

# Optimism helps females achieve higher grades - males score lower when overconfident: study

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Female students who were more optimistic achieved significantly higher grades than their less optimistic peers, according to a new study by Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) researchers. For male students, however, too much optimism led to overconfidence and less studying, resulting in lower grades.

"Optimism in male students can lead to overconfidence or an attitude of 'things will work out for the best'," according to Tamar Icekson, a Ph.D. student in BGU's Guilford Glazer Faculty of Business and Management. "So instead of studying enough for a test, they go out the night before."

Icekson, along with BGU Prof. Ayala Malach-Pines, dean of BGU's business faculty, and Prof. Oren Kaplan of Israel's College of Management, examined the [attitudes](#) and grades of 174 BGU business undergraduates (28% men and 72% women, ages 20 to 28, with an average age of 24). The study was recently presented at the International Conference of Positive Psychology.

Icekson and Kaplan focus their research on positive psychology – the effect of positive emotions and thinking on behavior. Those male students who scored as most optimistic got the lowest grades.

For [male students](#), optimism tempered by conscientiousness produced the best results. However, there was no correspondingly high rate of

conscientiousness among female students because it was not necessary to achieve higher grades, according to Ickson.

"For female students, optimism alone was beneficial because they're naturally more conscientious than their male counterparts," she says.

"Women have lower self-esteem and so if they are not sure things will work out, they study for the test."

Previous [positive psychology](#) studies have shown the value of dispositional optimism and conscientiousness in the workplace; however, the academic context has not been particularly well studied as yet. In Ickson's study, each participant completed an anonymous self-report questionnaire, for which extra course credit was awarded. Optimism was assessed using the Life Orientation Test. It is a one-dimensional measure that consists of 10 choices, such as: "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best," or "If something can go wrong for me, it will."

Academic performance was estimated using the student's final B.A. grade.

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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