival and a somewhat improved quality of life. The researcher's findings show that Saeed and Nadia have maintained and overcome every challenge that comes with being refugees. They are both quite optimistic people. Currently, Hamid's perspectives on psychology are closely related to Seligman's theories of positive psychology; for our positive psychology, hope, gratitude, and wisdom are all crucial components of life.

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